

## **The Art of Meaningful Universal Values: Case Study Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between individual and organizational values in order to create a positive performance outcome. Meaningful organizational cultures based on intrinsic values have been found to increase staff engagement and create a happy workforce, which in turn leads to improved customer service and loyalty. Yet, organizations struggle to develop such cultures. The study of organizational and individual values in the airline industry is particularly under-theorised and under investigated. So, the case studies of Thai Airways and South West Airlines were used to illustrate how organizational culture can be enhanced by recognising and incorporating real and intrinsic values. This paper contributes to knowledge as it shows how a more meaningful culture can be developed by incorporating individuals' spiritual beliefs into organizational values. It further contributes by exploring how such meaningful organizational cultures can make organizations more resilient and adaptable in unpredictable and demanding environments.

**Keywords:** organizational culture, strategy, values, universal value-based model, work environment.

### **Introduction**

Organizational values are the principles that an organization uses to inspire employees with clearly-articulated values. Their importance lies in the fact that they reflect the organization's

aspiration to create a positive culture within an organization (Rahbek, Pedersen, Gwozdz, & Hvass, 2018). Although the concept has emerged within the last decade, there have been attempts to find ways to apply new workable models to create successful organizations suited for the globalized world (Rahbek et al., 2018). However, the problem is that there are any gaps that still need to be considered and understood to help organizations create meaningful cultures, employee engagement, happy workforce, and as a result, have better customer service and loyalty. This paper aims to investigate organizational and individual values because one of the most important assets of many organizations is its people, especially in the knowledge economy.

Many organizations are aware of the benefits that can be derived from an organizational culture based on well-defined company's values. Despite this, most find it a difficult task to create such values in their organization, which not only sound good to the external stakeholders, but are actually meaningful to the people working for and with the organization (Rahbek et al., 2018).

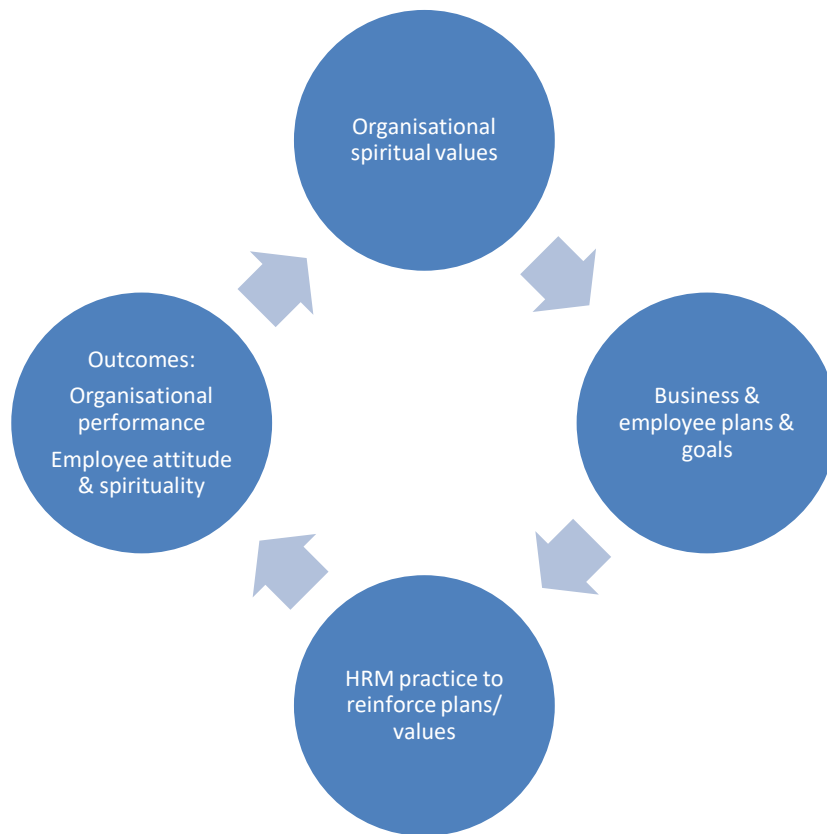
Ideally, a company's values should reflect the core of its organizational culture and be a true reflection of how people within the organization interact with each other, with customers and other stakeholders. This, however, is often not the case; organizational value statements are often quite distant from the intrinsic values of its people. Such a situation could be quite dangerous because meaningless organizational values can create cynical employees, and undermine managerial credibility (Lencioni, 2002).

From an organizational behaviour perspective, an organization can be changed and improved if individuals change their behaviour from within. What might an organization look like if its organizational culture were based on true intrinsic values of its people? This article attempts to illustrate the role of intrinsic values, which also include spiritual values, in the workplace

environment and the extent to which peoples' spirituality interacts with organizational culture using a values-based management model adapted from Anderson (1997) and Schuler and Jackson's (1987) strategic human resource management (HRM) framework (Figure 1). The conceptual model has been designed by combining the organizational and individual values, and behaviour perspectives, HR and management practice.

The recognition of the role of spirituality, both developmental (as a set of spiritual values) and structural (as one of the most important internal value systems), and its management in the workplace environment gives a sense of purpose that can set the direction of business goals and values. It can also become a human resources practice within the organization. In this article, individual and organizational culture are both regarded as part of the value-based management model.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model



Source: Adapted from Value Based Model (Anderson, 1997)

We found a gap in the research around the Value-Based Model in that organizational spiritual values cannot be achieved if individual values are not aligned. Moreover, factors such as span of control, leadership, organizational change and decision-making should play a big role in the organization. This will enable the organizational values to be fulfilled. HRM practice should embed these values into the organizational processes such as recruitment and selection.

This research asks:

- How can organizational culture be enhanced through the incorporation of intrinsic values?
- What is the impact of such management on the organization's performance?

## **Spirituality in the United States of America**

Since the establishment of the USA as a state in 1776, its culture has been closely linked with Christianity and its values. The main emphasis was on freedom, progress and unity (C) which were put in the foundations of the Constitution. The Declaration of Independence (1776) frequently mentions God and God-given “unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (National Archives, n.d.)

Ever since the creation of the USA, despite its intense ethnic and religious diversity, which is reflected in the numerous sub-cultures present in the country. The ancestors of the first settlers from northern Europe are the predominant group in American business today (Payne, 2016) This then leads to the strong influence of mainly Christian inheritance in the business environment of the whole country. And despite the presence of many sub-cultures and the separation of the state and church, American culture is still very much dominated by the Christian based sub-culture.

According to the official government statistics currently over 70% of Americans belong to various Christian denominations (CIA, 2017). This leads to some unity in spiritual beliefs across the majority of the population as all Christians refer to the same text for guidance. There are many Christian values that can be identified from the Bible, which help to transform society by changing ourselves. The eight main values for social interactions have been summarized in Table 1 below. These values are also consistent with the Fruit of the Spirit, recommended (Erisman & Daniels, 2013) for measuring attitude in performance reviews at the workplace as these are generally seen (Erisman & Daniels, 2013; Dean, 2019) as commonly practiced Christian values.

**Table 1:** Eight Fundamental Social Biblical Values

Value	Fruit of the Spirit	Social implementation
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Grace	Kindness	Giving others more than they deserve
Hope	Faithfulness	God is always present with people and hence no fear, worry or despair
Faith	Gentleness and self-control	Commitment, fidelity and trust in human relationships
Love	Love	Choosing to love everyone including the unlovable
Justice	Patience	For all people
Joy	Joy	As a quality of being
Service	Generosity	Meaning is in serving others
Peace	Peace	As a positive state of well-being

Source: Adapted from Edgar Brian's Eight Core Christian Values and The Fruit of the Spirit series by The Basilica

The official role of the Church in business and social life has been diminishing in most developed countries since the start of the Industrial Revolution (Tawney, 2015). As a result, the values listed above, as well as other spiritual values, have become detached from business values, and very often have either been ignored or deliberately avoided in workplace environment-related discussions. This has created the problem of separation of the outside world and the inner world of spirituality (Payne, 2016). Hence, the intrinsic values of employees are often being simply left out, despite their beneficial effect on workplace outcomes (Dean, 2019).

In the middle of the 20th century, however, a new movement with an emphasis on human motivation in the workplace began in the USA (Melé, 2003), and lately it has emerged again with a new focus on spirituality at the workplace and has now spread to other developed countries across the continent (Schutte, 2016).

The global challenges faced by employers and employees alike in the 21<sup>st</sup> century require new ways not only to manage the work processes, but also to rethink the relationships between people in the workplace. The spirituality at work movement recognises the inner life of people

as an important factor that brings meaning and satisfaction to work as well as to other aspects of human life.

Thus spirituality at work means that employees feel supported in acknowledging and developing their connection with the Higher Power, and at the same time are empowered to serve other human beings and the planet as a whole; what Dehaghi, Goodarzi and Arazi (2012) call “vertical” and “horizontal” elements of spirituality in the workplace.

This new movement can and should be seen in the historical perspective - it is inevitably interconnected with the Christian past and present of the USA and thus includes the spiritual values in Table 1, which are often not referred to as Christian or Biblical or aren't even seen as connected to any religion as such, but nevertheless still exist in today's world. These values, especially to the people exposed to a Christian inheritance such as in the USA, play a vital role in how humans think and what they do, give meaning to our experience of life, and influence our attitudes and relationships with other human beings.

### **Spirituality in Thailand**

Intrinsic values come from within, and affect our attitudes and actions. The key Buddhist values are the notions of no self and impermanence (Freeman, Jinpa, & Kiely, 2016). These spiritual concepts are related to cause and effect in the present moment (Hershock, 2015). Karma consists of three parts: cause and effect, positive action, and enhancing karma by developing a positive cause-and-effect cycle for human beings (Hershock, 2015). This is related to a practice of self-improvement that can be applied by anybody. In Buddhist philosophy, greed, desire, anger and hatred arise from a false sense of ego, because there is no self apart from the impermanent state of life (Freeman et al., 2016).

It also has a connection with mindfulness, which comes from peacefulness of the body and mind, which in turn can lead to wisdom and awareness (Hershock, 2015). Mindfulness has become very popular, as it can increase people’s awareness in stressful situations. It suits a complex world, because people tend to stay calmer and more focused with the help of such practices. In Buddhist terms, mindfulness is part of the Eight Noble Truths (Table 2).

Buddhism in Thailand can take a commercial form. People believe that the more money you donate to the temple, the better your life will be (Taylor, 2012). Thailand is also the only country with a constitution that states clearly that Buddhism is the major religion in the country (Hardy, 2008). However, although Buddhism is the main religion in Thailand, this does not necessarily mean that everyone follows the right path. Some people still hold mistaken beliefs and strong superstitions, especially in the rural areas of Thailand. The Buddhist teaching of the Eightfold Noble Path have been summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** The Eight Noble Truths

<b>Division</b>	<b>Eightfold Path factors</b>
Wisdom	1. Right view
	2. Right intention
Ethical conduct	3. Right speech
	4. Right action
	5. Right livelihood
Concentration	6. Right effort
	7. Right mindfulness
	8. Right liberation

Source: Sumedho (2014)

According to O’Connor et al. (2015), compassion and mindfulness can increase self-worth, and when internalized, can lead to more genuine interactions with other people. Inner resources include virtues (such as patience, energy, generosity), meta cognition, attitudes (optimism, compassion, kindness), emotional intelligence, positive emotions (gratitude, love) (O’Connor et al., 2015, p. 35). They also state that inner belief is important in terms of how to deal with



life situations. As mentioned above, desire, greed and hatred can cause a negative cycle, whereas other resources such as peace and happiness can cause a positive cycle within ourselves.

One key difference between the US and Thailand in terms of spirituality is that Thailand never stopped being a country with a strong, spiritual and religious orientated national culture. Therefore, it does not need to reinvent its spirituality as the US and many other developed countries are doing at present.

### **The Effect of Inner Values in relation to Cognitive Psychology**

The concept of the inner values can be connected with concepts in cognitive psychology published by scholars such as Fronsdal (2010) and Kabat-Zinn (2013). Tenets such as “right view” can be interpreted as referring to how we see the world and how that leads to patterns of thought, intention and action (Fronsdal, 2010). Sutcliffe, Vogus, and Dane (2016) also argue that there is a link with the seventh factor of “right mindfulness”, which can change thoughts and behaviours.

Sonenshen, Decelles, and Dutton (2014) explain that ethical assets such as right action, right resolve, right speech and right effort should be considered extremely positive attributes for an organization. Moreover, knowledge assets are also related to an individual’s positive self-evaluation, which can, in turn, lead to integrated thinking (Sonenshen et al., 2014). These concepts are related to right mindfulness and right concentration: in order to develop an organization, the employees need to develop themselves first.

Scientific scholars evaluated employees’ motivations and behaviours, and it has been suggested that there has been a paradigm shift in the field of social sciences. There is a relationship between neurological, psychological and sociological factors, which are all based on human

interaction. Care for others rather than self-interest can create compassion, which in turn can develop into productive performance within the organization (Brown, Brown, & Penner, 2012; Mansbridge, 1990). This concept is also related to the theories of human development that see compassion and kindness as central to human behaviour (e.g., Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010).

Ellis states that the way to reduce anger towards others is the contemplation of love and kindness. If we compare inner values with psychology, this practice appears similar to a cognitive behavioural therapy technique called “emotional training” (Aich, 2013). This can be useful in the workplace as well as for problem-solving in one’s personal life, which also helps in emotional regulation.

Right mindfulness is the acceptance of thoughts that arise and perceptions that occur during meditation. Once a thought has arrived, it will pass away of its own accord. There is also a relationship between Buddhism and psychology such as that posited by Rhys Davids (1974), whose *Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* argues that compassion is a principle of ethics for both individuals and organizations. There is also existential psychology, which has a similar conception of life as suffering. Apart from all the benefits of spirituality, a focus on cognitive behaviour can help with phobias and fears through positive self-talk as part of right mindfulness and right action.

In terms of wisdom, both airlines being studied – Thai Airways and Southwest Airlines - have developed a sense of wisdom by creating the right mindset to improve customer service. They have the right intention to make customers happy. Southwest in particular intends to develop the organization by sharing customers’ views, whereas Thai Airways develops wisdom through a belief in cause and effect.

In terms of right action, it can be seen that both Thai Airways and Southwest Airlines manage to do the right thing by doing their best for service. It can be argued that these actions might not be genuine and this in turn can cause emotional burnout among staff. But the argument is that if the interaction is genuine and the staff have developed spiritual values, the internalisation should be a positive one. Right speech, right action and right livelihood are developed through ethical conduct. Each airline has developed a different kind of first impression on customers. Southwest Airlines have developed this through a philosophy of fun and love, whereas Thai Airways have developed it through cultural norms and values.

### **Methodology**

American and Thai organizations were selected as case studies to demonstrate the role of inner values within an organizational setting. A qualitative approach using exploratory research methods was chosen for this research to enable a meaningful analysis of various texts and discussions, collected from documents, interviews and observations.

### **Research Approach**

There is considerable research in recent years on the limitations of qualitative research methods (Ragin, 2008; Popper, 2002; Reiter, 2017). An exploratory research approach, keeping in mind the limitations pointed out in the literature, was chosen to produce some insightful findings in the area of this study.

We applied the inductive method to understand how different factors relate to each other as the inductive approach links with the qualitative methods. We started by formulating questions based on existing theories; we were open to reformulating these questions as we progressed in our study and collected data and evidence.

## **Data Collection**

Triangulation (Berg, 2001) was used to collect a variety of data from three different sources. Empirical data for Thai Airways was collected through semi-structured individual interviews of 16 flight crew members, personal observations as well as through analysis of the policy documents provided by the airline company.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

The sample from the interview was separated into 3 groups according to age to account for career stages. As marital status still plays a significant role in the Thai workplace (UNFPA, 2015), it was also taken in account during interviews. There were a total of 16 cabin crews. The first group were single and in their early 20s, in other words, they were in the new career experience stage. The second group were married and in their 30s, and work-life-balance was important to them. The last group was over 40, they wanted to be settled in life and stay with their families. All these variables also spoke to their need satisfaction and career progression. All those years of experiences helped them learn how to react to passengers.

### ***In-flight observation***

In-flight observations gave the researcher the opportunity to observe the behaviour of cabin crew during flights. This was to investigate surface acting which includes emotions, and verbal and non-verbal communication which reflect onto their values.

### ***Secondary documents (company policies)***

In terms of document analysis, there were 3 principles that the researcher looked into. They were general principles, rules and regulations, and duties and responsibilities. This will also reflect onto the organizational culture and values.

The data for Southwest Airlines was collected from publicly available sources - approximately 40 pages of documents published by the airline summarising corporate strategy and mission, anonymous customer feedback and interviews with customers and staff available on [www.glassdoor.co.uk](http://www.glassdoor.co.uk), other media and on the corporate website. There were a total of 50 observations that were detailed enough to be used in the research. Data was also collected from literature based on case studies on the South West Airline case. A total of 12 peer reviewed articles on airline culture and employee management were examined. Customer reviews for both airlines, publically available on [www.airlinequality.com](http://www.airlinequality.com), were also summarized and analyzed to enable this research.

### Strengths and Weaknesses in Data Collection

**Table 3:** Sources of Evidences and their Strengths and Weaknesses

Source of Evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Secondary documents (company policy)	Stable and able to be repeated anytime  Content names and references (such as company policy)	Bias on the part of the author  May be difficult to access data
Semi-structured interviews (cabin crew)	Targeted directly for the case study	Bias can occur due to unstructured questions  Interviewees might provide the answer that the interviewer would like to hear
In-flight observation	It is real and occurs in real time	It is time-consuming

	It covers the context of events	There can be several events because they can occur differently  Needs human observation
Interviews and reviews left by staff on publically available sites.	Helps to identify the most common trends, not included in the initial research questions.  Publically available for everyone to examine.  Independent of the researcher.	Not tailored to the study.  Data source may be unavailable in the future.

Source: Authors' own

An interpretive approach was used when analysing data collected for both airlines, using both criticism and connoisseurship to understand its meaning and theoretical implications. Content from the collected documents was analyzed and structured using the universal values-based management model. In terms of limitations, it was difficult to make the appointments with the cabin crews. Appointments had to be made one month in advance, and were also unpredictable, as in a month's time, they might have been forgotten.

### ***How data was analyzed***

A coding mechanism was utilised. Keywords were selected as references to the interview questions; the values are listed in Tables 1 and 2. This method greatly facilitated the analysis, and provided further insights into both research questions. Once the keywords had been selected, it became easier to examine findings and proceed to the analysis of each category, starting from the organizational culture, job and personal characteristics, company policies, and then moving on to gender and cultural issues. The alignment of the organizational and intrinsic

values of its people was tested to answer the first question. The second question was answered by analyzing the relationship between misaligned intrinsic values and customers' reviews.

The 'making sense' of the data consisted of comparing components of the collected data with each other and to the general historic data available on the subject. This process was used to put the collected data in the context of the researched topic. It was a gradual learning process that eventually enabled the formulation of reasonable explanations for the observed phenomena and the building of some related theoretical arguments as "a set of constructs linked together [...] to explain a focal phenomenon" (Eisenhardt, 2021, p. 148). This was achieved by the selection of research questions and the matched case studies as well as by the cross-case analysis.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The article focuses on case studies on Thai Airways and South West Airlines and examines how organizational culture can be enhanced through the incorporation of intrinsic values and the outcome of such management, and its impact on the organization's performance. Although culturally the two airlines are different - Southwest Airlines being an American company and Thai Airways being a Thai company - universal values were identified from both case studies and summarized in this section of this research.

#### **The Case of Thai Airways**

##### ***Organizational culture incorporated with intrinsic values***

In Thai Airways, spiritual belief combines with the organizational culture, enabling staff to achieve positive performance and give good service to passengers (Tungtakanpoung & Wyatt, 2013).

There are two elements that are used by the airline to differentiate their quality of service: internalization, and positive verbal and non-verbal communication, which is used throughout the hospitality industry. Internalization is related to beliefs, values and attitudes, and reflects spirituality. In the words of one of the interviewees:

*There is a training course that teaches positive thinking when handling passengers, and this reflects real-life experience, as when passengers become aggressive or assertive, they immediately respond to our positive approach.*

Self-reflection is related to self-analysis. Nowadays organizations in many industries apply positive thinking (Compton & Hoffman, 2013). Although this is considered good practice, there are limitations to positive thinking, which depends on job characteristics. In order to utilize employee behaviour effectively, there must be equal emphasis on both individuals and organizations. The basic notion behind this is social recognition, based on belief in spirituality.

This could also be seen in the observational data regarding positive verbal and non-verbal communication as well as gentle mannerisms, where the “extra touch” was one of the elements of self-reflection. Positive attitudes and self-reflection can also reduce conflict and bring harmony, both within and outside the organization.

In terms of company policy, training procedures facilitate behaviour and conduct-based policy. When passengers react in a negative way, cabin crew should respond in a positive way. The interview data indicates that if regular positive interaction is governed by the company policy, it can create positive outcomes.

*Remember passengers’ names during a conversation. This gives the passenger a feeling of importance.*

(Thai Airways International, 2010: PSM5).



According to Freitas-Magalhães (2009), smiling represents positive surface acting. Our observations reveal a consistency in positive self-presentation as well as positive communication in interactions with passengers from different cultures. Furthermore, an emphasis on the “Thai touch” and other positive non-verbal communications such as smiling and gentleness leads to passenger satisfaction.

Internal balance and experience are related to cultural values. Cabin crew have been told to give genuine smiles. How can they remain positive? Cultural norms and self-regulation lead to their attitudes towards the environment. A job dynamic that allows crew to “let go” can create positive emotions. In this case, cabin crews’ intrinsic rewards are directly linked to motivation and work-life balance, which in turn lead to the competency of adaptability.

### **The Art of Self-Reflection and Hospitality**

It is important to reflect on how you would like to be treated by others, as that will create self-awareness which in turn will create a positive outcome (Goleman, 2015). Based on the interview data, personality traits are also related to traditional gender roles. Self-identification is formed through beliefs and values from national cultures and social norms, where socio-cultural factors are moderating influences. One of the interviewees explained:

*The self-reflection we practise leads to sympathy for others, for which there is no word in the English dictionary. Foreigners (fa-rang) do not understand the word nam-jai (sympathy). They would think that sympathy alone is enough, and you don't have to offer more than this, but we would feel that it's not enough. We feel we should give more. Anything we can do to help, we should, whilst not expecting anything in return. This is our Thai kindness, which is different from the Japanese way of being considerate of others' feelings. The Japanese are under pressure not to express feelings. They do things in accordance with duty, in the manner of their society, and do not express their*

*emotions. But we have this thing called Thai charm, and a sincere smile. One other asset we have is that we easily forget slights, easily forgive, even if we feel very angry at the time. We are not easily offended. This is one of the points that passengers like, we smile and are cheerful, even if we do not speak good English, as we have this strength, which is Thai charm. (Interview)*

According to the content analysis and semi-structured interviews, smiling, friendliness and cheerfulness imply hospitality. This heartfelt manner is related to the concept of soft-side characteristics in the service industry. The data revealed an emphasis on elements such as attentiveness, sincerity and courtesy, bowing, paying respect and greeting.

Cabin crews' behaviour towards their colleagues and passengers is inevitably about their ability to relate to others, known as interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). As a result of interdependent self-construal, self-reflection is utilised to create the adaptability to deal with others (Goleman, 2015).

“Display of good cheer and the skilled utterances of those providing social amenities” is required in service work. (Mattila, Grandey, & Fisk, 2003, p. 25). Previous studies have found that customers feel more content with the service when the staff express positive emotions (Kim, Matilla, & Baloglu, 2011) which is also related to face-saving in Thai society (Nuttavuthisit, 2007). Social awareness and social skills are also important (Hochschild, 2012). Moreover, self-awareness and self-reflection have been seen as a part of emotional intelligence. Cultural and spiritual values are related to self-reflection and positive thinking, which in turn are related to psychological variables.

A part of spiritual values is the ability to “let go” after working in a busy environment, and then enjoy a break in a different country after the flight. From a spiritual point of view, “let go” is about the awareness of uncertainty and the acceptance of things as they are. It is linked to

cause and effect, which is connected to the past, present and future (Taylor, 2012). “Let go” is also related to positive reinforcement which is further related to adaptation in psychological terms.

Hochschild analyzed the work of female cabin crew to attract passengers in terms of caring and sexuality, which she called “emotional labour” (2012, p. 32). However, the airlines organization also includes male cabin crew, so excellent service is not just about gender roles. There is a debate about being forced to be nice to customers, especially in the airline industry, where front-line staff are acting as ambassadors for the company. There is a need to develop soft skills which can be harnessed by employees of both genders, leading to emotional intelligence (Newman, Joseph, & MacCann, 2010). People skills or interaction skills such as communication and good listening are also part of the preconditions for the job.

*Organization culture of Thai cabin crew? if it's cabin crew, it is totally different because we don't have a certainty companion. We have to learn new people all the times. But the job task and everything would be finished on the flight, there would be no stress after work which is different from other organization. (Interview)*

*Some people would go for business, some would fly to face sadness, or have been lost someone. Go to the funeral or the death ceremony. So in the cabin, it would be different from waiter or waitress in the restaurant. That customers would be still and have the same emotional. This is the different in airline jobs because there would be a different group of ages, different gender, different nationalities, different emotional, all gathering to get meals and other service. It is so different, so we have to have the capability of many things. Not everyone understand the service job, but depends on the passengers themselves to have a satisfaction for the service. Some are getting irritation,*

*get on the plane and these are different than other organization. Definitely, there is no time, time difference from other cities. (Interview)*

From an organizational perspective, the time schedule is not fixed. Therefore, it has a major effect on individual performance. The connection with passengers is varied, and depends on the flight rota and destinations. Moreover, the job is dependent on teamwork, so the relationships with colleagues are also important.

### **The Case of Southwest Airlines**

#### ***Organizational culture incorporated with intrinsic values***

Another example of inner management is at Southwest Airlines where such management includes customers as well as employees, thereby leading to a teamwork orientation. The company uses existing practices and behaviour to achieve its goals and business plans (Figure 2). The staff at Southwest Airlines always assist each other, and this extends to the involvement of their families, who can participate in many kinds of activities organized by the airline. Armstrong and Baron (2005) state that the staff at Southwest Airlines feel that they are part of the organization and that their participation is valued. In addition, they are also entitled to frequent flights at low fares and enjoy other employment related benefits. This kind of participative culture encouraged by the airline produces a corresponding belief and value system amongst employees. They believe their work is meaningful and feel that they can contribute something to the organization (Benefiel, Fry, & Geigle, 2014).

Academics have acknowledged Southwest Airlines as value-based, as the airline uses a soft-side approach. It emphasizes on shared goals and values as well as on teamwork (Gittell, 2003). In terms of the recruitment and selection process, candidates need to demonstrate an awareness of others. The training process is aligned with the job design as well as job description, and

includes team building in order to empower teamwork. The airline also makes sure that staff are able to spend some time with their family and have fun with work. In terms of job security, the airline avoids redundancy and invites unions to make decisions with the team. This tactic reduces conflict.

People at Southwest care about one another's families. We recognize deaths and births. We assist in times of tragedy...We hire people who have worked for other airlines who say they never received anything at home from their former employers, that they never were acknowledged in a personal way.

(Bamber, Gittell, Kochan, & Von Nordenflycht, 2009, p. 91)

Southwest Airlines pay attention to personality traits and soft skills such as customer orientation (Day & Silverman, 1989). Relational competence at Southwest Airlines relates to the ability to relate to others, which in turn it is related to self-construal (Lorenzoni & Lipparini, 1999). As a result, such relational competence can increase the level of cooperation within the organization as well as staff performance and excellent teamwork. Coordination means shared goals, knowledge and mutual respect (Gittell, 2003), which in turn can shape personal identities. If everyone acts in coordination, a collective identity is created within the organization.

Firstly, there is a strong emphasis on community, which includes employees, their families and customers as was already discussed above. Secondly, there is a clear mission to serve and to fly as many customers as possible by providing fun, reliable and low-cost service (Southwest Airlines, 2017). Employees are included in the realisation of this mission and made to feel a part of the larger fabric of the organization. This is reflected in how they feel and what they say about the company. Thirdly, the employees are empowered by encouraging them to contribute to improvements in services and processes, and if necessary, are even allowed to

break policies to provide better customer service and to help each other at work. This enables growth and reinforces self-worth, which in turn creates more motivated and able employees.

Next, emotion and humour aspects of work as well as professionalism and intellectual abilities of the staff are taken seriously by the company. This creates a joyful and lively environment and enables people to be themselves without feeling too restrained by the corporate culture. This also contributes to a unique competitive advantage which is hard to copy.

Finally, strong work ethics are also prevalent at Southwest Airlines and compliance is seen as an essential requirement to work at the company. Employees are required to work hard, be flexible, and to reduce the staffing needs of the company as much as possible, as a team.

As a result of building its culture on spiritual values listed above, Southwest Airlines became a good example of a corporate culture concerned with community (Godsey, 1996; Tyler, 1998), customers, employees and teamwork. Staff help each other and feel that they are part of a team. Staff believe their work is meaningful, and they are happy to contribute something to the organization (Collins & Porras, 1994).

Staff believe that they can help develop an organization by accepting its inherent spiritual values and culture. The self-worth of employees is also at stake because of policies such as allowing them to get involved in company decisions (Sunoo, 1995). There are three elements of the spiritual model at work here: enthusiasm and commitment (Rosen, 1992), emotional expression (Bracey, Rosenblum, Sanford, & Trueblood, 1993) and personal relationships (Miller, 1992). Southwest Airlines' philosophy is to have happy employees, as this leads to productive work (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhard, & Wright, 1997). The company is about fun, love and service, which strongly correlates with the eight Biblical values summarised in Table 1 above.

## **The Effect of Dimensions of National Culture and Employee Behaviour**

In terms of three cultural dimensions, Power Distance (US: 40 / Thailand: 64), Masculinity (US: 62 / Thailand: 34), Individualism (US: 91 / Thailand: 20), it was found that Power Distance influences employee engagement in different ways. Southwest Airlines staff have been involved in the decision making process as well as being part of the organization. This creates self-worth for employees whereas Thai Airways is mainly related to a top-down, authoritarian management style. Staff are obedient to the organization due to high power distance. Thai Airways union representatives have not been involved in any decision making compared with Southwest Airlines, where union representatives have been involved in the redundancy process and other decision making.

In terms of Masculinity, there are some differences between the two airlines: the characteristics of the Thai Airways staff are mainly related with gender. However, there is some similarity in terms of the soft-side approach which affects the personality traits for the staff of both airlines.

Although there are some differences in Individualism, the nature of the job is related with team work. This could also be related to relational competency which is similar to interdependent self-construal from collectivistic culture and as a result, relational competency can be practiced and trained for. Part of the training can be emotional training to develop a harmonious relationship with others.

From these results, it can be seen that a soft side approach and relational competency can be developed without cultural boundaries. In the meantime, Power Distance is more difficult to change so this could have an effect on the growth of Thai Airways in terms of change management due to the fact that the power of top-down management still exists within the organization. However, mutual respect is one of the shared values between both airlines. It was

observed to be a part of coordination for Southwest Airlines staff whereas mutual respect is a norm for Thai Airways. Both airlines provide a positive outcome with these shared values.

### **Universal Values of Thai Airways and Southwest Airlines**

We found common values between Southwest Airlines and Thai Airways from the case studies based on the two companies. These values have been illustrated below:



**Table 4:** Shared Values - Southwest Airlines and Thai Airways

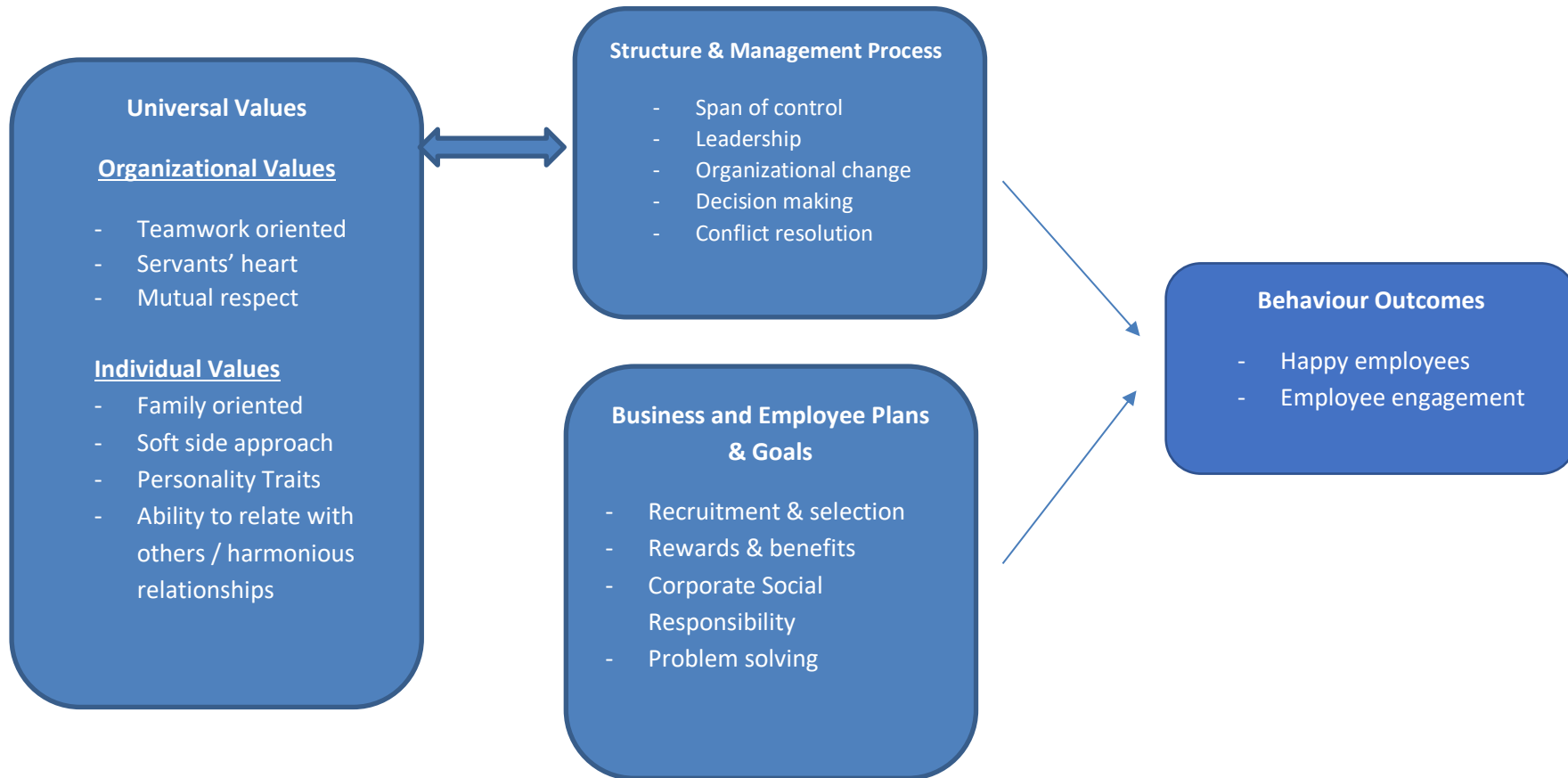
<b>Shared Values</b>	<b>Thai Airways</b>	<b>Southwest Airlines</b>
Family Orientation	Consider passengers / colleagues as their own relatives	Extends to the involvement of their families
Teamwork Orientation	Team building training	Team building training / empower teamwork / relational competence
Recruitment and Selection	Self-reflection	Candidates demonstrate awareness of others.
Corporate Social Responsibility	They need to be kind and mindful and this is different from other airlines. Cabin crew need to be involved in some charity work such as going to blind schools in order to learn how to help disabled passengers. By doing so, they will learn how to serve passengers from their hearts because they feel sympathy for other people.	Corporate culture concerned with community. The emphasis is on the customers and putting others first. The company is also addressing the environmental challenges by recognising its responsibilities to reduce its environmental impact. The employees are actively encouraged to get involved by becoming the Green Ambassadors of the company.
Rewards & Benefits	The life style of a cabin attendant is an approach to a sense of freedom in the work centre, that is perhaps compatible only in the airline industry. Although the primary purpose of a cabin attendant is to respect and attend to the requirements of our passengers, the cultural differences are a reflection of how we view the world in reality.	All airline staff get low cost air tickets, hotel discounts, etc. There are also specifically tailored training programmes and various career paths available inside the company.
Soft-side approach	There are many types of people at work, one has to learn how to be happy and let go of negative thoughts, so that one can be happy at work	Soft skills such as customers' orientation and focus on services by creating a warm and helpful attitude to others.
Personality Traits	Gender based	Pay attention to personality traits
Ability to relates to others/ Harmonious relationship	Interdependent self-construal	Relational competence. Team building. Support and value others
Mutual respect	Sense of respect developed through upbringing	Part of coordination is mutual respect which can shape personal identities

Happy employees	Fulfil their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	Fun and love. Sincere and positive atmosphere. Be yourself attitude.
Problem solutions	Use common sense	Common sense and initiative is encouraged, even if this means breaking the rules. In fact, such behaviour is actively promoted if this enables better customer service and innovative approach to problem solving.
<b>Different values</b>	<b>Thai Airways</b>	<b>South West Airlines</b>
Employee engagement	It is dependent on the top management who make decisions	Extended family to join in the company's activities
	Top management is involved in organizational development	Willingness to help develop the organization
	Company policy is created by the management.	Involved in company policy
	Top management makes redundancy decisions	Union is involved with redundancy decisions
	Long-term recruitment	Enthusiasm and commitment

Source: Authors' own

The proposed conceptual framework was constructed based on the findings and integrated with the value-based management model.

**Figure 2: Universal Values-based Management Model**



Source: Author's own

## **Universal Values**

In terms of organizational and individual values, both airlines are customer-focused and pay attention to their customers and employees alike. The sense of teamwork is an important part of the airlines' job roles.

Comparison between the two airlines reveals that adaptability, common sense and the dismissal of negative thoughts are embedded in both airlines' staff. The observational data demonstrated that face-to-face interactions could not be prepared in advance, so "let go" was adopted in order to cope with negative behaviour. The two airlines bring together organizational and personal characteristics, and for both, harmonious relationships are related to well-being within the group context (Schwartz, 2006).

As a result of positive organizational and individual values, the behaviour outcomes are productive as employees are happier and more engaged. It can be seen from the Southwest Airlines examples that staff have a fun and loving attitude. They are friendly with customers and this fits well with both organizational and individual values. In terms of structure and management process, this can reduce conflict within the organization, and bring some changes in the organization and leadership which could then elaborate further to corporate social responsibility.

## **Business and Employee Plans and Goals**

### ***Recruitment and selection***

Hiring practices have been designed to select potential employees with similar values and this is the main priority of the hiring process. In the words of Julie Weber, who is vice-president of people at Southwest Airlines, "when we're faced with a qualified candidate who doesn't have the right values, we won't make an offer – no matter how long the job has gone unfilled"

(Weber, 2015). This approach ensures a perfect match between the corporate and personal values of the employees from the start of the working relationship and contributes to the creation of a unique corporate culture.

### ***Rewards and benefits***

In terms of rewards and benefits, all airlines provide discount tickets which provide their staff the freedom to travel and enjoy their lives. This also applies to a developing country such as Thailand where the airline sector has been seen as a privileged job. This creates happy employees for both airlines because the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are fulfilled. In terms of problem solving, common sense and adaptability to situations have been applied by both airlines.

One of the most important service characteristics of the airline industry is inevitably related to travel. Once the service has been delivered, it cannot be returned, so first impressions are the most important factor for airline service delivery (Albrecht & Zemke, 1990). As a result of this, the value of the service relies on personal experience – whether positive or negative –and hence quality assurance must proceed before production, because it requires human interaction and cannot be recalled.

Airlines' organizational cultures should be considered part of the analytical framework, as airline culture is related to adaptability and common sense. Common sense is part of the solution to problems for both Thai Airways and Southwest Airlines. Personal characteristics such as friendliness, cheerfulness and good humour are regarded as no less important than common sense and a good personality.

## **Structure and Management Process**

Once individual and organizational values are well-embedded within the organization, management process such as span of control, spiritual and transformational leadership need to be considered. This will enable organizational change and conflict resolution. Employees need to participate in decision making. Once they feel valued, it results in positive performance.

## **Conclusion**

Amid all the turmoil in the world today, changes and solutions can start with individuals transforming and modifying themselves from within. The connection between gender, values and cross-cultural management can then be used as the basis for cross-cultural development, by looking into female characteristics and strengths, and into internalisation – because internalisation can be adopted by both genders anywhere in the world. Therefore, this recognition can be a fundamental cross-cultural development, and necessitates a new standpoint-based epistemology.

The outcomes of spirituality, based on inner values, can have an effect on cross-cultural management where people care for and think of others and produce genuinely positive reactions towards each other. Soft-side characteristics such as compassion, kindness and sympathy reflect aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path such as right action, right view, right resolve, right speech, right livelihood and right effort. All these factors can be implemented in company policy in order to create best practices and a positive response to passengers from around the world. Characteristics such as courtesy and respect also reflect right action.

Internalization implies attitudes and beliefs, which in turn reflect spirituality. Positive verbal and non-verbal communication reflects right speech of the Noble Eightfold Path. Self-analysis is the way to improve an individual, which in turn leads to the improvement of the organization.

By combining these aspects of the company and individual through internalization, there can be benefits for employees, customers and the organization.

Another positive outcome from inner values is that they can create engagement among both customers and employees. If employees are supported, they feel motivated to work and commit to the organization as well as to customers. A focus on inner values can also draw talented people to work with the organization, because such candidates will not be interested in working for a company that is only concerned with making money – rather, that they will go for a company that shows love and care to its employees. Once inner values are established in the organization, they can cultivate change and adaptability.



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