

Buddhist Doctrines for Human Capital Development in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore how the five Buddhist doctrines called ‘The Five Precepts (FP)’ are used to develop human capital in Thailand. In this study, the qualitative research method was used to collect the data from the key informants joined in the organized focus-group discussion. The research results indicated that FP including to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants causing heedlessness can be used to promote the human capital as the behavioral guideline of actions or a code of conducts. However, the study suggested that using the FP in promoting the human capital should be integrated with the other Buddhist principles such as Bhavana 4 and so on. Because FP is the method to control only the physical and verbal actions only, therefore other doctrines should be used to control the mental actions. When the three actions are in control of consciousness, the human capital is effectively and perfectly developed. This research aims to explore how the five Buddhist doctrines called ‘The Five Precepts (FP)’ are used to develop human capital in Thailand. In this study, the qualitative research method was used to collect the data from the key informants joined in the organized focus-group discussion. The research results indicated that FP including to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants causing heedlessness can be used to promote the human capital as the behavioral guideline of actions or a code of conducts. However, the study suggested that using the FP in promoting the human capital should be integrated with the other Buddhist principles such as Bhavana 4 and so on. Because FP is the method to control only the physical and verbal actions only, therefore other doctrines should be used to control the mental actions. When the three actions are in control of consciousness, the human capital is effectively and perfectly developed.

Keywords

Human Capital, Five Precepts, Buddhist Doctrines, Thailand

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Introduction

The term ‘human capital’ was used in the earliest formal way in economics probably by Irving Fisher in 1897 [1]. Since then, the term has been historically defined and discussed by many academics such as Jacob Mincer, Gary Becker, Schultz and Robert Solow [1]. Today, human capital is essential in terms of its significance to the national development based on human resource development. In Thailand, the development of human capital is one in six key indicators of the National Strategy in pursuit of the goals of the national development: ‘A Secure Nation, Contented People, Continued Economic Growth, An Equal Society and Sustainable Natural Resources’ [2]. In regards to this, it is necessary for Thailand to boost multi-dimensional and national competitiveness to empower human beings at each and every stage of life to produce the competent and moral citizenry [2]. The national strategy clearly aims to develop and strengthen human capital in order to improve Thai people of all ages in a multi-dimensional manner to become good, skillful and quality citizens. In order to attain the mentioned goal, the operational scope of this mission covers promotion of physical, mental and intellectual qualities, adequate multidimensional developments, sustainability of welfare of life, promoting public mindedness, and generating social responsibility. Thai individuals are also expected to be frugal, generous, disciplined, and ethical, equipped with logical thinking, 21st century skills and communication skills [2].

In 2018, the National Statistical Office declared that a school of Buddhism called ‘Theravada’ was followed by 93.5% of the Thai population [3], although Thai people

today do not religiously practice as seriously as their ancestors. However, it is to say, since its arrival approximately 250 BCE, Buddhist doctrines have been used to develop human capital in terms of physical, verbal, mental and intellectual domains. At the beginning, the Buddhist teachings is used to serve the religious ultimate purposes such as to attain Nirvana or to eliminate the worst evil called ‘defilement’ or to attain the ultimate happiness. Later on, it is used to promote peace within the society as it is beneficial to the country governance. The one of the best examples has been seen in the national project called ‘Five Precepts Villages’ undertaken between 2014-2017 by collaboration of National Office of Buddhism, Thai Sangha, governmental agencies, educational institutes, local governmental organizations, private organizations, sub-district headmen, village headmen and Buddhist network organizations [4]. This project encourages Thai individual to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants causing heedlessness [5]. Nowadays, Buddhist teaching is alternatively used to build the national competitiveness as seen in the National Strategy mentioned above [2].

As mentioned above, the development of human capital becomes the important key indicator of the national development as it is one of the keys to build the national competitiveness. Also, Buddhism has played the important part in developing Thai society. There are many studies related to the application of Buddhist teaching to develop the manners of personnel in Thailand. However, these studies have focused on the behavioral development, a few of them focuses on the application of Buddhist teaching to promote the human capital to increase the national

competitiveness [6]. Due to this academic gap, this research has its aim to fill the gap left behind by the former scholarly works. Therefore, this study aims to explore the how FP is used in the human capital development to contribute the national competitiveness.

Research Objectives

The research methodology involved the interpretative paradigm and aimed to explore how FP is used to develop human capital in Thailand. In so doing, the first objective of this study is to investigate Thailand's policies on human capital development and study the ways that FP supports the human capital development in Thailand.

Research Methodology

Research design

This study was a qualitative research carried out by the following procedures:

- 1) Study the concepts of Thailand's policies, current conditions, problems, needs and other sources related to using FP to develop the human capital in Thailand. In this stage, the documentary research is mainly used.
- 2) The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of six experts was organized to discuss the ways to use FP in developing human capital in Thailand.
- 3) The information systematically recorded from the FGD was analyzed and reported to the public.

Key informants

- 1) The area of this study was to study the perspectives of the experts in six different academic fields from universities in Khon Kean Province towards using FP in developing human capital.
- 2) The FGD participants included six experts from the relevant academic fields including: (1) Buddhist Studies, (2) Social Sciences, (3) Educational Administration, (4) Political Sciences, (5) Buddhist Philosophy and (6) Social Development, selected by purposive sampling based on their academic backgrounds and expertise.

Research tool (focus group discussion)

The FGD in this research is designed and developed according to Krueger [7] and Urwongse's [8] techniques as follows:

- 1) The FGD members were briefed about the topic of discussion, also informed about their rights and confidentiality by the assigned moderator. For example, their identities will not be revealed in any report or publication.
- 2) The participants were asked with the open-ended questions and sometimes were encouraged to talk more freely. During this process, the entire session was recorded in both audio and visual formats; at the same time, the note-taker wrote down the important aspects of the discussion.

Data analysis

- 1) Analytical Induction: the researchers summarized and analyzed the data obtained from the whole research process.
- 2) Content analysis was used to codify and summarize the data from documents and information technology as well as FGD.

Research Results

Today, human capital management is a new dimension of challenge that changes the concept of human resource management by drawing the talent of people to create added value to help organizations increase their competitiveness as the dynamic changes require organizations to adapt for sustainable survival. Human capital arises from individual knowledge, ability and skills affecting the intelligence of each individual in organizations and it becomes the intellectual capital of the organizations. Any organization that has the right intellectual capital will take a lead to create a sustainable competitive advantage [9]. In Oxford Learner's Dictionary (Online), human capital is defined as 'the skills, knowledge and experience of a person or a group of people, seen as something valuable that an organization or nation can make use of' [10]. This includes assets like education, training, intelligence, skills, health, loyalty, working habits and punctuality. In 2003, Gratton and Ghoshal's work "Managing Personal Human Capital: New Ethos for the 'Volunteer' Employee", published in European Management Journal [11] presented the three elements of human capital or what they call three kind resources that people possess which, collectively, constitute individual human capital: intellectual, social and emotional capitals (see Figure 1).

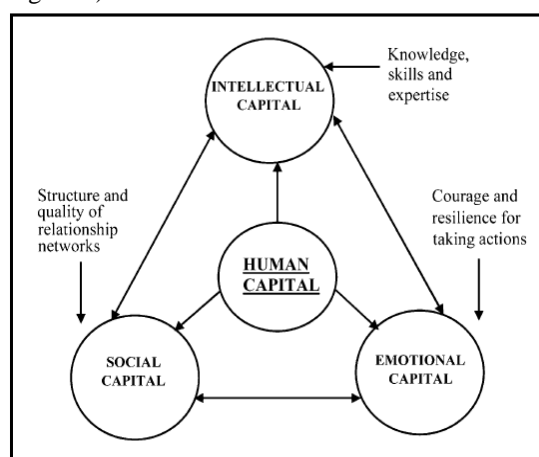


Figure 1 Gratton and Ghoshal's Human Capital consists of the Intellectual, Social and Emotional Capitals of Individuals and Organizations

The first is consisted of knowledge, skills and expertise and it is sometimes called 'tacit knowledge'. The second refers to the structure and quality of relationship network and the last is composed of courage and resilience for taking actions. When the individual has these three elements, he/she becomes a valuable asset of the organization.

Globalization of the world in the 21st century has connected the world as one, leading countries enter the fast-paced competitive battle with a weapon called 'Human Capital', making it the most powerful and valuable weapon in the organization. This gives the organization a competitive advantage and drives the organization to its goals efficiently. If any organization has talented people with potential, it makes the organization stronger than its competitors and achieves organization's goals. This means that the overall competitiveness and progress of a country can be achieved when there is quality human capital in each country's public, private and governmental enterprises [9]. Therefore, the notion of human capital mainly concerns the competence of human or human competency, beneficial to the organization and then the country.

However, Thai people are not expected to have such competence only but also to be disciplined and ethical according to the National Strategy [2]. In order to achieve such goal, many moral trainings have been organized in the educational institutions, and governmental and private organizations with the aim to train Thai people to be ethical. It does not exaggerate that Thai government wants its citizens to be a perfect human endowed with competency and morality [12]. Thus, Thailand's national human capital is slightly different from others in this respect. Depending on the religious background and learning ages, many Buddhist doctrines are taught to Thai citizens such as Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Noble Path, Threefold Training and so on. The most common one taught to all generations directly as the topic of a talk or indirectly as a part of the ceremony is FP, generally known as a code of conduct or rules for helping people behave morally and ethically. The rules of FP are: to refrain from (1) taking life, (2) taking what is not given, (3) misuse of the senses or sexual misconduct, (4) wrong speech and (5) reckless intoxicants [5]. Today, FP is taught to people in Thai society with the belief to create happiness for the practitioners and their members of the family and society.

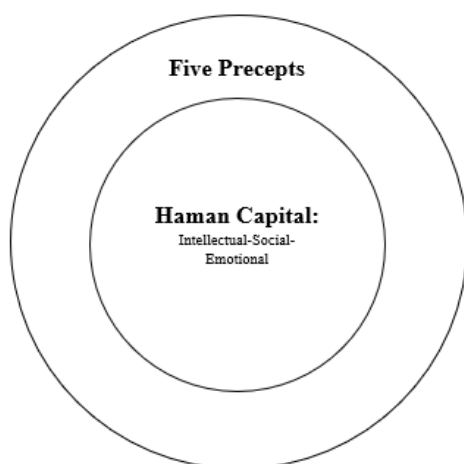


Figure 2 FP is used to develop Human Capital as a behavioral guideline or a code of conduct.

To answer the question 'How does FP support the development of human capital?', as FP is used to control the physical and verbal actions of the practitioner, it can be used as the behavioral guideline restricting the human actions in

wholesome ways. It can be said a smart person with high human capital is not always a good person. Having a lot of people with high human capital but without morality or ethics can cause more damage to the organizations. It is the same as having a master thief or outlaw at work.

Discussion

According to the research results, the development of human capital in Thailand's National Strategy focuses on developing human competency together with morality or producing a competent and moral citizenry [2]. It is said Thai people must be a good worker and a good person simultaneously; while, FP plays its important role in developing people to be ethical or moral or helping people behave in a moral and ethical way. This directly and indirectly responses to the development of human capital, one of the six key indicators of National Strategy: (1) well-being of Thai people and society, (2) national competitiveness, economic growth, and income distribution, (3) development of human capital, (4) social equality and equity and (5) sustainability of national biodiversity, environmental quality, and natural resources [2].

Based on the data obtained from FGD, FP should not solely used to support the development of human capital as it is a conceptual framework of physical and verbal conducts or development only. What left here is the mental development. The FGD participants therefore have recommended various Buddhist doctrines in order to fill such gap. For example, Four Noble Truths should be used to promote the human capital in terms of critical thinking as it is the teaching related to problems-solving skills: find a problem, identify its causes, set the plan and goal to solve the problem and follow the plan. Meditation (Samādhi) or mindfulness was recommended to use as the tool to develop better consciousness and emotion in consistency with Teper and Inzlicht's work 'Meditation, mindfulness and executive control: the importance of emotional acceptance and brain-based performance monitoring', published in Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, Oxford Academic, which confirms that meditation increases the acceptance of emotional states and the capacity to deal with the emotions associated with errors. [13].

The most agreed Buddhist doctrine used to support the development of human capital of Thailand is the teaching called 'Bhāvanā 4 (Four Kinds of Development)[5]'. This doctrine is consisted of four elements: (1) Kāya-bhāvanā (Physical Development), physical development to be healthy and ready to work, (2) Sīla-bhāvanā, development of morality, (3) Citta-bhāvanā, development of the mind to have good qualities and (4) Paññā-bhāvanā, intellectual development. Some FGD participants said this principle may be more effective and suitable than using FP to support the development of human capital. This is consistent with the work by Krongbun 'Buddhism-based Human Capital Management in Thailand 4.0 Era', where Bhāvanā 4 is recommended for human capital development [14]. However, what is missing in this doctrine is the verbal training which can be seen in FP. Moreover, the Noble Eightfold Paths (Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right

Concentration) [5] was suggested as one of the doctrines that should be used to the human capital development. However, some said there is a need to integrate all aforesaid doctrines in the systematic process for the effective use.

Conclusion

In pursuit of the goals of the national development: 'A Secure Nation, Contented People, Continued Economic Growth, An Equal Society and Sustainable Natural Resources', Buddhist doctrines could be used to promote the development of human capital. FP is suitable for the physical and verbal development, but for the mental or intellectual development, it requires other doctrines such as meditation or Bhāvanā 4 to support. However, the human capital development should not be limited to using the Buddhist doctrines only, other religious teachings can be applied if applicable. As mentioned in the National Strategy in developing and strengthening human capital, human capital is one of the key factors to propel the country development making Thailand to be a developed country, driven by wisdom and innovation. It is necessary for all stakeholders in Thailand to have a systematically comprehensive human capital development strategic plan. The integration of honesty, discipline, moral and ethical standards in educational programs should be effectively made by the educational and religious institutions and community.

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