

Cultivating The Sage's Creative Vision

Insights from Perennial Wisdom on Approaching Organizational Change and Sustainability

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Within many meditative traditions and also within shamanism, there is an emphasis on cultivating a transformed and penetrating way of perception. Through this perception, termed in this paper as creative vision, the possibilities or potentialities in any situation are clarified and brought to fruition. The result is described within some traditions as a perception imbued with “clarity, intelligence and unboundedness”. This paper explores the process by which creative vision is cultivated, and how such vision may be vitally useful in meeting the challenges of organizational change and sustainability on our rapidly developing planet. Guiding insights and practical advice grounded in the perennial wisdom traditions are presented against the backdrop of recent research in the areas of Buddhist and cognitive psychology, perspective-taking, altruism, organizational change, organizational development, sustainability and systems theory. We conclude by suggesting how a sage's creative vision is valuable in overcoming resistance to organizational change, creating alternatives for action and invigorating action.

- Vision
- Creativity
- Unlearning
- Self-deception
- Meditation
- Organizational change
- Sustainability

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H AZRAT INAYAT KHAN, THE GREAT classical Indian musician and Sufi mystic, spoke of a powerful creative potential within the sage. In his words:

The glance...of the seer is penetrating, and in this it differs from the glance of the ordinary [person]. It has three characteristics... The first is that it penetrates through body, mind and soul. The second quality of this glance is that it opens, unlocks, and unfolds things... The third characteristic is...[that as] it falls upon a thing, it makes that thing as it wants to make it. This is not actually creating, but it is awakening that particular quality, which was perhaps asleep (Khan, 1982, p. 54).

This paper explores this potential, a capacity we call “creative vision”, as it is cultivated within certain wisdom traditions, and as it also emerges through individual and collective processes of maturation regardless of formal study or practice in a spiritual/wisdom tradition. As we will explore, this capacity for creative vision can be communicated through mentoring, role modelling and organizational culture, and can affect the creativity and potential of groups, teams and entire organizations. Aligned with the impulse behind this special issue, we will offer guidance and examples related to creative vision that parallel work on transformational leadership and organizational change. We believe connecting organizational scholarship regarding intellectual shamans with the classical and mystical traditions associated with shamans and visionaries creates a more holistic and “complete” understanding of how edgewalkers and system thinkers guide us through the challenges of our time (Neal, 2006). The syncretizing of an exploratory creative vision with practical methods from organizational literature contributes to more circumspect, creative relationships with others, with organizational goals and with the natural world.

Some of our present day organizations are making possible a realization of the sacred within everyday life in a wholly different way. Many organizations seem to be embodying, either consciously or unconsciously, some of the core elements of contemplative vision—such as meditation for insight (Yeganeh and Kolb, 2012) as well as collective brainstorming, found within creative consulting firms such as IDEO (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997). Mindfulness and experiential learning are embraced by organizations like Zappos, which instantiates a parallel culture of open-mindedness (e.g. “Create Fun and A Little Weirdness”, “Be Adventurous, Creative, and Open-Minded”) and humility as core values (Zappos, 2016).

Either directly or indirectly, the very core elements of mind and heart cultivation found in mystical/contemplative training—fresh and unbiased perception, a passion for experimentation and possibility, an emphasis on compassion and humanistic values, creativity that breaks from habitual ways of thinking—are embodied in such organizations. This type of innovation involves a non-arrogant “attitude of wisdom” (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997, p. 720) and is an expression of ancient wisdom, relevant not only to pioneers like Google and Zappos, but also to anyone who wishes to effectively manage in this age. As such, creative pathways and strategies that closely parallel contemplative training, resulting in thinking “outside the box” and “pivoting” towards change

(Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Milliman *et al.*, 1991) have produced such innovations as the surgical stapler, the vacuum razor and the smartphone. These innovations reflect an embodied or evolutionary wisdom and intelligence of a kind that heretofore was thought reserved for the mystic or visionary.

Spiritual and religious traditions that emphasize some form of creative vision are described by Aldous Huxley as aspects of a “perennial philosophy” (Huxley, 2004). Huxley observes that the *philosophia perennis* recognizes a universal pattern in life, an essential and inclusive truth behind many diverse spiritual and Indigenous traditions. This tradition makes no distinction between sacred and secular, and recognizes “reality” to be inclusive of all dimensions of life.

Perennial wisdom has also been described by Huston Smith who offers a perspective that we found helpful as we define our construct of creative vision. Smith’s insights (Smith, 1995, pp. 240–241) reveal that the creative vision of a sage closely parallels what Waddock (2015) would call the realization of the intellectual shaman. Smith describes how, to the one who sees through the lens of creative vision, life situations are “more integrated than they seem, are better than they seem and are more mysterious than they seem” (1995, p. 241). While we might ordinarily see isolated parts, the beauty, harmony and mystery of the whole is grasped in those moments when we see interconnections. In a parallel way, Carter suggests that transformational leaders are encouraged to create value by perceiving organizations as more than the sum of their parts (Carter *et al.*, 2013), and to build upon the interconnections among organizational components. Similarly, the 7S Framework facilitates visionary change by holistically synchronizing and aligning all organizational systems (Waterman *et al.*, 1980).

Smith also suggests that creative vision encourages an optimism and openness that “things are much better than they seem” and “things are more mysterious than they appear”. This corresponds to attitudes encouraged by Positive Organizational Scholars (POS) both for transformational leaders and, system-wide, among all organizational members. Smith’s perspectives echo the advice of Bright and Miller (2012, p. 323) who encourage organizational citizenship behaviours that are positive and “life-enhancing” instead of negative and “life-draining”. Regardless of appearances and in some cases our understanding of the mysteries of human potential, and regardless of feelings of limitation and separateness, each organizational member is realized as an ever-unfolding potentiality in spite of difficult conditions, turbulence and uncertainty.

The schools of practice within perennial wisdom offer promise to the challenges of modern culture and management. Following the lead of such firms as Google and Eileen Fisher, organizations are embracing elements of perennial wisdom within their repertoire of management training. In the next section, we further explore perennial wisdom with regard to creative vision. Following this, we relate creative vision to management practice and offer practical examples from contemporary management research and suggestions for best practices that encourage creative vision in organizations.

Creative vision: the sage's way of seeing

Creative vision is referred to by C.G. Jung and some of the ancient Sufi meditative schools as “true imagination” or “true vision”. Specific forms of meditation associated with creative vision were termed by Jung as practices of “active imagination” (Jung, 1968, p. 250). Active imagination involves openness to images found either in the natural world or the unconscious, and a process of seeing how these “refer back” or somehow speak to deep strata within the psyche.

Jung saw how such practices of the active imagination not only connected the practitioner to the “symbolic” or archetypal dimension of the unconscious but also actually brought the individual into a greater intimacy with the natural world. He observed that the practices yielded an “informed perception” (Jung, 1968, p. 250). To Jung, such vision is not “informed” or “true” because it is somehow correct or accurate, but because it is not filtered, distorted or encumbered by the psyche.

This emerging clarity of vision has tremendously practical implications for organizations. Biases and preconceptions about normative and acceptable practices can distort and encumber strategy development, and an unfiltered lens is central to strategy formation. True vision, according to Jung, feels genuine, because it has an archetypal and sacred dimension. It brings forth highly creative dimensions of the human being, and provides an inroad to moving beyond fears and limitations and thereby experiencing creative “flow”.

To the practitioner from perennial wisdom, the translation of the word *Maya* reveals something of the practicality that creative vision can bring forth. Instead of the usual translation of *Maya* as “dream” or “illusion”, the definition of *Maya* may be traced to the same root in Sanskrit as *mater*, meaning both “mother” and “building material” (von Franz, 2006, p. 22). In the Sufi tradition, this life is seen as an expression of “a hidden treasure longing to be known” (Corbin, 1969, p. 121), evidenced in the natural world as a potential for producing beauty and/or elegance. From such a view, each situation that is met freshly can bring forth potential and opportunity, akin to giving warmth, light and scope to a seed that may sprout into a new plant.

The creative vision that recognizes potential, beauty or elegance is closely akin to the methods and perspectives related to *appreciative inquiry* (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987). The parallels between perennial wisdom and appreciative inquiry are not so surprising, in that both traditions pay reverence to the place of awe and intuitive apprehension, which the Greeks called *thaumazein* in discerning and bringing forth the potential in a given situation. Appreciative inquiry, building on institutional theory, suggests that expanding our perspective beyond bounded rationality is fundamental to overcoming socially constructed beliefs that limit perception in problem solving and cause hesitation in taking action.

In both perennial wisdom and appreciative inquiry, wonder and openness to experience play an integral part. A key attribute of mindfulness includes an openness of awareness or “wakefulness” (Langer, 1990) and a receptivity to new

experiences. There is an intention to meet each situation with an unknowing and apprehension of mystery, a recognition that each situation not only can be but is impacted by the observer.

Such an impact of one's way of seeing or one's interpretation of a situation is affirmed in the research on "mood as information theory". By meeting a situation with openness and awe, it is more possible that a positive outlook or mind-set may be present and accented, rather than overemphasizing negative biases that will cloud judgement and constrain creativity. As we note below, there is of course a possibility that the use of such a technique may at times result in an unrealistic way of dealing with a situation.

Construct of creative vision defined

The term creative vision, as we will describe and give examples of it here, refers to a way of seeing and encountering life that is active and creative rather than passive and reactive, the latter seeking the preservation of a status quo. In terms of the key components that seem directly associated with such an active/creative quality, we identify three: 1) a continual capacity for unlearning; 2) a prevailing value of care and compassion for others and for the natural world; and 3) an enlightened practicality that sees the value in nurturing the best potentialities of the individual, group or organization.

Why is creative vision relevant today? While creative vision may appear immediately valuable to many managers, change agents, CEOs and others, it is often described as rare and difficult to obtain. On an organizational level, a rapidly changing world requires frequent change initiatives, organizational restructuring, competing with well-funded new entrants within the dynamic marketplace of the 21st century (Tellis, 2006). Yet, as radical and fundamental changes take place, managers tend to avoid or delay challenging the coercive, mimetic and normative forces that proscribe and constrain our perception of the environment and social reality. Yet while it may be a small minority who dare to go outside of accepted and seemingly protective schemas, more and more individuals, including leaders and managers, are edgewalkers and wayfinders (Spiller, 2012) who accept the challenge to venture outside of Plato's cave in their attempts to reconcile perception with reality.

A sage with creative vision is likewise compelled to continuously venture into uncharted territory and as a first step must unlearn and challenge preconceptions, mores, norms and assumptions about systems and reality. The "creative vision" we describe intersects with the three fundamental components of an intellectual shamans' wisdom—moral, systems and aesthetic considerations. Intellectual shamans have attained a measure of wisdom through experience and sometimes training, and act on and share their wisdom and insights with others. This wisdom is not a rigid set of rules, however. This wisdom is more akin to a guiding process to reconceptualize and unlearn our assumptions and

move forward to holistically synthesize solutions within dynamically shifting systems. This process of unlearning is further guided through a sensemaking process requiring moral tolerance.

Creative visionaries, intellectual shamans and sages are devoted to a life of complete engagement with and benefit to the world—a concept known as right livelihood in Buddhist traditions and understood as “finding and using your power” to implement the intellectual shaman’s wisdom (Waddock, 2015, p. 329). This active engagement is grounded in a moral imagination that tolerantly and compassionately evaluates specific experiences including the relationships, values, norms and roles of that specific situation. Compassionate moral imagination requires a disengagement from one’s preconceived framework of mores and an adaptation to the specific situation in a way that envisions practical and viable and actionable ideals. This is not simply what the shaman instinctively considers to be good, but it involves seeing both sides of a situation or opportunity. The Persian Sufi Rumi describes this capacity with elegant brevity:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field.
I will meet you there (Barks, 2005, p. 123).

Shamans are expert at this unlearning of morality by compassionately seeing the world from both sides through the psychological process of perspective taking (Batson *et al.*, 1997). Perspective taking involves putting oneself into the shoes of another person as a way to understand their motives and values. This results in self-other-overlap whereby a shaman uses creative vision to imagine and experience what the other person would go through. The more the perspective-taker experiences and feels what the other person may be feeling, the more she is able to relate that experience to her own goals, motivations and values. This sensemaking process of unlearning embraces uncertainty as an aesthetically beautiful and emotional process of overlapping with and enmeshing with the value systems of others to create practical shared solutions (Waddock, 2015, p 320; Weick, 1996).

The sage’s creative vision compassionately synthesizes both sets of values and goals into new, practical solutions that all parties may embrace as their own. A shaman uses this creative vision to understand the “wicked” as well as the “good” side of human nature. By having a broad, practical systems perspective, shamans consider what is “true” and what is actually occurring within the diverse interrelated communities, organizations and interdependent “wholes” (Senge, 1990). These interdependent wholes each have independent as well as interrelated qualities—no individual, organization or system exists in a vacuum. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) describe a similar form of connectedness among holistic systems that frequently interact in ways that balance out and harmonize both good and wicked components. The sage’s systems perspective explores beyond accepted assumptions and practices in which institutions are socially embedded; if not, we do not act—as is occurring with the climate crisis. We have evidence that the climate is changing but our institutions are socially embedded and enmeshed in patterns of behaviour that hinder us from seeing the “true” situation and acting wisely and practically.

Although creative vision guides sages and shamans towards positive practical action, there is the risk of negative consequences if the moral, systems or aesthetic perspectives are not compassionately considered. For example, various forms of disruptive—instead of creative—visions have had dire and long-lasting negative consequences for institutions and entire countries. One such disruptive policy, shock therapy, is an economic reform policy that has been implemented in many countries without considering the moral impact on the poor and disenfranchised of those countries (Klein, 2007). Although the individuals initiating such reforms describe their policies as visionary, they do not think or act compassionately. On the other hand, the conscious capitalism movement and the Conscious Capitalism Institute (CCI) holistically embrace the considerations, values and needs of all stakeholders within interrelated systems (Mackey and Sisodia, 2013). The CCI guides leaders, change agents and shamans towards a conscious leadership that directs attention to the human foundations of business, interdependence and the mutual reliance of all life within our shared ecosystem.

Through a number of examples of organizational leaders, all pioneers in new ways of thinking and creative, impactful individuals, we hope to illustrate that creative vision is indeed not a rare and esoteric quality reserved for the spiritual elite. The examples we will discuss will emphasize different dimensions of creative vision, and help us to identify those ways of thinking and being that seem to help us align with such vision.

Unlearning as a way to creative vision

C. West Churchman

C. West Churchman (1968) had a profound insight into human problems. He was a source of inspiration for many in budding fields related to general systems theory and organizational decision making. Churchman was truly an “intellectual shaman”, in that his writings, teachings and friendships were paths towards healing and building bridges.

Churchman saw the essential step towards the sage’s perception, a process of “unlearning” our ways of self-deception, an understanding of the internal “enemies” of our sane and whole-system ways of thinking. These included rigid ideas centred on religion, politics, economics and aesthetics. He saw that we tended to use rigid belief systems and/or deeply held feelings that keep us at arm’s length from “reality”.

Churchman’s emphasis on questioning our own belief systems was in close accord with many other theorists who hold that our innate desire for certainty—in a most uncertain world—is thoroughly unrealistic, biased and limiting.

Having extensively studied both Eastern and Western spiritual traditions, it is not surprising that Churchman’s perspectives exactly parallel those of many

sages from the perennial wisdom traditions. The hermeneutic of “unknowing” or “unlearning” is central to these traditions, seen as a process of removing distortions and unveiling rather than adding something new to a situation.

Churchman thus challenged inquisitive problem solvers to recognize and move beyond their own innate tendency to self-deceive. In a lecture on 14 April 2000 Eleanor Rosch described such an awakening regarding her research on the psychology of cognitive categorization. As a result of her recent work involving Buddhist psychology, Rosch acknowledges the irony of her earlier focus on how we create and hold onto categories and labels for everything. Rosch discovered that emptying the mind of categories was a fruitful alternative. By letting go of these categories and labels and removing our judgements we can see how we share superordinate identities with others. These broader superordinate categories can reduce divisions and increase a sense of belonging and connection with others (for example, as members of the family of humanity, wage-earners, community members, etc.).

Paul Polman

In the leadership of Paul Polman of Unilever we find a good example of unlearning, and a leader who questions conventional thinking, including his own. Polman announced on his first day as CEO of Unilever that his company would no longer issue quarterly financial reports. He chose the first day because he knew the board would be too embarrassed to fire him on the day of the announcement (Cunningham, 2015). Polman’s message was clear: the company should focus on long-term goals. A long-term focus would allow for sustainability and carbon reductions initiatives that would not be justifiable on the basis of short-term quarterly returns.

A further example from Polman relates directly to the attitude that made West Churchman a revered systems philosopher. Polman suggests that he has no idea whether he is making significant efforts or even right or wrong decisions with regard to contributing to the long-term sustainability of the planet. Rather, he simply suggests that he tries to do what seems right.

Polman’s “unknowing” closely parallels that of former CEO of Interface Carpets Ray Anderson (2011) who urged corporate leaders to take a step in the dark by finding new ways of framing business activities, of making and selling products:

The earth is finite and fragile, and we ignore these plain physical facts at our peril. That’s why we need a new industrial revolution and a new set of wings, ones properly designed according to the laws of “aerodynamics”. Wings that will allow our civilization—and our grandchildren’s—to fly, sustainably. To soar, not crash. But conventional wisdom and the status quo are powerful sedatives. Like opiates, they dim our vision and blur our minds (Anderson, 2011, p. 3).

Creative vision as compassionate vision

Ryuzaburo Kaku of Canon

Akin to the example of Polman above, a second central dimension of the construct of creative vision is a sense of connectedness and compassion for creation and for sentient beings. Ryuzaburo Kaku, former President of Canon, and Chairman from 1989 to 1999, embodied this sense of a selfless creative vision. He believed that business needed a global philosophy for the 21st century, and called upon Canon to attain this.

Kaku wanted to dispel the notion that multinationals had to exploit the countries in which they operate. He advocated what he calls *kyosei*, the Japanese word he uses for corporate responsibility. The word literally means symbiosis, but Kaku interpreted it as a “spirit of cooperation in which individuals and organizations live and work together for a common good [establishing] harmonious relations with its customers, suppliers, its competitors, the governments with which it deals and the natural environment” (Kaku, 1997, p. 55). Kaku was particularly concerned about the legacy we would leave to future generations and ecological issues. He saw that no corporation could expect to exist if it did not contribute in a positive way to the world around it. Since 1995, Canon has been a global leader in corporate sustainability efforts.

Konosuke Matsushita

Another Japanese luminary, Konosuke Matsushita closely parallels Kaku in his vision of what his corporation, Matsushita Electric (now Panasonic) was all about: He felt “industrialists” must work with the well-being of all people as their priority, and must know, breathe and thrive on a spirit of craft. Matsushita laid the foundation for an organization dedicated to service to humanity and also dedicated to being highly efficient and highly profitable. Instead of an obsession with beating the competition and invoking fear in the worker, Matsushita Corporation sees what it may offer to the world. Admitting openly the many challenges it has in terms of the environmental “friendliness” of its products, the company nevertheless strives vigilantly to treat the environment with great care.

Konosuke Matsushita was intent on outperforming his US competitors, but his reason was not competition. He wanted to awaken Westerners to different ways of thinking, rooted in his lifelong study of Buddhist philosophy, and based on attaining an attitude of working for the benefit of the world around us—what he called “the right inner condition”. To manifest this, and moved by a vision that every human being could have access to both light and water, Matsushita set about preparing a 260-year plan for his organization, so that it could be a major contributor to this goal.

Creative vision as enlightened practicality

Kazuo Inamori

Tremendous practicality is often found in certain individuals with a strong spiritual bent, such as the above-mentioned Konosuke Matsushita. Another example is Kazuo Inamori, a lifelong Buddhist practitioner who founded Kyocera and then became CEO of a crippled Japan Airlines (JAL), at a time when they were close to bankruptcy. Although JAL also received help from the government to survive, it flourished and came out of debt under Inamori's leadership, which he humbly took little credit for. He claimed the success was based on a most simple principle: make the workers as happy as possible (Inamori, 2009, p. 99). Inamori's approaches, however seemingly simple, were actually highly sophisticated, as reflected in what he called "amoeba management", the creation of high performance, self-organizing teams.

Eileen Fisher

Eileen Fisher's design clothing firm embraces a parallel humility, and, in what is almost an understated way, has created a powerful model of humane, employee-centred and sustainability-centred organizational culture. Fisher emphasizes the importance of wholeness in herself and the organization. Employees receive specific cash perks to be used toward massage or other therapies/modalities, or some aspect of their spiritual lives. She does not profess any particular form of spirituality except a very strong respect for nature and for fellow human beings. Her wisdom and practicality is evidenced in her exacting and uncompromising standards of sustainable supply chain management, ensuring that both the environment and the human rights of workers are respected. The same spirit of care and concern goes into hiring practices and the culture of cooperation, spaciousness and creativity she encourages.

Reflection and meditation as central elements for the cultivation of creative vision

In the wisdom schools from which creative vision emerges, mind and consciousness are not separate from our world. Life is seen as an alchemical process by which the individual can realize herself or himself as a microcosm of the underlying creativity of the universe. For example, in her study of the medieval Sufi alchemist Ibn Umail, Von Franz recognized the powerful correspondence between one's "inner work"—of opening to and fulfilling this transformative process—and the life around one:

In a modest, almost inconspicuous way, our author here expresses a mind-blowing thought: that if man works on his inner cosmos (what we call the self) the whole outer cosmos falls into harmony with it (von Franz, 2006, p. 148).

The core principle of perennial wisdom and of creative vision, life as a unity, is far different from our ordinary way of perceiving life through a dualistic lens. Yet the creativity spoken of here is not merely arbitrary. Rather, it emerges from a sense of being in touch with the needs of people and of a situation. As an expression of wisdom, creativity is balanced and informed by a strong sense of responsibility and an interest in contributing to, harmonizing with and bringing healing to one's surroundings.

The exemplars of creative vision described here are highly reflective, philosopher sages: Eileen Fisher and Ray Anderson express a natural sense of compassion and care for their world. The leaders of Canon, Matsushita and Kyocera corporations have roots in the highly meditative Buddhist tradition of Japan. Meditative practice relaxes the individual in a positive state of attention that includes a perspective beyond oneself. From this emerges an intrinsic engagement as well as an intensified sense of relatedness to others, and a state of awareness of connectedness with others, termed intersubjectivity. This appears to be the same state which Thich Nhat Hanh calls "interbeing" (Hanh, 1987). Enhanced by living fully in the present moment and with the awareness of creative emptiness, interbeing is the heightened sense of the interdependent nature of all phenomena and people.

Meditation and reflective practice help cultivate creative vision by a desire to be of greater service to something beyond one's individual interests. These result in a heightened awareness of oneness or "self-other overlap" (Aron *et al.*, 1992). Self-other overlap involves a dynamic process of putting oneself into another's shoes and experiencing the world from their perspective, resulting in a recognition of individuals, belonging to shared superordinate categories such as "fellow human beings".

The emergence of this sense of interdependence can be a healing journey that touches solitude but instills in the individual an empathy and altruism. In this regard, periods of meditation and retreat serve as a *practice* rather than a principle within perennial wisdom, and are understood to only be useful in order to expand consciousness so that one may return to life seeing situations, relationships and systems in a new way.

Perennial wisdom suggests some practices that guide wayfinders and edge-walkers as they approach the challenges of modern culture. They openly confront subtle levels of self-deception through a process of unlearning and "re-collection" of projection. This, in turn, brings forth a fortifying and enlightening experience, one which provides joy, exuberance and awe (Keltner and Haidt, 2003). In turn, creative vision can encourage shamans and change agents to approach crucial issues rather than avoid them, to be empowered and action oriented rather than passively resting in denial and inaction.

Discussion: the fruits of creative vision in management and organizations

Is there a shadow side to creative vision? When we speak of vision, the dangers are very apparent: visionaries who are blinded by their ideals have certainly wreaked havoc on our world when their decisions and actions have not been rooted in compassion and concern for others. An inconsiderate, disruptive, Schumpeterian method may transform rigid calcified organizations and systems in need of creative destruction (Tellis, 2006). Yet, such callous, Social Darwinist approaches rely on a form of “creative destruction” quite distinct from the creative vision that is life giving, and conceives a re-creation that is humane. A form of creative destruction known as “shock therapy” was imposed during the sudden economic liberalization that transformed countries such as Russia (Klein, 2007). However, this form of creative destruction is critiqued as inhumane and inconsiderate of the majority of citizens who were thrown into long-term poverty by these policies.

Another potential “shadow” side of creative vision has to do with elements of inaction in the face of crisis or evil in our world, and the common perception of the contemplative as seeing life as Maya, as illusion, and standing apart from it. While there are certainly cases where this takes place, indifference is not the standpoint of the contemplative experience.

Here one might think of such cases as Mother Teresa, or of Noor-un-nisa Inayat Khan, codenamed Madeleine by the British Secret Service, a delicate and soft spoken Sufi poetess and harpist, who was awarded the George Cross for her bravery in service against Nazi Germany (Basu, 2007). Wishing to serve in the cause of human liberty, Khan worked undercover and held the last radio link between occupied France and Great Britain. She was captured and executed at Dachau at the age of 30 after two years of imprisonment and torture, refusing to reveal her name.

We suggest here that when the capacities for unlearning and compassionate action fuel an active sense of practicality, the shadow dimensions explored here will be minimized. Creative vision implies an intention to allow—and actively help—life to unfold in new and fresh ways. As such it is very much in harmony with those aspects of management that proactively encourage rather than diminish the quality of our lives. Von Franz saw that such creative vision would serve to heal the artificial distinctions between the worlds of spirit and matter, and that this is *the* issue of our age, and the only way of averting an environmental catastrophe.

It seems very clear at this time that a sage’s creative vision could not possibly avoid addressing the environmental crisis that is before us, affirmed by 97% of the scientists who have studied it. Still, there is a long road ahead for the wayfinders and edgewalkers confronting the challenges of sustainability. It is encouraging that to many young people, anything “sacred” or “spiritual” must be somehow relevant to the stewardship of the Earth. Recent valuable work has

begun to address individual psychological and group psychosocial factors that impede climate change activism (Daniels, 2009).

Our hope within this paper is to make clear the potential contributions that creative vision offers to the present global crises we face. The examples we have provided from the corporate world give evidence that the qualities of creative vision tend to yield actions and attitudes that do indeed bring awareness and benefit to the cause of addressing the problems around us. Facing the environmental crisis, the sage-like leaders we have discussed tend to turn attention away from blame and instead encourage courses of collective action that enhance a sense of “interbeing”. Instead of a focus on passive, condemnatory, retributive forms of social action and justice, these leaders would emphasize healing, and their ways embody an effective social action that is based on truthfulness, forgiving and restorative forms of justice and participation.

In closing, returning to the kind of challenge that C. West Churchman offers us, to find our way out of limiting self-deception, it seems that anyone truly interested in effective social change could benefit—even if only as a thought experiment—from the exploration of the sage’s methods of expanding consciousness. The most radical of hypotheses might then come forward: the possibility that we all already possess this capacity for creative vision and that changes in our ways of perception can have profound effects. This is most relevant to organizational contexts, as explained by Canon’s Ryuzaburo Kaku:

Because multibillion-dollar corporations control vast resources around the globe, employ millions of people, and create and own incredible wealth, they hold the future of the planet in their hands... If corporations run their businesses with the sole aim of gaining more market share or earning more profits, they may well lead the world into economic, environmental, and social ruin. But if they work together, in a spirit of kyosei, they can bring food to the poor, peace to war-torn areas, and renewal to the natural world. It is our obligation as business leaders to join together to build a foundation for world peace and prosperity (Kaku, 1997, pp. 62-63).

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