

Oneness as Dao in Business

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Abstract

In an era marked by profound societal challenges, this paper explores the transformative potential of "Oneness as Dao in Business," proposing a philosophical foundation to support the oneness in business (OIB) framework that serves as the nexus between traditional Eastern wisdom and modern organizational studies. By synthesizing the insights of Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism with contemporary perspectives from organizational studies scholars such as Cameron, Freeman, and Donaldson, this paper emphasizes the vital role of interconnectedness as a foundational principle for oneness to underpin the development of responsible leadership and organizational culture, two pillars to serve as catalysts for transformative change within organizations. It argues that embracing the oneness hypothesis can guide enterprises toward business success not only for the near term, but for the long term: Doing well, as well as doing good. This exploration invites leaders to cultivate compassion and empathy, amidst passion for excellence, fostering environments where both individuals and organizations thrive. Challenging hyper-individualism, the framework offers practical pathways for businesses to navigate complexities in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: oneness as Dao in business, oneness in business, interconnectedness, transformative philosophy, governance, wellbeing, sustainability, stakeholder management, responsible leadership, virtuous organizational culture, organizational transformation

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Preamble: A Journey into Transformative Philosophy: Unveiling New Horizons

Imagine yourself stepping into the vibrant city of Zagreb, where the air is charged with anticipation and the echoes of intellectual dialogue fill the streets. The 18th International Conference on Philosophical Practice, held from June 12 to 14, 2025, was not just another gathering; it was a crossroads of ideas, a melting pot of thinkers ready to reshape the landscape of philosophy itself.

As the conference unfolded, a distinguished panel took centre stage—Lydia Amir, Lou Marinoff, Jose Barrientos-Rastrojo, and Rick Repetti. Their voices, each unique yet harmoniously intertwined, resonated with a powerful call to action: philosophy must evolve into what they termed Transformative Philosophy. They argued passionately that the traditional academic approach, often steeped in abstraction and hyper-individualism, was failing to address the real-world complexities that practitioners face daily.

Instead, they envisioned a rebirth of philosophy that embraces experiential understanding and practical application. By weaving together threads of experientialism, consciousness, and the rich tapestry of Eastern philosophical wisdom, they urged the audience to envision how these elements could breathe new life into philosophical practice.

Amidst this intellectual fervour, I had the privilege of presenting my own work: “Oneness in Business (OIB) framework”. I shared how the OIB framework could tackle the contemporary governance challenges that enterprises face today. I explained how insights gained from exploring the oneness hypothesis, alongside contemporary principles developed in organizational studies, can inform practical approaches to cultivating compassion and empathy in daily life. By embracing our interconnectedness—spanning economic, environmental, and social realms—we can collectively strive toward a more productive, just, and sustainable world. This was not merely a theoretical exercise; it was a call to action; a vision of what business could become when guided by the principles of oneness.

In this paper, I delve deeper into the notion of *Oneness as Dao in Business*, positioning it as a philosophical foundation for the OIB framework. My hope is that this exploration will become a vital thread in the fabric of Transformative Philosophy, enhancing its relevance and practicality.

As the conference drew to a close, the air was thick with possibility. Together, we stood on the brink of a philosophical transformation, ready to forge a path toward a future where philosophy not only enlightens minds but also enriches lives.

Introduction

In today's complex and interconnected world, exploring fundamental questions about existence, ethics, and our shared humanity is essential. Philosophers tackle

these inquiries, using their insights to help individuals and organizations discover their purpose and impact. My journey as a philosophical practitioner starts with the exploration of oneness.

Western and Eastern Perspectives on Oneness

The concept of oneness holds profound significance across cultures, yet it unfolds in deeply resonant ways within Eastern and Western philosophies. In the cradle of Western thought, the Presocratic Greek philosophers turned their gaze toward the cosmos, grappling with the timeless question of unity amidst diversity. They sought to unravel the intricate tapestry of existence, pondering whether a singular essence binds the myriad forms of life. As the Sophists redirected focus from the universe to humanity, Parmenides emerged, passionately proclaiming the primacy of the One—a notion that would echo through the ages, shaping the very foundations of idealism. Anaxagoras's *Nous* and the atomistic theories of Leucippus and Democritus further enriched this dialogue, laying the groundwork for a mechanistic understanding of reality. In this philosophical journey, Parmenides illuminated the path to true being, asserting that the essence of existence is unchanging and eternal. Plotinus took this further, revealing the One as not just a static state, but as the ultimate source of life itself—a dynamic force that breathes energy into all that exists. His vision of a universe in a constant dance of differentiation and return underscores the sacred unity woven into the fabric of life.

In contrast, Eastern philosophies beckon us to dissolve the illusion of the self, revealing that our individual identities are but fleeting shadows within a vast, interconnected reality. This profound understanding, articulated by Confucians and Daoists, offers a harmonious counterpoint within Chinese culture. Lobel observed that Confucianism and Daoism forms the yin and yang pillars of Chinese philosophy (Lobel, 2017). Confucianism emphasizes the beauty of relational ethics, defining the self through our ties to family, society, and the cosmos. Daoism invites us to embrace spontaneity and individuality, urging a return to the natural world, where the essence of oneness resides in every breath and every heartbeat. These philosophies remind us that our journeys are not solitary, but part of a greater whole, urging us to see ourselves in the rich tapestry of existence.

The oneness hypothesis

Ivanhoe et al. have noted in their 2018 book dedicated to “oneness” several key features of the oneness hypothesis: “The connections the oneness hypothesis advocates are those that conduce to the health, benefit, and improvement of both individuals and the larger wholes of which they are parts” (Ivanhoe et al., 2018, p.

1). Further, the authors argue that this aspect of the oneness hypothesis explains why it carries the practical implications it does: since the kinds of connections it concerns are integral to the health and well-being of both the individual and the larger wholes of which she is a part, it tends to imply certain obligations to endorse and extend care beyond the strict limits of individuals, and to see and feel more common cause and shared identity between the self and others (Ivanhoe et al., 2018, p. 1). In a book published the previous year, Philip J. Ivanhoe wrote along similar lines:

Not only religious thinkers, but also philosophers and psychologists, especially in recent years, have sought to understand our capacity to care for others and the ways in which we might improve and strengthen whatever abilities that we might have in this regard” (Ivanhoe 2017, p. 6).

Living a life guided by such virtues enable one to locate oneself within the grand natural and social orders that facilitate greater spontaneity, security and metaphysical comfort, resulting in a special, resilient and enduring form of happiness (Ivanhoe, 2017, p. 12).

The oneness perspective gives us a framework to understand the interconnectedness of the world around us under different vantage points. One approach places emphasis on an independent self - emphasizing individuality, autonomy, and the need for independence (Hayton, George, & Zahra, 2002). It provides the foundation for the hyper-individualism that characterizes many contemporary western theories of the self. Another approach emphasizes an interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and characterizes East Asian traditions such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, which take a more expansive view of the self in understanding self - others interaction patterns. It argues for a different but often relationship-based version of the oneness perspective that makes claims about the nature of the self and the relationship between the self and the other people, creatures, and things of the world based on a more expansive version of the self (Ivanhoe, 2017, pg.3).

As noted by Ivanhoe (2017), East Asian traditions like Buddhism and Daoism support different versions of this hypothesis. As a rich philosophical foundation, by promoting interconnectedness, Ivanhoe advocates for a compassionate society (including enterprises) where individuals recognize their responsibility to others. This aligns with both Confucian values of harmony and Western ideals of individual rights and responsibilities. The oneness hypothesis contributes to discussions on what constitutes the good life for an individual. It espouses a relational conception of the self as having greater potential to lead to happiness and well-being for both the individual and the larger wholes of which they are a part. This paper considers how the oneness hypothesis might be extended to contribute to the discussion on what constitute the good life for an enterprise.

Interconnectedness as Foundation for Oneness

The concept of “self” varies significantly across cultures, influenced by factors such as religion, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and sociology. In the Global North, characterized by an “I”-centred culture labelled as WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic), individualism prevails. Conversely, the Global South embodies a “we”-centred culture, described as non-WEIRD, where societal needs take precedence over individual desires.

R. Shweder (1991) elucidates why the concept of self diverges across cultures, emphasizing the societal imperative to balance individual and collective needs. This notion resonates with Ivanhoe's proposition that East Asian traditions, including Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, advocate for various interpretations of the oneness hypothesis. Ivanhoe (2017) suggests that recognizing our interconnectedness with others promotes a compassionate and ethical society, essential for navigating modern complexities.

Oneness as Dao to Address Contemporary Issues

The synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophical traditions in understanding oneness unveils a profound tapestry of thought that holds the potential to illuminate our path through the complexities of modern life. This comparative exploration invites us to delve into the depths of interconnectedness, revealing how our individual experiences are intricately woven into the larger fabric of humanity. By embracing oneness as a philosophical practice, we can foster deeper connections and understanding among one another, transcending cultural and ideological boundaries.

In a world grappling with pressing challenges such as economic inequality, ecological crises, and social fragmentation, this integrated philosophy becomes increasingly vital. It compels us to confront our shared responsibilities, urging us to recognize our interdependence not just as individuals, but as stewards of the planet and members of a global community. Moreover, the insights gleaned from this exploration offer us practical avenues for cultivating compassion and empathy in our daily lives. Imagine a society where these values are not merely ideals but active principles guiding our interactions and decisions.

As we navigate our interconnected realities, the potential for transformative change becomes not just a possibility but a necessity, inspiring us to engage thoughtfully with the world around us. What if we could harness the ancient wisdom of the east and the modern insights from the west to create a more harmonious existence? The answers lie within the rich dialogue between these philosophical realms, inviting us to ponder our roles and responsibilities in shaping a better future.

Oneness in Dao for business: Philosophical underpinning of the Oneness in Business (OIB) framework

The oneness in business (OIB) framework refers to cultivating enterprise identity using the oneness hypothesis as a philosophical foundation. This value creation process shapes enterprise identity through oneness governance (denoted as G^*), well-being (W^*), and sustainability (S^*), driven by oneness leadership (CEO^*). The outcome of G^* reflects stakeholder support and the potential for future support. Enterprise well-being cannot exist in isolation from the well-being of employees and other stakeholders. Happiness at work is often described in terms of subjective well-being (SWB), encompassing positive and negative affect as well as life satisfaction. Enterprise well-being (W^*) embodies sustainable happiness and flourishing for employees and stakeholders, reflecting the support received from stakeholders. The oneness approach to sustainability (S^*) is integral to cultivating enterprise identity. Sustainable enterprises operate long-term, depending on healthy stakeholder relationships. The ideal of "doing well/doing good" emphasizes creating value for shareholders and stakeholders alike. Such sustainability suggests oneness between self, enterprise, and the broader world. (Savitz, & Weber, 2006). In the OIB framework, shaping enterprise identity* is underpinned by oneness leadership (CEO^*). The interplay among identity, leadership, governance, well-being, and sustainability can be illustrated through the governance of an orchestra, where the CEO collaborates with internal stakeholders to create performances that resonate with external stakeholders.

Oneness as dao in business provides the philosophical foundation to support OIB. As a philosophical perspective and resource, the oneness hypothesis emphasizes our deep interconnectedness with others and the world around us. This idea isn't just theoretical; it has powerful implications for business. As a business perspective and resource, the "oneness in business" framework guides enterprise governance, shaping an organization's identity through meaningful interactions among its stakeholders, both internal and external. The oneness of Dao in business unites philosophical insights with practical organizational practices, empowering leaders and managers to forge a powerful path that harmonizes enterprise governance, well-being, and sustainability—ultimately creating a workplace that inspires admiration from all stakeholders. This vision for a harmonious enterprise not only enhances productivity but also nurtures a sense of belonging and purpose.

Integrating insights from the Chinese philosophical tradition to support Oneness as Dao in the business realm

We have earlier observed that Confucianism and Daoism forms the yin and yang pillars of Chinese philosophy. When applied to oneness as dao for business, Confucianism underscores the importance of social harmony and moral

development, advocating for virtuous conduct rooted in relationships. By integrating Confucian principles, organizations can cultivate a culture of virtuousness emphasizing respect, trust, and accountability among stakeholders. This deepens the understanding of enterprise identity and governance, compelling leaders to embrace their ethical obligations in fostering harmonious relationships both internally and externally. Daoism introduces the concepts of naturalness and alignment with the flow of life, encouraging businesses to embrace flexibility and adaptability. This organic approach to governance and leadership allows organizations to navigate complexities and uncertainties with grace, fostering an environment that values creativity and innovation. By incorporating Daoist principles, organizations can promote a holistic view of enterprise well-being and sustainability, resonating with the natural rhythms of their environments.

In addition to Confucianism and Daoism, Mohism also offer further insights into relationships and ethical conduct that enhance the oneness in business framework, making it highly relevant for today's business leaders. Mohism emphasizes universal love and impartial concern, providing a robust ethical foundation for responsible leadership. By advocating for the well-being of all stakeholders, Mohism encourages leaders to transcend self-interest and actively promote the welfare of others. This aligns with the oneness hypothesis, which asserts that the health of individuals is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the larger whole.

Synthesizing thoughts from this Chinese philosophical tradition into oneness as dao in business can elevate responsible leadership, virtuousness organizational culture and organizational transformation. This integration enriches the theoretical foundations of oneness as dao in business, while providing practical insights for leaders striving to cultivate a culture of oneness within their organizations. Confucian values can inform leadership development programs, fostering a sense of duty and moral responsibility among leaders. Daoist principles can promote organizational agility and responsiveness to change. Mohist principles can guide stakeholder engagement processes, ensuring decisions reflect the collective good.

Incorporating these philosophical perspectives offers an enriched oneness as dao in business for understanding the interconnectedness of individuals, organizations, and the broader social and environmental context. It encourages a transition from a transactional view of business to a relational and transformational one, where success is measured not only by profit margins but also by the impact on the well-being of all stakeholders.

Integrating insights from organizational studies to support Oneness as Dao in the business landscape

In today's complex business landscape, there is an increasing need for organizations to adopt a relational approach that prioritizes the diverse needs and

interests of all stakeholders. Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory highlights the need for businesses to engage not just with shareholders but also with employees, customers, suppliers, and the community. This holistic perspective aligns with Thomas Donaldson's emphasis on ethical considerations within stakeholder management. By integrating these principles with oneness as dao in business, organizations can foster a culture of collaboration and accountability, ensuring that every stakeholder feels valued and engaged. This shift enhances trust and loyalty, driving sustainable success in a competitive environment.

Cameron (2011) equates responsible leadership with virtuousness, highlighting the importance of ethical behaviour in guiding organizations. Currently, research on responsible leadership and virtuous behaviour in enterprises primarily focuses on individual-level dynamics, prioritizing ethical conduct for its own sake. The OIB approach broadens this perspective by investigating responsible leadership and virtuousness at the enterprise level, framing them as integral to shaping the organization's identity. This identity is expressed through interactions among internal and external stakeholders, reflecting the principles of governance, well-being, and sustainability. By fostering a relational understanding of self, the OIB framework advocates for a shift from hyper-individualism to a more interconnected approach.

Oneness as Dao in business reinforces the Oneness in Business (OIB) framework, enhancing the development of responsible leadership, virtuousness in organizational culture, and transformative change.

Fong and Askun Celik (2021) have observed that in an organizational context, two key constructs that can energize the parts and the wholes found in the self–others interaction experience, which support responsible leadership, are consciousness “from within” and conscientiousness “in between,” whether oneness is understood from the framework of an independent or interdependent self. Furthermore, differentiators open to opportunities and integrators mitigate risks. Connectors maintain the optimal balance between the two. The oneness as dao in business approach to enterprise governance provides tools to help CEOs to shape an enterprise’s identity through an understanding of the interconnectedness of self–others interaction experiences among internal and external stakeholders (Fong & Aşkun Celik, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper illuminates the concept of oneness as Dao in the realm of business, serving as a philosophical cornerstone for the Oneness in Business (OIB) framework. This transformative vision champions a new era of leadership and organizational change.

Weaving together the timeless wisdom of Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism with the insights of contemporary thought leaders in organizational studies like

Cameron, Freeman, and Donaldson, a cohesive OIB framework has been crafted. It embodies the essence of interconnectedness.

Through a synthesis of Eastern and Western thoughts,

- OIB stresses that our enterprises are not isolated entities but vital threads in the intricate fabric of society, governance, well-being, and sustainability.

- OIB emphasizes interconnectedness in enterprise identity, governance, well-being, and sustainability, advocating for ethical and compassionate stakeholder management.

- OIB fosters responsible leadership, nurtures a virtuous organizational culture, and facilitates a meaningful organizational transformation.

- OIB aspires to create a harmonious and sustainable enterprise environment that benefits not only the enterprise but also enriches the lives of its stakeholders.

Oneness as dao in business calls for a compassionate and ethical management of stakeholders, fostering responsible leadership and nurturing a virtuous organizational culture. It seeks to ignite meaningful transformation within organizations, cultivating environments where harmony and sustainability flourish.

With oneness as the guiding principle, enterprises and their leaders can aspire to not only thrive but also enrich the lives of everyone they touch. It allows us to make a transformative impact on both business and society, driving us toward the noble goal of fostering workplaces that strive for excellence while contributing to a healthier, more equitable world. They can pave the way for an economic, social, and environmental legacy that uplifts all.

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