



## Review

# Human performance improvement and Confucian values

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### Abstract

**Human performance improvement and performance management are discussed through the visor of Confucian values. In line with the Way of the Tao and filled with Confucian values ('Heavenly directed'), the Confucian (person) leader, learns and grows in terms of his or her ability or competence, overall character and motivation. There is continuous learning and improvement, and he or she increases his or her ability to become efficient and productive. And not only that, not only being just and with moral courage – in spite of obstacles, he or she takes the challenges; he or she acts and stands tall. This article is an adaptation of Low's (2013a) 'Confucian Leadership, D Way'.**

**Keywords:** Human performance improvement, performance management, efficiency, productivity, motivation, Confucius, values; Confucian values.

## INTRODUCTION

There are some scholars and practitioners who believe that human beings may have conquered space, but what they have not conquered, control or tame is their very own primeval instincts and emotions that were necessary for their survival in the Stone Age yet not in the space age. In other words, human beings are inherently vicious and have to refrain from their viciousness. Lee Kuan Yew, the father of Modern Singapore, has always thought that humanity was animal-like, while Confucian philosophy says that the behavior of human beings can be improved upon. Lee is "not sure it can be, but it can be trained, it can be disciplined ... You can make left-hander write with his or her right hand, but you cannot really change his or her natural-born instinct" (Allison and Blackwill, 2012). These seemingly coincide with Low's (2012) article that Confucian concepts and thinking introduces and reinforces discipline and self-regulatory controls.

In this paper, the authors extract performance and leadership lessons as seen from the wisdom of Confucius. From Confucius comes the emphasis on positive human performance and progress, harmonious relationships and growth as well as the value of self-cultivation, learning and continuous learning; and this

paper links or relates human performance improvement to the Confucian philosophy and thoughts.

### What is human performance improvement?

Companies, public or private and employers want their employees to be (motivated to be) efficient and productive. Even parents want their children to study well and to be efficient and productive (Choong, 1984). Everyone wants to be motivated; everyone, in fact, wants to grow and everyone wants to improve their performance. But what it takes to be efficient and productive? To be efficient, one should be able, capable or competent. And to be efficient is to do something ably, skillfully or competently. When one is efficient, one also becomes productive, and when a person is both efficient and productive, he or she learns, and learns continuously and human performance improvement can then be enhanced, if not, occurred.

Performance, in this context, can be defined as the execution of an action or the ability to accomplish something. A job to be done has and is to be done. Any person and in fact everyone including leaders need to do their jobs well. In the Islamic perspective, the Messenger

(peace be upon him) said: “Allah loves that if one does a job he perfects it.” In another words, a leader must perform his duty for the interest of the people according to the guiding principle of Allah (Ang et al, 2012). Human performance improvement can therefore be defined as a willingly learning person who equips him(her)self with the necessary useful values; he or she learns and continuously learns to update or upgrade him(her)self to be able, efficient and productive. Staying motivated, he or she learns and grows to realize his or her potential.

“A gentleman is always eager to learn” (*Confucius – The Analects*, I verse 14) (Lau, 1979: 61). The Confucian is “eager to learn” and he or she “learn(s) widely” (*Confucius – The Analects*, XIX, verse 5, 6) (Lau, 1979: 153). For Confucians, learning is really an ongoing process – as long as one lives, one learns and grows (Lin, 1994, Zhou, 2005, Low, 2012a, 2012c, 2010; Low and Mohd. Zain, 2012). Note that “productivity improvement (too) is an ongoing process.” (Choong, 1984: 4).

To start with, one needs to first ask oneself: Does a person want to learn? Is he or she of the learning type? Is he or she able or capable of learning well? Is he or she capable of being flexible enough to learn? Unlearn, learn and relearn? (Low, 2011). Of course then, one needs to be...

### Knowing oneself

There is a common Chinese saying which goes, “禍福苦樂，一念之差” (*Hanyu Pinyin: huò fú kǔ lè yī niàn zhī chà*), meaning a person who thinks that he or she is fortunate, unfortunate; sad or happy, he or she should, in reality, realize that all these feelings merely arise from his or her own mind; and are just his or her perceptions (Hong, 1993:117). Therefore, people who become what they want to be must know their own potentials, strengths and limitations. They establish their goals for themselves and achieve them by their own energy, creative vision and understanding. “Success increases rather than absorbs their vitality” (Wilson, 1989: 19).

It is important to note that one should abide by one’s values. However, more so in Asia where loyalty and compliance appears to be virtues stressed by the superiors, some malaise or sickness, such as the *Hang Tuah* syndrome or blind loyalty, may occur, and it is obviously terrible when one sees some of these so-called leaders, in essence, non-leaders may not even know themselves or their own respective goals yet they simply or blindly do what their superiors ask them to do or worse, apple-polishing or licking the boots of their superiors. Yes, in this case, they are conveniently discarding their values (Low, 2013a).

It is also worthy to note that one’s values supply or charge one with one’s motivation (Low, 2005), and one’s motivation affects one’s output and productivity. (Choong, 1984: 7).

Additionally, in terms of “strategy is all about leadership”, strategy expert Jack Trout has pointed out that, “No one will follow if you don’t know where you’re going.” (Trout, 2004: 29). One must thus really know oneself before one leads others. This also presumes that one must vitally adopt a high integrity and humane posture. Confucius said, “...look within and examine your own self.” (*Confucius – The Analects*, IV: 17, Lau, 1979: 74). Only after doing this can one then look and go outwards.

One should indeed be aware of oneself, and this means one has desire(s), one knows one’s desire(s). One’s ‘desire’ is the values or key beliefs (“firm convictions”; Matsushita, 1994: 36) that one holds. Motivating (Low, 2005), these values help human performance improvement. As Mahatma Gandhi (1869 - 1948), the Indian political and spiritual leader once said, “Your beliefs become your thoughts. Your thoughts become your words. Your words become your actions. Your actions become your habits. Your habits become your values. Your values become your destiny.” (<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/36464.html>).

When one upholds a set of values such as a set of Confucian values and leads with these values in mind and action, one is indeed leading from within. Note a value is one’s convictions or key beliefs – what one holds dearly. A value supplies one with the sense of what is right and what is wrong, even subconsciously values guide us and they provide us with the basis for our day-to-day actions (Abdullah, 1996). Kidder (2005) has added that these values, for what they stand for also give leaders the moral courage; it makes them to be committed to the moral principles espoused and be aware of the dangers involved in supporting those principles as well as the willingness to endure the risks.

### Being compassionate and doing good

A crucial virtue of Confucianism is benevolence (仁, *rén*) or compassion (*ren ai*), humaneness towards the others. The golden rule for Confucianism is reciprocity: one should not behave towards others in a way which is disagreeable to oneself. (Mencius VII.A.4 cited in Opdebeeck and Habish, 2011). Confucius said, “One who sets his or her heart on compassion (benevolence) will be free from evil and he or she will do good always.” (*Analects of Confucius* IV:4). To a great extent, compassionate leaders give life, or put it differently, they should be life-giving – motivating, energizing and enlivening the people. Life-giving promotes or gives rise to efficiency and productivity. The word “life-giving” should be underscored since life becomes enriching and grows with care, compassion, and love; love really gives and strengthens people, lives and living. For Confucius, benevolence or *ren* and loving-kindness must be sustained, the leaders need to take care of their people, and loving, caring or being compassionate to the people is critical. (Low, 2013; 2008a).

“Gold in the heart is better than gold in one’s purse.” as a Chinese saying goes. Showing care and concern to his followers, the benevolent Confucian leader is thus like a father (*mother*) to his followers (Low and Ang, 2011: 201, *italics, author’s*; Low, 2006). The family spirit is also all too often fostered, and to quote Confucius: A true gentleman is in harmony, and is friendly with others though he does not agree with them ... (Chew, 2000: 17, also cited in Low and Ang, 2011 and Low, 2013a).

It is certainly inherent for men to be or do good or be benevolent; and one naturally upholds one’s integrity (Mencius says, 2009). “The Master said, ‘The gentleman agrees with others without being an echo. The small man echoes without being in agreement.’” (*Confucius – The Analects*, XIII: 23) (Lau, 1979: 122). There must be ‘desire’, and that desire can also be seen or interpreted as loving one’s fellow people. The leader then serves, and servant leadership is practiced (Low, 2013), and not simply enjoying the perks, taking long lunches or breaks while entertaining themselves with their ‘clients’.

The Confucian leader has to follow the Dao; he or she cannot ignore the people; if the leader ignores the people – their target audience, then he or she is ignoring the Dao.

### **Pursuing the Dao – having desire and being aware of one’s goals**

Also, having the ‘desire’ presupposes that one is aware of one’s goal(s) and hence, also of one’s direction (Low, 2013a). The Chinese has a saying that speaks of ‘a good horse not turning back or returning to eat in the same old field of grass’ (好馬不吃回頭草: *Hanyu Pinyin: hǎo mǎ bù chī huí tóu cǎo*). It simply refers to a smart leader who is well-guided by the vision, direction and goals; ordinarily, he or she does not dwell on his past actions or contributions and live in a melancholic state; instead he or she single-mindedly pursues his or her goals, and being bold and resilient, such a leader simply but determinedly moves on.

The late Matsushita Konosuke (1994: 36; *italics author’s clarifications*) spoke of “the crucial importance... of conviction (*values*). (*Just like child-rearing and employee education*), if we want to bring up our children properly, we need to have clear ideas of the basic goals in a life of integrity and humanity, and how to be a good member of the family and community.” In leadership too, one is convinced, one knows what to get and what is to be attained. Here, we can see that the “desire” is formulated and fortified with integrity, basic love (loving-kindness) and compassion for others (Confucian values) (Yu, 2009; Zhou, 2005; Lau, 1979).

For Confucius, looking after the people, a noble cause and the genuine leadership was a high calling (De Barry, 2004). So the Confucian leader says, “I am the Captain of my ship, and I will charter it, leading it to where I want it

to go!” As a person and a leader, he or she follows the way of the *Dao* (Tao) to attain his destiny or fate. Similar to Taoism, Confucianism stresses on the pursuit of the *Dao* (Tao), and that the *Dao* (Tao) is the ultimate (Low, 2011a). While following the Dao, it is worthy to note that changes abound. And this is, overall, also similar to what Goethe (cited in Nylan, 2001: 202) has pointed out, that is, “You should not resist fate nor need you escape it. If you go to meet it, it will guide you pleasantly.”

It is admirable to take note of goal-setting; goal-setting truly works (Choong, 1984; Low, 2013a). One key goal is also to get the right people to be appointed to the right positions. Implementing a best practice without ensuring that the skills are in place to leverage the practice fully is a common mistake and in fact, it can be more damaging; there is really a need to match the skills and capabilities of the organization, and that is a good, if not, one of the best practices of performance management (Axson, 2010). Few managers do that, and good leaders do goal-setting for their people and with their people. The people need goals and challenges; it helps them to perform better (Conlow, 1991). Most managers want their people to be around, at work every day and we’ll get along fine; and in some places/civil bureaucracies, you just don’t rock the boat and you’ll do fine! If such is the case, how can one then succeed as a leader? These are non-leaders in non-action!

Thus, there is really a need to set goals for the employees (people) and set goals with the employees (people). (Goals acceptance is necessary and important; Choong, 1984: 17.] Either way works although the second way is more effective because the employee is more committed, he or she is more involved. The goals then need to be SMART: Specific (the goal is focused), Measurable (one can tell if the goal is accomplished), Actionable (the target is realistic), Relevant (is it a priority) and Time-based (the results can be tracked over a period of time) (Conlow, 1991: 13-14; Achua and Lussier, 2010: 85).

### **Taking right actions are so important**

“Growth that adds volume without improving productivity is FAT. Growth that diminishes productivity is cancer.” (Peter F. Drucker, cited in Choong, 1984: 46, in capitals, authors’ emphasis).

It is significant to note that broadly-speaking, Confucianism considers religious beliefs as having less importance than religious practices. In fact, like Daoism (Taoism), what is good is that it emphasizes “orthopraxy (right actions) over orthodoxy (right beliefs)” (Low, 2011a: 115).

One should take right actions, putting in one’s efforts and achieving one’s goals. One must be working hard and achieving, thus raising one’s efficiency and productivity. For the Chinese, achievements are indeed

valued; they are honourable as opposed to shame or humiliation (*chi*) (Zhou, 1999). Some people in various countries such as in Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore who knew that the researchers were doing this study review approached the researchers to present their views, and remarkably they expressed these: “I can’t go through life quitting everything. If I am going to *achieve* anything, I have got to stick with something. That’s why I am in this business”; “I was told that with a bit of talent and extraordinary perseverance, ‘you would be *successful* in anything you do’” and “patience and perseverance in doing things, in fact, is a key to *success*” (Several interviewees’ inputs). Therefore, achievement is, in fact, contrary to ascription where one’s status is given based on age, gender and/or family background.

Office politics, play-acting and boot-licking in organizations are empty, if not, cause troubles; they do not help to raise efficiency and productivity. Office politics, play-acting and boot-licking in organizations is not motivating. Confucian leaders set example by taking the right course of actions. They work hard to be the role models to their people; and their people follow their example set. The spirit of the words spoken and actions taken play an important role. If the children see parents who are accountable, they will be more responsible (Fritz, 2002: 26-28); and in the same way, the people will see and act based on the leader’s example and actions. Right actions by the leaders will even motivate their people.

Taking the right actions really require inner leadership, and the latter needs to be practiced or worked out. Leaders should have strong values or put it in another way, they must act or move with strong attachment to certain values, key beliefs/ principles and convictions. Without attachments to any values, they cannot or should not be detached; if they were detached and without any values anchored, then they can become lost; they are rudderless or without a compass. And when any opportunity comes, it may be seized by them; without firm or established values upheld, they turn into opportunists and freebooters. They are like jellyfish without any backbones, floating with the tides. Or another analogy to be used is that of floating jetties, being blown or carried by waves, not stable and when any land comes by, it docks or berths onto it. When the author speaks of this, the author has in mind “leaders or more specifically, non-leaders who do not know what integrity is or what values are all about and when any opportunities come, they would even rob their staff of any credits due to them so that they look good to their superiors, or in the case of civil servants, to the public” (Low, 2013a: 4). Here again, several interviewees approached the researchers to opine and they interestingly alluded to the researchers the fact that “such a leader even got the cheek when giving awards to their staff for their capability, diligence or whatever commends to claim credits and honor for it; this particular leader even claims that he’s the one who is really smart, cleverly identifying the award recipient, and

it is all because of his brilliant choice and high IQ and EQ!” “These non-leaders are just fat cats, lazy and irresponsible”; “simply caring for themselves and their image is so all-important”. How attached such a leader is, and how sadly selfish, self-centered or arrogant such a ‘leader’ is. Is this not a case of adding “fat”, adding “volume without improving productivity”?

Some leaders (may not be fit to be called as such) not thinking or analyzing, they merely follow their superiors blindly. They have no mind of their own; in fact, they hold no firm views of their own, let alone values. They simply follow the prevailing wind. Today, the North wind is blowing, so they join the North wind school. Tomorrow, the South wind is blowing, they move onto the South wind school. They thus join cliques and go into office politics (“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know”; the petty people – *xiao ren* – spend much time and effort developing a clique or network of contacts and/or partnerships that support or cover up for one another, and these managers/ ‘leaders’ get promoted very fast. This further supports the importance of contacts over knowledge of facts in gaining influence; Robbins and Judge, 2007: 430.) In Confucian terms, these non-leaders are simply clannish, scheming or colluding.

True, sad indeed, but they also copy things bluntly and blindly. When others innovate, they also claim to innovate or modernize but actually they introduce things mechanically or like robots without much people touch or warmth (*wen*). They do it without knowing their target audience’s needs or getting their people’s feedback and/or in fact, without adaptation or improvisation; they even stubbornly refuse to listen to their people. So seemingly things happen, but in essence, these non-leaders do not make things come about; they do not perform; they are merely stirring dusts.

The authors next strongly believe that people in leadership positions (leaders) must not be ignoramuses or parochial and must have the necessary experience and exposure; they also indeed need firm, well-formed (yet not close but broad and open-minded) views on society, business, and life (values) if they are to exert a solid influence on those whom they lead or under their supervision. They must also take right action(s); when leaders or the Company’s senior executives are consistent in their thinking and behavior, their people will trust them and follow their examples with a sense of security. However, corporate leadership and management requires a little more than conviction and consistent attitudes. It needs a sense of purpose (and mind you, the actions must not be ritualistic or perfunctory or otherwise, they are useless). And better still, this sense of purpose is coupled with a supreme order, in the spiritual context. One stands for what is right and then one wins (even if one loses for at heart, one knows that one is aligned with the *Dao* or the Universe) (Low, 2013a).



**Figure 1.** below shows poor performance leads to rewards, good performance leads to punishments and performance does not matter, having no consequences; these can cause a serious morale and/or motivation problem among employees in the organization with a drop in human performance, let alone, performance improvements

### **Facing serious leadership and organizational management problems: being egoistic, not being empathetic and putting weak persons (or non-leaders) in leadership positions**

A person (leader) must know what or where he or she is falling short otherwise he or she cannot improve him or herself (Choong, 1984). Or worse, seeing and acting like an ostrich, he or she operates parochially, a frog in a well way and/ or as if there is nothing wrong.

One of the key real problems in today's world is that of ego; the bloated egos of the leaders (Low, 2013); and the key questions posed include: are they leading? Can self-centered or egotistic leaders lead well? Are they really leading? Are they working? Are they really working? If they are working, can they raise their people's performance? Are these leaders performing well? Do they listen? Are the leaders really working in the interests of their people? Are the leaders being empathetic to their people's needs? Are they motivating or energizing their people? Are they really motivating or energizing their people? Would they not be demotivating or demoralizing their people, lowering their people's efficiency and productivity

One of the major flaws of leaders is that they are callous or not being sensitive to the needs of their people; in short, they are not empathetic to their people (Low, 2008a). True, great leaders do not share the same qualities, but certain traits are often mentioned; and one of them is empathy, which is the ability to imagine or put oneself in another's position (Kurtz and Boone, 2008). Leaders cannot function in ivory towers, whether totally or partially cut off from their people and their needs.

Yet another real leadership problem is that there is just much corporate greed (Kothari, 2010) and corruption

(tantamount to poor or ill performance), and not to also mention national greed. Some, if not all of them, come in like fat cats, lords and big shots, fast and furiously wanting to enjoy the benefits and perks of the positions and appointments or simply, be served. When in fact, the leaders are there, they exist to serve, and not to be served. The needs of the people are paramount; the Heavenly mandate must be there!

Unqualified non-competent favorites can be appointed, occupying top positions and their non-leader superiors can stand by them, defending these favorites' appointments. Most times, these appointments too can be cloaked with a lack of transparency, and this can really be not only demotivating, but also demoralizing to the people, especially able and hardworking managers and people. There are also no positive consequences to do it or perform (Fournies, 1988: 32-37), let alone do their best and worse, there are also no negative consequences to the incompetents for their poor performance. Moreover, the people are often afraid or have fears, the leaders send wrong messages and they are punished for doing for what they are supposed to do (Fournies, 1988). It will certainly not help to boost performance since it in fact pays or the "system" (or dare we say, no system or no agreed criteria and standards) becomes overall rewarding to the non-performers and non-rewarding or worse, punishing to the performers (Bacal, 1999; Fournies, 1988) (Please see Figure 1). When such things happen, the people will also not be motivated to learn or upgrade their skills after all, performance does not really matter. What more, it is only evident that the non-leaders, these highly placed managers or executives are only putting a bigger premium on politics than performance. Indeed there is a need to instead put a premium on what the employee is

doing for the company, not on his or her contacts/ social network (Stillman, 2009). These non-leaders mistake (when they should not take) personal affinity for organizational benefit.

And besides, another thing, the authors strongly believe that more or serious damage are often done by weak persons or non-leaders (the majority may be those incompetent favorites who are appointed in leadership positions; worse still in systems where there is no meritocracy and the appointments are based on ascriptions rather than achievements) – not standing up for what is right (sheer inertia, docile, inactive and weak or the lack of moral courage) – than by wicked persons or the strength of evil. These non-leaders can also be passives, just be quiet and they do nothing, simply not to rock the boat and indeed just to be on, all the time, the safe side. Worse still, some of these goodie-two-shoes are claiming that they are doing much justice and contributing goodness to the world! And they think they are right to say these.

Such non-leaders need to be searched and flushed out. Please let the authors explain: a leader, in the Confucian way, should be just or have moral courage (義, *yi*). Here, similar to Moss's (1994: 82) adage, "to become a leader – be a leader" is, in essence, the urgent call or message in the Confucian Rectification of Names (Low, 2012b; Sun, 2008; Fung, 1948). This needs to be referred to; a father is to be a father and a mother is to be a mother, a son a son and a daughter a daughter. To illustrate this, let us take a simple yet practical example of the staff car-park of an organization with no safety or gate personnel on guard. This car park designated exclusively for the staff has its entrance gentry at the IN gate controlled or opened by tapping the drivers' electronic card but supposed the faulty exit bar is left opened or broken and it cannot be closed. It is a staff car-park yet in reality, it is not a staff car-park; it is a car-park for all, including the public. Other drivers can simply enter the car park through the exit gate so is there any control? Is it a car-park designed for staff? Where then is the rectification of names? One might as well dismantle the IN gate control because this car park did not serve the staff alone; others can enter from the open exit point. This also means that the drivers' electronic card and the opening and closing of the entry gate bar do not serve any purpose; for every entry, it becomes a useless or meaningless activity and a waste of time for the staff to execute or tap on.

Supervisors, department heads or managers with proper job titles and designations are important because job titles rectify their names, their roles of responsibility, their capacities/potentials and their achievements. The only problem is that most of them may not deserve to have those job titles because they may not live up to their jobs' requirement or expectations. And being so, most people with job titles treat and use their subordinates (human resource) as slaves to achieve what they want

for self-interest (personal glory and promotions) and worse still, not for the organisations' interests.

This Rectification of Names concept simply means that when a person holding a certain position must take certain action(s) and if one has to do it, then one simply does it! This then presumes and accepts that one does so with courage and with justice in mind. (Some people may simply not do anything, purely getting salaries and perks or merely wanting to please their superiors aka the Baa Baa Black Sheep way, by saying "Yes Sir, Yes Sir" and worse still, agreeing with their superiors without even any form of courage or thoughts of doing justice to others. They may even not express or voice out any opinions or stand up for others, let alone for themselves – and shamefully, at times, unthinkingly or carelessly).

### **Having Moral Courage and Fleshing It Out With Example**

The leaders' lack of moral courage and example can cause a puncture to their people's motivation, morale, efficiency and productivity as well as their trust of the leadership.

As highlighted by Low (2013a: 6), "excellence is often not granted on pretense and on easy conditions". Similar to what Moss (1994: 44) has highlighted, "You can preach a better sermon with your life than with your mouth", the Confucian leader, like the Master, strives to be the Great Teacher, lives his or her life with him(her)self being the role model.

Moral or ethical courage is the courage that enables one to take action for moral purposes or reasons even though there are risks of adverse consequences (Vesilind, 2006: 55). Role modeling and moral courage truly supply the Confucian leader with much power, and these are more of soft power. These "softer" tactics ordinarily rely on personal power such as personal (upholding certain values), character building and inspirational appeals (Robbins and Judge, 2007); these are also critical leadership skills (Bell, 2012).

For Confucius, it is important that one should not go about in life with play-acting, conniving and/or pretending. In other words, hypocrites – please get out from the leadership positions! It is too hot for others especially the people; please get out! And make it easier or less taxing for real leaders to emerge. This is alike or related to what Kopmeyer (2003: 282-283) has indicated that is, even leaders should "make progress or (they should) "step aside" for those who do. Excellence and integrity are not incompatible – they are the twins and, in fact, pillars in the family of leadership success. "Say yes when you really know. Say no when you don't. This is the way to become a wise person." (Zhou, 2005: 18). To add, a leader needs to practice what he or she says (Matsushita, 1991). She moves into action with her examples. Matsushita (1991: 111) highlighted that:

and get the goals accomplished and/or realized. With these comes complete commitment on the leader's part.

This dedicated commitment then leads to learning, further learning, continuous learning and (mind) growth (Confucian values; Low, 2013; Yu, 2009; Low, 2008a; Zhou, 2005; Lau, 1979). This is continual learning, and is part and parcel of "smart leadership" (Vlamiš, 1999). For Confucius, a person must indeed learn, and learning is emphasized, and there is continuous learning. To Confucius, learning is vitally important for self-growth and self-development, and one increases one's abilities or competences and becomes a better leader (Low, 2012a, 2012c, 2010; Low and Mohd. Zain, 2012; Zhou, 2005) and this, overall, needs self-discipline.

### Going, Growing and Blending-in with Destiny

Destiny or fate is tied-in with the Way of the Dao but the person or leader must first know him or herself and have the intention or the will to move the world/ universe. And then he or she does good and has, accordingly, the world/ the universe in his or her hands, he or she is in charge (Figure 2)

### Doing Upright and Being Detached

As said, the Confucian leader does good, showing care and compassion to his or her people. For Confucius, any person should just work, and do his or her job (Yu, 2009). In this regard, one interviewee excitedly intimated to the researchers that "in some organizations and cultures, a number of these big cats or good-for-nothings (*what the authors would objectively and detachedly call – non-leaders*) may not only not do their jobs, but may also even ridicule, belittle or laugh at the foreign professionals or talents to cover up their own ability, little or no work done and even their shortcomings... they may even not promote or highlight the foreign professionals' efforts or work" (an interviewee's inputs, *italics authors*). These inputs coincide with what have been indicated by Pfeiffer (1991) and Ullian (1976), that is, humor should be correctly or appropriately used as a support for competence rather than as a means of hiding a lack of competence. Humor at its best is one aspect of an individual's communication repertoire; its use should not be an alternative to giving direct feedback or to dealing with an issue. (Pfeiffer, 1991: 348).

And here, it is worthy to note that he or she is detached (To Confucius, the Mean is "being without inclination to either side" (Legge, 1960). A concern for the Mean leads to a sense of moral control and self-regulation], and detachment here means that being straight and of strong character (*lien*), the Confucian leader is disciplined and is not attached, attracted or tempted to worldly desires or cravings.

These words, from *The Analects* can indeed be further interpreted as the Confucian leader is practicing detachment and was detached since Confucius himself "refused to entertain conjectures or insist on certainty; he refused to be inflexible or to be egotistical." (*Confucius – The Analects*, IX, verse 4) (Lau, 1979: 96).

Being attached and rigid, one's mind can be blocked (one then develops a mind-set) or one cannot see clearly or objectively. Being detached, one's mind can be clear; it is like a moon free from clouds (Low, 2013a). Being detached too enables one to be self-monitoring; and these were the ways of Confucius; one sees these examples as follows:

One, "in the local community, Confucius was submissive and seemed to be inarticulate. In the ancestral temple and at court, though fluent, he did not speak lightly." (*Confucius – The Analects*, X, verse 1) (Lau, 1979: 101).

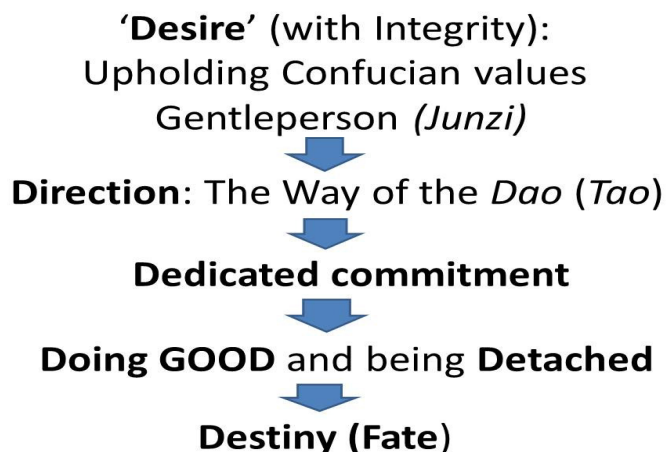
Two, "at court, when speaking with Counsellors of lower rank he was affable; when speaking with Counsellors of upper rank, he was frank though respectful. In the presence of his lord, his bearing, though respectful, was composed." (*Confucius – The Analects*, X, verse 2) (Lau, 1979: 101).

Three, "when he was summoned by his lord to act as usher, his face took on a serious expression and his step became brisk. When he bowed to his colleagues, stretching out his hands to the left or to the right, his robes followed his movements without being disarranged. He went forward with quickened steps, as though he was gliding on wings. After the withdrawal of the guest, he invariably reported, 'The guest has stopped looking back.'" (*Confucius – The Analects*, X, verse 3) (Lau, 1979: 101).

By detaching and having a sense of shame (positively speaking, performing or achieving honorably) and example-setting, the Confucian (leader) keeps him(herself) (the people) in line; corruption would also be kept at bay. "The Master said, 'Guide them (*oneself/ the people*) by edicts, keep them (*oneself/ the people*) in line with punishments, and the common people (*one*) will stay out of trouble but will have no sense of shame. Guide them (*oneself/ the people*) by virtue (*values*), keep them (*oneself/ the people*) in line with the rites, and they (*oneself/ the people*) will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves (*oneself/ the people*).'" (*Confucius – The Analects*, II verse 3) (Lau, 1979: 63, *italics, authors*).

### The limitations and benefits of the research review

The review study would be beneficial if a further or full-scale survey can be carried out and incorporated for further research on the topic, and as it is, readers are not in the know of the organizations involved or what the latter can do to improve themselves. Nonetheless this



**Figure 2.** below shows the **Ds**, that is, gentlemanly or lady-like and with 'Desire', the Confucian leader fulfills his or her Destiny, following the *Dao* (Direction), with Dedicated commitment while Doing good and being Detached.

**Source:** Low (2013a) 'Confucian Leadership, D Way', *Business Journal for Entrepreneurs (BJE)*, Vol. 2013 Issue 1, p. 1-11.

article contains the literature review of the human performance improvement with some interviewees' inputs from Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei; and readers when reading this review research would have realized and some may even agree that there are some elements of truth, happening within their own organizational context. It is worthy to note that although no organization or corporate names were mentioned or revealed, these research findings were obtained from interviewees in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. Indeed, the fact that some respondents had willingly or voluntarily related their (bad) experiences to the researchers makes this study even more beneficial and relevant.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In *The Analects*, the Old Master urges that wisdom entails not only righteousness and the need to be useful or helpful; and that the wise person learns and knows the Way (Dao), but also that knowledge must be combined with action (Beck, 1999; also cited in Rowley, 2006); and be the one of the leadership skills deployed.

Dispelling any sense of attachment and applying detachment is thus wise and useful, and it is good for a person, let alone a leader, to apply such wisdom. Asian thought sees wisdom as relating or harmonizing with one's setting, being productive, leading a good life, and better still to do things for others or the society.

All in all, the above reinforces what have been stated in Low (2013a). With Dao – embracing the Confucian set of values ensures a person – and without outside mechanism, the Confucian person (leader) self-regulates him or herself to subscribe and hold self-checking ways while striving to be a *junzi* (gentleperson/ lady). He or she

stands tall, being filled or imbued with a sense of honor and righteousness (going and doing the Dao Way] while naturally or automatically avoiding humiliation or shamefulness (*chi*). Caring and showing concern, he or she is efficient and productive, taking actions and/ or serving the people.

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