

Spiritual Leadership - A Buddhist Skillful Means Approach towards Corporate Social Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual leadership can be approached from various religions with their own merits; however, this paper explores and examines the practicability and adaptability of the Buddhist teaching principles in leadership practices. Rather than concentrating on some specific Buddhist principles that have been studied and became familiar in Western literature such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eight Fold Noble Path, the Middle Path, the laws of nature, etc., the study is aimed at a comprehensive theoretical framework from the Buddhist perspectives towards Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) based on the Buddhist qualities from the Ten Stages of Perfections in the Flower Garland Sutra. Among the qualities of those ten stages, skillful means will be of special interest in this paper. Though skillful means are appreciated in various Buddhist Sutras such as the Vimalakirti Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, or the Flower Garland Sutra, etc., there are nevertheless limited literature and studies on it.

This paper presents a conceptual leadership framework based on the Buddhist principles and qualities that facilitates skillful means as a vehicle to bridge the gap between spirituality and contemporary business management.

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing acknowledgement over the focus on employee spirituality at the workplace (Shellenbarger 2000). A spiritual transformation and movement in organisations can be acknowledged recently with less to do with rules and orders, but more concerns over meaning, purpose and sense of membership and community (Ashmos and Duchon 2000). In addition, developmental concerns and environmental changes have raised the issue of CSR, introducing new approaches to sustainable businesses. Enterprises, organs of the society, which contribute to social strength and harmony (Drucker 1954), now acknowledges a broader range of obligations in terms of economic, financial, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll 1979, 1991, 1999; Van Marrewijk 2003). Rather than practicing compliance approach in the past, moving from pollution control to pollution prevention (Brockhoff et al. 1999), enterprises tend to pursue sustainability and green management, seeking for balance between industrial growth and wealth creation so that the future generations may thrive (Daily and Huang 2001). Enterprises are expected to facilitate themselves with a high level of management skills and innovative developmental programs (Callenbach et al. 1993), in which the role and contribution of leadership are significant. Given the important role of leadership, there is a call for a more holistic leadership

approach that can combine the four fundamental arenas of body, mind, heart and spirit (Moxley 2000).

Fry (2003) has introduced the spiritual leadership model to encourage positive individual and organisational outcomes by creating meaning and appreciation for what people do, believe and want. This model appreciates individuals' inner life through intrinsic motivation. With its influence on Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line model (Fry 2013) and the learning organisation (Senge 1990), this model has significant impact on sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Within the research theme of spiritual leadership and corporate social responsibility, a particular study on Buddhism with empirical case studies is conducted within the context of Vietnam. The research serves to justify a proposed conceptual framework for future studies.

ORGANISATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT SHIFT – THE SPIRITUAL MOVEMENT

The literature around the concept of spirituality and religion in the workplace has gained tremendous and rising attention from scholars (Dent et al. 2005). Over recent few decades, there has been a shift in organisational and management theory and practices: from predictable outlook to unpredictable ones (Gleick 1987); from control to trust and empowerment (Conger and Kanungo 1988); from simplicity to complexity (Lewin 1999); from transactional to transformational leadership (House and Shamir 1993); from closed to complex systems (Dooley 1997); from an economic focus to quality of life, spirituality and corporate social responsibility (DeFoore and Renesch 1995; Walsh et al. 2003); from self-centeredness to interconnectedness (Capra, 1993); and from materialistic to spiritual orientation (DeFoore and Renesch 1995; Fox 1994; Neal 1997). Therefore, there is a significant paradigm in organisations, which is defined as “the spiritual movement” by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) for more appreciation towards meaning, purpose and community at the workplace.

Palmer (1998) explained that there are various dysfunctional behaviors on different levels of our lives, like being a workaholic, burnout, broken families, and lack of family connectedness. Neal (1997) indicates that less secure jobs due to downsizing and the search for mid-life journey purposes of the baby boomers are contributing to the need for spirituality at the workplace. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) have summarized the reasons for the growing interest of spirituality at work: the feeling of demoralization of workers due to downsizing, restructuring, etc. in the previous decades (Brandt 1996; Hamel and Prahalad 1994); inequality in wages (Beyer 1994); workplace

as a source of community for people as a result of decreased neighborhoods, extended families, connected groups (Conger 1994); the growing interest in contemplating life's meaning among the baby boomers (Brandt 1996; Conger 1994); and increased global competition acknowledging the importance of the meaningfulness of work (Ashmos and Duchon 2000). Though previously and traditionally, spirituality is not welcomed to be freely expressed at work (Laabs 1995), however, its meaning and purpose in living might well shape organisation's needs as corporate spirituality (Wheatley 1992; Zohar 1997).

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

Kruger and Seng (2005, 722) identified spirituality as “the attendant feeling of interconnectedness with all things in the universe” or Conger (1994, 15) defined spirituality as “deeper connections to one another and to the world beyond ourselves.” Case and Gosling (2010) also emphasized on the complexity of the spirituality in the context of the five main world religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, while Wexler (1996) further reflected its complexity through Eastern and Western mysticism, paganism, magic, astrology et al. This could indicate problems in specifying, codifying or measuring spirituality presence and influence within organisations (Hicks 2003).

The term spiritual leadership in the context of workplace leadership was first introduced by Fairholm (1996, 1998) and later validated and further developed by Fairholm (2002) and Fry (2003). Fry (2003, 2005) established the theory of spiritual leadership which has been validated extensively in over 100 organisations with positive result showing the influence of spiritual leadership on employee satisfaction, organisational commitment, productivity, sales and growth (Fry and Matherly 2006; Fry and Slocum 2008; Malone and Fry 2003; and Fry et al. 2007). According to Fox (1994), spirituality at work comes together with the acknowledgement of people's inner and outer life in the sense that inner life can stimulate a more positive and meaningful outcome of the outer one. Therefore, the development of spirit is considered as important as the development of the mind (Ashmos and Duchon 2000)

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

One of the earliest corporate social responsibility terms referring to the “Triple Bottom Line” was widely acknowledged in the business world through the introduction of Elkington in 1997. It measures the impact of organisation on its stakeholders in consideration to people, planet, and

profit (Fry 2013). According to Fry et al. (2009), various socially responsible organisations go beyond short term profits and appreciate employee well-being.

Spiritual leadership intrinsically motivates and inspires employees with hope and faith in the vision of service to key stakeholders, thus creates an altruistic love culture to achieve spiritual well-being through calling and membership at all organisational levels to foster employee well-being, organisational commitment, social responsibility, sustainability and financial performance – the triple bottom line (Fry 2013).

In terms of *people*, literature recognizes the power of spirituality in maintaining health (Matthews et al. 1994; Zellers and Perrewé 2003). Higher levels of spiritual well-being can lead to higher levels of better human health, psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Fry 2005; Ryff and Singer 2002) with more appreciation to relationships and a sense of meaning and purpose of the surrounding world (Fry et al. 2009).

For the *planet*, organisations are expected to have continuous commitment to CSR while meeting or exceeding the expectations of stakeholders (Freeman 1984). Spiritual leadership, with its emphasis on vision and values of altruistic love, concentrates significantly on social responsibilities (Byrne 2002; Fry 2005). This creates a sense of belonging, membership and meaning purpose within organisations and stakeholders (Fry et al. 2009).

In terms of *profit*, according to Fry et al. (2009), the intrinsic motivation of spiritual leadership which, based on vision – performance, altruistic love – reward, and hope/faith – effort can encourage spiritual well-being and then organisational outcomes such as organisational commitment and productivity and continuous improvement (Fairholm 1998). With these organisational characteristics, organisations' financial outcomes can significantly be improved.

Spiritual leadership with its characteristics has its own strengths towards corporate social responsibility in bringing awareness, attention and willingness of employees closer to its implementation and practicability, which would be remarkably beneficial to investigate in contexts where religion and spirituality are significant.

BUDDHISM AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Buddhist Principles towards Desire

Buddhism encourages simplifying desires rather than multiplying them (Zsolnai 2007). The Four Noble Truth associates inadequate desires with ignorance and suffering. Ego and greed, it cannot be controlled, cannot be fulfilled, satisfied, hence resulting in destruction and suffering. According to Welford (2006), a human being can be captured by greed, an avaricious mind with constant dissatisfaction. In addition, Grof (1998) argues that trying to satisfy desires is not the answer to end suffering. If people cannot reach their expected goals, they will fall into continuous negative dissatisfaction with their failure; on the other hand, if people succeed in achieving their goals, this does not necessarily bring what they hoped for. Thus discomfort arises. Therefore, in the view of Buddhism, building up desires from one's ignorance is self-destructive and self-suffering.

Buddhist Principles towards Wealth and Social Responsibility

Buddhist economists perceive wealth from the viewpoint of the Middle Path. Wealth alone is not evil as long as its accumulation is non-harming since organisations cannot contribute to society or serve people without having the means to do so (Welford 2006). In Buddhism, the proper distribution of wealth is significant in eradicating poverty and basic physical suffering. If people are not provided with basic needs such as food, it might lead to poor health and diseases, and ethical, moral and "right" behaviors cannot be expected (Kovács 2011). Alexandrin (1993) also emphasized overcoming poverty and the proper distribution of wealth among the rich and the poor as the solution to social drawbacks and prosperity. In Buddhism, there is a concept of Dana (generosity) - a genuine way of wealth distribution to eradicate suffering in society from those who have the opportunities and conditions to give. Not only wealthy people, corporations, or government, but everybody in the society can practice Dana as long as they have the means. If there is no distribution or sharing, it again comes back to the greed of privatisation and accumulation of wealth, which eventually leads to suffering (Kovács 2011). In addition, "non-violence" is also another principle of Buddhism to ease suffering and social problems with actions that do not harm both the doer and the receiver (Zsolnai 2007).

Compared to Carroll's (1991) pyramid of social responsibility, Buddhist philosophy covers all the responsibilities mentioned in the pyramid. Economic responsibility is crucial because it provides the means for further contributions to society. Additionally, without ethical responsibilities and understanding, the harm from desires and economic achievements, wealth, or

economic outputs can be counterproductive. The Eight Fold Noble Path guide in Buddhism correlates with legal, ethical, philanthropic responsibilities of the pyramid by practicing the “right” element in various ways in life. Carroll gave levels and weighted the importance of responsibilities differently; however, in Buddhism, all responsibilities should fall in together. If individuals or corporations have the wealth, but not mastering the meaning of distribution and giving, they might fall back into the trap of desire and suffering. Moreover, “right intention,” “right action,” “right effort” or “right livelihood” can hardly be practiced at a philanthropic level to bring good to the society if there are no means to support those intentions. In Buddhism, there is no distinguished or ranked level of importance of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities, but rather a “Middle Way” of a balanced approach to all of them.

The Buddhist Systems Thinking Towards CSR

Midgley and Shen (2007) have developed an integrated model of Buddhism and systems thinking to practically involve the philosophy of Buddhism in organisations, which includes 5 main Buddhist concepts: *the eight fold noble path* – to highlight the awareness of different opinions, boundaries, taking into consideration “the right” in 8 aspects like speech, action, living, view, thinking, endeavor, memory and meditation to be open to other’s viewpoint, contributing to conflict resolution and prevention; *the middle path* – to avoid extremes in ethical principles from incomplete or limited knowledge, accepting practical decision making that might not be ethical at first sight like downsizing, redundancies, and gaining critical reflection that could lead to further understanding or longer term purposes; *the cause-condition effect* – to insist on the awareness of contextualization, interpretation of both causation and consequences, particularly in considering a careful decision making and thinking in complex circumstances to avoid unwanted or negative side effects; *space* – the awareness of local, cultural and ecological issues; *time* – learning from the past and considering the future consequences of today’s actions, revealing the issue of sustainability. The five aspects of Buddhist thinking is interlinked in the process of intervention from choosing a method of thinking, building critiques, overlooking at the context, consequences, or either reaching out for recommendation or improvement in the way that its elements are considered back and forth till all of its aspects is well addressed and applied. The theory shows valuable contributions to CSR in terms of ethical values, and sustainability approaches.

The Buddhist Qualities of Paramitas for Leadership

In the Flower Garland Sutra of the Mahayana Path, ten stages of perfections have been introduced for the Buddhist practitioners to attain the utmost happiness stage towards the enlightenment path. The stages demonstrate ten qualities rich in meaning that can well be applied in leadership towards corporate social responsibility and other meaningful purposes. The first six qualities are popularly practiced in the Mahayana Path: generosity, virtuous conduct, forbearance, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom (Rinpoche 2003).

Generosity is the practice of giving to those who are misfortunate and poor to show compassion and to those who are better off for greater practice of offering to the three jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha – awakening one; the Dharma – the teaching; and Sangha – the community. By offering the above, one can show compassion, devotion, faith, confidence and appreciation to the true meaning of the jewels (Rinpoche 2003). This quality can promote a healthy and positive working environment and relationships within the workplace with expressions of willingness rather than intentions on reciprocity. The second paramity – *virtuous conduct* is a commitment to do good and harmless things to others. Virtuous conduct is crucial for individuals to practice the basic teachings of Buddhism, which can furnish one with mindfulness and consciousness (Dalai Lama 1995). Therefore, ethics can be considered as the foundation of Buddhism on all other values and actions (Swearer 2006). With this quality, greater responsibility to practice generosity can be further accumulated for the greater life at work within organisations and for the community and society. If the two first paramitas depend mainly on one's own effort, the third one – *forbearance* is far more difficult and challenging in training one's patience and compassion in the face of aggression or difficult times. Within the workplace, this quality is really helpful in maintaining positive emotional levels, developing listening and understanding skills to create a supportive working atmosphere. In addition, patience can also stimulate more sustainable and long term business orientations rather than concentrating on short term interests. However, one also needs *diligence* to practice the above paramitas without being blocked by laziness to experience continuous joy in practicing. Diligence is a quality that would encourage members of the workplace to pursue goals, tasks, and meaningfulness at work with great effort. Whether it is work-life or spiritual life, diligence is a crucial companion on the path. The fifth paramita – *meditative concentration* is aimed at training the mind to settle to achieve mental stability so that the paramita of prajna or *knowledge* can be achieved. Concentration is a quality that highly appreciated at the

workplace to attain effectiveness. The ability to be able to concentrate also helps members of the organisations to stay away from distractions and troubles from the surroundings, not being involved in unhealthy actions like grapevine, which might jeopardize relationships and work effectiveness. Concentrative meditation takes one further at this stage to acquire knowledge and wisdom. The more understanding and wisdom one has, the more one can achieve in practicing along the Buddhist path. Further insight into emptiness is attained at this stage, and further determinations are made by the practitioner to help other sentient beings (Mitchell 2008). By practicing all the above qualities of the previous stages, one becomes wiser, more experienced in dealing with workplace issues; and can truly enjoy inner peace.

Apart from the six popular paramitas in the Mahayana Path, the seventh stage – *skillful means* is considered a very important perfection stage in practicing Buddhism. By skillful means, one has the ability to adapt the teaching of Dharma to benefit different people (Mitchell 2008). Even Buddha himself has adapted his version of truth to different levels of sentient beings (Williams 1989; Gombrich 1996). The importance of skillful means can also be acknowledged in different sutras. However, it is rarely mentioned by scholars because of its far progressed perfection stage that a Bodhisattva can achieve. In the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, skillful means is united with wisdom and Nagarjuna also stated that skill-in-means could be considered as the father of perfect wisdom (Lindtner 1986, 127). The Lotus Sutra considered skillful means as the root of Buddhist wisdom (Schroeder 2011), whilst the Vimalakirti Sutra stated that “wisdom integrated with liberative techniques is liberation and wisdom not integrated with liberative technique is bondage” (Thurman 1986, 46). By stating the importance of skillful means, Buddhism shows its flexibility in delivering its practices and truth. Even the teachings of Dharma are skillful means, a “raft” to reach enlightenment and different people would practice them differently without clinging or attaching to any particular ones. The Buddha himself was not born to be a beggar, but used his begging skills to train his mind to enlightenment; Bodhidharma used his kung fu skills to deliver his teachings and wisdom even though he was a prince (Thich 2014). Therefore, today, people with knowledge and wisdom can also use their professions and businesses as skillful means to reach enlightenment. All the qualities of compassion, virtuous conduct, patience, diligence, concentration, knowledge can be applied and explored flexibly as means to bring meaningfulness, happiness to members of the workplace and help them to have the confidence, skills, and qualities to attain

those states by themselves as well.

At the eighth stage, the bodhisattva makes vows to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings (Mitchell, 2008). This is the stage where greater commitments are made for the community in one's journey of attaining Buddhahood. More powerful skillful means, techniques, practical outcomes are achieved here with continuous perfection of wisdom through one's involvement with the community and members of the workplace. This is when meaningfulness at the workplace goes beyond organisational context; responsibilities socially, environmentally and for all other sentient beings become more of concern. Moving on to the ninth stage, with perfected skillful means practiced within the community, at this stage, the perfection of power allows the bodhisattva to use various means to teach dharma in the whole cosmos (Mitchell, 2008). Wisdom and power are further accumulated through the practice and application of skillful means within the community. Greater contribution and collaboration at this stage will lead to respect, reputation, advanced skills, wisdom and knowledge. One would have more powerful voice within the members of the workplace to deliver compassion, virtuous conduct and other benefits for members. At the final stage, the bodhisattva conquers all the qualities of Buddhahood by mastering concentration, knowledge with the preparation to reborn as a Buddha with skillful means, confidence and power. The stages highlight ten qualities that might be applicable for leadership practices, especially in contemporary business management. Like Buddha himself, these stages are meant to be for ordinary people. It is not a myth, not a miraculous path; it is a path that can be practiced by everyone every day in life.

SKILLFUL MEANS

Skillful means is a term that is mentioned in various Buddhist Sutras of the Mahayana Path. However, there is limited study on it due to its complex and controversial interpretations. The common question is concerned about whether it is possible to have a guideline of Buddhist practice that is applicable to every practitioner? Many debates exist around justifying a purpose, efficacy and fixed Buddhist practice for all people; however, skillful means indicate no single teaching or practice is sufficient to cover various karmic differences in the world (Schroeder 2004).

Skillful means does not limit any knowledge, concerns over laws of nature, truth, causality or the self, etc. The Buddha realized the need to respond to the world in various different ways with a variety of philosophical and religious views that suit the context of his audience (Schroeder

2004). The Buddhas demonstrated the Dharma in various karmic reasoning, forms of words and wealth of skillful means towards the path of enlightenment (Kern 1989; Lindtner 1986). For some, the advice was offered; others received philosophical explanations on reality or reprimands, or there are occasions when the Buddha himself just kept silent about his teachings about truth due to the contextual needs of his audience (Schroeder 2004). In Buddhism, there are sixty-two views or paths to enlightenment, each representing meditation techniques or disciplines; however, people become attached to them and tend to reduce to their beliefs in one particular path. Thus the Buddha intended to teach non-attachment through skillful means. Pye (1978) further stated that the same doctrine can either be a barrier or a door depending on how it is practiced, and the effectiveness and value of any content in the doctrines does not separate from how it plays itself out in people's lives.

However, there are also conflicting views on skillful means. The Lotus Sutra illustrated that the Buddha himself sometimes manipulated the truth to various karmic level or withheld it when people were not spiritually prepared to receive it (Schroeder 2011). In the Mahayana Sutras, some doctrines described the Buddha's compassionate activities for a murderer or those who were about to be murdered even go against his own moral principles (Tatz 1994). Thus the Buddha was willing to suffer because of it for showing his own way of "compassion." Schroeder (2004) claimed that suffering is a personal experience, no two people suffer in the same way and there is no general rule. Therefore, when there is a change of view from the Buddha himself, it is the way to respond to the unique karmic formations of a human being.

There is a story in the Lotus Sutra about a man who lures and attracts his children out of a burning house by promising beautiful gifts (Kern, 1989, p.94). The house reflects ignorance, outside the house represents enlightenment, and the imaginary beautiful gifts are the Buddha's style of teaching. From the Western stance, Garner (1993) stated that to avoid any other misinterpretations, the Buddha should have been simply talked about the truth. Other Western views also stated Buddhist orientations to abandon logic, reasoning, conceptual dualities, etc. towards personal identity, consciousness, or language (Murti 1955; Conze 1973; Suzuki 1956; Robinson 1967; Stcherbatsky 1968). Schroeder (2004), on the other hand, claimed that Western approaches to Buddhism have strictly put Buddhism into a framework, which against the Buddhist

heart of compassion that skillful means represents.

The Lotus Sutra emphasized on the skill-in-means as the Buddha's teachings, which should not be narrowed into any single religious practice or philosophical view. In addition, the Vimalakirti Sutra claimed that failure to integrate skillful means is an expression or signal of being attached to Buddhist principles and practices, which the Buddha himself describes as "rafts to ferry sentient beings across a turbulent river of suffering" (Schroeder 2011). Skillful means represent a flexible way of practicing Buddhism based on wisdom and knowledge. Its characteristics and meaning are remarkably relevant to be applied to the organisational workplace. Workplace diversity has been acknowledged to be present in today's workplace. Demographic, cultural factors like globalization, multi-culturalism, equality issues, etc. have made organisational workplaces more diverse than ever before (Jackson 1992; William and O'Reilly 1998). It is expected that people from diverse backgrounds will be sharing the same workplaces within the increasingly competitive business environment (Burack and Mathys 1987; Goldstein 1980; Griggs 1995; Jamieson and O'Mara 1991; Loden and Rosener 1991; Thomas 1991). Therefore, flexible management has become more important than ever before.

Leadership and management skills require more flexibility, contextualisation, and understanding and knowledge of the diversity of the workforce. With different individuals, different appropriate skills, techniques and qualities are needed to make their work and life effective and meaningful. Different individuals with different backgrounds, different beliefs and perceptions will consider different things as sufferings or meaningfulness. Skillful means as a means for practicing Buddhist wisdom without clinging to any specific principle or rigid orientations can be well tested in today's diverse organisational workplace. Therefore, approaching CSR from the perspectives of the Buddhist skillful means would be practical yet challenging and would remain an issue of much controversy that can lead to further research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following proposed model explores the application of Buddhism into leadership and organisations from the basic teachings of Buddhism in the Buddhist vehicles and Sutras, especially the Ten Stages of Perfection of the Flower Garland Sutra. The model aims at exploring those teachings' effectiveness towards corporate social responsibility. The model poses importance on the "Skillful means." Skillful means serves as a powerful bridge to connect leadership and

Buddhism principles and qualities with CSR by posing importance on the flexibility and contextualization of practice. Practically at the workplace, with various distractions, incidents, pains, and sufferings (Frost et al. 2000), skillful means brings a crucial spirit of flexibility and offers various ways to problem-solving in the pursuit of CSR. The following figure illustrates the role of skillful means as a bridging vehicle to practice Buddhism and CSR in contemporary business management.

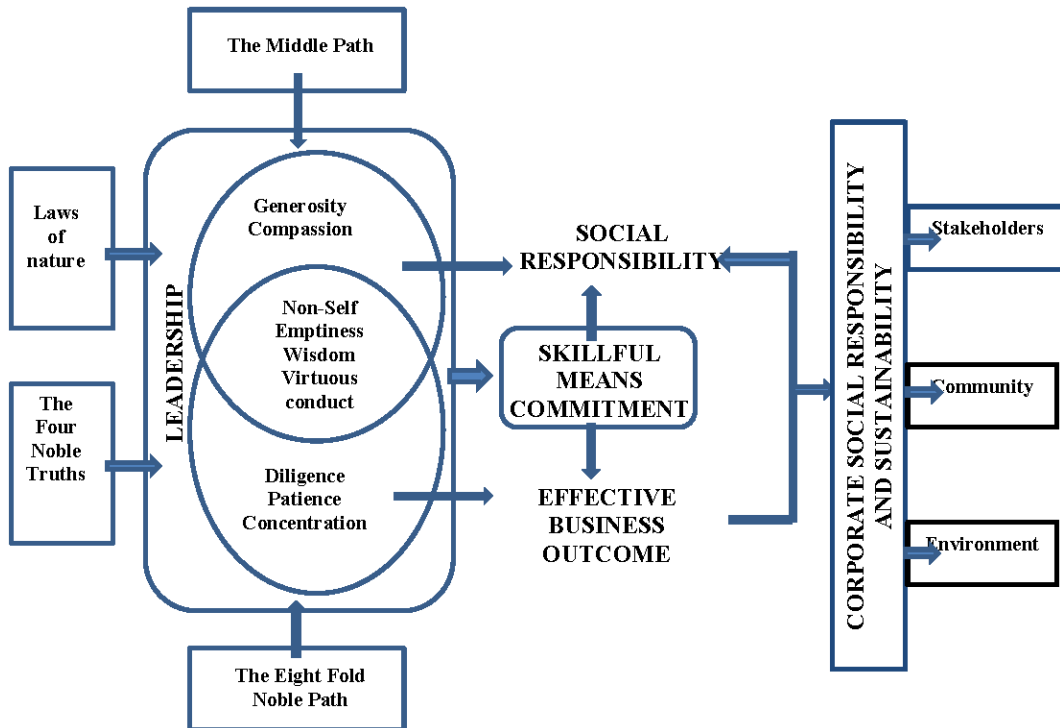


Figure 1 Buddhist skillful means and corporate social responsibility framework

BUDDHIST SKILLFUL MEANS AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FRAMEWORK:

Like it is stated in the teachings of Buddha and the Buddha himself, the path to enlightenment is for ordinary people, for the ones who have full comprehension of the Dharma teachings, and more importantly, who can practice them. This conceptual framework proposes knowledge and qualities that a leader needs and uses them as skillful means to practice for the benefit of the community and society along their path of practicing Buddhism. First, a leader should understand the basic teachings of Buddhism in the Middle Path, Laws of nature, the Four Noble Truths and Eight Fold Noble Path to be able to perceive the ultimate truth of nature, desires, and ignorance. Once the mind has been purified, the leader should acquire the basic qualities of the six paramitas to move

on to a much meaningful purpose for the good of others. Understanding emptiness, non-self with the practice of generosity, compassion, wisdom and virtuous conduct would help one to open up themselves to help others, whilst with other qualities like concentration, patience, diligence, a leader can have positive decision makings for effective business outcomes. Overall all the six qualities are equally important and need to be applied together. However, one might need some qualities more than others in different circumstances, and this is when skillful means becomes powerful. Different people might have different approaches to practice Buddhism, and so do leaders in the business world. Once a leader can master the qualities in the paramitas, the leader can transform them into leadership skills and power as means to reach out to the benefit of the community. The more skillful means a leader has, such as material wealth, skillful profession, compassion, which might lead to respect, reputation, trust, and altruistic love, the more power that leader has in implementing CSR.

CASE STUDIES AND INSIGHTS

To have a practical picture of how the proposed conceptual framework would make sense in organisations, two empirical qualitative case studies have been undertaken. Interviews with selected leaders and employees within two organisations were implemented in Buddhist embodied organisations in Vietnam.

Vietnam Communications Corporation

VCCorp (Vietnam Communications Corporation) is a leading internet company in Vietnam with top products in social media, online content, e-commerce, mobile value added services, etc. As a communication organisation, largely involved socially with the community, VCCorp is not only well-known for its premium products but for its sustainability over the past ten years. Its philosophy and direction are greatly influenced by its Founder Cum Managing Director, who is a Buddhist and appreciates the Buddhist practices not only in his personal life but also within the organisation.

His practice in Buddhism strongly correlates with the “Eight Fold Noble Path” in committing to do good and ethically through everyday practice with the right intention, right action, right livelihood, right effort and concentration. Within the industry context, he understands the complicatedness in law-abiding issues for businesses. Many competitors have been trying to dodge the law, at the same time creating massive cyberattacks, stealing copyrights from his

company. He, on the other hand, chose a harder but more ethical and longer-term solution to take efforts initiating changes in the Vietnamese law, which become beneficial to the whole industry in the country. He emphasized that “revenge” has never appeared in his mind or thought, but rather than that he tried to put himself into competitors’ shoes, understanding the circumstances. This action represents his qualities of virtuous conduct, compassion, patience, concentration and consciousness over respecting stakeholders and social responsibilities.

Within the organisation, there are leader-member talking sessions available every week privately or in groups, in which with the concept of “no self” and without comparing mind or distinctions on superior and inferior relationships has been implemented. He shows his true being; shares personal stories, living opinions, and philosophies. He also provides opportunities for stock ownership within the organisation. He creates generosity, a sense of membership (Fry 2003) within the organisation.

For organisational outcome, he approaches financial concerns over the “Middle Path,” perceiving that financial success and revenue are not ends but means to achieve the ultimate end of human. During ten years of operation, there was no profit for eight years; however, what his company has achieved is a strong, sustainable stance within the industry with increased market share, advanced technology, employee well-being and a learning culture. Employees have the opportunity to be creative and innovative. His vision on sustainability is based on “innovation” in acknowledging the cause-effect principle, staying away from “the three poisons” – greed, hatred, delusions to overcome “ignorance” without fear of losing fame or reputation for longer-term pursuits for the organisation and the community. He clearly demonstrates a skillful means of wisdom and other Buddhist qualities and paramitas powerfully to let the employees be involved and be engaged in implementing corporate social responsibility in the spirit of flexibly appreciating the context.

Venerable Thich Hue Dang - Thanh Quang Orchid Limited

Venerable Thich Hue Dang, born in 1940, is not only known for his membership and contribution to the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam and the Vietnamese Buddhist studies but also for being voted one of the 100 remarkable entrepreneurs nationwide for his contribution to the Vietnamese economy. With 50 years of practice in Buddhism, he transformed his knowledge of Buddhism into business and life very uniquely.

Venerable Thich Hue Dang has developed two research facilities. He formed his company named Thanh Quang Orchid Limited for the first research facility for orchid cultivation and conservation of Vietnamese orchid species when most of the growers quit the industry because Vietnam lost its export market to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1990. His second research facility focuses on the development of cloned Ngoc Linh Ginseng varieties and tissue development. His research aims to preserve and develop the Vietnamese Ginseng for medication to improve health for society. His facilities have created hundreds of work opportunities for locals within the mountainous Da Lat district in Southern Vietnam.

He shares his concept behind practicing Buddhism as an entrepreneur lies in his knowledge, understanding, and practicing Buddhism for over 50 years. He chose not to carry begging bowls for 49 years to achieve the state of “enlightenment” in Buddhism, but to apply his wisdom proactively in life to help others and the future generations. He does not accept financial offerings and monetary funds from the government for his projects but sells orchid to fund his research on ginseng. He claimed that the teachings of Buddha are about truth, life itself, and not about rituals that many Vietnamese people misinterpret. It is not about a Holy Spirit, or merely about religion, a superstition that needs burning votive, worshiping, and charity; but about understanding life through the Buddhist principles and practice them wisely.

If one understands the law of nature taught in Buddhism, and the rules of life and death, building up a roadmap to living fully for the present life is crucial. Within that roadmap, Vietnamese people need three things to transform themselves: skills, health and reputation. If people have skills, they can develop their profession and create wealth, which should be divided into four parts: one for eating and survival, two for developing self and career, and one for helping the misfortunate. In terms of health, ignorance towards health, desires, insatiable actions are often the cause of “illness”; hence without health, nothing can be accomplished. If people have good health, ability and skills to work wisely, they can build up their reputation, receive more significant responsibilities, and achieve greater things for the society. Therefore, this is what Venerable Thich Hue Dang is aimed at practicing Buddhism in his own way. His research facilities assist people in gaining professional skills. His monastery provides shelter, food and spiritual knowledge for his employees; his research on ginseng provides health support for people and society, and his well-known reputation is a source of motivation to inspire Buddhist businesses to transform the meaning

of Buddhist principles into life and practice with social responsibilities and sustainability.

He approached Buddhism as an entrepreneur in order to have the means to help people and society. This philosophy correlates with Buddhist economics like Welford (2006) or Payutto (1994). If compared to Elkington's triple bottom line model of corporate social responsibility, Venerable Thich Hue Dang's practices cover all the Ps, establishing profit as a basis to care for people and the planet. His way of practicing Buddhism represents all Buddhist qualities and paramitas. His entrepreneur expertise and his research facilities are powerful skillful means to deliver compassion, true Buddhist generosity and teachings to the community. His skillful means have gained reputation, power, and appreciation from many of his business followers in various industries in Vietnam. He is a symbol for many successful business leaders in Vietnam who are devoted to following his roadmap through their own businesses. His skillful means are powerful, effective and represent the true enlightened path and heart of Buddhism.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The case studies illustrate the sense-making approach of applying skillful Buddhist means in organisational workplaces. Ancient Buddhist practices and principles can be transformed and practically brought alive into modern organisations reflect the power and importance of skillful means, as stated in various Buddhist Sutras. The debates over whether skillful means is nothing than the Buddha's tricks that goes against the basic Buddhist principles just further emphasised on the significance in acquiring appropriate and sufficient knowledge and wisdom for the right interpretation of skillful means without clinging or biding to any specific context or view (Schroeder 2004, 2011; Federman 2009). This is one of the reasons why skillful means are rarely mentioned in the literature since, in the Buddhist practice, one needs to conquer the six qualities of perfections first before even actually being able to reach and practice skillful means. The proposed model suggests a flexible way of bringing Buddhist qualities into organisations towards CSR, which can be obtained by skillful leadership skills, just like how Buddha himself taught and approached different groups of people.

The case studies prove that applying Buddhist principles in life does not have to be rigid, does not have to be narrowed or controlled by any boundaries, but applicable with the right knowledge, understanding, respect and appreciation of the context and surroundings. There might be questions over why a Venerable needs to use his business or entrepreneur role as skillful means

rather than just devote himself to teaching? Why bring Buddhism into business if the outcome every business is looking for is mainly benefit? Why bring Buddhism into a diverse workplace with different beliefs and perceptions? Before answering any of those questions, remember that the Buddha's life himself is a skillful means, his begging bowl is a skillful means; Bodhidharma's Kung Fu techniques and teachings are skillful means, and the illustration of "the raft" or "beautiful presents" are also skillful means. The beauty of the Buddhist qualities and teachings can be demonstrated within classroom teachings; however, it remains textual without practice and application. The complicatedness of the business workplace and world challenges Buddhist practices and, at the same time, offers wisdom back to the practitioners to master their skillful means for greater contributions.

From the proposed conceptual framework, the study will follow on with further empirical studies with larger samples to evaluate and justify the framework in three phases: (1) qualitative research with interviews with leaders and managers with Buddhist orientations to justify and modify the proposed conceptual framework and build up hypotheses; (2) quantitative research with survey distribution to stakeholders of Buddhist and non-Buddhist oriented organisations within similar industries to test hypotheses, leadership and organisational outcomes; and (3) combining qualitative and quantitative research outcomes to propose leadership practices.

CONCLUSIONS

Organisational and management shifts and the spiritual movement have highlighted the picture that there is a need for greater purposes rather than just basic organisational outcomes of surviving today. Buddhist teachings and principles show a strong correlation to CSR. Buddhism itself is not merely a religion. It is about truth in life and it appreciates differences and divergence. This paper proposes an alternative way for leaders to implement CSR practices by effectively involving and engaging stakeholders within the process through skillful means. Buddhism enacted skillfully in organisations through the role of leaders would be the key to unlock any hesitations or obstacles for organisations to pursue CSR. Skillful means offers a flexible and practical way of practicing Buddhism in business management. It poses importance on contextualisation and flexibility that many organisations lack or disregard in contemporary business management. Skillful means is a tool that leaders can master to make the most out of their means to implement CSR activities. This

paper is aimed at demonstrating a practical and applicable viewpoint on skillful means to connect spiritual leadership and CSR from the Buddhist perspectives effectively.

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