

The Heart Sutra and Modern Day Management

(This article is a summary of a talk presented by Professor Chung-kwong Poon, President of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University at DDM Melbourne on 30 October 2004)

Professor Poon highlighted the main teachings of the Heart Sutra, in particular the application of the Four Noble Truth in management through identifying the problem, finding out the cause of the problem and working out a way to resolve the problem through such techniques as SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) Analysis. He also explained how we could apply The Twelve Links to deal with emotional issues and make better judgements and decisions.

The Heart Sutra talks about the Five Skandhas that cover both our physical form and mental aspects; by the same token, in modern day management we must also consider both the economic efficiency of the organization (physical form) and the well-being and needs of the employees (mental aspect).

In his talk, Professor Poon pointed out that “form is not other than emptiness” refers to the wisdom of one’s ability and limitations, analyzing the situation in an objective manner and creating the conditions and opportunities to achieve success. “Emptiness is not other than form” refers to compassion as expressed in understanding the needs of the employees, caring for them, respecting them, utilizing their strength to enhance team spirit and work. “Form is precisely emptiness and emptiness is precisely form” refers to the interdependence and inter-connectedness of all things, that nothing can exist by itself and we must be willing to listen to others and accept their criticism.

By understanding that “the five skandhas are empty”, we can let go of our attachments to our previous experience, by understanding that “all dharmas are marked with emptiness”, we will be able to consider all factors and conditions and act with flexibility according to the situation and set up new strategies.

The Heart Sutra shows us that management personnel must uplift his wisdom and compassion, raise the performance level of the organization as well as help its employees to change the working environment and their mindset for the better.