Buddhism, Sustainability and Organizational Practices

Fertile Ground?*

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This paper provides a systematic review of literature relating to Buddhism, sustainability and organizational practices. How extant literature acknowledges Buddhism informing sustainability as an alternative to current business practices predominantly governed by an economic rationale is examined. Thirty journal articles and 20 books/book chapters are analyzed. Commonly discussed Buddhist principles in the literature include the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Law of Karma, and Compassion. Through the analysis of Buddhist principles, a set of values are derived that enable the possibility of fostering sustainability in organizations. Core values emphasized are interconnectedness, moderation and empathy. Given the limited attention to date, this paper contributes to the extant literature through providing avenues for future research that could examine efforts to enact these core values in further exploring the connections between Buddhism, sustainability and organizational practices.

- Sustainability
- Buddhism
- Organizational practices
- Interconnectedness
- Moderation
- Empathy

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URRENT BUSINESS PRACTICES, GOVERNED PRIMARILY by economic rationality are far from assuring a fertile ground for sustainability (Ehrenfeld and Hoffman, 2013; Welford, 1998). Prevailing economic rationality suggests that profits and growth are mostly still prioritized even where business organizations make efforts in the name of sustainability or corporate (social) responsibility (Banerjee, 2003, 2011). According to Daniels (2007), organizations are often assessed on the basis of material accumulation—in the form of profit or wealth—and control over resources such as finances, energy and even markets. Profits earned through material accumulation tend to promote materialism that is often driven through self-interest and competition (Daniels, 1998, 2007, 2011). An organization's approach towards the attainment of sustainability which is predominantly governed by the pursuit of profit and growth tends to overlook humanity's connection with society and nature. Such connection is accomplished through an understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings, both human and non-human.

Alternative organizational approaches to sustainability that enable understanding of interconnectedness are called for. A shift from a perspective based on economic rationality towards a spiritual perspective provides an alternative way of looking at sustainability (Ehrenfeld and Hoffman, 2013). This shift would challenge the business-as-usual approach and be an inspiration for organizational actors to engage with and encourage sustainability (Bouckaert and Zsolnai, 2012) in potentially profound ways.

John Ehrenfeld defines sustainability as "the possibility that humans and other life will flourish on Earth forever" (Ehrenfeld and Hoffman, 2013, p. 7). He posits two distinct levels in expounding his definition on sustainability. The first level focuses on the individual. Ehrenfeld asserts that sustainability will be realized through a reorientation of individuals' ways of thinking about humanity's fundamental relationships with society and nature. The second level focuses on the system—and calls for a change in the assumptions society holds as rational in attaining utility. Starik and Rands (1995) also reinforce the effective integration of individual and collective levels in the achievement of sustainability, and they posit a central role for organizations/entities in their definition:

> The ability of one or more entities, either individually or collectively, to exist and flourish for lengthy timeframes, in such a manner that the existence and flourishing of other collectivities of entities is permitted at related levels and in related systems (p. 909).

Daniels (2011) contends that Buddhism enables the transformation of an individual's thinking in a way that "enhances prospects for sustainability" (p.35). Buddhism is seen as a mind-based approach to gaining understanding of reality that "emphasises thought and learning processes rather than an unquestioning acceptance of dogmatic rules" (Boyce *et al.*, 2009, p. 58). It also fosters deep feelings of connectedness—to self, to others and to nature—that appear to be fundamental to the achievement of sustainability (Daniels, 2011). The extent to which Buddhism is influential in informing sustainability at societal level, and within organizations in particular, is yet to be fully explored.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a systematic review of literature which relates to Buddhism, sustainability and organizational practices. It not

only provides a comprehensive analysis of published work to date, but also enables the identification of gaps for academics interested in further research, and the provision of useful insights for practitioners. Further, the review, much of it presented in tabular form, provides convenient summaries of common Buddhist principles, connections between Buddhism and sustainability and organizational practices.

The treatment of Buddhism in this paper is an inclusive one. Although Buddhism is generally known as a religion, scholars such as Cooper and James (2005), Daniels (1998, 2011), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), and Marques (2010, 2011) interpret it rather as a psychology, a philosophy, an ethical system, a way of life and as an epistemology formed on insight. Some consider Buddhism as a worldview underpinned by a set of beliefs that could justify behaviour (Daniels, 2007). Puntasen (2007) and Prayukvong and Rees (2010) claim that Buddhism cannot be considered as a philosophy since it is neither based on faith nor a system of beliefs, but an empirically tested theory. Despite these varying views, Buddhism is interpreted in this paper as a philosophy that enables adherents to postulate a basis for the understanding of reality. Also, Buddhist philosophy is the commonly accepted form of interpretation identified in the reviewed literature.

The authors of this paper are advocates for the possibility of strong sustainability which is underpinned by the inclusiveness of economic, social and environmental dimensions rather than trade-offs between these dimensions (Hahn *et al.*, 2010). The first author of the paper is also a practising Buddhist. Her mind-set and interpretations are therefore shaped by Buddhism, but the paper's overall outlook is one of seeking out connections that make sense to, and could be helpful for a wider audience.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the method employed to select and analyze the journal articles, books and book chapters used is described. Second, Buddhist principles cited in the reviewed literature are introduced and explained. Third, the paper examines how these Buddhist principles relate to the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. Fourth, the organizational implications are discussed. Research gaps and potential avenues for future research conclude the paper.

Method

The ABI Inform online bibliographical database was used to search for scholarly, peer reviewed journal articles in relation to Buddhism, sustainability *and/or* organizational practices. The selection of the articles was based on their inclusion of Buddhist principles irrespective of different schools of Buddhism emphasized, in order to obtain a broad perspective. Articles that did not specifically refer to either sustainability or organizational practices were eliminated. For example, articles about Buddhism and world politics, state power and racial interaction were excluded. As a result, 30 relevant scholarly, peer reviewed journal articles remained in scope.

In addition, books and book chapters were sought to extend the sources used in the review. The Summon database was used to locate scholarly books and book chapters on Buddhism, sustainability and organizational practices. Screening the abstracts and key words of all these sources resulted in a total of seven books and 13 book chapters (from edited books) based on overall topic relevance. The literature found (journal articles, books and book chapters) was published between 1992 and 2012. Journal articles related to Buddhism, sustainability and/or organizational practices dated mostly from 2005 to 2012, and the books and book chapters from 2004 to 2010.

All of the journal articles, books and book chapters (50 in total) identified at least one or more Buddhist principles. Twenty-six were related to Buddhism and sustainability in general without referring to any organizational practice in particular. Another 17 were related to Buddhism and organizational practices in general but did not focus on sustainability. The remaining six journal articles and one book chapter focused on Buddhism and sustainability-related organizational practices. In this paper, the term sustainability-related organizational practices refers to the strategic, managerial and operational level functions aligned with organizations' sustainability initiatives. Figure 1 depicts the composition of the literature analyzed.
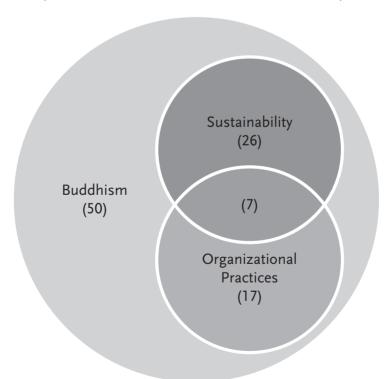
Figure 1 Composition of the reviewed articles, books and book chapters

All 50 articles, books and book chapters were read carefully and summarized in a master table denoting the Buddhist principles, sustainability dimensions and organizational practices discussed in each. Subsequently, a table was

prepared to identify the Buddhist principles and the corresponding articles that discussed those principles mentioned. Likewise, tables were prepared for sustainability dimensions, organizational practices, and the nature of human and non-human relationships analyzed along with the exemplar articles/books and book chapters. The summaries and lists prepared in tabular format facilitated the further close analysis of content, which occurred alongside further reading of the articles, books and book chapters.

The reviewed articles, books and book chapters were mostly conceptual in nature (38 out of 50). Only eight reported empirical research along with appropriate methodologies and methods to explore Buddhism's potential and challenges informing sustainability in organizations. Of these, three employed multiple case studies (Chaisumritchoke, 2007; Prayukvong and Rees, 2010; Valliere, 2008), two used survey methods (Parboteeah *et al.*, 2009; Phillips and Aarons, 2005), one study referenced phenomenology (Marques, 2010), one action research (Lamberton, 2005) and another used grounded theory (Fernando and Jackson, 2006) as methodologies. The remaining four papers stated their respective data collection methods without clearly indicating the approaches adopted. The majority of the empirical studies were based on in-depth interviews and documentary sources.

The four empirical studies that integrated Buddhism and sustainability-related organizational practices were situated in diverse social and cultural contexts. Prayukvong and Rees (2010) conducted their study in Thailand, a context where Buddhism is prevalent. The study performed by Fan (2009) was based in Taiwan, where Buddhism is gaining popularity. A comparative study conducted by Valliere (2008) was in Canada (a Western country where Buddhism is not prevalent) and Nepal (an Eastern country where Buddhism is one of the prominent religions). The remaining study by Lamberton (2005) did not disclose the social and cultural context in which the study was conducted. Among the Buddhists interviewed, some were Buddhists from birth (especially participants from Buddhist prevalent countries) and some adopted Buddhism (e.g. all Buddhist participants from Canada stated that they were previously Christians) (Valliere, 2008). Further, the organizations taken into consideration represented multinational corporations (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010), small companies that belonged to for-profit (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010; Valliere, 2008) as well as not-for-profit sectors (Lamberton, 2005). The reviewed articles, books and book chapters identified a range of Buddhist principles. These principles are generally in line with those expressed in key writings on Buddhism, notably the Pali Canon.

Buddhist principles cited in the literature

Table 1 lists the Buddhist principles and offers short definitions as cited within the body of the literature reviewed. The order of the principles presented in the table was determined based on the frequency of citation of each principle within the reviewed literature. Exemplar articles, books and book chapters that cite these principles are listed.

Table 1 Buddhist principles

Buddhist principles	Short definitions as cited in the literature	Exemplar articles, books and book chapters
The Four Noble Truths	Suffering is inherent in life; suffering is caused by craving; craving and suffering can be ceased; and the Noble Eightfold Path leads to the cessation of suffering	Daniels (1998, 2003, 2007, 2011), James (2004), Cooper and James (2005), Lamberton (2005), Phillips and Aaron (2005), Ruether (2005), Hall (2006), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Dhiman (2009), Marques (2009, 2010, 2011), Parboteeah et al. (2009), Roberts (2009), Barnhill (2010), Inoue (2010), Kaza (2010), Koizumi (2010), Prayukvong and Rees (2010), Schmithausen (2010), Williams (2010), Sivaraksa (2011), Case and Brohm (2012)
The Noble Eightfold Path	Right understanding, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration	Daniels (1998, 2003, 2007, 2011), James (2004), Cooper and James (2005), Lamberton (2005), Ruether (2005), Hall (2006), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Valliere (2008), Dhiman (2009), Marques (2009, 2010, 2011), Parboteeah et al. (2009), Roberts (2009), Barnhill (2010), Eckel (2010), Inoue (2010), Kaza (2010), Koizumi (2010), Prayukvong and Rees (2010), Muyzenberg (2011), Case and Brohm (2012)
Law of Karma/ Karmic law of cause and effect/ Interdependence/ Causality	The relationship of people's intent and consequences of their thoughts and actions	Gurung (1992), Daniels (1998, 2003, 2007, 2011), James (2004), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Paterson (2006), Abeysuriya et al. (2008), Valliere (2008), Fan (2009), Marques (2009), Roberts (2009), Borden and Shekhawat (2010), Inoue (2010), Kaza (2010), Koizumi (2010), Prayukvong and Rees (2010), Schmithausen (2010), Williams (2010), Muyzenberg (2011), Case and Brohm (2012), Foo (2012)

Buddhist principles	Short definitions as cited in the literature	Exemplar articles, books and book chapters
Compassion on living beings	Non-violence and responsible behaviour towards humans and non-humans	Cooper and James (2005), Hall (2006), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Chaisumritchoke (2007), Abeysuriya et al. (2008), Fan (2009), Flanigan (2009), Barnhill (2010), Borden and Shekhawat (2010), Dake (2010), Kala and Sharma (2010), Kaza (2010), Marques (2010, 2011), Prayukvong and Rees (2010), Schmithausen (2010), Williams (2010), Daniels (2011), Case and Brohm (2012), Li et al. (2012)
Impermanence	Impermanent and illusory nature of physical reality (anicca), pervasive suffering (dukka) and selflessness (anatta)	Daniels (1998, 2003, 2011), James (2004), Cooper and James (2005), Dhiman (2009), Foo (2012), Kriger and Seng (2005), Neal (2006), Valliere (2008), Yoneyama (2007), Barnhill (2010), Inoue (2010), Kaza (2010), Koizumi (2010), Schmithausen (2010), Muyzenberg (2011)
Mindfulness	Cultivating awareness of the body and mind in the present moment	Lamberton (2005), Fernando (2007), Hays (2007), Valliere (2008), Dhiman (2009), Borden and Shekhawat (2010), Inoue (2010), Marques (2011, 2012), Muyzenberg (2011), Rees and Agocs (2011), Sivaraksa (2011), Foo (2012)
Dependent origination/ conditional co-arising/ cycle of samsara	Ignorance, mental formations, consciousness, mental and physical experiences, the six senses, contact, sensations, craving, addiction, becoming, suffering and rebirth	Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Barnhill (2010), Dake (2010), Eckel (2010), Koizumi (2010), Schmithausen (2010), Prayukvong and Rees (2010), Muyzenberg 2011
Five precepts	Abstain from killing, stealing, unwholesome sexual conduct, incorrect speech and from using intoxicants	Lamberton (2005), Fernando and Jackson (2006), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Kaza (2010), Case and Brohm (2012)
Non-dualism	Interconnectedness between human and non-human nature/ oneness	Paterson (2006), Fan (2009), Barnhill (2010)

Continued

Four sublime states of mind	Loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity	Kriger and Seng (2005), Kaza (2010), Marques (2010)
Unwholesome mind states	Greed, hatred and ignorance (delusion)	Dhiman (2009), Fan (2009), Kaza (2010)
Wholesome mind states	Generosity, compassion and wisdom	Hays (2007), Prayukvong and Rees (2010)
Reciprocity	A relation of mutual dependence	Kato (2007), Barnhill (2010)
Seven factors of enlightenment	Mindfulness, investigation of dharma, diligence, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity	Kriger and Seng (2005), Dhiman (2009)
Five aggregates	Form, feelings, perceptions, mental states and consciousness	James (2004), Dhiman (2009)

The most commonly cited Buddhist principles in the reviewed literature are: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Pali canon, which is the commonly cited source of Buddhism, states that the core of the Buddhist teachings is encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path (Lamberton, 2005; Schmithausen, 2010). The Four Noble Truths explain that: (1) suffering is inherent in life; (2) desire/craving causes suffering; (3) suffering can be ceased; and (4) the Noble Eightfold Path leads to the cessation of suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path, embedded in the Four Noble Truths, comprises eight aspects of overcoming suffering or enabling wholesome living: right understanding (also described as right view), right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. "Right" emphasizes the behaviour that is beneficial for both oneself and others. The Path encompasses "complementary principles that mutually reinforce one another" (Koizumi, 2010, p.138).

The Noble Eightfold Path emphasizes the value of moderation nurtured by neither inclining towards complete self-denial nor "indulgence in worldly pleasures" (Koizumi, 2010, p. 137). Thus, it is also called the Middle Path. Prayukvong and Rees (2010) note that The Noble Eightfold Path is classified into three parts: (1) morality; (2) concentration; and (3) wisdom. Morality consists of right speech, right conduct and right livelihood, whereas concentration consists of right effort, right concentration and right mindfulness. Wisdom is constituted through right view and right aspiration. The interplay between morality, concentration and wisdom as described by Prayukvong and Rees (2010) follows. Morality denotes ethical behaviour on a personal level that leads to fostering cooperation at a societal level. Concentration assists morality by enabling the development of wholesome intentions in an individual accountable for his or her actions. In turn, harmonious coexistence at the societal level is encouraged. Wisdom signifies the insight one develops in understanding the nature of reality which is the interconnectedness of all phenomena that helps one shape intentions. Insight into the web of relationships enables individuals to understand deep connections with self, others and nature.

The next most pervasive Buddhist principle cited in the reviewed literature is the Law of Karma which is also referred to as Karmic law of cause and effect or causality. This principle is "one of the foundations of the Buddhist thought. Karma literally means 'the results of our actions'" (Borden and Shekhawat, 2010, p. 146). The Law of Karma is commonly interpreted as every action one performs with an intention in mind has a consequence. However, such causality does not imply a punitive effect, but a sense of self-responsibility to one's own thoughts that lead to words and actions. The Law of Karma tends to be used as an explanation or rationalization, offered by research participants and even by authors of the articles, for why something has occurred. According to Borden and Shekhawat (2010) a negative incident, when it occurs, should be seen as an opportunity rather than a punishment—an opportunity to build new strengths, while being cautious in present actions, realizing the effect of past wrongs. This is a common interpretation within Buddhist philosophy.

Another extensively cited Buddhist principle in the literature is compassion towards living beings. Living beings include both humans and non-humans. Buddhist philosophy extends loving kindness towards all living beings on Earth (Cooper and James, 2005). Compassion enables one to feel empathetic of other human beings and to be sensitive to the connection with nature. One could be compassionate about all beings through one's thoughts, words and actions. Compassion is itself a part of the four sublime states as well as of the three wholesome states of mind mentioned in Table 1.

The next most commonly cited Buddhist principle is impermanence of self, which forms the basis for understanding the nature of reality: suffering. Suffering is better interpreted as "pervasive dissatisfaction" (Epstein, 2005 cited in Daniels 2007, p. 158), rather than as "pain". According to Daniels (2007), life's experiences become pervasively dissatisfying due to impermanence (caused through constant change in relation to ageing, confronting diseases, etc.). Impermanence of life leads us to understand the nature of selflessness and in turn, underscores that self-centredness leads to pervasive dissatisfaction/ suffering.

A further Buddhist principle often highlighted in the literature is mindfulness. Mindfulness enables one to gain self-awareness through: "objectivity to examine [one's own] attitudes and actions without feeling threatened, because one develops detachment from the play of the ego" (Borden and Shekhawat, 2010, p. 149). The present moment awareness gained from mindfulness is cultivated through meditation which lays "the very foundation of Buddhist practice" (Dhiman, 2009, p. 58). Mindfulness is a key component emphasized in Buddhist teachings to attain spiritual success.

The aforementioned common principles together constitute the foundation of Buddhist philosophy within this systematic review of literature. The remaining of the Buddhist principles depicted in Table 1 are less frequently cited in the literature. References are made to those principles that connect closely with sustainability-related organizational practices in later sections of the review. Next, the explicit connections in the reviewed literature between Buddhism and sustainability are outlined.

Buddhism and sustainability

Buddhist principles can be seen to have relevance to the commonly defined dimensions of sustainability: economic, environmental and social. The order of sustainability dimensions presented in Table 2 is once again determined based on the frequency of citation within the literature. The exemplar articles, books and book chapters focusing on each dimension are listed.

Relationships between the individual, society and the natural environment come to the fore in most of the articles, books and also in book chapters—even though these might not always be explicitly linked to sustainability. Daniels

(2007) states that human wellbeing is subject to a variety of "mental and physical levels of the self and relations between the self, society and natural environment" (p. 158). He further explains that "the worldview espoused by Buddhism provides a substantive basis for a more complete understanding of the influences on wellbeing and the fundamental sources of the sustainability problems" (Daniels, 2007, p. 158).

Table 2 Buddhism and sustainability

Common sustainability dimensions	Related Buddhist principles	Exemplar articles, books and book chapters
Economic		
Redesigning economy based on an alternative value system Changes in production and consumption patterns/Prevent excessive consumption Reject happiness on abundance Organizational transformation rather than enlargement Social enterprises Pricing based on social and environmental costs Meeting local needs using local resources	The Four Noble Truths The Noble Eightfold Path Law of Karma/ interdependence Compassion The five precepts Mindfulness/ consciousness Forms of desire	Daniels (1998, 2003, 2007, 2011), Lamberton (2005), Chaisumritchoke (2007), Puntasen (2007), Abeysuriya *et al.* (2008), Valliere (2008), Fan (2009), Parboteeah *et al.* (2009), Roberts (2009), Inoue (2010), Koizumi (2010), Prayukvong and Rees (2010), Williams (2010), Sivaraksa (2011)
Environment		
Protection of biodiversity/ species and ecosystems Conservation of nature/ wildlife/valuing species	Law of Karma/ interdependence Dependent origination Non dualism Compassion on living beings Four sublime states of mind The Four Noble Truths The Noble Eightfold Path Reciprocity	Gurung (1992), James (2004), Cooper and James (2005), Lamberton (2005), Ruether (2005), Hall (2006), Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), Paterson (2006), Kato (2007), Barnhill (2010), Dake (2010), Eckel (2010), Kala and Sharma (2010), Schmithausen (2010), Williams (2010), Li *et al.* (2012)

Continued

Common sustainability dimensions	Related Buddhist principles	Exemplar articles, books and book chapters
Social		
Inter-generational (spatial)/ intra-generational (temporal) equity	Compassion The Four Noble Truths	Lamberton (2005), Valliere (2008), Kaza (2010), Prayukvong and
Socially productive entrepreneurship	The Noble Eightfold Path	Rees (2010), Williams (2010), Muyzenberg
Alternative cultures to re-examine Western values in changing mind sets/sufficiency economy	Law of Karma/ interdependence The five precepts	(2011)
Simplicity of living	Four sublime states of mind	
Social activism against injustice and exploitation	Wholesome states of mind	

Some of the literature reviewed identifies that the core Buddhist principles, the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path connect well with sustainability. Daniels (2011) suggests that the first and the second Noble Truths explain "causes of unsustainability", whereas the third and the last truths explain "the effect or way of achieving sustainability" (p. 44). Contemplation of the first and the second Noble Truths enable one to realize that unsustainability (a manifestation of suffering) is caused through excessive greed/craving (Daniels, 2007). An over-reliance on an economic growth mentality can engender large-scale production and exploitation of natural resources, including non-renewable resources and the creation of environmental and social problems (Dake, 2010; Williams, 2010). This highlights an economic growth pursued without paying attention to planetary limits. The third Noble Truth identifies that unsustainability could be overcome by addressing its cause which is not overly relying on an economic growth mentality and being concerned about planetary limits. Daniels (2007) notes that a change towards investment in goods and services with a minimum impact on nature, in terms of more careful use of resources and the creation of less waste would make for an economic system aligned with sustainability. The final Noble Truth, which is the Noble Eightfold Path, defines a way towards sustainability.

The Noble Eightfold Path accentuates the value of moderation. Being moderate and making full use of any resources drawn from the Earth is strongly emphasized as a remedy for exploitation of natural resources (Daniels, 2011; Schmithausen, 2010). Right livelihood is the core aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path that is pervasively used in showing the connection with achieving sustainability (Daniels, 1998, 2007; Johansen and Gopalakrishna, 2006; Prayukvong and Rees, 2010; Valliere, 2008). According to Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006), right livelihood means a life that conforms to the five precepts (abstaining from killing, stealing, abusive sexual conduct, incorrect speech and use of intoxicants) that relate to morality and ethics. Daniels (2007) interprets right

livelihood as wellbeing that emphasizes "earning one's living in ways that do not harm, deprive or exploit other people, animals and nature" (p. 170). Koizumi (2010) reinforces this idea by stating that the Noble Eightfold Path ensures the wellbeing of humans and nature.

Using the principle of the Noble Eightfold Path, Muyzenberg (2011) argues that sustainability is linked with the right view and right conduct that foster prosperity and happiness. The right view and the right conduct provide a sense of responsibility to one's self and towards society and nature in enjoying the liberty of prosperity and happiness. Right view underscores that prosperity and happiness can never be attained through the acquisition of material possessions including wealth, with the absence of mental and spiritual tranquillity (Muyzenberg, 2011). In the same vein, Sivaraksa (2011) maintains that prosperity is not strictly linked to income and wealth but is aligned with "self-reliance, self-dignity, contentedness, generosity and mindfulness" (p. 89) according to Buddhist philosophy. Muyzenberg (2011) notes that Buddhism encourages the creation of wealth "as long as it is done honestly without harming people besides making a positive contribution to society" (p. 176). Wealth creation should encourage selflessness and cooperation rather than capitalist values of self-interest and competition (Puntasen, 2007).

Another key attribute that explicates the connection between Buddhism and sustainability is the value of interconnectedness of all living beings. This means that both human and non-human beings, including nature, cannot exist in their own right, but that they coexist (James, 2004). Thus, the value of interconnectedness provides a holistic view of sustainability across economic, environmental and social dimensions (Lamberton, 2005). The Buddhist principle pervasively adopted in making this connection with sustainability in the reviewed literature is the Law of Karma. It explains the mutual interaction between causes and effects that help understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. For example, nature is threatened due to ignorance of the interconnectedness of humans and nature. If humans realized the importance of safeguarding nature for their existence, they would not destroy it. "Thus, anything that has an impact on the self, also has an impact on society and nature" (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010, p.79). The Law of Karma enables individuals to infer their responsibility to find a balance between self-interest and the society they live in. Such an understanding tends to foster cooperation instead of competition as a more rational behaviour in society.

The exemplary articles listed under the economic dimension (see again Table 2) stress how Buddhist principles provide "a logic and means to help resolve this tension between in-grained economic system imperatives and the changes actually required for achieving environmental sustainability" (Daniels, 2007, p.155). For example, the logic inherent in the Law of Karma highlights the interconnectedness of economic decisions with society and nature (Daniels, 2007, 2011). Thus, the functions of an economy associated with production, consumption and exchange are perceived to depend on society and nature. The Law of Karma accentuates this interconnectivity among different spheres enabling a cyclical view as opposed to a more linear one.

The majority of the articles, books and book chapters that referred to the economic dimension of sustainability were based on the "seminal Western discourse on Buddhism and economics—Schumacher 1973" (Daniels, 2007, p. 157). Buddhist economics relates to economic ideas embedded in Buddhist philosophy that underscores the interdependent nature of all phenomena including "individuals, society and environment of the present, past and future" (Abeysuriya *et al.*, 2008, p.26). This understanding brings ethics and morality to the fore in economic activity through the awareness of consequences emphasized by the Karmic Law of cause and effect. Wellbeing is also stressed in Buddhist economics with economic activities supposed to be "driven by ethical motivations [that] seek to cause no harm to individuals, to create no agitation in society, and to have a benign impact on the environment" (Abeysuriya *et al.*, 2008, p.26). Buddhist economics differs from conventional economic rationalism based on "self-interest and competition in the pursuit of maximum welfare or utility" (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010, p.75). Instead, in Buddhist economics wellbeing is seen to be attained through core values of interconnectedness, empathy, and collaboration fostered among all stakeholders including the environment (Sivaraksa, 2011).

The value of interconnectedness is stressed in initiatives to preserve the environment. For example, Paterson (2006) asserts that ignorance of the interconnectedness of all beings causes environmental degradation. The symbiotic relationship between humans and non-humans including flora and fauna is misunderstood. Barnhill (2010) stresses the value of interconnectedness, citing a pioneering Western eco-Buddhist, Gary Snyder's affirmation "that nature has intrinsic value" (p. 94). As cited by Barnhill (2010), Snyder's interpretation of "intrinsic value extends to all beings, 'every creature, even the little worms and insects, has value. Everything is valuable—that's the measure of the system'" (p. 95). James (2004), Kala and Sharma (2010), and Paterson (2006) also underscore the belief that all non-human species and ecosystems possess intrinsic value which promotes nature conservation efforts. The value of interconnectedness of all beings emphasized in Buddhism is viewed as the most distinctive feature that enables the formulation of connections across the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability.

Furthermore, the Buddhist principle of compassion adds the value of empathy to the notion of sustainability. Gaining the capacity to be considerate of others and of their feelings allows one to respect others. Compassion's application in an organizational context enables better understanding of connections with stakeholders, strengthening collaboration and harmony (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010). Compassion also underlines the value of nonviolence. Paterson (2006) claims that biodiversity conservation efforts set forth towards ensuring environmental sustainability are driven by the need for "nonviolent coexistence" (p.147) between humans and non-humans.

Buddhist philosophy inspires interconnectedness among all beings, moderation, and empathy in relation to all three dimensions of sustainability at societal level. Such realization made in light of Buddhist principles and values is different from the competitive ethos of economic rationality. How Buddhist philosophy is seen to play out in organizational contexts is considered next.

Buddhism and sustainability-related organizational practices

Most of the reviewed literature applied Buddhist philosophy either to sustainability at a national policy level or to an organizational practice alone, overlooking the possibility of applying it as an alternative approach to foster sustainability in organizations. In fact, the review found only six journal articles and one book chapter that elaborate on the application of Buddhist principles in sustainability-related organizational practices.

Table 3 lists the sustainability-related organizational practices identified in the six journal articles and the book chapter along with the Buddhist principles they relate to. Also the table indicates the values inferred through the Buddhist principles applied in organizations as well as the corresponding exemplar articles/book chapter.

The Noble Eightfold Path that focuses on morality, concentration and wisdom is shown to help organizational decision making to be aligned with sustainability. Decision making is analyzed in light of right view and right conduct embedded in the Noble Eightfold Path (Muyzenberg, 2011). Right view enables organizational members to broaden their insight about the true purpose of making a decision rather than being self-centred or too materialistic, underscoring the value of moderation. The value of moderation aligns decision making with sustainability ideals in production, consumption and investment functions in organizations (Daniels, 2007; Lamberton, 2005). Right conduct with discipline assists implementation of the decision and evaluation of the expected results.

Table 3 Interrelationship between Buddhism and sustainability-related organizational practices

Sustainability-related organizational practices	Link to Buddhist principles	Values inferred through practices	Exemplar articles/ book chapter
Decision making and problem solving			
Reflection on causality in organizational/ entrepreneurial goal setting and strategy formulation Production of minimum intervention goods and services Investments on minimum intervention production Pricing based on full social and environmental costs	The Four Noble Truths The Noble Eightfold Path Karmic law of cause and effect/Interdependence The five precepts Impermanence/nature of self	Moderation Interconnectedness Empathy Cooperation Contentment	Lamberton (2005) Valliere (2008) Daniels (2007) Fan (2009)
Leadership			
Moderating the pursuit between material wealth with non-material (spiritual) wellbeing Dharma not dogma, but, the true leader of the organization Not being egocentric in decisions/regulations Ensure social justice by serving the society rather than sole pursuit of profit	Karmic law of cause and effect/Interdependence The Four Noble Truths The Noble Eightfold Path Compassion Five precepts Mindfulness/ consciousness Impermanence/nature of self Five hindrances Seven factors of enlightenment Four sublime states of mind Three wholesome states of mind	Interconnectedness Moderation Empathy Cooperation Equity Honesty	Prayukvong and Rees (2010) Muyzenberg (2011)
Human resource (HR) practices			
Threefold training in management systems Human resource development with a focus on all stakeholders and happiness Empowerment	Karmic law of cause and effect/Interdependence Four Noble Truths Eightfold Path Compassion Four sublime states of mind Three wholesome states of mind	Interconnectedness Moderation Empathy Respect Equity Honesty Generosity	Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006) Prayukvong and Rees (2010)

Sustainability-related organizational practices	Link to Buddhist principles	Values inferred through practices	Exemplar articles/ book chapter
Innovation and creativity Research and eco-efficiency on reducing pressure on the natural environment	Karmic law of cause and effect/Interdependence Four Noble Truths Eightfold Path Compassion	Interconnectedness Moderation Empathy	Daniels (2007) Fan (2009)
Organizational change and learning True and fair view of communication and reporting	Karmic law of cause and effect/Interdependence The Noble Eightfold Path Mindfulness	Interconnectedness Moderation Accountability Equity	Johansen and Gopalakrishna (2006) Prayukvong and Rees (2010)
Corporate citizenship volunteer initiatives Biodiversity/wildlife and ecosystem conservation practices	Compassion Karmic law of cause and effect/Interdependence Non-dualism	Empathy Interconnectedness Equity Respect Reverence	Prayukvong and Rees (2010)

In the sphere of decision making, reflection on causality in goal setting and strategy formulation is recognized as aligned with sustainability (Daniels, 2011; Muyzenberg, 2011). Decision making is affected by causes and conditions that give rise to the decision followed by the consequences (Muyzenberg, 2011; Valliere, 2008). For example, a decision to produce a (required) good that has a minimum impact on nature would result in the optimal use of natural resources involved. Such a decision with a concern for planetary limits is imperative where the level of natural resources is rapidly being depleted due to over-production/consumption.

In order to achieve the most positive effects out of a decision made, decision makers should contemplate and consider the consequences for the organization and for other organizational stakeholders (including the natural environment) who are affected by such decisions (Muyzenberg, 2011). Such contemplation emphasizes responsibility and accountability for the decision made. According to Daniels (2011), reflection on causality together with an appreciation of the interconnectedness of the effect of a decision being made assists organizational decision makers to advance sustainability ideals.

A connection between Buddhism, leadership, and sustainability is presented by Muyzenberg (2011). A leader who drives his or her organization towards sustainability should realize that the purpose of its existence should foster happiness (Muyzenberg, 2011). Happiness is understood as being content rather than having an egoistic or longing for materialistic pleasure (Daniels, 2007).

Simultaneously, the understanding of connectedness of one's own self with society and nature is also needed for a leader. Muyzenberg (2011) asserts that the Noble Eightfold Path's right view and right conduct aspects will be useful in cultivating these characteristics in leaders (similar to decision making). Right view will enable leaders to perceive that happiness will be gained through their organizations' connections with the greater society and nature of which they are a part. Right view is also supported by the understanding of impermanence of all living beings. Realization of the nature of impermanence in relation to worldly possessions means letting go of extreme greed and thereby fostering both sharing and cooperation within a leader.

Further, Muyzenberg (2011) highlights a set of characteristics of an ideal leader's understanding: principles and causes; objectives and results; oneself; moderation; and the efficient use of time, organization and people (pp. 171-172). These attributes enable an organizational leader to win trust and respect from followers in the organization and beyond. Trustworthy relationships between the leader and members of the organization concerned, other organizations, government, society and the natural environment are seen to encourage moral and ethical dealings leading to social and environmental justice.

Using a corporate citizenship initiative called employee volunteer programmes, Prayukvong and Rees (2010) illustrate how the Noble Eightfold Path assists in human resource development in some Thailand-based organizations. They employ an approach named "threefold training" (p.80) that comprises morality, concentration and wisdom. Threefold training assists organizational members to develop their understanding of interconnectedness and focus on responsibility for their own behaviour at an individual level. According to Prayukvong and Rees (2010) when individuals share their understandings with other organizational members (internal stakeholders), the application of the threefold training manifests at the organization level. Further, when the organization interacts with the external stakeholders the understanding translates to the societal level.

The need to understand the nature of relationships is at the heart of certain sustainability-related organizational practices discussed above including leadership, decision making, and involvement in managing human resources. The section that follows describes the nature of relationships that organizational actors could recognize from different scopes.

Nature of relationships

This review of literature in relation to Buddhism, sustainability and organizational practices enabled inferences to be made about human and non-human relationships within and beyond traditional organizational boundaries. The nature of the relationships within and beyond the organization that Prayukvong and Rees (2010) and other researchers point to as fundamental to the achievement of sustainability is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Nature of relationships

	Human relationships	**Non-human relationships**
Within the organization	Empathy for colleagues Cooperation instead of competition Trust and respect Receptivity Loving kindness towards colleagues Accountability and responsibility of service Less corruption	Harmonious existence with nature Recognition of animal rights Connectedness with ultimate reality in difficult situations (decision making)
Beyond the organization	Empathy for sentient beings Interconnectedness with larger community Loving kindness towards community/clients Being non-judgemental and tolerant of ambiguity Generosity/fairness and justice	Reverence for nature Interrelatedness/oneness with nature Connectedness with an ultimate reality and deities Spiritual relationships with animals and trees Seeing nature as "mother"

Human relationships within the organization closely relate to dealings with the organization's primary stakeholders: owners, managers, employees, suppliers, and customers. Interconnectedness, empathy, cooperation, trust and respect are seen as the frequently emphasized Buddhist values, underscoring the nature of relationships between humans within the organization. Borden and Shekhawat (2010) explain that when an organization considers Buddhist philosophy as "the leader", loving kindness flourishes among the organizational members. In turn, tolerance and understanding of each other is fostered, and egocentric behaviour is reduced.

Non-human relationships within the organization identified in the review indicate the value of interconnectedness between the organization and the natural environment including animals and ecosystems. An understanding of connections that are deeply held with nature enables organizational members to regard nature as an organizational stakeholder (Fan, 2009). According to Snyder, as cited in Barnhill (2010, p. 97), the sense of community as interpreted in the Buddhist philosophy focuses not just on humans but also on "the larger biological community". Recognition of animal rights, where applicable within organizational operations, is taken into account (Barnhill, 2010). Efforts to reduce the environmental impact that reduces the usage of natural resources and conservation of natural habitats through redesigning products, processes, and practices are encouraged (Daniels, 2007).

Human relationships beyond the organization were underscored by Muyzenberg (2011, p. 175) through statements such as "the purpose of a business must lie outside the business itself. In fact it must lie in society, since a business enterprise is an 'organ of the society'". Organizational leaders' contribution

to the wellbeing of employees' families, and community as well as the underprivileged can be perceived as part of the obligation of their leadership that is influenced by Buddhism. The feeling that comes from "benefiting others as well as oneself", stated by Inoue (2010, p. 122), explains the importance of relationships organizations can foster both within and towards their neighbourhoods and community. Thus Williams (2010) states that the influence of Buddhism assists in transforming not only one's self, but the whole of society.

Apart from the relationships with humans, the literature also emphasized biodiversity conservation projects that considered wildlife, plants and trees and ecosystem protection as part of non-human relationships beyond the organization. Understanding of interconnectedness is predominant in fostering such understanding in relation to non-humans beyond the organization.

Implications for organizations

Buddhism works with a profound understanding of interconnectedness that offers the possibility for organizations to foster harmonious relationships within and beyond, with both society and nature. Such understanding appears most likely to be engendered at the level of the individual in the first instance—rather than the organization. In order to elevate the level of awareness of key principles and values that make up Buddhist philosophy from an individual to an organizational level, many organizations would need to review their fundamental operating principles, and ground them in a different thinking pattern.

This paper prompts thoughts around what might be possible in the realm of more mainstream business organizations. Table 5 presents a set of alternatives to the principles underpinning economic rationality offered by the enactment of Buddhist philosophy that would assist in reorienting organizational actors' values/thinking to feel more connected with society and nature.

Table 5 Alternatives to economic rationality offered through enactment of Buddhist philosophy

Principles governing economic rationality	Alternatives offered through Buddhist philosophy	Core values emphasized
Short-term profit focus	Focus on consequences both short and longer term	Interconnectedness
Self-centred orientation	Concern for all beings (both self and others) orientation	Interconnectedness
Exploitation of resources including non-renewables	Care for the Earth/non-humans	Interconnectedness/ Moderation
Growth without limits	Growth within planetary limits	Moderation
Material accumulation	Accumulation of spiritual merit and happiness	Moderation
Competitive ethos	Collaborative ethos	Empathy

Short-term profit focus fuelled by thoughts of self-centredness (Prayukvong and Rees, 2010) and exploitation of resources (Daniels, 2007) are replaced with the understanding of both short- and long-term consequences for all beings including nature. Such change is possible through the realization of interconnectedness. For example, an organization's purpose, strategies, processes and practices including designing, planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling should reflect the understanding of interconnectedness of all beings. It is imperative that growth initiatives of organizations should be formulated with awareness of ecological limits on Earth. For example, initiatives in relation to investments and resource allocations need to be designed in moderation avoiding excesses (Daniels, 2007, 2011). Organizational actors should embrace the value of empathy within and beyond their fellow members. Empathy needs to be fostered in managing all relationships (both human and non-human) with internal and external as well as existing and potential stakeholders of the organization.

The need for organizational change processes would involve organizational leaders and those involved in sustainability initiatives identifying and designing activities to nurture organizational values agreed upon in relation to promoting sustainability. Professional development workshops and team projects could be organized to build shared understandings of the values and agreements, about what they mean for the organization, society and nature. Unless such understanding is built at all levels of the organization, through a holistic approach, enactment of the above values informing sustainability practices will be adopted just at personal/individual level, restricting their wider application.

Incorporation of values of interconnectedness, moderation, and empathy inferred through Buddhist principles in fostering sustainability-related organizational practices may not be straightforward, and is likely to vary with the nature of the context in which such initiatives are proposed. For example, if the values identified above are introduced in an organizational culture that embraces Buddhist philosophy, then, framing such values as Buddhist would be warranted. In contrast, organizational practices governed by Buddhist philosophy or principles could possibly be seen as discriminatory within a multicultural context. However, even if an organization does not welcome Buddhist philosophy or principles, the values inferred could still be used as a basis to promote sustainability thinking and enactment.

Research gaps and recommended areas for future research

This paper helps to create an understanding that Buddhism is a philosophy that has application both in the way individual members work in organizations and the way those organizations can then relate to society and to nature differently from conventional organizations based on strong economic rationales. Even though the focus tends more towards Buddhism's application at individual level, both organizational and societal level transformation towards sustainability may well be possible through individuals' leadership and involvement.

These different levels of application identified and presented through this review raise particular issues in practice, as well as for researchers. A philosophy understood and espoused by an individual may not always be evident in an organizational setting, or at the organizational level. Individuals' personal assumptions and beliefs relating to Buddhist philosophy may differ markedly from those beliefs possessed by their leaders or co-workers. Organizations might not be easily identified as Buddhist even in a society where Buddhism is prevalent among the wider population. Moreover it is not known whether the application of Buddhist philosophy in an organizational context delivers results in respect of the achievement of sustainability. Sustainability as a broader systems construct suggests that powerful and pervasive belief systems would be needed for its achievement, and organizations would then become one logical locus for focusing those beliefs.

Whether Buddhist principles are really informing organizational practices in Buddhist and/or non-Buddhist contexts, and the extent to which they might be informing, is an area that needs further exploration. An initial step in undertaking research in this area is to explore whether, and to what extent, organizations are already following Buddhist principles in engaging in sustainability-related organizational practices—and analyzing what the result of doing so is and the conditions which make it possible. If no businesses are able to be identified that are actively incorporating Buddhist principles into organizational practice (in particular in contexts where Buddhism is prevalent and constitutes the dominant worldview), then further questions arise for further exploration. For example, do Buddhist principles lack practical relevance at an organizational level? Or, what hinders application of Buddhist principles and values at an organizational level?

Further, the necessity of a holistic integration instead of an incremental or a piecemeal approach is commonly highlighted in the extant literature on sustainability (Hoffman and Bansal, 2012; Ehrenfeld and Hoffman, 2013; Milne *et al.*, 2006). In this regard, whether principles embedded in Buddhism enable the cultivation of a holistic approach to sustainability-related practices in organizations is worth exploring. For example, whether Buddhist principles prompt meaningful stakeholder engagement is an important area that could be further investigated. Whether Buddhist principles enable the possibility for organizations to move away from monologic stakeholder management to a dialogic and participatory approach could be explored. The above stated areas for future research could help inform practice and/or critique current practice in relation to sustainability in the light of the reviewed literature.

Conclusion

This paper offers analysis and commentary on the literature on Buddhism, sustainability and organizational practices through a systematic review of the literature and identification of areas for future research. Buddhist philosophy,

principles and values formed a useful theoretical framing for the analysis. The common Buddhist principles that the reviewed literature linked with sustainability were: The Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path, The Law of Karma, and Compassion. The core values inferred through these principles are interconnectedness, moderation and empathy. Connections between Buddhism and sustainability-related organizational practices identified in the literature pertained to organizational decision making and problem solving, leadership, human resource practices, change and learning. These connections were extended to identify the nature of the relationship with humans and non-humans within and beyond organizations.

One of the important aspects for future research that arose in interpretation of the Buddhist teachings in relation to sustainability suggested that practice and research in this arena, despite the difficulties, must of necessity be multi-level. Whereas the decision to subscribe to Buddhist philosophy rests with the individual, individual enactment of the principles and values may occur within organizations, from which an impact at the societal level may conceivably be able to be discerned. As a systems level construct, sustainability makes most sense at the broader societal level. But from a Buddhist perspective, the philosophy and enactment begin with the individual. Organizations, as ever, may be able to be identified as a locus for bringing together collective power of individuals for the greater good—in this case, sustainability.

Literature on sustainability and organization studies underscores the necessity of "broadening the narrowly economic definition of progress to include notions of environmental and social justice" (Livesey and Kearins, 2002, p. 253). Incorporation of values of interconnectedness, moderation, and empathy in organizations' pursuits of sustainability signals the possibility of creating a holistic approach taking into account economy, environment and society. Clearly other bases for the enactment of these values are also possible, but the connection between Buddhism and sustainability-related organizational practices acknowledged in this review, and the foregoing strand of literature suggests this is fertile ground for further research. The possibility Buddhist philosophy offers in orienting organizational actors' mind-sets to see deep connections with nature and society is an appealing idea—the realization of it in practice is the real test.

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