

# **MINDFUL LEADERSHIP:**

How meditation and mindfulness enhance leadership qualities

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## **Executive Summary**

While the concepts of meditation and mindfulness are no longer new to the West, the notion of mindful leadership emerged only recently. This thesis adds to this field by exploring how mindfulness, achieved through the practice of meditation, can enhance leadership qualities, as summarized from several Western theories as well as Buddhist principles. Qualitative interviews with business leaders as well as discussions with monks reveal that only a few factors are underlying the enhancement of all leadership qualities. Strong connections between Buddhist teachings and psychodynamic concepts in the clinical paradigm were also found. Finally, to further enrich the quality of this thesis, I decided to be ordained as a Buddhist monk since direct experience is the best way to learn about mind and mindfulness.

## **Keywords**

Buddhism, Clinical Paradigm, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, Meditation, Mindfulness, Psychodynamic, Self-Awareness



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In a world of perpetual change and very competitive environment, there is a real need to make managerial and leadership thinking evolving. However, the past ten years have seen numerous leadership letdowns, ranging from the dot.com collapse of 2002, to the bankruptcies of some of the world's largest companies due to accounting misstatements, to the meltdown of the global financial market in 2008. In examining these failures, one study shows that not a single leader failed due to lack of intelligence (IQ), but on the contrary, these leaders were smart and highly intelligent. The unsuccessful leaders appeared to have failed due to low levels of emotional intelligence, a.k.a., EQ (George, 2010).

A low level of EQ usually stems from a lack of self-awareness (Goleman, 1995). Authentic leaders are genuine in their intentions and understand that the purpose of their leadership is to serve their customers, employees and investors, and not their own self-interests. The notion of self-awareness is highly relevant to that of mindfulness, an attentive awareness of the reality of things in the present moment, which is a core element in Buddhism (*Mindfulness*, n.d.). Mindfulness is typically cultivated through a practice of insight (Vipassana) meditation which helps reveal that ego (selfness, self-grasping, self-centered) is the root of human suffering, and many problems and failures in the world. Note that there are many kinds of meditation, but for brevity, meditation in this thesis refers to insight meditation from Buddhism (*Meditation*, n.d.).

The main objective of this thesis is therefore to understand how mindfulness, achieved through the practice of meditation, can enhance quality of leadership in the business world. Specifically, this thesis will explore what leadership attributes constitute good

leadership, and then study the impact of meditation on those attributes. Coming from France and living in Thailand for the past decade, I have come across numerous leadership attributes from the Western theories as well as the principles in Buddhism that are better known in the Eastern communities. I will draw upon these attributes as the basis of what good leaders should possess. I will also draw upon my recent experience in the monkhood to enrich the quality of the findings.

This thesis consists of eight chapters, each of which will help achieve the above objective in logical steps.

After the introduction in this first chapter, chapter 2 will review various literature that dealt with the impact of meditation and mindfulness on leadership. It will also highlight the gap in the literature that this thesis aims to fill.

Chapter 3 then outlines the research methodology. As the topic is deep and qualitative in nature, I rely on interviews with business leaders as well as discussions with monks in order to gain meaningful insights. The research methodology is separated into three main stages: pre-interview stage, interview stage, and post-interview stage.

Chapter 4 addresses the pre-interview stage where the set of key leadership attributes are defined. I first explore what attributes constitute good leadership, drawing from more than ten leadership theories and relevant Buddhist principles. I then synthesize the core and common elements of those attributes in order to group them in a meaningful way. This synthesized set of leadership attributes form the basis of the interview questions with business leaders.

Next is the interview stage which is covered in two chapters. Chapter 5 outlines the interview setting with business leaders. It describes who the interviewees are, what questions will be asked, and how the interviews will be conducted. Questions regarding relationship between mindfulness and some psychodynamic concepts will also be included. Chapter 6 then analyzes the interviews and summarizes the key findings. The results show that meditation and mindfulness do enhance most attributes of leadership, especially those that require high levels of self-awareness and EQ. The strong connection between mindfulness and some psychodynamic concepts is also discussed.

Chapter 7 then addresses the post-interview stage. Here I ask monks, who are leaders in their own right, for advice to business leaders, as well as to help clarify any findings from the interviews that may initially seem strange or surprising. The most interesting one is why mindfulness (thus self-awareness) weakens the selfness and increases loving-kindness to others.

Finally, chapter 8 concludes the thesis. To avoid biasing the results from other interviewees, I save the sharing of my own experience in the monkhood in this last chapter. Buddhism teaches me that by lessening selfness, happiness can be found within ourselves. I also relate the findings with the concepts in the Consulting and Coaching for Change (CCC) program, as well as suggest some possible future research areas.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Mindfulness has gained more popularity in the West in recent years. Part of the reason is due to its close connection with notions of self-awareness and emotional intelligence, both of which have been studied extensively. Buddhism becoming widespread in the West also plays a major part. Right mindfulness is the seventh element of the noble eightfold path, the core teaching of Buddhism as the way to the cessation of suffering and the achievement of self-awakening, also known as enlightenment (*Noble Eightfold Path*, n.d.).

For the purpose of this thesis, which focuses on mindful leadership, the relevant research areas are as follows:

### **2.1 Mindfulness and leadership**

The term “Mindful Leadership” is gaining ground in the West and there are a number of recent studies on this subject. Bill George (2010, 2012), who is one of the major advocates of this subject, argues that the practice of mindful leadership teaches leaders to pay attention to the present moment, recognizing their feelings and emotions and keeping them under control. He further suggests that among several ways to practice mindfulness, meditation is the most introspective way.

A different angle of the study was taken by Dunoon and Langer, who looked at dynamic quality of mindfulness toward leadership (2011). They argue that mindfulness enables leaders to see new or different things in the particular context, whether in the external environment or in their own reactions. They listed three aspects of mindfulness and used them as lenses to consider leadership while focusing on actions to make headway with

contentious problems. The first is the alertness to multiple perspectives which allows leaders to notice without immediately judging. The second is the active self-reappraisal which prepares leaders to step out of a particular framing and take a second look at their own thinking. The last one is the attentiveness to the use of language, e.g., use descriptive rather than judgmental languages, as well as conditional rather than absolute languages.

Note that the above studies did not specifically study how mindfulness can enhance leadership qualities at a more detailed level beyond self-awareness.

## **2.2 Meditation and leadership**

Another relevant line of research is on meditation's impact to business organizations as well as their leaders. There is extensive research on meditation as an effective method of reducing stress at work (Frey, 1974; Bruning & Frew, 1985), and as a powerful tool to trigger increasing change assimilation and conflict management capability development (Warshal, 1980; Chen & Ma, 2002).

A recent study by Arias (2008) demonstrates a relationship between meditation practice and stress reduction, change assimilation, conflict management, and leadership performance. His findings include the following:

- Meditation practice is positively related to reduction of executives' stress levels
- Formal practice of meditation is positively related to the development of changes assimilation capability on executives' performance in business organizations

- Gains in executives' capabilities to managing conflicts within business organizations environment increase, as the practice of meditation oriented towards cultivating compassion is introduced
- Gains in executives' leadership performance within business organizations increase by introducing formal practice of meditation oriented to develop compassion

Note that these studies did not put much emphasis on mindfulness, and they also did not study how meditation can enhance the quality of leadership, attribute by attribute.

### **2.3 Emotional intelligence and leadership**

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee are the leading authorities in this area. Inspired by Buddhism, Goleman (1995) first brought the term "Emotional Intelligence" to a wide audience in his book "Emotional Intelligence". The three authors then together published a series of papers on this topic in the Harvard Business Review (Goleman, 1998; Goleman 2000, Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2001; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). These papers defined what makes a good leader, with an emphasis on emotional intelligence components.

In their book "Primal Leadership", Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee (2002) further elaborated the importance of emotional intelligence to leadership. There they highlighted key emotional components of leadership which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. These components were later developed as part of one leadership theory which will be covered in detail in Appendix 1.

The above studies argued why EQ is essential to better leadership. However, the emphasis was not so much on how to create emotional intelligence via meditation.

This thesis aims to fill the gap of the above literature by studying how mindfulness, achieved through the practice of meditation, can enhance the quality of leadership in the business world. Specifically, this thesis will explore which leadership attributes constitute good leadership, as summarized from several Western theories as well as Buddhist principles, and then study the impact of meditation on those attributes.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

The main objective of this thesis is to understand how mindfulness, achieved through the practice of meditation, can enhance the quality of leadership in the business world. There are three main stages in the research methodology to achieve the above objective.

### **3.1 Pre-interview (Synthesis of leadership attributes)**

Leadership has been widely observed, studied, and defined, so much to the extent that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are of those who have attempted to define the concept (Stogdill, 1974). For the purpose of this thesis, achieving the exact definition is less relevant than understanding the desirable leadership qualities: meaning the traits and qualities that leaders should possess, the principles leaders should adhere to, as well as the behaviors that leaders should demonstrate.

The focus of the pre-interview stage is to review various literature on leadership theories as well as Buddhist principles to understand what attributes constitute good leadership. As commonalities of attributes from different theories and principles are expected, this stage also synthesizes those core and common elements into a set of key leadership attributes. The synthesis step helps minimize the redundancy of attributes, thus simplifying the interview stage during which I seek to understand how meditation and mindfulness can enhance such attributes of good leaders.

### **3.2 Interview (Settings and findings)**

As the topic is deep and less quantitative in nature, in order to gain meaningful results and insights, I rely on interviews with business leaders at different levels of various organizations as the main approach. With a list of synthesized leadership attributes from the pre-interview stage, the interviews seek to understand changes that happened to those attributes as a result of meditation. Such interactive discussions also allow me to apply the clinical paradigm and explore the inner theater of the interviewees more effectively (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007).

To make the interview stage more interesting, I also ask if the interviewees see the relationship between mindfulness and some psychodynamic concepts such as negative capability (Keats, 1899) and listening with third ear (Tonge, 1967).

### **3.3 Post-interview (Insights from monks)**

I enhance the quality of my conclusion by having discussions with a few monks who are leaders in their own right. Here the focus is more for the monks to preach and give advice on the benefits of meditation to the business leaders. In particular, the monks can also help clarify any findings from the interviews that may initially seem strange or surprising.

After these three stages, I conclude the thesis by highlighting insights from all the findings, including sharing my own recent experience in the monkhood. The relationship with the concepts in the CCC program will also be discussed, together with suggestions on future research areas.

## Chapter 4: Synthesis of Leadership Attributes

There is a vast body of literature on leadership but no single universally accepted definition of leadership (Goethals, Sorenson, & Burn, 2004). Rost (1991) found hundreds of different definitions. Below are some examples from the literature search:

- Chemers (1997) defined it as “a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task”
- Northouse (2007) defined it as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”
- Goethals et al (2004) said “Leadership is a process (not a position) that involves leaders, followers and situations”
- Katz & Kahn (1966) described it as “any act of influence on a matter of organizational relevance”

Again, for the purpose of this thesis, achieving the exact definition is less relevant than understanding the traits and qualities that leaders should possess, the principles leaders should adhere to, as well as the behaviors that leaders should demonstrate.

From the extensive review of relevant literature, I classify leadership theories (or principles) into four groups as shown in Table 1. Appendix 1 then reviews each of the above theories and principles in order to understand what are being proposed as desirable leadership attributes. Although they cover different aspects of leadership, there are many common attributes (traits, qualities, principles, and behaviors) among them.

Table 1. Summary of leadership theories and principles

Themes	Theories and Principles
On traits of leaders	Great Man Trait Leadership
On leadership styles towards different situations	Contingency Situational Leadership
On qualities of leaders	Democratic Leadership Servant Leadership Transactional Leadership Transformational Leadership Resonant leadership
On Buddhist principles for leaders	Supremacy Bases for Social Cohesion Virtues of Noble Person Virtues of Ruler

This chapter will synthesize these core and common elements from the various theories into a set of key leadership attributes. The synthesis will then be the bases of the following chapters where I seek to understand how meditation and mindfulness can enhance such attributes of good leaders.

First, note that most, if not all, leadership definitions have three common components:

1. **Self:** Leaders themselves
2. **Others:** Colleagues and followers
3. **Job and Environment:** Tasks to be accomplished and objectives to be met

For ease of presentation, I group the leadership attributes into the same three categories accordingly. Table 2 illustrates the synthesis of these attributes together with their supporting theories and principles.

Table 2. Synthesis of leadership attributes from the various theories and principles

Theme	On traits of leaders		On leadership styles dependent on situations		On qualities of leaders					On Buddhist principles for leaders			
	Great Man	Trait	Contingency	Situational	Democratic	Servant	Transactional	Transformational	Resonant	Supremacy	Virtues of noble person	Virtues of ruler	Bases for social cohesion
<b>Towards self</b>													
1. Adaptability	√	√	√	√					√		√		
2. Ambition	√	√											
3. Assertiveness	√	√											
4. Commitment and Responsibility	√	√						√			√		
5. Decisiveness	√	√							√				
6. Dependability and Trustworthiness	√	√				√	√	√			√		
7. Ethics and Morality							√	√	√		√		
8. Impartiality									√				√
9. Influence and Persuasiveness	√	√		√		√	√	√			√	√	
10. Patience and Persistence	√	√									√		
11. Self-awareness						√		√		√			
12. Self-confidence	√	√						√					
13. Tolerance of Stress	√										√		
<b>Toward others</b>													
1. Understanding of others		√		√		√	√	√		√			
2. Development of others				√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	
3. Collaboration with others	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√			
<b>Toward job and environment</b>													
1. Awareness of Surroundings	√		√			√		√		√			
2. Clear Vision and Objectives						√	√	√		√			
3. Development of Society						√					√	√	
4. Knowledge of jobs and principles	√	√	√	√			√			√			

In this table, a theory or principle is considered to be supporting an attribute if it mentions that attribute explicitly. For example, although Buddhist principles are neither immoral nor unethical, not all of the four principles in this thesis mention morality and ethics explicitly, thus not all of them are considered to be in direct support of morality and ethics. Also note that only attributes in which there are two more supporting theories or principles are included in the table. In other words, the attributes need to be significant enough to be mentioned more than once.

#### **4.1 Attributes towards self**

This group focuses on the attributes relating to intrinsic qualities and characteristics of the leaders.

1. **Adaptability:** There is no single leadership style that fits all types of situation. Each situation is unique to a certain extent, and capable leaders know how to deal with them appropriately. This requires an awareness of the environment, people, and context in order to apply the best-suited leadership style. This includes knowing when to do what and setting proper priorities at any given point in time  
*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait, Contingency, Situational leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person*
2. **Ambition:** Effective leaders aim high and have a strong desire to be successful. They set challenging goals to stretch their teams in a positive way. The desire for achievement is also not for personal benefit, but for the team and company as a whole  
*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait*
3. **Assertiveness:** Good leaders are capable of confidently conveying their needs and standpoints. Assertiveness magnifies leadership strengths when balanced with

other leadership skills appropriately. Note that being assertive is different from being aggressive as the latter can be viewed negatively by others around the leader

Supporting theories: *Great Man, Trait*

4. **Commitment and responsibility:** As leaders are to lead their followers to achieve the goals, they have to hold firm commitment and be responsible for that commitment. This will help the leaders in gaining trust from their followers as well as setting a good example for them

Supporting theories: *Great Man, Trait, Resonant leadership, Virtues of ruler*

5. **Decisiveness:** This is commonly cited as a key trait of any leader. Being decisive does not mean making decisions quickly without sufficient supporting facts. Rather, it means being able to make good decisions with the available information at hand. To be decisive, leaders have to allow themselves to make mistakes, then learn from them and move on

Supporting theories: *Great Man, Trait, Supremacy*

6. **Dependability and trustworthiness:** People not only expect their leaders to guide them, but also to help them when needed. They want dependable and trustworthy leaders who are receptive and understanding

Supporting theories: *Great Man, Trait, Servant leadership, Transformational leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of ruler*

7. **Ethics and morality:** These are the foundations of leaders to practice and adhere to in every possible decision and action. It has been said a number of times that many business failures are not due to lack of intelligence, but rather lack of morality and ethics

Supporting theories: *Transformational leadership, Resonant leadership, Supremacy, Virtues of ruler*

8. **Impartiality:** Fairness is what sets apart good leaders from bad. Being fair and impartial will create loyalty among their followers. It will also foster a collaborative environment where people are rewarded based on their contribution rather than bias and prejudice

*Supporting theories: Supremacy, Bases for social cohesion*

9. **Influence and persuasiveness:** Leaders, by definition, are not working alone. Therefore, the ability to efficiently elicit their followers' support is definitely a key success factor. Leaders need to be able to positively influence, persuade, motivate, and inspire their followers to voluntarily do what they want. Diplomacy and tactfulness, saying the right thing at the right time, are a few of the core skills

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait, Situational leadership, Transformational leadership, Servant leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of ruler, Bases for social cohesion*

10. **Patience and persistence:** Patience and persistence are important yet rarely mentioned. Patience and attention span are getting shorter with newer and faster technologies, but they can still distinguish effective from ineffective leaders. With patience, leaders spend more time listening and contemplating, and do not make decisions that jeopardize long-term goals for short-term gains. To complement patience, persistence helps leaders adhere to principles and goals, to relentlessly work towards the goals despite obstacles and tough times

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait, Virtues of ruler*

11. **Self-awareness:** This encompasses understanding one's own capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, values, and characters. Knowing oneself forms the basis of almost everything we do, not only as a leader, but also as an individual. It is particularly important for leaders as what they do can have high impact on other people

*Supporting theories: Servant leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person*

12. **Self-confidence:** Leaders have to believe in themselves before others will. They need to communicate with conviction which will increase the confidence of their followers in achieving common goals. This usually manifests itself through other attributes, such as assertiveness and decisiveness

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait, Resonant leadership*

13. **Tolerance of stress:** This is the ability to thrive in stressful situations and to cope with uncertainty, change, as well as performance demands. Leaders with stress tolerance can endure higher levels of discomfort related to their jobs, and can quickly regain their strength and optimism

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Virtues of ruler*

## **4.2 Attributes toward others**

This group focuses on the attributes of leaders that directly relate to how they work with people around them.

1. **Understanding of others:** Each person is different from every other person, e.g., different capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, values, goals, etc. Leaders should understand these differences in order to be able to work with their followers more effectively

*Supporting theories: Trait, Situational leadership, Servant leadership, Transformational leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person*

2. **Development of others:** Everyone has intrinsic values, needs, and concerns. Leaders need to recognize those values and beliefs, and need to commit to

fulfilling them. They have a responsibility to nurture the personal and professional growth of their followers that drive self-fulfillment and self-worth

*Supporting theories: Situational leadership, Democratic leadership, Servant leadership, Transformational leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person, Virtues of ruler, Bases for social cohesion*

3. **Collaboration with others:** Leaders need to work collaboratively with their followers to accomplish common goals. Working collaboratively fosters a positive environment where everyone is recognized and rewarded fairly based on their contributions. They also need to be able to leverage the strengths and recognize the weaknesses of their followers in order to best utilize the resource they have

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait, Situational leadership, Democratic leadership, Servant leadership, Transformation leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person*

### **4.3 Attributes toward job and environment**

This group emphasizes leadership aspects around functional competencies as well as the ability to work within and for society as well as the environment.

1. **Awareness of surroundings:** This covers the understanding of issues, community, and environment, as well as the impact on them from the leader's decisions. Such awareness will enable leaders to take a holistic and integrated view in most situations, and also to draw lessons from the past to understand the likely consequences of a decision for the future

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Contingency, Servant leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person*

2. **Clear vision and objectives:** Leaders should know where to lead the company toward. Having a clear objective is important as it helps provide a sense of meaning and challenge as well as common focus for their followers. While practice and discipline are required to stretch the thinking boundary, the ability to look beyond day-to-day realities will enable leaders to creatively guide their followers in overcoming obstacles and achieving goals

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Transformational leadership, Servant leadership, Resonant leadership, Virtues of noble person*

3. **Development of society:** Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR) is one topic that has received much attention recently. The betterment of society is becoming part of most companies' visions. Therefore, not only should leaders be alert to and understand how their decisions impact the social environment, they should also identify a means of serving and improving them

*Supporting theories: Servant leadership, Virtues of ruler, Bases for social cohesion*

4. **Knowledge of jobs and principles:** Leaders should be proficient in their own fields as well as be able to train others in order to carry out tasks and achieve objectives. The significance of this varies by the level and span-of-control of leadership. Higher-level leaders cannot afford to know everything their followers need to know, hence the ability to use the right man for the right job becomes more important at higher levels of leadership

*Supporting theories: Great Man, Trait, Contingency, Situational leadership, Transactional leadership, Virtues of noble person*

From the above, one can hardly argue that these leadership attributes are not what good leaders should possess. They are comprehensive and relevant as seen by a number of supporting theories and principles. The main question is no longer how important they

are, but rather how to develop those attributes in order to become better leaders. The next few chapters will address this question from a specific angle, i.e., how do meditation and mindfulness play a role in enhancing those attributes.

## **Chapter 5: Interview Settings**

The previous chapter explored and synthesized the core and common elements of leadership attributes from a number of theories and principles. The next two chapters will seek to understand how meditation and mindfulness can enhance these attributes through interviews with business leaders at different levels of various organizations. This chapter outlines the interview settings, while the next chapter analyzes the results and summarizes the findings.

### **5.1 Interviewees**

The interviewees included people from within and outside my organization. They are all meditation practitioners as I seek to understand the changes that occurred to their leadership qualities as a result of meditation. Within my organization, I approached two of the most senior members of my team, because they have been not only with the company for over fifteen years, but also devout Buddhists who regularly meditate.

For those outside my organization, the interviewees were fifteen high-level executives selected from various industries. These included both manufacturing and service industries, as well as both private and public companies. The interviewees varied greatly in their ages, leadership experience, and size of their organizations. See Table 3 for summary of their profiles.

Table 3. Profile of interviewees

Background	Number of interviewees
<b>Age</b>	
• 30 – 40 years	2
• 40 – 50 years	9
• 50 – 60 years	6
<b>Gender</b>	
• Male	9
• Female	8
<b>Size of organization</b>	
• 0 – 100 subordinates	8
• 100 – 500 subordinates	6
• 500 – 1000 subordinates	1
• 1000 subordinates or above	2
<b>Years of leadership experience</b>	
• 10 years or below	2
• 10 – 20 years	4
• 20 – 30 years	10
• 30 years or above	1

## 5.2 Questions

Each interview was a different and unique conversation with different key questions posed. Nonetheless, there were a few basic questions that were asked in every interview in addition to typical background questions. These questions were asked in three successive parts.

### 5.2.1 Introductory Part

There were three basic questions in this part:

1. Why, how, and how long have you been practicing meditation?
2. What major impact do meditation and mindfulness have on you?
3. Please share example(s) when mindfulness helped you overcome a difficult leadership situation/dilemma

The answers to the above questions led to different probing and clarifying questions, depending on the experience of each leader.

### 5.2.2 Main Part

The introductory part provided a clue as to what leadership attributes were enhanced through the practice of meditation and mindfulness. This session dug deeper by probing to see if other leadership attributes were also enhanced but not mentioned explicitly in the introductory part. Here each of the leadership attributes in Table 2 was validated one at a time through open discussion with examples as appropriate.

### 5.2.3 Concluding Part

This part wrapped up the interview by asking more open-ended questions about meditation and mindfulness. Two basic questions were:

1. Did meditation and mindfulness deteriorate your leadership effectiveness in any way?
2. What advice do you have to other leaders about meditation and mindfulness?

To make the interviews more interesting and relevant to psychodynamic concepts, two specific questions were also added in this part:

3. Did meditation and mindfulness help you in dealing with negative capability?
4. Did meditation and mindfulness improve your ability to listen with third ear?

### **5.3 Interview formats**

The interviews took about one month to complete. Most of the interviews were conducted in person, both in Bangkok and in other provinces. An interview typically lasted approximately one hour, with a voice recorder being used to allow full engagement of both the interviewer and interviewee.

The basic questions in the introductory part were sent in advance so that the interviewees had time to digest the materials and prepare their responses. However, the list of leadership attributes in Table 2 was not sent in advance in order to avoid the anchoring of the interviewee's responses toward the pre-defined attributes.

## Chapter 6: Interview Findings

There were a number of interesting insights from the interviews. As questions were mostly open-ended and the verbatim from each interviewee was unique and quite long, the key messages from the responses were summarized in order to better highlight their commonalities as well as distinctions. For ease of presentation, I will address the interview findings by following the questions listed in the last chapter.

### 6.1 Introductory part

Here the key take-away is that all interviewees agreed that although different reasons led the interviewees to start practicing meditation, the most noticeable changes, as a result of practicing meditation, are common. They are related to emotions and attitudes.

#### Question 1: Why, how, and how long have the interviewees been practicing meditation?

The lengths of practicing varied as expected. What was surprising was that none of the interviewees stated business-related reasons (e.g., stress from work) led them to meditation. Some already had a strong interest in Buddhism and decided to begin meditation, some lost their loved ones and needed refuge, some came across Buddhist books that brought them closer to the religion and then later to meditation, while many followed their friends and relatives to meditation retreats.

There were two responses that stood out. One said she picked up a book that discussed how to prepare oneself for death, an inevitable certainty that no one likes or is ready for. She picked up meditation as a way to train her mind for this matter. Another interviewee

said he felt that his life has been successful and was wondering if there was a higher purpose in life. Meditation taught him how to achieve inner happiness, one that goes beyond happiness from all worldly successes.

As for the meditation approaches, each interviewee practices one or more of the standard techniques taught in Thailand. These include, for example, sitting with the eyes closed and observing the breathing, walking slowly and observing the body's movement, and so on. While doing all these, the interviewees also observed that their sensations and other mental formations (thoughts, emotions, etc) also came and went during the process.

The interviewees usually practice these techniques on a regular basis, e.g., half an hour a day. Most of them also attended meditation retreats on an annual basis, or as time permitted. These retreats helped isolate them from their chaotic lives, allowing them to contemplate what has happened, and devote full energy to practicing the meditation.

Question 2: What major impact did meditation and mindfulness have on the interviewees?

All of them agreed that the most noticeable changes are related to emotions and attitudes. These include, for example, reduction of anger, greater calmness, and more loving-kindness toward others. I notice that these changes formed the basis of almost all their responses to the rest of the interview questions. Therefore more detail will be provided in sections 6.2 and 6.3

Question 3: Please share example(s) when mindfulness helped you overcome a difficult leadership situation/dilemma

Many of them were able to cite specific situations where calmness prevented them from exploding or reacting too aggressively in key meetings with clients or colleagues. A few of them cited the 2011 flood that they went through. It was the worst flood in Thailand in 50 years, affecting almost everyone in one way or another. Calmness with less anger as well as learning to accept things as they are (after giving their best efforts), are among the things that helped them overcome this disastrous event.

Interestingly, on the other hand, some said that they could not recall any special situation as mindfulness has been helping them to have better relationships with others (for example, through genuine loving-kindness and impartiality toward others), and therefore tough situations or confrontation with others became somewhat rare. One cited an analogy to being a Zen monk whereby people can feel calmness around him, and that people tend to cooperate better with him.

## **6.2 Main part**

The main part showed that although meditation and mindfulness were found to have an impact on every leadership attribute in Table 2, there were only a few common factors that underlie the impact on those attributes. These factors are, again not surprisingly, driven by changes related to emotions and attitudes.

### 6.2.1 Attributes toward self

1. **Adaptability:** Most interviewees saw positive impact. At a primary level, they are calmer and more willing to understand as well as adapt to the needs of other. At a secondary level, they start to see that all things are impermanent, so they should

not be blindly attached to those things, but to be more adaptable to the changing world around them

2. **Ambition:** Most interviewees said that their ambitions in worldly things have been reduced. They start to understand that any satisfaction that is conditioned on worldly achievement never lasts. Instead, their ambitions are now to improve the quality of their minds. They care more about right vs. wrong and about the well-being of other people, rather than being ambitious and achieving their goals at all costs
3. **Assertiveness:** Most interviewees said they are more assertive. First, they have a better sense of what is right vs. wrong, thus are more comfortable to stand up for the right things. Second, they have less egos, so any assertion is made with the right intention under the right principle with little self-interest
4. **Commitment and responsibility:** About half the interviewees saw no impact in this aspect while the other half said they saw positive impact. The positive impact came about because some formal meditation techniques, e.g., sitting or walking quietly for hours, no conversations for days, require strong personal commitment. This easily translates into commitment in other aspects of life as well
5. **Decisiveness:** Most interviewees said they do not necessarily make quicker decisions, but they do make better decisions. They become aware of their egos quickly, which allow them to factor those egos out when making decisions. In other words, decisions can be made with more confidence and little self-interest
6. **Dependability and trustworthiness:** The majority of interviewees said that their followers consider them more dependable. By being calm and less emotional, their followers feel more at ease to approach them to share their work-related as well as personal problems

7. **Ethics and morality:** This is one of the few attributes where all interviewees saw positive impact as meditation in Thailand is heavily linked with Buddhist teachings
8. **Impartiality:** Most interviewees saw positive impact here. By being aware of their emotions, biases, prejudices, and so on, when they arise, they can factor these mental formations out and be fairer and more impartial when making decisions or dealing with others
9. **Influence and persuasiveness:** Most interviewees said they become more persuasive but in an interesting way. Meditation and mindfulness do not teach them any speaking or psychological skills to help choose the right words for the right persons, but instead make them more sympathetic without hidden self-interest. Two positive things happen as a result: they are more careful about what they say, and their followers tend to interpret what they say as genuine and sincere
10. **Patience and persistence:** This is also one of the few attributes where all interviewees saw positive impact. By being calm and less angry, they are already more patient in dealing with people and problems. Also, discipline in practicing meditation helps them develop persistence in carrying tasks through
11. **Self-awareness:** This is the core objective of meditation and closely linked with mindfulness, so all interviewees said that they have more self-awareness, unsurprisingly
12. **Self-confidence:** The majority of interviewees said they have more self-confidence, but in a specific way. It is a self-confidence from knowing what is right vs. wrong, from realizing the fact of life that everything is impermanent, and from knowing that mental formations (sensations, thoughts, emotions, and so on) have been dealt with properly when making decisions, etc. This is in contrast to typical self-confidence that is associated with ego, one that fosters self-interest, and to do everything to satisfy worldly satisfaction

13. **Tolerance of stress:** This is also another attribute where all interviewees saw positive impact. They learn that stressful situations are often made more stressful by their worrying thoughts on top of the stressful situations themselves. Meditation and mindfulness help them realize that things, including stressful situations, are impermanent. They will end, thus there is no need to be overly worried once they have done their best. This in turn allows them to be calmer and have higher tolerance when working under pressure

### 6.2.2 Attributes toward others

1. **Understanding of others:** All of the interviewees said that they not only understand themselves more, but also understand others more. They have more loving-kindness and compassion toward other people. They genuinely realize that each person is different and behaves differently depending on his/her circumstance, intrinsic values, needs, and concerns
2. **Development of others:** All of the interviewees respond positively to this aspect as well. With more loving-kindness and compassion, they are genuinely keen not only on understanding others but also on developing them on an individual basis
3. **Collaboration with others:** Most interviewees shared that they work better with other people. On one hand, they genuinely want to understand and develop other people on individual basis. On the other hand, when people feel that they are understood, that they are being developed for their own benefit, then they are more open to collaboration

### 6.2.3 Attributes toward job and environment

1. **Awareness of surroundings:** The majority of interviewees said they have better awareness of their surroundings. Mindfulness enables them to see the

impermanence of things, which helps them to accept things as they are. They also see the cause and effect relationship, thus the interconnectedness, of all things. This often reminds them to take a more holistic and integrated view of the surroundings, and to put things in the right perspective

2. **Clear vision and objectives:** There are two schools of answers here. About half of the interviewees see no impact in this aspect. They associate having clear business vision with having high IQ, while associating having mindfulness from meditation with having high EQ. They view these as two separate dimensions. The other half said meditation also brings better concentration, clearer mind, and thus more clarity of thought. This allows them to stretch their thinking boundaries and to look beyond day-to-day realities, both of which are useful when forming visions and objectives
3. **Development of society:** Most of the interviewees said the enhancement in leadership attributes that are related to understanding, developing, and working with others, extend beyond their followers but also to society as a whole. Although the effort to develop society may be less than that to develop others around them, the loving-kindness and compassion does apply to everyone beyond their circle of co-workers
4. **Knowledge of jobs and principles:** The responses to this are similar to that of vision and objectives. About half of the interviewees see no impact in this aspect as they associate knowledge of jobs with having high IQ, while associating having mindfulness from meditation with having high EQ. They view these as two separate dimensions. The other half said meditation also brings better concentration, a clearer mind, and thus greater clarity of thought, all of which allows them to absorb more information and be more knowledgeable about what they are doing

### **6.3 Concluding part**

The interesting answers are in the concluding part. It also addressed how mindfulness is related to the notions of negative capability and listening with the third ear.

Question 1: Did meditation and mindfulness deteriorate leadership effectiveness of the interviewees in any way?

Here the responses were open to different interpretation. Below are two classic examples.

First, the interviewees said that they were used to telling white lies to get something done without even feeling bad about it. After practicing meditation, however, they are able to observe and notice the guilt in their minds more quickly when telling those white lies. They are now avoiding those lies whenever they are aware of them. Some interviewees viewed this as lower effectiveness of leadership to get things done quickly. Other interviewees viewed this as better effectiveness (albeit long-term) as people will eventually have more trust, and things can move even more quickly.

Second, as most interviewees experienced more loving-kindness and compassion toward other people, some became reluctant to punish their people according to the rules, and tended to give them more chances. Some interviewees viewed this as lower effectiveness of leadership as it weakens the rules in some ways. Other interviewees viewed this as better effectiveness as they purposely gave more chances so that those people could be properly re-trained. They went as far as finding new jobs for their people if they eventually needed to fire them.

Question 2: What advice the interviewees may have to other leaders?

Every interviewee basically encourages other leaders to practice meditation because of all the benefits highlighted thus far. Some have even encouraged their employees to join meditation retreats without losing vacation days, and advise other leaders to consider doing something similar. A few stresses that leaders often cite as the #1 reason for why employees are satisfied with their jobs or not. Thus, the enhancement of leadership attributes from mindfulness via meditation will play an important role in improving employees' satisfaction and will eventually lead to enhanced company performance.

Question 3: Did meditation and mindfulness help the interviewees in dealing with negative capability?

Most interviewees said that there will always be uncertainty and ambiguity in the business world. As mindfulness helps them to see things as they are, to understand their existence and the nature of being impermanent, they become more patient in dealing with uncertainty and ambiguity. They can stay with uncertainty and ambiguity peacefully while finding the answers. In other words, they continue to seek clarity but without being angry, annoyed, or irritated about them. Indeed, a lot of energy is being diverted from dealing with those emotions to seeking answers more systematically.

Question 4: Did meditation and mindfulness improve their abilities to listen with third ear?

There are two levels of answers here. First, the increase in awareness of the surroundings and understanding of others help the interviewees to pay more attention beyond what they

hear when talking to others. They listen attentively not only to what others are saying or reading between the lines of what is being said, but also to the subtext of their conversations, body language, posture, demeanor, etc.

Second, they are quicker to be aware of their own minds. They can detect not only bias or prejudice in their minds more quickly, but also other mental formations (sensations, thoughts, emotions, etc) which need to be dealt with properly. Mindfulness is the key to listen and react to things in their minds neutrally and quickly.

In conclusion, the results show that meditation and mindfulness do enhance most attributes of leadership, especially those that require high levels of self-awareness and EQ. High levels of self-awareness also lead to high levels of awareness and understanding of others, through loving-kindness and compassion. A strong connection between mindfulness and psychodynamic concepts was also found.

The next chapter will focus on advice from monks regarding meditation and leadership. In particular, the monks also helped clarify why mindfulness (thus self-awareness), weakens selfness, and results in the strong enhancement of leadership attributes that are related to others (non self), e.g., better understanding of others through more loving-kindness.

Before ending this chapter, one relevant point worth mentioning is that the interviewees appeared to be focused, calm, and mindful during the interviews. One reason might be that the topic is in itself neither controversial nor emotional.

## **Chapter 7: Insights from Monks**

To enhance the quality of the research, discussions with monks are also part of the methodology. Though not business leaders themselves, they are holding senior positions within their communities, thus are leaders in their own right.

One of them is currently the vice abbot of one of the Royal temples in Bangkok. He holds a senior title within the Thai monastic institute, and is a regular publisher of books on Buddhism. The other is very famous among foreigners in Thailand as well as Thais living abroad. He is one of the few foreign monks in Thailand, and has served as abbot of the International Forest Temple for several years. He is also instrumental in publishing books on meditation, as taught in Thailand, in English language. The last one is the vice abbot of a remote temple in the northern part of Thailand. He was my meditation teacher when I was recently ordained as a Buddhist monk in this temple.

Note that the objective of these interviews is different from those with the business leaders. Here the focus is more for the monks to preach and give advice regarding meditation and leadership. In particular, the monks also helped clarify why mindfulness (thus self-awareness), weakens selfness, and results in strong enhancement of leadership attributes that are related to others (non self), e.g., better understanding of others through more loving-kindness. Below are the key advices and insights:

### **7.1 Meditation needs to be in the right context**

Meditation needs to be within context of the overall effort of how we live our lives, i.e., our conduct, our speech, and so on. For example, observing five precepts (See Moral in

the appendix section A.4.4) is critical to ensure right speech and right conduct. Though they are not seen as commandments by God, they are helpful in training the quality of our conduct, which has impact on our minds. This is because the main reason why meditation is not always effective is that in daily life, we are acting and speaking in ways which are strengthening the very mental habits that we are trying to let go of in the meditation. This is like taking one step forward and taking two steps backward. There has to be a harmony between the outer and the inner.

## **7.2 Meditation effort does matter**

So many people apply worldly criteria to meditation. They see it in worldly terms that it is something to do in order to get some reward (in which we call peace or stress-free life). However, from a Buddhist point of view, it's the effort itself which is the important thing. It is about being aware of and then able to deal intelligently with mental formations. These not only include simple emotions such as greed and anger, but also more complex emotions such as mental agitation, depression, anxiety, worry, obsessive thoughts, and so on.

But before we can really do that kind of work, we need to increase our attention span. So most meditation techniques begin with some simple objects such as the breath and then just sustain the attention from it. As soon as the mind wanders to various places from the object, we realize that and come back to the present moment. The fact that we have to do it again and again is not a sign of failure. Every time we become aware that we are distracted and let go of that distraction to return to the object, it is like we are flexing that mindfulness muscle one at a time. That muscle over time becomes stronger. Our minds

wander less often. And we realize much more quickly those mental states arising in our minds.

Slowly, always being in the present moment with simple object such as breathing will help us to be aware of whatever happen in their minds and then to be able to deal with them intelligently. Note that observing breathing is just one of many techniques; meditation can also be practiced by being in the present moment while chanting, dressing, eating, reading, sitting, walking, and so on. As soon as the mind goes off various places from these activities, we can just realize that and come back to the present moment.

### **7.3 Self-awareness weakens selfness (ego)**

Buddhism teaches us to be aware of our bodies and minds, and then to realize the truth that they are impermanent and uncontrollable. Happiness (or unhappiness), greed (or anger), good thought (or bad thought), all seem to appear in our minds randomly throughout the day, and we usually act in a good or bad ways according to these driving forces. Similar to sensations and other mental formations, our bodily functions are also subject to being impermanent and uncontrollable, i.e., none of us can control ourselves from getting old, getting sick, and dying.

Mindfulness is a kind of self-awareness that enables us to realize and accept that our bodily functions, sensations, and other mental formations are all impermanent and uncontrollable, which eventually leads to a genuine acceptance that nothing is actually ours. The notion of self vs. others becomes weakened as nothing is truly ours or theirs; they all belong to the world. This could appear to be in contrast with many leadership theories where the notion of self is their key element.

#### **7.4 Self-awareness is not self-control**

Meditation trains us to be in the present moment; to be aware of our bodies and minds. It teaches us to be aware of our sensations and other mental formations which come and go all the time. The keyword here is “aware” which is different from “control”. People, including leaders, are trained to control or suppress their emotions rather than being aware of them. This process basically strengthens the belief that we can control our sensations and other mental formations. Therefore, although reasonable self-control, especially of speech and conduct, are still needed, excessive self-control, especially on emotions, can have negative effect of strengthening selfness and ego, which runs against the teaching in Buddhism.

#### **7.5 Mindfulness leads to more loving-kindness and compassion**

As meditation leads to more self-awareness and mindfulness, it inherently teaches us to look at ourselves before others when problems arise, to look at everything, neither optimistically nor pessimistically, but realistically. When mindfulness weakens the notion of self, it relatively strengthens the importance of others. Loving-kindness and compassion toward others come naturally as we begin to understand that other people, who are not trained to be mindful, are acting under the influence of the same uncontrollable sensations and other mental formations, without even realizing it. Here our authority comes not from our status or position within the organization, but from our knowledge, our experience, our wisdom, and our loving-kindness as well as our compassion toward others.

In Buddhism, loving-kindness and compassion are part of the principle called **The sublime states of mind** (Brahmavihara 4). The principle is also very well known in Thailand as it is taught in early years of school. It consists of:

1. **Loving-kindness** (Metta): Wishing others well and happiness
2. **Compassion** (Karuna): Wishing others free of suffering
3. **Sympathetic Joy** (Mudita): Joy with wellness and happiness of others
4. **Equanimity** (Upekkha): Accept things as they are with impartiality

Equanimity is of particular importance in the context. In some cases, when we wish others happiness or free of suffering, we can be unhappy ourselves if those wishes do not come true. Equanimity helps counter-balance this kind of excessive loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy.

## **7.6 Mindfulness leads to cessation of suffering**

By being aware that all things are impermanent, uncontrollable, and not ours, we start to loosen our attachments to them. This is because attaching to things that are impermanent, uncontrollable, and not ours, will never bring true satisfaction. As our bodily functions, sensations, and other mental formations are also impermanent and uncontrollable, and that nothing is truly ours, we will no longer attach even to ourselves (our ego) in the end. This leads to the cessation of suffering as there is no longer self to suffer, no self-interest to be fulfilled.



## Chapter 8: Conclusions

Mindfulness, as cultivated through a practice of meditation, was found to enhance the key leadership qualities, as summarized from several Western theories as well as Buddhist principles. Business leaders, who have practiced meditation regularly, all noticed improvements in their emotions and attitudes. The most noticeable ones were reduction of anger, greater calmness, and more loving-kindness toward others. And these in turn were the underlying factors behind the improvement of other leadership qualities. Interestingly, non-anger (and to a lesser degree, reduction of anger which was cited by every interviewee) is uniquely listed under the Buddhist virtues of a ruler, but not under other leadership theories at all.

Discussions with monks also enlightened a few more insights such as how self-awareness can reduce selfness (ego) and increase loving-kindness to others. The advice on how to properly incorporate meditation into the daily life was also given by the meditation masters. My recent experience in the monkhood with intensive meditation practice not only confirmed the above findings, but it also made me realize that the benefits of meditation and mindfulness could be well beyond what was being studied here.

Beyond mindfulness, Buddhism also has a lot to offer to leadership. It highlights the cause and effect of all phenomena and thus the interconnectedness of things. Every action has consequences, and leaders, whose one tiny action can have a propagated impact on many individuals, need to keep that in mind. As action can also have consequences that go beyond their companies, Buddhism teaches leaders to have more holistic and integrated view of things, to care for not only themselves, their people, their business partners, but

also other people in their communities and beyond. This is at the heart of a modern-day corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Before ending this thesis with some future research areas, I would like to highlight my recent monkhood experience as well as relate the findings with the concepts in the CCC program.

### **8.1 Own monkhood experience**

I was not planning to become a monk when I decided on this Mindful Leadership topic. Interestingly, the more I did research, the more I realized how little I knew about mindfulness in Buddhism. Though I meditate, I barely knew how it fits within the overall context of Buddhism. I knew about leadership not only through books but also from being a leader myself, but I could not say the same when it came to mindfulness.

The opportunity arose and I decided to spend a few weeks as a Buddhist monk in one of the royal temples, located near the border between Myanmar and Thailand. This allowed me to have direct experience in Buddhism, to be more isolated, and to perform all monastic duties properly. I also had an intense meditation course under the guidance of a Buddhist monk (meditation master).

A typical day started at 6 a.m. in the morning. I woke up and practiced chanting as well as meditating (sitting and walking). These were followed by a daily alms round outside the temple to collect food from villagers. An interesting note is that one of the disciplines of Buddhism still widely practiced in Thailand, which I also adhere to, is to not wear shoes – even when I went out to collect alms. Breakfast was around 8 a.m., after which I spent

time back and forth between studying Buddhist books and meditating until lunch time. Most of my afternoon was then spent with the meditation master to learn Buddhism as well as practice meditation. I also spent time cleaning the temple and discussing with a few visitors (family, friends, and colleagues) who knew of my ordination. As the monks only have one or two meals a day, there was no dinner and I typically ended my day in isolation, contemplating what I have done during the day.

I could observe that the psychodynamic among the monks within the temple was slightly different from what I experience in normal life. The monks tended to be calm, peaceful, and happy from the inside. The key was that they were always (or tried to be) with the present moment (while chanting, dressing, eating, sitting, walking, and so on). It was the basic mental health that they exercised on all the time.

I then fully realized that being in the present moment, though it sounds simple, was extremely challenging. My mind wandered all the time, especially into thinking about my past and my future. My meditation master kindly reminded me that the past has gone and the future has not arrived, thus I was hardly in the present moment at all.

As discussed in section 7.2, I resorted to use my breathing as an object while meditating. It enabled me to notice sensations and other mental formations, and I could come back to the present moment more quickly. The thoughts about past and future became rare which was a strange experience for me as I was so accustomed to thinking about what happened and what to do next.

Reflecting on my own experience using myself as a tool, it was very difficult to be with myself and be my own companion for so many days. But this illustrated one of the

Buddhist teachings that I should not expect others to bring me happiness, as it is within me. Admittedly, I could not wait to finish my monkhood and come back to my normal life. I said to another monk that I would be free in a few days, and he replied with a smile that “You are already free here, it is the jail that you are going back into”. I just began this serious meditation journey, and time will tell if that is indeed the case.

## **8.2 Relationship with Consulting and Coaching for Change (CCC) program**

There are also a number of strong relationships between Buddhist’s teachings and the concepts taught in CCC program by Kets de Vries, Lehman, and van de Loo (*Executive Education*, n.d.).

### 8.2.1 Premises of clinical paradigm

Kets de Vries and Korotov (2007) argued that there are four premises in the clinical paradigm:

1. All human behavior, even in its most odd or deviant forms, has a rational explanation
2. Our unconscious plays a tremendous role in determining our actions, thoughts, fantasies, hopes, and fears
3. Our emotions contribute to our identity and behavior
4. Human development is an interpersonal and intrapersonal process

A careful consideration will reveal that they are all related to mindfulness and Buddhism. Buddhism teaches us that there is a rational explanation behind everything. Every phenomenon is subject to a chain of cause and effect, not excluding our mental process. Mindfulness enables us to see that our conduct and speech can be explained by our inner

sensations as well as other mental formations, and well-trained minds can be conscious and aware of these unconscious plays. Even ethical behaviors, which most believe need to be consciously attentive, are also found to be non-deliberately spontaneous with a well-trained mind (Garfield 2011).

### 8.2.2 Core-conflictual relationship themes (CCRT) within inner theater

The clinical paradigm focuses on exploring a person's inner theater. Buddhism teaches us to first explore our own inner theater, i.e., to be fully aware of ourselves. They are complimentary with a subtle difference, nevertheless.

Buddhism teaches us that:

- Whenever we see things, hear things, smell things, taste things, touch things, and think of things, the sensations (pleasant feeling vs. unpleasant feeling) arise as a result of our subconscious interpretation of those things, somewhat similar to the CCRT in our inner theater
- Then other mental formations, such as emotions and thoughts, arise. For example, greed typically arises when the things we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think about, are pleasant. We want them more or to last longer. Likewise, anger typically arises when the things we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think about, are unpleasant. We want less or none of that
- Selfness also arises which makes us the ones who are happy or angry
- Selfness and these other mental formations in turn drive our speech, conduct, or even more thought

- Mindfulness enables us to be aware of the sensations before the other mental formations arise; or to be aware of the other mental formations (if they have arisen) before acting, speaking, or thinking further
- Mindfulness also enables us to see that sensations and the other mental formations are impermanent, not controllable, and not ours (not us)

The clinical paradigm states that:

- The CCRT within our inner theater contribute to our individual style and pattern
- That style and pattern in turn determine how we think, behave, speak, and so on
- Emotions are also driven by the core-conflictual relationship themes within our inner theater
- Exploring inner theater enables us to better understand the overall context behind our thought, speech, and conduct, as well as dynamics associated with the perception, motivation, relationship, and so on

A similarity between Buddhism and clinical paradigm is that Buddhism teaches us to be aware of our mental formations, such as thoughts and emotions, before we choose to speak, to act, or to think further. For example, once we are aware of a negative thought that has arisen, we can somewhat direct our thought into a more positive one which could then lead to different emotions, although some random thoughts will still occur due to our minds still wandering around. This is similar to the clinical paradigm which states that after knowing the thought we currently have, we can have different thought and action, which could also then lead to different outcomes.

There is also a subtle difference between clinical paradigm and Buddhism. Mindfulness in Buddhism focuses on being aware of the sensations and other mental formations without necessarily trying to understand them. It is the awareness and being in the present moment that matters, and not the content of the awareness. This is slightly different from exploring the inner theater which focuses on understanding what are behind those sensations, other mental formations, behaviors, and so on.

### 8.2.3 Being on the balcony

Meditation trains our minds to be aware of our bodily functions, sensations, and other mental formations. Mindfulness helps detach ego and self-interest from the problems, which enables leaders to be non-judgmental and more systematic as well as impartial when dealing with them. This is like forming a hypothesis to be tested without bias and premature conclusion. The clinical paradigm similarly teaches us to be in the present moment in what we do and know when to stay “on the balcony” vs. “on the dance floor”; i.e., when to observe all the visible and invisibles from a distance without making any premature judgment vs. when to intervene, get involved, and make decisions.

### 8.2.4 Using oneself as tool

Mindfulness is about the mind, something intangible where science has not yet come close to an understanding of it. There is no other way to understand true mindfulness rather than experiencing it ourselves. Mindfulness (thus a true understanding of Buddhism) comes from direct experience using ourselves as a tool with the classroom right here surrounding us in every moment. This technique is also central to the clinical approach in consulting, coaching, and mentoring. It enables us to uncover what is going on beneath the surface, smell the place, read the invisible part, and so on. I would also like to stress that there is no need to take Buddhism religiously, but philosophically or psychologically in order to

benefit from its teachings. Buddhism is all about direct experience. Practice, not Faith, is the most important thing here.

#### 8.2.5 Consulting and coaching

In consulting and coaching, it is very important that we are being with the clients as our minds tend to wander around, sometimes on irrelevant things, just like mind monkeys that are unsettled and restless (*Mind Monkey*, n.d.).

I also found that the improvements related to emotions and attitudes are useful for consulting and coaching. Though the interviewees are neither formal coach nor consultant, they are better equipped and more willing to be one. On one hand, with more loving-kindness and compassion, they are more willing to understand and help others. They become less judgmental and have more understanding of others' circumstances and wishes. These are good attitudes for every consultant or coach. On the other hand, they are quicker to be aware of and able to deal with their sensations and mental formations. They become more patient, neutral, impartial, with less anger. These are also desirable qualities of every consultant or coach. In addition, the ability to better tolerate ambiguity (negative capability) and quicker to listen to their own minds (listen with third ear) also prepares them well to be effective consultants or coaches. This compliments the recent study that related Buddhism to executive coaching (Eamrunroj, 2012).

### **8.3 Future research**

To confine the scope to mindful leadership, below are some interesting future research areas:

- Interviews with peers, sub-ordinates, or clients of those who meditate regularly in order to listen to other perspectives
- Interviews with other levels of executives. This thesis focuses on high-level leadership, but insights from lower-level leadership might also be useful as they are under different circumstances

Another interesting research idea was shared to me by one of the interviewees, it is related to the question of whether meditation and mindfulness deteriorate leadership effectiveness in any way. As the ultimate objective of most businesses is to make profit, the idea of ineffectiveness needs to be looked at more broadly. He suggested a topic on “Economics of Trust”, to see if trust, which is gained by not telling white lies, not cheating, and so on, which can have negative impact in the short-run, will eventually make economic sense in the long run.



## **Appendix 1: Relevant Leadership Theories and Buddhist Principles**

### **A.1 Theories on traits of leaders**

This group looks at leadership as in in-born characteristic. Only certain people possess traits which enable them to be successful leaders. There are two relevant theories within this group.

#### A.1.1 Great Man

The Great Man theory states that leaders are born with the necessary attributes that set them apart from others. These certain traits are responsible for their assuming positions of power and authority. Great leaders can arise when there is a great need with the capability that they were born with.

This theory became popular in the nineteenth century and was predominantly influenced by historian Thomas Carlyle (1888). According to Carlyle, effective leaders are those gifted with unique qualities, divine inspiration and the right characteristics that capture the imagination of the masses.

In the early days, some of the research on leadership focused on people who were already successful leaders and leadership was considered as a quality associated mostly with males. Well-known leaders such as Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Alexander the Great helped contribute to the notion that great leaders are born and not made.

Stogdill (1974) identified critical traits and skills to leaders as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Critical traits and skills of leadership from Great Man Theory

Traits	Skills
Adaptable to situations Alert to social environment Ambitious and achievement-orientated Assertive Cooperative Decisive Dependable Dominant (desire to influence others) Energetic (high activity level) Persistent Self-confident Tolerant of stress Willing to assume responsibility	Clever (intelligent) Conceptually-skilled Creative Diplomatic and tactful Fluent in speaking Knowledgeable about group task Organized (administrative ability) Persuasive Socially-skilled

### A.1.2 Trait Leadership

Similar to the Great Man Theory, Trait Leadership studied successful leaders to draw their traits and suggested that human behavior is governed by a measurement of habitual patterns in behavior, meaning patterns in personality that remain constant in a person's life (Allport & Odbert, 1936). Further assumption for this theory was that if people were found with these leadership traits, they would become leaders. The right combination of traits would make a person a good leader.

Gardner (1989) summarizes the key traits that make leaders successful as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Key traits of leadership from Trait Theory

Traits
Physical vitality and stamina
Intelligence and action-oriented judgment
Eagerness to accept responsibility
Task competence
Understanding of followers and their needs
Skill in dealing with people
Need for achievement
Capacity to motivate people
Courage and resolution
Trustworthiness
Decisiveness
Self-confidence
Assertiveness
Adaptability/flexibility

## **A.2 Theories on leadership styles towards different situations**

This group views that situations will create different leadership styles required of a leader.

There are two key theories here.

### A.2.1 Contingency

The contingency theory developed by Fiedler (1967) shows the relationship between the leadership style and group performance under various situational conditions. The success of the leader is a function of various contingencies in the form of subordinate, task, and group variables.

The effectiveness of a given pattern of leadership behavior is contingent upon the demands imposed by the situation. Fiedler discovered that while the task oriented leaders were more effective in low and moderate control situations, the relationship oriented managers were more effective in moderate control situations.

### A.2.2 Situational Leadership

Developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1988), the situational leadership states that leaders choose the best course of action based upon situational variables and there is no single "best" style of leadership. The effective leadership is task-relevant, and the most successful leaders are those who adapt their leadership style to the situations.

Hersey and Blanchard characterized leadership style in terms of the amount of Task Behavior and Relationship Behavior into four behavior types:

1. **Telling:** One-way communication in which the leader defines the roles of the individual or group and provides the what, how, why, when and where to do the task
2. **Selling:** The leader provides the direction using two-way communication. At the same time he/she also provides emotional support to influence the individual or group to buy into the process
3. **Participating:** The leader encourages shared decision-making on how to accomplish the task. He/she provides less task behaviors while maintaining high relationship behavior
4. **Delegating:** The leader is less involved in decisions, but passes most of the responsibility to the individual or group. The leader still monitors progress

While Telling and Selling are focused on getting the task done, Participating and Delegating are more on developing team members to work independently. No one style is considered optimal for all leaders to use all the time. Effective leaders need to be flexible, and must adapt themselves to the situation.

### **A.3 Theories on qualities of leaders**

The focus of this group covers the qualities and abilities, both intrinsic and extrinsic, of the leaders including the relationship with the followers.

### A.3.1 Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership, also called participative leadership, is one of the three different leadership styles identified from leadership decision experiments by Lewin, Lippitt & White (1939). The underlying principle is democracy where leaders involve the team members in the decision-making process.

The democratic leadership benefits the followers as it supports individuals to reach their personal development goals through contribution in decision making, problem solving, planning and implementation. It can bring the best out of an experienced and professional team as it capitalizes on the followers' skills and talents by embracing their views, rather than simply expecting them to conform.

### A.3.2 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership seeks to serve others, gets them involved in decision making and helps enhance their growth.

According to Greenleaf (1991), the servant-leader is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?

Since first introduced in the 1970s, servant leadership has been written and spoken about by many creative thinkers as an emerging leadership paradigm for the 21st century.

Spears (2010) identified ten critical characteristics of the servant leaders including:

1. **Listening:** Deep commitment to listening intently to others. Identify the will of the group and help clarify that will. Listen receptively to what is said and unsaid, and encompass one's own inner voice
2. **Empathy:** As people need to be accepted and recognized, the leaders should strive to understand and empathize with others
3. **Healing:** One of the great strengths of leaders lie in healing one's self and one's relationship to others. Servant leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to help make whole those with whom they come in contact
4. **Awareness:** Awareness helps leaders to understand issues and be able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. General awareness and, especially, self-awareness strengthen the servant leader
5. **Persuasion:** The servant leader seeks to convince others, rather than use positional authority and coerce compliance. This specific characteristic sets clear distinction between servant leadership and traditional authoritarian model
6. **Conceptualization:** This is the ability to look at a problem beyond day-to-day realities. It requires practice and discipline as it stretches the thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. While boards of directors need to be mostly conceptual by nature, staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspectives. Servant leaders, therefore, should find a balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day operational approach

7. **Foresight:** This characteristic enables the servant leader to understand lessons from the past, realities of the present and likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind
8. **Stewardship:** This is defined as holding something in trust for another. Servant leadership assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving other people's needs while emphasizing openness and persuasion
9. **Commitment to the Growth of People:** It is based on the belief that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions. The servant leader recognizes this belief and assumes high responsibility to nurture both personal and professional growth of the followers
10. **Building Community:** Due to the shift from local communities to large institutions as a primary shaper of human lives, much has been lost in human history. This drives the servant leader to identify some means for building true community among those who work in businesses and other institutions

Note that the above characteristics are useful in themselves, whether or not the leader adheres to the servant leadership paradigm.

### A.3.3 Transactional Leadership

According to Bass (2008), transactional leadership focuses on basic management roles of supervision, organization, and group performance. Leaders use rewards and punishments contingent upon the performance of the followers given that the relationship is based on an exchange.

Transactional leaders emphasize short-term goals, and standard rules and procedures while creativity and generation of new ideas are not valued. This leadership style, therefore, tends to be effective where the organizational problems are simple and clearly defined.

#### A.3.4 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders are those who create positive change in their followers by inspiring the followers to go beyond their task requirements, and focusing on intrinsic needs. Burns (1978) described it as an ongoing process that "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation".

Bass (1998) extended the work of Burns and introduced four components for transformational leaders as follows:

1. **Inspirational Motivation:** Vision, mission and values are the foundation of transformational leadership. Leaders should provide a sense of meaning and challenge to the followers as well as foster the spirit of teamwork and commitment
2. **Intellectual Stimulation:** Leaders should encourage innovation and creativity from the followers and not criticize them publicly. The leaders' vision should guide the followers to see the connections among themselves, the organization and the goal. This big picture will allow the followers to creatively overcome obstacles and achieve the goal
3. **Charisma or Idealized Influence:** Leaders act as role models by having a clear set of values and demonstrating them in every action. Such leaders always win the genuine trust, which is built on a solid moral and ethical foundation, from their followers
4. **Individualized Consideration:** This refers to leaders' attention to follower's needs and act as mentors to their followers including listening to their concerns and

needs. It encompasses the need to reward them for creativity and innovation, respect and celebrate their contribution. Not only does this component fulfill the individual's self-actualization, it also propels self-fulfillment and self-worth.

#### A.3.5 Resonant Leadership

According to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), resonant leaders are those who are “stepping up, charting paths through unfamiliar territory, and inspiring people in their organization, institutions, and communities”. They manage inevitable sacrifices but also care for themselves to ensure they can sustain resonance over time. They build resonant relationship with people around them and use emotion intelligence as a key.

Apart from being aware and attuned to themselves and the world around them, great leaders are seen to possess:

1. **Commitment to their belief and values:** Values are based on beliefs and determine our attitudes. Sharing values and living them daily will create trust between the leader and the followers
2. **Emotional intelligence:** EI includes self-awareness and self-confidence, self-management such as adaptability and trustworthiness, social awareness, and relationship management such as influence and desire to develop others. The first 2 domains determine how well we understand and manage ourselves and our emotions. The latter 2 indicate how well we recognize and manage the emotions of others, build relationships, and work in complex social systems
3. **Mindfulness:** Live in full consciousness of self, others, nature, and society
4. **Hope:** Inspire through clarity of vision, optimism and profound belief in ability to turn dreams into reality

5. **Empathy and compassion:** Use this quality to face sacrifice, difficulties, challenges and opportunities for the people they lead and those they serve

#### **A.4 Leadership principles from Buddhism**

The focus of this group is on some of the Buddhist principles that are applicable to leadership. Since the ultimate sources of Buddhist principles were all written in Pali or Sanskrit over 2 millennia ago (*Tipitaka*, n.d.), I refer to their translation and interpretation by Payutto (2002, 2008). These books organize the principles into several categories, for example, those for society, those for rulers, those for practitioners, etc. Here I select four sets of principles which I view as very relevant to business leadership. As these are preached by Buddha, morality is therefore a core element within them.

##### A.4.1 For decision-making

The notion of **Supremacy 3** (*Adhipateyya 3*) can serve as the overall guiding principle for leaders when they need to make decisions or judgments. The principle consists of:

1. **Supremacy of Self** (*Attadhipateyya*) which takes oneself as the ultimate decider. Leaders should not adhere to this as the guiding principle because anyone can be wrong, unfair, and make bad decisions. Using self as the ultimate judge is easily prone to error and bias
2. **Supremacy of others or public opinions** (*Lokadhipateyya*) which takes others as the ultimate decider. Leaders should also not adhere to this as the guiding principle because public opinions are not necessarily the right consensus to follow. Majority of people may agree to do something which is not good for themselves, especially when they lack the information to make informed decisions

3. **Supremacy of the righteousness** (Dhammadhipateyya) which takes fact and righteousness as the ultimate decider. This is what leaders should adhere to as the guiding principle. Leaders should listen to all the facts, be non-judgmental, not take things personally, and use righteousness when making decisions

Adhering to this last principle will help any leader to earn the respect of their colleagues. By managing a large company, the ability to make fair and non-judgmental decisions based on facts are crucial to correctly resolve complex cross-functional issues at hand.

#### A.4.2 For social cohesion

**The bases for social cohesion** (Sangahavatthu 4) describe key behaviors that will help integrate groups of people together. The bases include:

1. **Charity, Liberality, Generosity** (Dana): This includes donating things as well as providing help to others without expecting anything in return
2. **Kind Speech** (Piyavaca): This encompasses the ability to say the right thing at the right time, with kindness, convincingness, and sincerity
3. **Useful Conduct and Service** (Atthacariya): This emphasizes the service aspect of leadership towards the followers as well as society
4. **Consistency, Impartiality** (Samanattata): This includes consistent behaviors as well as fairness and equality when treating others as well as oneself

#### A.4.3 For being good role model

**The virtues of a noble person** (Sappurisa-dhamma 7) describe the basic qualifications which a noble person possesses. As leaders also need to be good role models, these virtues are critical for leaders in setting themselves as examples, a pre-requisite of becoming genuine leaders. The virtues include:

1. **Knowing the objective** (Atthannuta): Good leaders know where they are leading their companies towards. Having clear objective helps filter out all the distractions that can prevent such achievement
2. **Knowing the principle** (Dhammannuta): Good leaders also need to know how to take their companies towards their visions. This includes not only technical knowledge but also skills to lead people in a way to best achieve the objectives
3. **Knowing oneself** (Attannuta): Knowing oneself means knowing one's own capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, etc. This allows people to improve their capabilities, capitalize on their strengths, and mitigate their weaknesses when striving towards the objective. This is equivalent to having self-awareness
4. **Knowing the proper balance** (Mattannuta): Good leaders need to strike the right balance and trade-off among many conflicting objectives. This virtue serves as a good reminder to avoid the extremes and continuously seek the optimal trade-off when making business decisions
5. **Knowing the proper time** (Kalannuta): Proper timing is also the key to leaders' successes. This includes proper time management such as knowing when to do what, when to start, when to finish, as well as being punctual
6. **Knowing the assembly** (Parisannuta): Leaders are not leading in isolation. They lead groups of people within society under certain environment. The ability to understand these external (non-self) factors undoubtedly enables leaders to become more effective and efficient, being able to stay on top of changes in the environment and competitive landscape
7. **Knowing the individuals** (Puggalannuta): Genuine leaders not only understand their own needs but also the needs of their assemblies and societies. Leaders need to know how best to mobilize their resources, and the ability to treat each

individual appropriately is the key success factor. “Put the right man to the right job” definitely aligns with this virtue

It is apparent why the above virtues would help anybody to become a better person, any leader to become a better leader and a good role model. A careful look will reveal that these virtues can help any company to become a better company as well.

#### A.4.4 For ruling

**The virtues of ruler** (Rajadhamma 10) describe in more details, the few specific behaviors that are deemed as desirable for a ruler to possess. Great leaders are like great rulers, they need to not only have the hard and technical skills to lead successfully, but also show some soft and moral behaviors to gain wholehearted trust from the followers. In my experience, these virtues can create better image and reputation for the leader, especially in the Eastern countries. They are:

1. **Charity, Liberality, Generosity** (Dana): This includes donating things as well as providing help to others without expecting anything in return
2. **Moral** (Sila): This can be summarized as five precepts which constitute the basic Buddhist code of ethics (*Five Precepts*, n.d.). The precepts include:
  - To abstain from taking life
  - To abstain from taking what is not given
  - To abstain from sexual misconduct
  - To abstain from false speech
  - To abstain from consumption that causes heedlessness, e.g., intoxicants, alcohols
3. **Self-sacrifice** (Pariccaga): This means the sacrificing of one’s own well-being for the betterment of others

4. **Honesty, Integrity** (Ajjava): This includes being honest and having integrity to oneself, to others, as well as to one's rights and duties
5. **Gentleness, Kindness** (Maddava): This includes treating others with care, kindness, and gentleness, in addition to fairness and righteousness
6. **Austerity, Non-indulgence** (Tapa): This illustrates the persistence, willingness, and discipline to carry on the task to its conclusion
7. **Non-anger, Non-fury** (Akkodha): This addresses the anger and fury that could result in the abuse of authority, leading to misjudgment and misinformed decisions
8. **Non-oppression, Non-violence** (Avihimsa): This includes not creating any violence and oppressing oneself as well as others beyond reasonable limits
9. **Patience** (Khanti): This highlights the patience required in carrying on the task despite the difficulties and obstacles. This also includes the tolerance toward desire and craving that can jeopardize the success of the task at hand
10. **Conformity to righteousness** (Avirodhana): This aligns with the Supremacy of righteousness that has been explained earlier under Supremacy 3

## Appendix 2: Contributors

Table 6. List of contributors

Name	Position	Organization	Industry
Ms Buppasawat Ratchatatanun	Owner	ThawSi school	Education
Dr Chada Pancharoen	Owner	Na Nakorn Property	Real Estate
Ms Chompunut Poomta-it	SVP	Siam Commercial Bank	Banking
Mr Chutin Thanasarn-aksorn	Owner	Aksorn Sampan Press	Printing
Mr Edpawin Jetjirawat	VP	Temasek Holdings	Investment
Ms Hattaya Areekarnlert	Deputy Director	True Corporation	Telecommunication
Mr Jaturong Jantarangs	Senior Director	Bank of Thailand	Government
Ms Kanit Muangkrachang	Owner	Toshiba (Thailand)	Home Appliance
Mr Nuttavuth Suwattanawong	Deputy Director	True Corporation	Telecommunication
Ms Piya Churarakpong	Executive Director	Lowe and Partners	Advertising
Mr Prawet Prungtangki	VP	Big C Supercenter	Retail
Ms Rumpa Kumhomreun	CFO	Big C Supercenter	Retail
Mr Somchai Charoenvorakiet	VP	Thai Olympic Fibre-Cement	Construction Materials
Ms Supavadee Santipraditkul	Senior Manager	Tesco Lotus	Retail
Mr Tanakorn Soontornantagit	Owner	Mu-an-ja-i	Film
Ms Vichunai Phanurai	VP	Boral Gypsum Asia	Construction Materials
Dr Witit Ratchatatanun	Owner	Panyaprateep school	Education
Venerable Jayasaro	Head	Baan Rai Thawsi Buddhist Center	Religion
Venerable MahaNikhom	Vice abbot	Tha Ton temple	Religion
Venerable RajaYanaKawee	Vice abbot	Rama IX temple	Religion



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