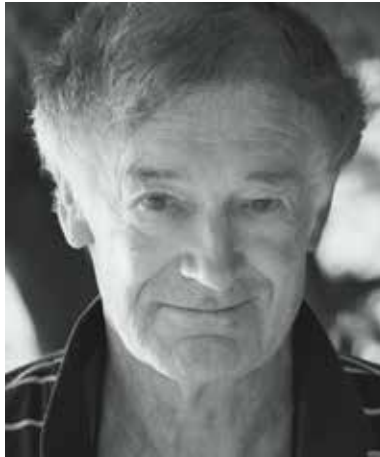


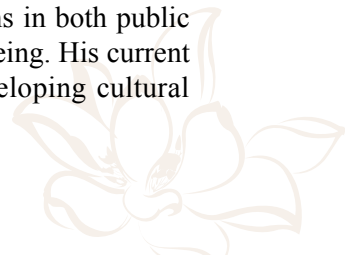
Laity and Naturalization of Humanistic Buddhism in the Workplace



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Introduction

The story told through this paper is a snapshot of one dimension of Humanistic Buddhism's future in Australia. A dimension, in the hands of lay members who seek to witness to their beliefs in their place of work. Macy (2010, p. 1) describes the characteristic of the people who underpin the credibility of this study, "it is an incredible privilege that we have been given, human life with a self-reflective consciousness that makes us aware of our own actions." Further, Macy (2010, p. 2) urges lay Buddhists to use their skills, no matter how small or insignificant they may personally feel about them, since one shared insight can escalate to initiating "meaningful societal change."

Venerable Master Hsing Yun (2016) postulates that Humanistic Buddhism¹ presents its beliefs as a way to enhance everyday life of humans in a manner that is intrinsic to the human state. Hence when these beliefs are introduced sensitively, with respect for the other, they provide a reference point for improved harmony, trust and compassion within an organization. The confidence that a community gains from these outcomes increases their receptiveness to the belief system that produced them leading to further integration opportunities.

To explore the Venerable Master's argument, the research seeks to test the notion that small, multiple, belief-based interventions by lay followers, can contribute to the process of improving harmony, trust and compassion in their workplaces and therefore promote the naturalization of Buddhism.

Starting from an invitation to Buddhist laity to tell a story about workplace experiences, the study highlights how the

1 Humanistic Buddhism focuses on issues of the world, caring for the living, benefiting others and universal salvation. It is the practical interpretation of theoretical Buddhism, which has become relevant in the modern world. It also emphasizes on application of wisdom that has been realized so far. (Shanker 2010, p. 1)

contribution of the personal intentions motivating their experiences, which are grounded in the Dharma, can make a difference to the naturalization of Buddhism in Australia.

Research Design

The study's design uses a systemic approach to investigate the relationship between the self-reported stories of Buddhists in the workplace with the complex process associated with Buddhism's naturalization in Australian workplaces. The activities of a systemic approach facilitates diverse experiences being "swept in" creating a "rich picture" of a complex situation (Checkland 1982). From the rich picture emergent insights about the complex issue are gleaned that are not necessarily available from the study of individual experiences.

Designing the study to investigate complexity in workplace situations systemically is different from most popular research methods that derive from scientific enquiry. Scientific methods are usually looking at repetition of concepts to create a critical indication of the significance of such a concept. That is, the focus is primarily on the parts that contribute to the complex issue. A Systemics research method is focused on the relationship between the parts and thus the way in which any part affects another part. Such dynamics generates the ripple effect that makes a complex issue so difficult to comprehend and manage (McKenzie 2006).

Systems designed by human beings, like Buddhism's expansion, are purposeful systems (Jackson, 2003). They are intended to achieve particular outcomes. Workplace organizations are such systems as is the Sangha that Buddhist may be associated with. Within the Sangha system, each of the participants retains their own worldview of the Sangha's purpose, that has been honed through their formal learning and everyday experiences. This means that as individuals behaving in good faith there will be many different actions taken to achieve the purpose. That is,

demonstrating how the Buddha's message about the cessation of suffering can improve Australian workplaces. Hence the study is designed to "sweep in" (capture) the diverse set of self-reported actions taken in workplaces by lay Buddhists, to reveal workplace actions achieving the purpose to naturalize Buddhism in Australia.

The study's design incorporates two fieldwork activities, both associated with the collection, collation and sense-making of experiential knowledge possessed by Australian lay Buddhists about their belief/practice-based interventions in their workplaces.

Fieldwork Part 1

To investigate the research questions, stories are collected from practicing Buddhists about their experiences in their workplace. Each is asked to tell the researcher one or more stories about situations during which they had drawn on their Buddhist beliefs to intervene to improve some aspect of the situation. In telling their story participants are not asked to respond to any pre-conceived template. However, after telling the story they are asked by the researcher to identify their story's most significant aspects, from their perspective as a Buddhist, and the intention that motivated the intervention. Further, they were asked to indicate whether their colleagues knew they were a practicing Buddhist.

The collected stories, along with their significant aspects, were clustered according to the intention stated by the teller. From each cluster a composite story was created to protect the anonymity of individual contributors.² The intentions were also recorded for use in the second fieldwork activity.

² Humanistic Buddhism focuses on issues of the world, caring for the living, benefiting others and universal salvation. It is the practical interpretation of theoretical Buddhism, which has become relevant in the modern world. It also emphasizes on application of wisdom that has been realized so far. (Shanker 2010, p. 1)

Fieldwork Part 2

Of the identified core intentions, from the first fieldwork activity, those which occurred across several stories were selected for a second round of activity. This activity was designed to test the significance of these intentions, in the opinion of practicing Buddhists and scholars of Applied Buddhism, in Australia. The second round of participants were asked to rate on a ten-point scale (1 low and 10 high) each of the intentions against two criteria: Value for appreciating Humanistic Buddhism and Probable impact on non-Buddhist Australians. The invitation to participate in the rating was extended through a computer internet program, WindTunneling. In the WindTunneling program, while the contributor has to submit an email address to sign in, there is no way to identify a specific contribution, as all contributions are merged by the software. A second invitation was extended via email to potential contributors unable to access the WindTunneling software. In the email invitation potential contributors were asked to complete an assessment form, identical with the WindTunneling page, and return it to the researcher, who then entered the data into the WindTunneling program.

Statistical analysis of the responses, in terms of average of responses and standard deviation between the responses, is generated by the computer program and displayed in both table and scatterplot formats. These are visible to all participants in the study and as such contribute to the collaborative learning about the intervention activities by the initiators.

Results

Fieldwork Part 1 – Story collection, collation, and emergence of intervention intentions

Fifty-one stories were collected from forty-three contributors. Thirty-eight of the contributors indicated that their relationship

to Buddhism was known by their colleagues, the other five were unsure. The contributors stated they worked in the following vocations:

Table 1: Vocational areas of story contributors

Medical Health	Mental Health
Life Coaching	Project Management
Financial Services	Hospitality
Education	Mentoring
Manufacturing	IT Programming
Retailing	Youth Work
Employment Services	Administration
Motor Repairs	Farming

While the intentions stated by contributors are not exclusive to Buddhism, the contributors unambiguously related them to their understanding and practice of the Dharma. Therefore, for the purpose of recording accurately the motivations of the storytellers a Buddhist understanding of the intentions is assumed.

Twenty-four of the stories focused on how the storyteller used compassion with work colleagues (individually or collectively) as an expression of their Buddhist practice. In all of these stories the outcomes were positive with enhanced peace, harmony and sense of security being most frequently mentioned.

Ten of the stories focused on persistence and patience in situations that had been made stressful by circumstances outside the control of the storyteller and with potentially negative consequences for all stakeholders. The practice of persistence was expressed in terms of not letting the peripheral forces, like verbal insults, distract from completing the task at hand, which were part of the responsibilities given to the storyteller by the organization. The patience practice embraced the storyteller's determination to

allow distractions to take their course and not engage with them, in the belief that the distractions are impermanent and without attention they will eventually disappear. Patience they stated allows the time to understand, to plan and adopt a way of moving forward that is reassuring for others experiencing the distraction.

Across all stories there is an emphasis on being mindful of yourself and the worlds you move in and out of. Practices that improve your capacity to adopt a mindful meditative position in any stressful or celebrative situation at work are described as positive contributions of the Buddhists to their work team.

From the fifty-one stories sixteen intentions emerged, which typified the motivation of participants' interventions about which they constructed their stories.

From the sixteen intentions, eleven that were most prevalent in the stories were selected for use in the second Fieldwork activity. The selected intentions are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Intentions used by Buddhists in the Australian workforce

Intention Headline	Synthesis of Intention
Mindful breathing	Being deliberate and mindful of creating a regular and steady breathing pattern to create a safe and supporting environment for sharing another's sensitive issues.
Compassion	Seeking ways of expressing one's compassion (sharing suffering) with the other, when they are troubled by their work-life experiences.
Impermanence	Sharing an understanding of impermanence to encourage colleague not to take an "it's finished" attitude to services we receive or deliver. Acknowledging change is ongoing.
Recognizing the Three Poisons at work	Naming the presence of greed, anger and ignorance in a work situation from the state of a calm mind so that emotional responses are lowered while exploring the causes and conditions that enabled the poisons to arise.

Reducing suffering we unintentionally cause	Mindfully reviewing, the unintended consequences of our work activities to identify and take action to minimize suffering caused to others.
Accountability against the Dharma	Using all my knowledge of the Noble Eightfold Path to assess the contribution of my work with a view to creating an agenda to discuss with colleague for improving our shared performance.
Mindful of suffering	The suffering of individuals is often lost in the corporate insistence on reputational protection and monetary profits. Holding a ‘loving kindness’ mindset towards the suffering inflicted as a way to encourage a greater sensitivity of suffering humanity.
Universal images of Buddha-nature	Telling and listening to stories about the lives of individuals who have expressed their Buddha nature through their work responsibilities to release the Buddha nature dormant in others.
Harmony through respect, compassion and causes	Proactively addressing episodes of arrogance, anger and ignorance with respect, compassion and causes in the same context. That is, engaging with similar situations with the opposite attitude.
Benefiting humanity	Holding onto a higher purpose in even the most meagre tasks is a powerful model to support another. The behavior helps others to see how any task done well can benefit humanity. This behavior lifts the morale of those who complete many of the routine jobs that are so often taken for granted.
Persistence	Persistence, when things don’t go to plan, indicates to everyone around you the generosity of your spirit to keep giving to others during times of adversity, encouraging them to also persevere. The suffering being felt is reduced if it is reconceived as an opportunity to learn. Focusing our attention away from self-recriminations to self-improvement enhances everyone’s morale.

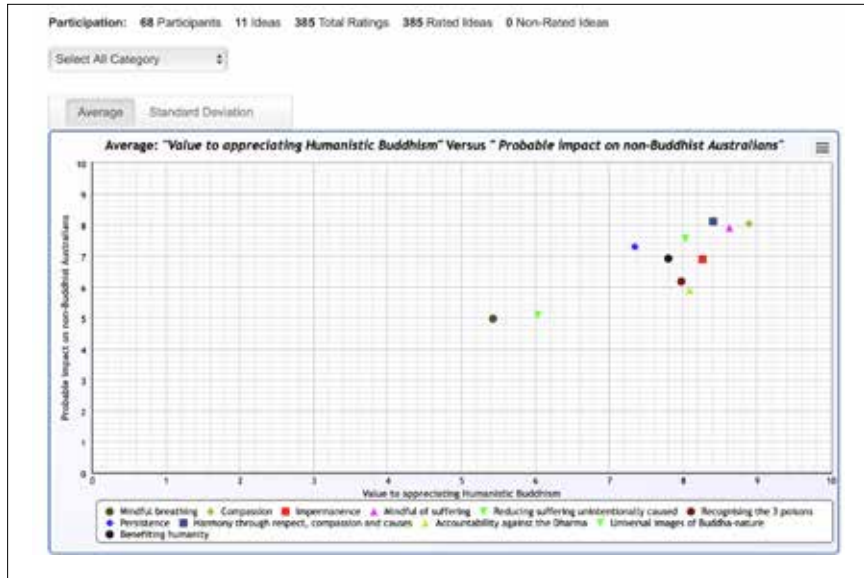
A composite story for each of these intentions was created from the cluster of personal stories related to an intention. These stories are one of the information sharing outcomes that contributes to future naturalization.

Fieldwork Part 2 - Making sense of the intentions in terms of Buddhism’s naturalization in Australian workplaces.

48 people with links to Humanistic Buddhism assessed the 11 most common occurring intentions in the stories against two criteria “Value for appreciating Humanistic Buddhism” and “Probable impact on non-Buddhist Australians.”

Assessing the intentions of the stories was conducted in two formats. The first was through an email invitation to people on the Nan Tien Institute mailing list that included an assessing document for completion and return. 23 completed assessments were returned. The second format was an invitation to Nan Tien Community of Practice attendees to contribute through the WindTunneling software program. 25 people contributed. Scatterplots displaying the average of the 48 assessments (Graph 1) and standard deviation between contributions (Graph 2) are shown below. A table of the same results is also included below (Table 3).

Graph 1: Average of assessments of story intentions



Graph 2: Standard deviation between contributors' assessments

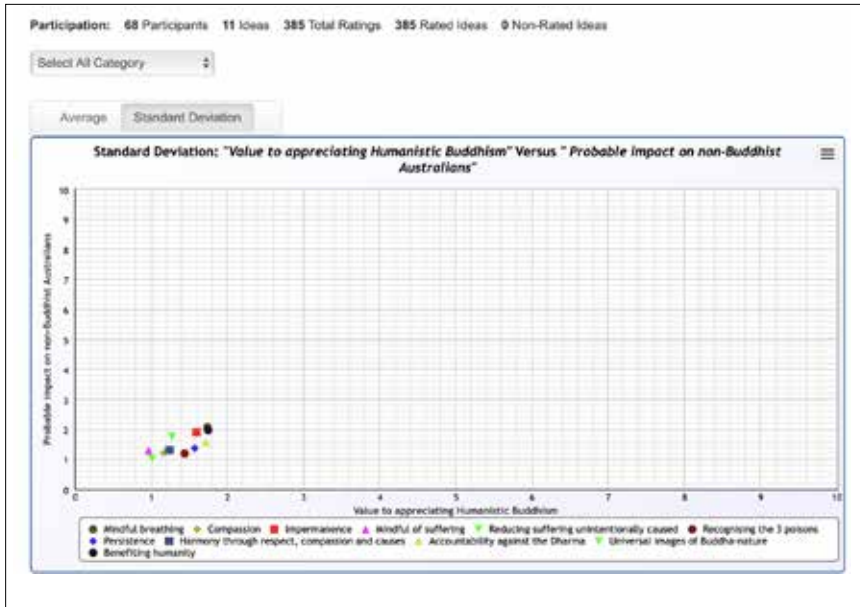


Table 3: Average and standard deviations of contributors' assessments

Ideas	Category	ID *	Value to appreciating Humanistic Buddhism		Probable impact on non-Buddhist Australians		Non-Ratings
			Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	
Mindful breathing ... read more	Eightfold Path	1	5.43	1.74	4.97	2.06	0
Compassion Seeking... read more	Four Immeasurables	2	8.89	1.16	8.03	1.20	0
Impermanence Sharing... read more	Marks of Existence	4	8.26	1.60	6.80	1.80	0
Accountability against the Dharma... read more	Eightfold Path	8	8.09	1.72	5.80	1.57	0
Reducing suffering unintentionally... read more	Eightfold Path	18	8.03	1.01	7.54	1.01	0
Mindful of suffering... read more	Four Immeasurables	20	8.63	0.87	7.91	1.20	0
Universal images of Buddha-nature... read more	Middle Way	21	6.03	1.27	5.09	1.74	0
Harmony through respect, compassion and... read more	Four Immeasurables	22	8.40	1.24	8.11	1.30	0
Benefiting humanity... read more	Eightfold Path	24	7.80	1.75	6.91	1.96	0
Persistence... read more	Perfections	25	7.34	1.57	7.29	1.30	0
Recognising the 3 poisons... read more	Four Noble Truths	26	7.97	1.44	6.17	1.18	0

Discussion

Discussion here focusses on relating the outcomes of the two fieldwork activities to the purpose, context, and method issues presented in the earlier review of the naturalization of Buddhism in new environments. Particularly the implication for improving the future understanding of the naturalization process in Australia, from the perspective of lay Buddhists in their workplaces.

Palmo (2019, p vii), President of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women writes in the Preface to the Proceedings of the 16th Sakyadhita International Conference, held in Australia:

the Australian community at large has discovered the Dharma and founded many centers and monasteries holding allegiance to the various Buddhist traditions in Asia... for the first time we are meeting in a country which contains both traditional and contemporary expressions of the Dharma.

Palmo accurately reflects the essence of this project's collection of stories as, "both traditional and contemporary expressions of the Dharma." The study indicates that the contribution of lay Buddhist's interventions in their workplaces are rooted in these two expressions of Dharma and are an Australian expression of the naturalization of Buddhism. Further, the study illustrates how a storytelling methodology can be used to explore the complexity of a faith's integration into a workplace's culture through the behavior of its adherents in their workplace situations. The collective stories provide knowledge that assists a better understanding of lay Buddhists' interpretation of the Dharma and its application to resolving workplace problems.

The application of the Midgley et. al. (2007) framework provided rigor to the study through guiding a systemic approach

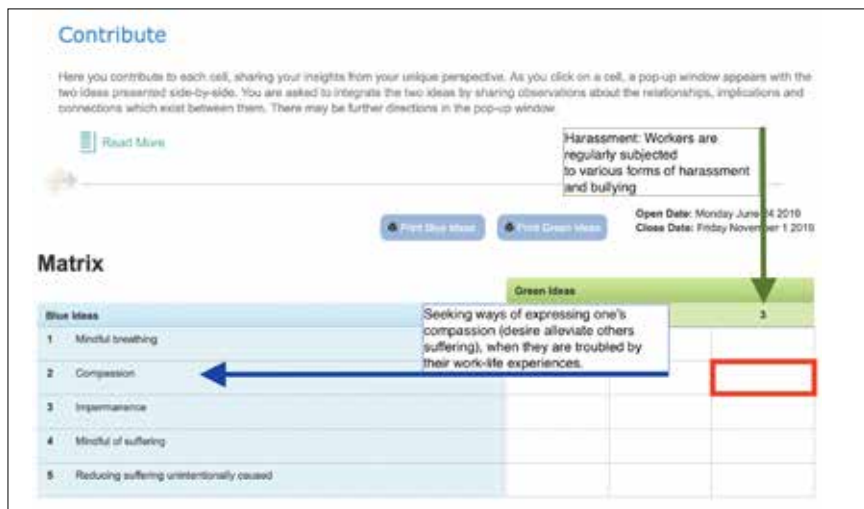
to minimize research bias. While some of the stories discussed experiences in the past, the majority of them could be called “living stories” as they were related to ongoing engagements in the workplace. Snowden (2012) argues that living stories add to the qualitative value of the storytelling methodology as they are more likely to include the whole experience of the teller rather than a reflective “redacted” version. Bowman and Crawford (2017, p. 20) highlight how storytelling enables investigation of the lived experience of 43 lay Buddhists about witnessing in the workplace: “through the stories we hear their voices.” This perspective of an ongoing narrative in the voice of the storyteller is particularly evident in the “Benefiting Humanity” (see Appendix) intention story: *The services have been stopped pending further in-depth study of their purpose and implementation processes.* It can be deduced that such interventions are not one-off events but have a life that goes on influencing the shape and behavior of the host organization.

This developmental nature of some of the stories can be related to the idea of a learning system (Bawden, McKenzie & Packham 2007). The storytellers stressed their personal learning as they successively implemented a particular intervention. This is illustrated by the story from the “Persistence” (see Appendix) intention: *The rewards from using the “persistence” bridge are enhanced competencies and capabilities from which we reduce our self-recriminations that initiate low morale.* These reflections by the storytellers generate an expectation that once an individual starts applying an aspect of their belief practice to a workplace situation, they catalyze a self-learning loop, enabling them to continually improve both their practice and the intervention activity. Further study is required to assess the extent of learning gained by the other stakeholders in the changed situation. Are they empowered to refine, extend and propagate further the intentions they have experienced? Such a study would shed more light on the “ripple” effect of a naturalization initiative through the proponents continuous learning.

The diversity of workplace backgrounds of the storytellers highlights that the activities of witnessing lay Buddhists are spread widely across Australian work-life. Further, this diversity of story backgrounds has provided a valid basis for identifying insights to create a framework for future story construction. That is, such a framework would appear to have validity across many vocations. Constructing this framework was beyond the scope of this study however, these future stories could be used as a starting point, by Humanistic Buddhists seeking to enhance their skills in engaging with Australian workplace culture.

The researching of such a framework could be structured around a Matrix where the vertical axis rows would list intentions that have proven successful in workplace situations, like those identified above. The horizontal axis would list a variety of workplace situations, one per column. Using the WindTunneling software discussed earlier, contributors could be invited from anyone, anywhere with internet access. The figure below is an example of such a Matrix.

Figure 1: Screenshot of a WindTunneling program window to further research naturalizing Framework



Participants in such a study would then be asked to fill in the cells (example in red in Figure 3) from their own experience. The results could be used to draft a framework to support all future lay Buddhists participation in the naturalization of Buddhism in their workplaces.

The stories collected indicate that many different aspects of Buddhism (traditional and contemporary) are the inspiration behind workplace interventions, as Palmo (2019) stated. The stories reflect a proactive Buddhism. Venerable Hsing Yun (2016, p. xiv) writes, “there was a time when Buddhists retreated to an other-worldly lifestyle, focused solely on cultivation of the self.” He goes on to stress how his understanding of Buddhism is at its core engaged with humanity in all its guises. Hence it can be reasoned that the activities of lay Buddhists captured in this study support the goals of Humanistic Buddhism. In fact, the eleven emergent intentions assessed in the second fieldwork program can all be linked to Venerable Hsing Yun’s (2016, pp xv – xxi) twenty points elaboration of what Humanistic Buddhism is.

From the results of this study the indications are that the engagement of lay Buddhists with their work colleagues is an everyday style of implementation of Humanistic Buddhism in Australian workplaces. The spirit of Humanistic Buddhism encourages the laity to blend in with others instead of seeing the self and others as separate beings on opposite stances’ (Hsing Yun 2016, p. xv). Further on (p. xxi) Venerable Master Hsing Yun states,

The purpose of collective cultivation is to maintain mutual respect of people’s conducts, shared values, equal distribution of benefits, harmonious social coexistence, loving and kind speech, as well as mental joy of spiritual attainment.

This is the essence of the stories collected and as the emergent insights show each recorded intervention, while stressing one element, is in general cognizant of all the elements associated with Venerable Master Hsing Yun's contention.

An examination of the results from the second fieldwork exercise—"assessing of intentions," gives an opportunity to see which of the Humanistic Buddhism premises are considered by the assessors to be more or less significant to simultaneously improving the workplace and witnessing to Buddhism. An intention with a high rating on both criteria is assumed to be making the most significant contribution to naturalization.

The benefits of the secularized interventions of Buddhism in reducing stress, anxiety, and conflict as revealed in the intentions:

- *Compassion,*
- *Mindful of suffering, and*
- *Harmony through respect, compassion and causes*

are evidenced by their high assessment on both criteria. Therefore, it is proposed that in the development of a guiding framework to aid lay Buddhists engagement with the workplace, these three intentions should be emphasized.

Three intentions stand out as being capable, through their actions, to significantly impact on the quality of life of non-Buddhists while witnessing strongly to Humanistic Buddhism:

- *Harmony through respect, compassion and causes,*
- *Mindful of the suffering of others, and*
- *Expressing compassion during times when others are experiencing stress and disruption.*

Two intentions were considered to have relatively less impact and value than the others:

- *Mindful breathing, and*
- *Universal image of Buddha-nature.*

While both of these intentions are an aspect of Humanistic Buddhism's practices they were not seen as significant witnessing

intentions. This may be because of the intense secularisation of mindful breathing on the one hand and the complexity of the concept of Buddha-nature on the other. It is also worth noting that the standard deviation between individual contributions, for mindful breathing, was highest on both criteria. The result reinforces the contention that considering it as a core Buddhist practice varies within the study's assessing contributors. Such a difference is a reminder of the diversity of experiences and worldviews that co-exist in the Australian Sangha. Every research program needs to be cognizant of this condition and ensure as much diversity as possible in contributors to the research. Failure to incorporate this diversity will likely introduce a fundamental bias that will be difficult to eradicate when assessing outcomes.

Two intentions rated highly (8) in terms of their value to appreciating Humanistic Buddhism but rated lower (6) on their impact on non-Buddhists:

- *Accountability against the Dharma, and*
- *Recognizing the Three Poisons.*

Insufficient context about the implementation of these core intentions and the difficulty for the intention to be understood in workplace settings may explain the lower impact assessment.

Consensus around the intention, "Reducing suffering unintentionally caused," was recorded on both criteria. This suggests this intention may be recognized by many of the assessors as an intervention that can be made in the workplace, which positively impacts non-Buddhists whilst simultaneously demonstrating the value of the Buddhist beliefs.

The assessment of impermanence (8.26, 6.89) draws attention to the view that while impermanence is a fundamental teaching of Buddhism its significance is not understood by non-Buddhist and that the stories collected reflected the struggle to catch the core meaning of the teaching. In general terms, it is counter intuitive to the Australian understanding of life in the workplace, which tradi-

tionally saw work and place as two of life's certainties, this may change in the future. While the stories that embodied the way in which impermanence can change attitudes to workplace setbacks of non-Buddhists, it seems the assessors were not convinced of its potential value.

Conclusion

The research reported in this study is a start towards building a deeper understanding of Buddhism's naturalization into Australian workplaces and the role lay Buddhists can take in this cultural change. The use of storytelling as a method of assembling insightful knowledge has been shown to be viable. However, more attention needs to be directed to ascertaining the link perceived by work colleagues to the interventions being Buddhist in their origination.

The study of lay-Buddhists in their workplaces has revealed that they are very active in using elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, consistent with the emphasis of Humanistic Buddhism, to make a difference. Further, it has been shown that these practices are considered by other Buddhists (Monastics and Lay) to contribute to an understanding of Buddhism by non-Buddhist. Thus, the process of the naturalization of Buddhism in Australian workplaces is enhanced by the interventions described.

While this study is too limited to make sweeping conclusions about the development of new naturalization resources, the outcomes are indicative of the potential that stories constructed from the insights, obtained from a rich tapestry of living stories, could make. To this end, there is justification in recommending that the methodology needs to be further investigated as a means to assist scholars assessing the naturalization of Buddhism in new situations, as it is happening. Further, the study has shown that the methodology could be extended to assist Buddhist organizations build a "reference framework," to guide lay Buddhists motivated

to initiate activities in their place of work to reduce suffering. Using an internet-based software package, as discussed, would enable such a study to reach a more diverse population of potential contributors and hence strengthen the value of such a reference framework. Kellis (2016) makes the observation that “in a time where it is not only secular evidence that is being studied scientifically, it is interesting to consider whether techniques and methods that are more obviously based in the Dharma Teachings would also be able to transcend the cross cultural barriers of the West.” The evidence from this study indicates that such transcendence is a possible outcome. An outcome that is enhanced as the interventions in workplaces develop into a learning system and ways and means develop relevance to each locale.

Naturalization of Buddhism in Australian workplaces will be influenced in the future by individual Buddhists making a difference in their own place of work. Hence there is significant value in further resourcing lay Buddhists in their endeavors.

***Appendix — Sample stories referred to in text.
For the benefit of humanity — Service sector’s middle management.***

I work in a middle management position. I have observed a man in my workplace use his Buddhist understanding of “right living” to advocate in staff meetings that everything we do should be a benefit to humanity and that we should use our time together in meetings to review this concept against other agenda items. This conversation, which everyone seemed to be happy to participate in generated many challenges as the question of which part of humanity often arose. However, in spite of different understandings, we formed a team approach to how we manage and market our range of products and services. Recently the Marketing Director joined in one of these discussions and became aware that we were unintentionally harming some people in the region

with information that could easily misinform potential clients. As a result, changes were made to the public information being distributed about the product. In another discussion we found two of our services that seemed to make no worthwhile contribution to improving humanity and may have actually had negative consequences. The services have been stopped pending further in-depth study of their purpose and implementation processes. The realization has also arisen that in these negative situations there are breaches of the business's own, rarely considered, values. Right living practices are being unconsciously integrated into each of us.

Just one man using his belief amongst others has led to greater commitment by all staff to strive at all times to be benefiting humanity.

Suffering as a bridge to learning (Persistence)—Parenting and Youth Work

Setbacks in our day-to-day work are common as we often find ourselves trying to complete tasks we are not trained for or experienced in doing. Such setbacks can cause a good deal of personal suffering, which spreads to others through our low morale and frustration. However, if we can move our minds away from judging our setbacks as failures to seeing them as indicators of learning challenges, even opportunities much of the suffering can be alleviated. Learning requires us to be proactive if we are to overcome a sense of failure and inadequacy. We need to reflect on what it is we don't know and discover other ways to deal with the task. I have started introducing to my colleagues and my family the value of persistence within times of suffering. Persistence to search for the knowledge and new ways of doing is like building a bridge to move away from the area of suffering. The rewards from using the "persistence" bridge are enhanced competencies and capabilities from which we reduce our self-recriminations that initiate the low morale. In a spiritual sense I am advocating the persistence bridge as a way of gaining greater enlightenment about suffering in our lives.



Silence is not stupidity.
Cleverness is not wisdom.
Self-respect is not arrogance.
Subservience is not loyalty.

—*Humble Table, Wise Fare*