

# Towards a new model of leadership that combines spirituality and pragmatism

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## **ABSTRACT**

From a Western perspective, leadership is primarily concerned with exerting influence on others to achieve set outcomes and generate maximum profits. Leader effectiveness is framed in terms of such results. During the past century, ideas about the correlate of effective leaders has changed as attention has shifted among various factors, including the leader's traits, the situation, relationships with followers, and goals. Overall, such shifts have produced a rather fragmented picture of the leadership role, rather than uncovering the complexity of leadership and providing a more holistic and integrated one.

Although Eastern management is heavily influenced by Western management theory and practice, Eastern leadership practice is underpinned by the strength of the spiritual bond between leaders and followers. This bond, "Nakama", which means "in-between" in Japanese, is the measure of leader effectiveness. Nakama is the major force to align or integrate a leader, followers and goals within an organisation. When a leader creates the consciousness of Nakama, the spiritual energy is enlarged and dissipated through all people.

The aim of this paper is to present two different views of leadership, one based on the pragmatic Western approach and the other based on Eastern tradition and philosophy, which is more spiritually based. After briefly discussing the main differences between these two approaches, the paper constructs a new model that combines spirituality and pragmatism.

## **Introduction**

Leadership has long been a topic of much interest among Eastern and Western scholars. Both have endeavoured to find the key to successful leadership focusing particularly on how leaders can maintain good relationships with followers while simultaneously achieving organisational goals and maximising desired outcomes.

It is important to note that good leadership (Ciulla, 1995) has been described as based on ethical or moral principles, and emphasises a leader's compassion towards his/her followers. Effective leadership (Rost, 1991; Jacque & Clement, 1994) on the other hand, is more concerned with how a leader achieves an organisational goal in an efficient and effective way. In general, the nature of leadership is understood to be the balance between good leadership and effective leadership (Bennis, 1997).

The way of achieving the balance of good and effective leadership is different in Eastern and Western Cultures. Eastern culture has developed a more collective society and Western culture has a more individualistic society (Hofstede, 1980). Their value mechanisms manifest in different ways i.e. Eastern leadership place a priority on the collective or group identity whilst Western Leadership prioritises individual achievement including their own.

In the West, research focuses on maintaining a balance between good leadership, which is based on sound relationships, and effective leadership, which is more concerned with goal attainment. If this balance cannot be achieved when the two are in conflict a leader tends to trade-off human relationship for organisational goals. On the other hand, Eastern leaders understand the concept of a balance of the two as oneness not as a trade-off. Many leaders consider an organisational goal as a means of improving the welfare of all members. Therefore, the spiritual bond that exists between a leader and his/her followers, is embedded within the paradigm of the company goal. For example, Japanese executives have committed suicide to protect their

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companies' benefits. This drastic action can be explained within the context of a spiritual bond between leaders and their company. This bond has been termed "Nakama" (Yoneyama, 1976), meaning literally "in-between" in Japanese. Eastern organisational culture avoids a well-structured task or an efficient reward system, when it might threaten the spirit of Nakama. Nakama can be strengthened within a loose structure in terms of valuing the collective relationship over individual contribution and a preference of multi-task roles rather than one specific job.

This paper delimits the scope of leadership elements to interactions and interrelationship of three fundamental elements: a leader, his/her followers, and goals. These elements are considered as the 'Trinity of leadership' (Wills, 1994), which are equally necessary for good and effective leadership in the East and West.

The aim of this paper is to present two different views of leadership, one based on the Western approach and the other based on Eastern tradition and philosophy. After briefly discussing the main differences between these two approaches, the paper discusses the basis for a model that combines spirituality and pragmatism.

### **Western leadership approach**

Within the Western tradition, leadership is typically described in terms of the person's capacity to influence others towards the achievement of goals and desired outcomes (Hellriegel, et al 1999; Davidson & Griffin, 2000). Ciulla simplifies the definition of leadership as "some kind of process, act, or influence that in some way gets people to do something" (1995:12). During the past century, specific ideas about how influence is actually achieved have evolved, with attention variously given to the leader's personality traits, behavioural patterns, situational elements (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1993; Yukl, 1989) and transactional-transformational characteristics (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Tichy & Devanna, 1990). Regardless of these shifts, the major focus has remained pragmatic, that is, with promoting the survival and growth of organisations through effective leadership.

Ideas of leadership have evolved from various disciplines such as psychology, sociology and organisational theory and these have influenced the management discipline, representing a Gestalt of the time (Kwon, 1996).

Trait theory, based on proposing universal personal characteristics distinguishing a leader and a non-leader, is the oldest of the approaches and was popular in the Scientific Management era. Leadership behaviour theory focused on the leader's style of interacting with followers, and acknowledged that much needed leader behaviour could be learnt. (Robbins, et.al. 1998) This theory became popular in the post-World War II period with the development of behavioural psychology and the human relations movement. In the 1960s, situation theory was developed within the frame of the contingency approach to management. This theory acknowledges that there is no "one best way" to lead, since each and every context presents different leadership requirements. In the early 1980s, the US economy was facing severe competition from global competitors then, transformational leadership was popularised to organisations in a fast-changing and increasingly demanding environment. The role of a transformational leader was differentiated from that of a transactional leader. A transactional leader guided or motivated their his/her followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirement, whilst a transformational leader exerted a strong influence and displayed a charismatic attraction toward the followers.

As the history of Western management indicates each new theory is meant to overcome the deficiencies in the previous approach, but the other aspect of leadership, how to keep harmony between good and effective leadership is largely unaddressed.

### **The Yin and Yang principle of leadership theory**

Interestingly, Western leadership theory has touched on ideas, which are consistent with the principle of yin and yang. For example, one of the most respected management writers, Warren Bennis, asserted that "the manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people. The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust (Bennis, 1997:88)." However, up until now, these ideas have largely been underdeveloped in theory building.

Taoist principles of Yin and Yang provide a pathway towards addressing some of the neglected issues in Western management thought. Yin and Yang are two fundamental elements or forces of the universe. Taoism is built upon the interrelationship of these two principles. They unfold the secret of the universe through the interactions or harmonisation of yin and yang. Yin is the principle of darkness, cold, femininity, invited withdrawal, rest, and passivity; Yang is the principle of light, heat, masculinity, expansion, activity, and

progression (Kaltenmark, 1969). It is not easy to simply apply these principles to a workplace because there is no absolute separation between yin and yang. But they certainly give a picture of how all things can be integrated within a conflicting hierarchical structure.

Tao (known as way or truth) upholds a dynamic lesson of harmony, describing all of nature – including human nature composed of both the compassionate, nurturing energies of yin and the forceful, assertive energies of yang (Dreher, 1998: 321). In Taoism all things are created through Tao (oneness) and evolved by the interaction of yin and yang. "One gives birth to Two, Two gives birth to Three. Three gives birth to all things" (Tao Te Ching, 42). Lao Tzu (about B.C 530 in China) shows the hierarchical structure of a universe evolution, but all steps contain the interactions of yin (lower position) and yang (higher position). Tao creates yang (heaven) and yin (earth), then yang and yin creates Man. These fundamental factors: heaven, earth, and man create all things.

The rotating black and white symbol with continuous clockwise movement of yin and yang, depicts a natural cycle of flux or change from one polarity to another within the universe. The Water Cycle is used as a classic example of the yin/yang paradigm. Heaven is at first regarded as Yang or Giving when it rains to the earth, considered as Yin or Receiving. However, Heaven can be regarded as Yin or Receiving when water (evaporation) rises to it from the earth, which is then regarded as Yang or Giving, in this case, to Heaven. Nothing that exists within the world can be described as either yin or yang. Everything retains aspects of each and is one or the other only in relation to any process of action and reaction that brings them into a relationship. The continuous circulation, without a blockage, is regarded as maintaining the universal order. Any disturbance or blockage of this flow or movement causes the universe to be out of balance.

I will now briefly outline the theories most relevant to this paper and discuss the evolution of leadership understanding from a Taoist perspective.

### **Trait theory**

Trait theory is the first theory of leadership. Known as the Great Man Theory (Carlyle, 1841), it promotes the notion that a leader is born rather than made. Within this theoretical framework different researchers (Stogdill, 1974; Bass, 1990) have identified traits that distinguish a leader from a non-leader including Kinder's four-factor theory (1986, cited in Aylor, 1998). This theory identifies traits that fit neatly within the yin yang paradigm:

- Competence traits: intelligence, knowledge, general abilities and experience
- Leadership traits: decisiveness, optimism, energy, patriotism, and ability to inspire
- Character traits: honesty, integrity, morality and sincerity
- Empathy traits: compassion, understanding, concern, and interpersonal skills.

From an Eastern perspective, competence and leadership traits are considered as the yang principle whilst character and empathy traits are seen as belonging to the yin principle. "All things have their backs to the female and stand facing the male. When male and female combine, all things achieve harmony" (*Tao Te Ching*: 42). Therefore the Yin/Yang paradigm would argue that it is the development of all aspects (traits) that forms the foundation of harmony, effectiveness and good leadership.

### **Leadership behaviour**

The lack of success in identifying the universal traits of leaders led to interest in the actual behaviour of leaders, rather than in their personality traits per se. In leadership situations effective leaders are justified by their actions and behavioural consequences.

Researchers present two main leadership styles (Blake & Mouton, 1964). One focuses on the task, while the other focuses on employees.

### **Situational and contingency theory**

This theory (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1993) suggests that successful leadership depends on matching a leader's style to the demands of a situation such as the power position of the level of readiness of the followers. Organisations can gain better leadership by making the situation more favourable to the individual's style. In other words, the situation determines the best style to use (Yukl, 1989). Since the situation introduces an additional factor that determines effective leadership, this theory broadens the scope of leadership

understanding enormously.

The element of the situation in leadership theory has generated controversy among researchers. Fiedler (1967), for example, argues that a leader's style is relatively rigid, so they may perform well in some situations, but not in others. His/her personal yin or yang characteristics can hardly change; therefore a leader makes the situation more favourable accordingly. On the other hand, Hersey and Blanchard (1993) claim that a leader can change his/her yin or yang characteristics according to the situation.

The cultural dimensions (individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity) identified by Hofstede (1980) can help to understand the differences in leaders' behaviour between Eastern and Western cultures. Eastern society, considered as a collective society, is closer to yin characteristics while Western society is an individualistic society closer to the characteristics of yang.

However, because of the complexity of individuals and societies, it is hard to generalise an absolute yin or yang element. The situation factor, therefore, makes the nature of leadership more complicated to understand.

### Transactional and transformational leadership theory

Regardless of the situation, a leader must depend on employees' willingness and creativity to accomplish the required work. This concept forms the basis for transactional and transformational leadership theory. It was Burns (1978) who firstly distinguished the concept of transactional and transformational leadership and which Bass (1985) further developed.

Bass claims that traditional leadership theories are confined within the scope of transactional leadership because this theory maintains the status quo rather than leading to change. Within the framework of traditional leadership, a leader does not create a vision or a future state of the organisation. Instead, followers are given rewards in exchange for achieving agreed levels of performance.

Transformational leadership on the other hand focuses on "change". A transformational leader inspires followers to exert extraordinary performance and transform the organisational environment. Transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership for confronting the turbulent changes of today. Jung and Avolio (1999) researched the interaction of leadership style and the follower's cultural orientation and found that Caucasians (individualists), in contrast to people from Eastern cultures, performed better in transformational leadership conditions than in transactional leadership conditions. This suggests that people from Western cultures are more familiar with, or are better adapted to organisational change.

Within the specific characteristics of transactional and transformational leaders (Bass, 1990) yin and yang principles can be identified, as shown in Figure 1.

<b>Transformational Leader</b>	
<b>Charisma:</b>	Provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust.
<b>Inspiration:</b>	Communicates high expectations, uses symbols to focus efforts, expresses important purposes in simple ways.
<b>Intellectual Stimulation:</b>	Promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving
<b>Individualized Consideration:</b>	Gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, and advises.
<b>Transactional Leader</b>	
<b>Contingent Reward:</b>	Contracts exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good performance, recognized accomplishments.
<b>Management by Exception (active):</b>	Watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards, takes corrective action.
<b>Management by Exception (passive):</b>	Intervenes only if standards are not met.
<b>Laissez-Faire:</b>	Abdicates responsibilities, avoids making decisions.

Figure 1. Characteristics of transformational and Transactional Leaders

(Source: Bass, B.M. 1990, From Transactional to Transformational leadership)

In the transformational leader category, only Individualised Consideration is a yin element whilst in the transactional leader category Management by Exception (active) is only a yang element. The other elements remain the same in each category.

Neither transactional nor transformational leadership can be easily identified as yin and yang elements because each style has both yin and yang elements. However, overall, transactional leadership is largely influenced by the yin principle while transformational leadership by the yang principle.

### Eastern leadership approach

Eastern leadership has not received the same intense scrutiny that has been directed towards Western leadership approaches, particularly during the past century. However, a cursory look at the history of Eastern leadership from ancient times to the present (the earliest writing on leadership can be traced back 2,500 years to Confucianism and Taoism), will give an understanding of a leadership method that is fundamentally different from that of the Western world.

Leadership is essentially about the development of the relationship between a leader and his/her followers. The leader is sensitive to his/her followers' morale, establishes good relationships, and exerts an effort to resolve the tension or conflicts among them (Park, 2000: 221). A good leader, therefore, establishes order and security in the context of the leader-follower relationship.

A good leader acknowledges that a binary set of organising principles (Kang, 1985) could be achieved through the harmonisation of yin and yang. All organising principles of society are interactions of hierarchy of yin and yang. A leader is yin against heaven (God or king) but he is yang against his followers at the same time. A father is yin against his ancestors but yang against his son. Within the hierarchy of social and organisational system, a father plays his role in loving his son and a son plays his role in respecting his father. A good leader demonstrates his personal traits by example.

A famous minister of state, known for his manly virtues, provides an example of how to handle situations of conflict. Hwang Hee (1363-1452) was one of best ministers of state through the 500 years of the Chosun dynasty in Korea (Kang, 1985).

"After A and B fought each other, A asked Hwang to judge their fight.

After listening to his complaint, Hwang told A: 'You are right'.

B heard this and went to Hwang to tell him his side of the story. He then asked for his judgement.

Hwang told B 'You are right'.

Having heard this, C went to see Hwang and asked: " How come both A and B are right?"

Hwang told him, 'You are right' and sent him away."

This story illustrates the different logical processes in Western and Eastern thought. In Western logic, when A is right then B is wrong, consequently this requires an objective measure to judge the case fairly. In the famous biblical example of Solomon's judgement, he made a very effective and timely decision, " A is a mother of the child, and so B is not." " All the people were awed, as they realised the great wisdom God had given him" (1 Kings, 3:16-28). His decision has an objectively justified ground, even with awe. So his straightforward decision is irrevocable. It would not need any further questioning from C, "what if both women claim to be a mother?"

In Eastern logic, A is right and B is right. Eastern logic is (Yes and/or No) not (Yes or No). Within this context, the trait of a good leader is to avoid the dissonance of extreme polarity and to broaden the range of tolerance (Choi, 1965). Eastern leadership puts more emphasis on the harmony, or the peaceful condition of human relationships, rather than on any external factor such as a goal or a system.

The quest for good and effective leadership is ongoing. What is the most important influence in the development of the relationship? The 2500 years-old Confucian normative traits of a leader, such as individualised consideration-compassion, integrity-honesty, and cognitive competence-ability, are still important elements for effective or good leaders of today. These traits are the basis for maintaining harmony and are more effective than forcing changes within the situation, or imposing judgements on others.

Following the IMF crisis, many Korean companies were required to re-engineer their company structure. The role of a general manager was to reduce the number of employees. One general manager submitted his resignation instead of firing his staff. His story has been widely discussed and understood. Many Koreans honour his sacrificial act.

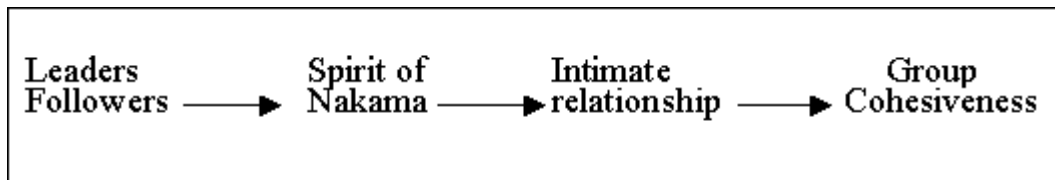
There has not been much research done on the effectiveness of the style of Western leaders in the Eastern business environment. However, nowadays, in order to keep up with the rapid changes in the organisational environment, Asian countries are adapting Western management theory and learning the different management styles. Yet, the Eastern ancient normative traits of leadership are still highly appreciated and respected in a contemporary business environment.

One other important leadership factor is the spiritual bond between a leader and his/her followers. Dore (1970) suggests that British and Japanese factories seem to be operated under a similar organisational structure, but with a big difference in employer-employees relationship due to the different cultural backgrounds. Dore identifies two different types of a factory management system: a market oriented system and an organization oriented system. His findings are that Japanese human relationships based on a cultural tradition of a Nakama bond generate better performance.

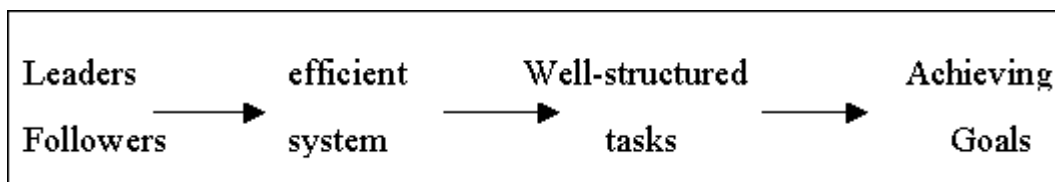
This kind of binding force in the workplace is manifested in Eastern collective society rather than individualistic Western society. The spirit of Nakama is intensified through effective leadership and employees show strong loyalty to the company. Once the spirit of Nakama is established, people within the organisation then show strong ties to each other. On the other hand, they exclude those they perceive as outsiders. This tendency prevents them from adapting to a new business environment. It also stops any change that may disturb the current group cohesiveness. Leaders' effectiveness, therefore, is gauged in terms of the strength of that bond, which is expressed through respect for the leader and work commitment on the one hand, and an orientation of caring and extending it to their family on the other.

Figure 2 illustrates the differences between the Eastern and Western approaches.

**Eastern approach**



**Western approach**



**Figure 2. Eastern and Western views of leadership**

**Blend of the two approaches**

With an understanding of the importance of each leadership element, a leader should integrate all elements in a harmonised and balanced way. This blend of the two approaches is depicted in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 is a progressive model and moves from a foundation of shared organisational goals to the common understanding of "oneness" that is supported by compassionate leadership and service. Figure 4 is a dynamic model that depicts the cyclical movement between leaders, followers and their goals within the external and internal organisational demands. The broken line represents a force of group cohesiveness / yin, the thick line is a force of achieving goals / yang)

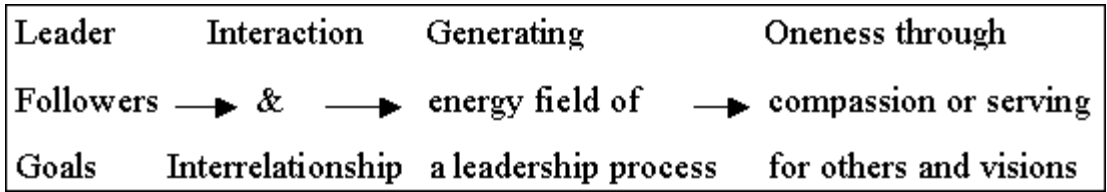


Figure 3. A blended approach to leadership

**Dynamics of leadership**

With an understanding of the importance of the driving forces of yin and yang, a leader creates an energy field (inner small circle). This integrated oneness of an energy field is expanding and growing towards the outer circle of personal and organisational goals in harmonising with all other influences. See Figure 4.

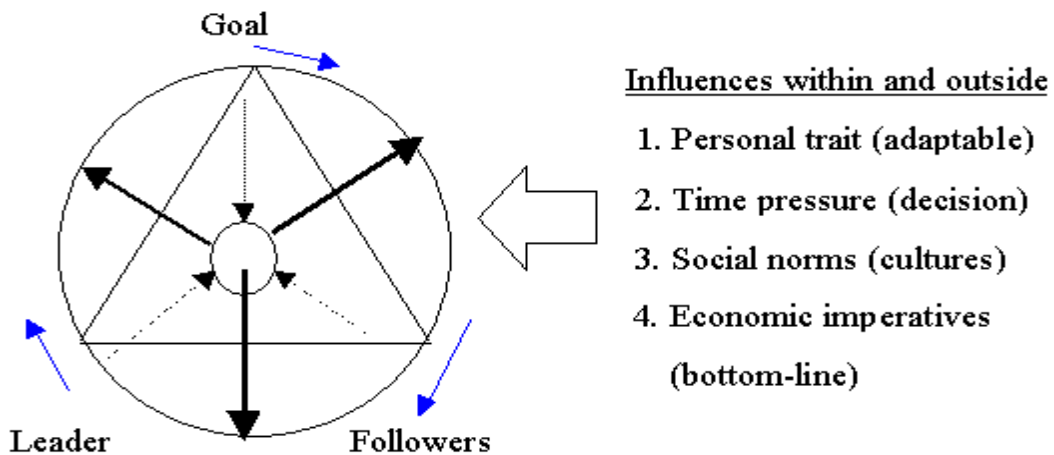


Figure 4. A model of the dynamics of leadership that illustrates the dynamic relationship between the leader, the followers and the goal

In contrast to the mechanistic Western view, the Eastern view of the world is ‘organic’. All things and events perceived by the senses are interrelated, connected, and are but different aspects or manifestations of the same ultimate reality (Capra, 1992:29).

The role of effective leaders is to align all leadership elements towards achieving goals (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). This can be represented as an archer who aims at the target. The Western archer tries to align each fragmented element toward a target without combining all the elements; that is, himself, the bow, the arrow, the target and even the wind. Each element is equally important because all are interconnected. A change in any one part potentially affects all other parts and the whole system (Bohm, 1985, Wheatley, 1992). If one is disregarded or missed, then a desirable result cannot be achieved. A Western archer concentrates on the target with all his strength whilst an Eastern archer is trained to understand that there is no individual target and no individual archer, so all are one. Similarly, to understand the machine model constructed by Sir Isaac Newton, a great thinker in the Western tradition, one must understand parts. Things can be taken apart, dissected and then put back together without any significant loss. The underlying assumption is that by comprehending the workings of each piece, the whole can be understood (Bohm, 1985; Capra, 1992).

The problem with the Eastern view of leadership is that it lacks pragmatism in terms of organisational functioning, and that personal relationships are valued over individual contributions. Task structure is considered relatively less important than the interrelationship between a leader and his/her followers. The tendency of devaluing a vision and an organisational structure causes the deficiency of organisational functions.

By comparing the two different approaches, it can be seen that Eastern leadership appreciates yin values: collective identity, human relationships, character-empathy traits, and good leadership. On the other hand, Western leadership appreciates yang values: individual growth, achievement of goal, competence-leadership

traits, and effective leadership.

In order to develop a new understanding of leadership, a new paradigm is needed, one that changes a piecemeal approach to a cyclical one; an approach that shifts the focus from understanding single parts to understanding the whole and from separateness to interconnectedness. In this new paradigm, an organisation is perceived not by a mechanical entity but as a dynamic interaction of organism.

A way of blending these two approaches is to draw on Eastern ancient wisdom and quantum understanding. In quantum science, the underlying currents are a movement towards holism and toward understanding the system as a system and giving primary value to the relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts (Wheatley, 1992). Heisenberg (1985:107) says that the quantum world "appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connection of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole."

## Conclusion

The definition of leadership according to the Western model can be represented in the following terms:

The power or influence between leaders and followers toward achieving a common goal in an efficient and effective way.

The definition of leadership according to the Eastern blended and cyclical approach can be represented as follows:

The force (gravitation of interconnectedness) or energy (flow of spirit) among initiators (leaders) and participants (followers) create a mutually shared image (reflection of intended meaningful change) and allow them to expand it in a balanced and harmonised way.

Within the context of a new leadership paradigm, there is no leader, no follower and no authoritative top-down position or control. There is an experience of oneness with the surrounding environment where every form of fragmentation has ceased, fading away into undifferentiated unity (Capra, 1992:47). When the harmony of East and West prevails, a leader can not only have insight into the meaning of wholeness but what is much more significant, he/she can realize the truth of this insight in every phase and aspect of a leadership process.

Leadership is about creating a domain (Jaworsky, 1996), an environment (Bass, 1985) or an energy field (Bohm, 1985) in which all people feel empowered, are motivated to perform better, continually learn and improve, unfold their potentialities and are happy. A great leader as a designer (Senge, 1990) is he who the people say, "Amazing, we did it, all by ourselves" (Tao Te Ching, 17).

Good leadership and effective leadership can be achieved when the yang's vision is growing within the good soil of yin's value.

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