

ABSTRACT. Well-known concepts in Organization Behavior are viewed in this paper through a Taoist lens, in particular through the perspective enshrined in the famous yin–yang symbol. Since Tao purports to be a fundamental Law of Nature, it should be possible to find Taoist principles operating within, or at least behind, concepts and theories presented in the field of Organization Behavior as having some degree of truth value. Concepts from personality theory, learning, motivation, leadership, and organization culture are found indeed to accord with the Tao. The review reveals aspects of OB concepts not usually discussed, and suggests a fresh approach for theory evaluation and development. A general principle of yin–yang balance as an essential dynamic for performance and harmony in a wide variety of contexts is suggested. Implications for further research are indicated.

KEY WORDS: Tao, Yin–yang, personality, motivation, leadership

“The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao” (Feng and English, 1972, verse 1). Thus begins the most famous book on the maddeningly inscrutable philosophy of Taoism, the *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tsu. More a path to enlightenment than a moral or religious treatise, Taoism predates Christianity and Buddhism by many centuries, and has had a profound, even if intractable, influence on the cultures of the East, especially China and Japan. Because it seeks a transformation not of the disciple’s way of thinking but of her perceptions and attitude – her way of seeing – Taoism cannot be presented as a set of logical principles subject to analysis or scientific investigation. In fact, cognitive processes are viewed by Taoism as a major stumbling block to the realization of its truth. People who claim the ability to explain Taoism through the vehicle of words are deluding themselves: “Those who know do not

know; those who speak do not know” (Feng and English, 1972, verse 56).

Does this enigma wrapped in a paradox have anything to contribute to the practical and rational discipline of business? The purpose of this paper is to suggest that it does, as it must if it claims to encompass Everything: “The great Tao flows everywhere, both to the left and the right. The ten thousand things depend on it” (Feng and English, 1972, verse 34). Autry and Mitchell (1998) agree, insisting that Taoism is the Law of Nature and as such points to the most elemental human truths, and illuminates all areas of human activity, including business and management. Scores of books (Chang, 1997; Dreher, 1997; Edelman and Crain, 1994; Heider, 1986; Herman, 1994; Huang et al., 1999; Wing, 1986) and articles (Brunner, 2001; Hensler et al., 2000; Mak, 2000; McCormick, 1999; Riehm, 2000; Valentine–Marshall and Walker, 2000) published in recent years attest to the growing interest in Taoism-inspired lessons for leadership and management. In addition, almost every imaginable subject has been interpreted through the perspective of the Tao: psychology (Bolen, 1982), physics (Capra, 2000), watercolor (Carbonetti, 1998), relationships (Grigg, 1988), photography (Gross and Shapiro, 2001), teaching (Nagel, 1999), even motherhood (McClure, 1997), and of course love and sex (Chang, 1993). The Internet has further contributed to the growing popularity of Taoism – one search engine returned close to one million hits for the keyword “Tao”.

Most of these books and articles use Taoism as an inspiration for their narrative and not as an analytical tool. A frequent device is to organize the presentation as a series of commentaries on the eighty-one verses of the *Tao Te Ching*, drawing “Business Lessons” from them. Often the commentaries are as inscrutable as the original. For example, Autry and Mitchell (1998) quote from verse 22 of the *Tao Te Ching*:

If you want to become whole,
 let yourself be partial
 If you want to become straight,
 let yourself be crooked.
 If you want to become full,
 let yourself be empty ...

The “lesson for business” the authors seek to derive from this begins with the following words:

“Think of yourself as a work in progress. Because we all are. And it is a major step toward wholeness to accept our incompleteness. When we recognize that very fact, we become more complete. If you truly accept that you have enough of everything, those gifts will multiply throughout your organization” (Autry and Mitchell, 1998, p. 7).

It is perhaps something about the poetical and paradoxical nature of Lao Tsu’s words in the Tao Te Ching that inspires this kind of response. This paper takes a fresh approach, asking whether currently widespread and accepted concepts in Organization Behavior are consistent with Taoism. If Taoism encompasses the Laws of Nature, concepts validated through the scientific method should conform to the Tao. In other words, it should be possible to find Taoist principles operating within, or at least behind, concepts and theories that are presented in the field of Organization Behavior as having some degree of truth value. This paper examines well-known Organization Behavior concepts from the Taoist perspective.

Yin and yang

Taoism’s influence on Chinese culture is immense. It is at the root of traditional Chinese medicine, martial arts, cooking, architecture, political science, and a lot more. Valentine-Marshall and Walker (2000) note that the Taoist method of knowing is responsible for the formation of classical Chinese medicine. Taoism is the basis not only of acupuncture but also of “herbal and dietary therapies, tui-na (a form of soft tissue and joint manipulation), and the Chinese exercise arts including T’ai chi, Qigong and Kung fu” (Valentine-Marshall and Walker, 2000, p. 4). Feng Shui, wildly popular in the West today, suggests that living and work spaces designed to accord with the Tao promote well-being and har-

mony. Harmony in human relationships too flows from adherence to the principles of Taoism.

By far the most fundamental of these principles is that of pairs of complementary but opposite forces of nature. “Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness. All can see good as good only because there is evil” (Feng and English, 1972, verse 2). The ubiquitous symbol for Taoism, as much representative of it as the cross is for Christianity, enshrines this basic notion of yin and yang, which together form the Tao, the Whole. Nothing exists that can escape this duality of positive and negative, masculine (yang) and feminine (yin):

Having and not having arise together.
 Difficult and easy complement each other.
 Long and short contrast each other.
 High and low rest upon each other.
 Front and back follow one another.

(Feng and English, 1972, verse 2).

These two forces exist in a dynamic balance when there is harmony. Imbalance of Yin and Yang causes discord and dysfunction. For example, illness is viewed in traditional Chinese medicine as “an imbalance between internal influences such as diet, exercise, rest, and emotions; and external factors such as weather, trauma, microbes or poisons. Health is not just the absence of symptoms, it is a state of being in balance in body, mind, and spirit” (Valentine-Marshall and Walker, 2000, p. 3). Foods and herbs, and even ways of preparing them are said to contain different quantities of yin and yang essence. Illness caused by an excess of yang essence is treated through ingestion of foods abundant in yin, arranging living space to maximize the flow of yin essence, doing exercises that expend the excess yang, and so on. Valentine-Marshall and Walker (2000) provide examples of yin and yang (See Table I).

In the organization

This idea is the point of departure for this paper, which examines the most widely known and established concepts in Organization Behavior through the lens of yin and yang. If balance between yin and yang is at the root of well-being and performance in all aspects of life, OB concepts designed to promote well being and performance in the

TABLE I
Some examples of yin and yang

Yin	Yang
Earth	Sky
Moon	Sun
Lower	Upper
Inside	Outside
Female	Male
Deep	Superficial
Matter	Energy
Structure	Function

organization should implicitly contain within them this notion of a dynamic balance between complementary forces. Though speculative and not subjected to empirical testing, the paper may nonetheless provide useful applications for an idea that has survived hundreds of centuries. At the least the approach utilized here may provide a fresh source of validation for OB concepts. If the approach produces convincing evidence that established Western concepts inherently accord with Taoist principles, it may prove useful as a yardstick for the evaluation and development of concepts and models in OB – and other fields. Applying a Taoist interpretation may also reveal aspects of OB concepts not usually made explicit.

When the yang essence in the organization is in balance with the yin essence there will be harmony in the organization. Yang is the pro-creative, rational, doing part of the organization; it produces the onward and outward thrust. Yin is the receptive womb, it is that element of the organization that nurtures and mothers, that cheers when something good emerges from the yang energy. In the end, yin is the soil from which the yang draws sustenance: if the organization did not provide a supportive environment, employees would be unable to produce results. Yin is structure, yang is function (see Table I). “In balance” does not necessarily mean equal quantities. In different people and in different spheres of activity in the organization and in different environments, balance will imply different proportions of the yang and the yin. Also, yang does not mean male, or yin female. Both are in all individuals, though males may possess more yang than yin on average. But there is wide variation in this, with many females being more “masculine” than

many males, and many males who possess an overabundance of yin.

Since it is not the intention of this paper to critically evaluate existing OB concepts but only to view them through the perspective of Taoism, original source materials for the concepts discussed are not referenced or cited. In order to limit the discussion to well established concepts, the paper takes the unusual approach of addressing concepts and theories found in a popular undergraduate textbook for Management and Organization Behavior: *Management Today* by Stephen P. Robbins (Robbins, 2000). Readers are assumed to be familiar with these concepts. Yin and yang aspects of OB concepts are identified. The extent to which concepts are consistent with Taoist perspectives is revealed. Concepts which do not readily fit into the Taoist approach are examined to suggest fresh interpretations.

Basics of human behavior

The first topic in the chapter entitled “Understanding the Basics of Human Behavior” is personality traits and the first personality trait discussed is locus of control. “Internals” and “externals” are described. The tendency to view personality as being dichotomous occurs here and elsewhere in the textbook, revealing the dualistic foundation upon which many theories rest. The traits themselves are of course more normally distributed in the population: most people are not internals or externals but somewhere in between. It is likely that people and organizations function effectively when the internal locus of control (yang) is in balance with the external (yin). Why is internal locus of control yang? Yang is proud, it believes in its own efficacy, it is the doing/can-do part of the person, the feeling within the organization that success does not fall into one’s lap, that it must be pursued. Yang seeks to bend the environment to its will and believes it has achieved precisely that when it reaches its goals. “Internals believe that they are masters of their own fate” (Robbins, 2000, p. 368). Self-efficacy requires that people believe they are masters of their own fate to at least a certain degree, more in some aspects of life than others. Without this feeling, motivation for action would not exist.

Yet every religion and spiritual tradition proclaims that there is a superior, all-powerful force that is really in charge. Christianity insists that God has a plan for everybody and everything, and difficulty in life is only a test. Hinduism attributes current misfortunes and setbacks to accumulated karma, which leaves no recourse but to accept and carry on. This external locus of control attitude is yin in nature, since it implies being rather than doing, a receptive state rather than an active state. The healthy personality balances this yin externality with the yang internality of the feeling of self-efficacy. For of course there are events in life over which people have no control whatsoever, hurricanes and earthquakes, accidents and just plain dumb luck. People who believe that they control their own destiny in every way would likely have a difficult time coping with such events. One can bend perhaps a small fraction of the environment to one's will, but the bulk of it goes its merry way regardless of people's best efforts. Not having this insight, or in other words, not having the internal locus of control in balance with the external, is a formula for a life of frustration and burden, a life sometimes of bitterness at those who take a more relaxed, God-is-in-charge attitude.

The textbook does go on to suggest that organizations need both kinds of people: "Internals are more suited to jobs that require initiative and independence of action. In contrast, externals should do well on jobs that are well structured and routine and in which success depends heavily on complying with the direction of others" (Robbins, 2000, p. 368). Though the classification of people as "internals" and "externals" remains problematic, in any case it is clear that organizations need both these elements. Without the willingness to subjugate themselves to the will of the organization, few people would make good employees; yet an organization that allows no "initiative and independence of action" would surely come to a sorry end sooner or later. No doubt there are jobs in organizations that require the more assertive and forceful attitude of initiative and independence, and others that require more of the yin attitude. "Balance" may thus imply different proportions of yin and yang in different spheres of activity in the organization (and in different spheres of a person's life).

Achievement and affiliation

McClelland is next in this chapter (Robbins, 2000, p. 368). The need for achievement is clearly yang, in contrast to the yin need for affiliation. nAch drives people to do; nAff requires being with others, receiving nurturance, relaxing and enjoying each other's company. Which do people have exclusively, with none of the other? Which do organizations need their employees to have exclusively, with none of the other? Again, there is variation in the proportions of the achievement motive (yang) and the affiliation motive (yin) that people have, that jobs require, and that organizations need. The person in whom the two are not balanced will be, in some way or the other, dysfunctional; the organization in which the two are not in balance will, sooner or later, suffer setbacks. People seek to achieve goals – this is what being alive means. High nAch people have more ambitious goals than low nAch people, or are more strongly goal oriented than others. But people also seek to have satisfying relationships with other people. The overly ambitious often come to grief, as do those who are unable to take any action that would have, or be perceived to have, adverse consequences for their relationships with others. Similarly, an organization with an exclusive concern for achievement and no concern for the well being of employees and shareholders will not last very long.

Personality type

"A Type A individual is *aggressively* involved in a *chronic, incessant* struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time" (Robbins, 2000, p. 370). Is this a personality trait or a medical condition? Surely a better balance between the yang (Type A) and the yin (Type B) is the prescription for these poor souls? Fortunately, the extreme Type A is probably a small minority in the population and, as before, the talk of Type A and Type B personality masks the variation of the two qualities in most people. Individuals who are "*always* moving, walking, and eating rapidly" are probably rare, as are those who "*never* suffer from a sense of time urgency with its accompanying impatience" (Robbins, 2000, p. 370, emphasis added). A balance between the two is probably what

the doctor would order. It is also what is needed in the organization. “Great salespersons are usually Type As, but senior executives are usually Type Bs” (Robbins, 2000, p. 371). Organizations crave and need both great salespersons and great senior executives. Type As, the textbook says, tend to trade off quality for quantity. The organization that fails to balance quantity (productivity) with quality (customer satisfaction) will encounter misery just as surely as the person who fails to balance the *struggle* for advancement with *contentment* with one’s lot in life, or concentrated effort with periods of relaxation.

Attribution theory

This theory suggests that behavior elicits an attempt by the observer to determine whether it was internally or externally caused. Internally caused behaviors are those that are believed to be under the personal control of the individual. For externally caused behavior, the person is seen as having been forced into the behavior by the situation. Presumably, people are more willing to excuse behaviors that they believe to have been externally caused than behaviors that are viewed as being in the control of the individual. In other words, attribution theory suggests that the way behavior is understood by an observer is a function of her perception of the balance between the yang and the yin in the person whose behavior is being observed. If yang is deficient (person is seen as having control over the circumstances surrounding the behavior, but also seen as having failed to apply himself adequately) he is judged as being willfully negligent. If yin is deficient, the person is viewed as pursuing goals that are unrealistic – ignoring the handwriting on the wall – and thus as being not very wise. When the yin and yang are thought to be in balance – the person did as much as could be expected, given the circumstances – we judge her to be OK.

Learning

People learn by doing – doing math problems, thrusting out and manipulating the objects in the environment, experimenting. But enduring change

in behavior really occurs when the new data acquired through action in the world (yang) is placed in the lap (yin) of what the person already knows, to arrive at deeper insights than before. Learning occurs through the interplay of yang and yin. In his seminal book *Biology and Knowledge*, Piaget (1971) declares this dialectic between acquiring new information, which he calls assimilation, and integrating accumulated information into existing cognitive structures (accommodation) to be the fundamental process in all learning, from that of snails to that of humans. Evolution is the result of the accommodation of new information into *biological* structures and thus follows the same principle.

Viewed through this perspective, reinforcement theory is a dynamic interplay between yin and yang. Individuals acquire data about the environment by consequences that follow their actions. Activity – manifestation of yang nature – is a pre-requisite to learning. The data that this activity produces lead to a modification of existing cognitive structures to result in more sophisticated mental maps – through what may be called “reflection”, a yin activity.

To round out this discussion of learning the paper skips briefly to the section on Organizational Learning, in a different chapter. “Most organizations engage in *single-loop learning*. When errors are detected, the correction process relies on past routines and present policies. In contrast, learning organizations use *double-loop learning*. When an error is detected, it is corrected in ways that involve a modification of the organization’s objectives, policies, and standard routines” (Robbins, 2000, p. 585). Through the lens of Tao, we can re-phrase this to read: in organizations in which the yang essence predominates, errors evoke only assimilation and no accommodation, partly based on the proud assertion of the superiority of the current system. In a learning organization, assimilation may occur (the error is corrected in the short term, using existing organizational structures) but this is accompanied by processes that eventually lead to accommodation (modification of objectives, policies, or standard routines – that is, of current organizational structures). A learning organization thus displays a balance between the yang attitude of effort to solve the problem and the yin attitude of being receptive to changing the established patterns of problem solving. The end result, as in all learning, is that the orga-

nization is better adapted to its environment. The other extreme, when yin essence pre-dominates so that every error, minor or major, engenders a crisis of being, an intensive soul-searching, leads to instability and paralysis. Learning requires a balance between the yang and the yin, a balance between action and reflection.

Organizational culture

Organizational Culture can be viewed as organizational personality, allowing parallels with the preceding discussion of individual personality. The chapter on organizational culture in this textbook begins with a list of “seven primary characteristics that, in aggregate, capture the essence of an organization’s culture” (Robbins, 2000, p. 340). This list falls more or less neatly into yang and yin categories: innovation and risk taking, attention to detail, outcome orientation, and aggressiveness all suggest a yang quality; people-orientation, team orientation, and stability are suggestive of yin. Research results seem to support the notion that an organization’s “personality” may be dominated by one or the other of these dimensions. Thus, the book declares that Microsoft, Siemens, and General Electric have strong aggressiveness personalities, while Hewlett-Packard and Toro are said to have strong people-orientation personalities. One suspects however that Bill Gates would aggressively defend Microsoft’s people orientation, and Hewlett-Packard would perish in its highly dynamic and competitive environment if it did not pursue opportunities and its competitors aggressively. Once again, the key to effectiveness and performance lies not in being primarily yang or yin but in achieving appropriate balance between the two, where appropriate balance depends in turn on the situation the organization finds itself in.

This is not to deny that an organization’s culture may be predominantly yang (aggressive, analytical, and result-oriented) or predominantly yin, just as an individual’s personality may be predominantly one or the other. The requisite amounts of yin and yang required will vary from organization to organization and for the same organization at different times. It will indeed vary in different departments and units within the organization. For example, during times

of crisis the yang may be called upon more than the yin – the organization may have to focus its energies on strategy, structure and systems. Employees may have to tighten their belts and work harder, neglecting for the time being their emotional needs, their need for praise and encouragement, for example. Decisions may have to become a bit more autocratic. Aggressive action may be required to overcome the crisis. Type of organization dictates required balance as well. Health service providers need more yin than yang – the very feel of such an organization exudes yin essence, and excellence of service is more a matter of collegial cooperation among many people than a matter of hard-hitting analysis. It does not aggressively seek customers; rather, it receives them warmly and surrounds them with nurturing concern. In contrast, an automobile salesperson pursues his prospect with zeal and energy (yang), manipulating the customer’s ambitions and anxieties. The better that he is able to penetrate into the prospect’s psyche the greater the likelihood of a sale. Similarly, different departments within the same organization will vary in their yin–yang requirements. Marketing needs to be more aggressive whereas HRM needs to be more nurturing and people oriented.

In the long run, however, it is the balance between the yin and yang that is the condition for high levels of performance. The yin qualities in an organization’s culture (people-orientation, team orientation, and stability) provide the nurturing foundation which enables the yang energies to push forward and bend the environment to its will. Perhaps the clearest statement of this insight came from the investigation of Japanese management practices in the 80s when Pascale and Athos (1981) concluded that excellent organizations balance the hard Ss (strategy, structure and systems) with the soft Ss (style, skills, staff, and superordinate goals.) Most American organizations in their sample devoted considerable energy to the hard Ss (yang) but tended to neglect the soft Ss (yin); the higher effectiveness of many Japanese organizations was attributed to a better balance between the two sets of variables. Strategy, structure and systems are the active, doing mode of organizational management – choosing goals and designing an (aggressive) set of plans to achieve them, organizing resources into dynamic patterns to produce designed outcomes. In all of this,

the purpose is to guide action, to signal to employees what they should do. Style, skills, and staff refer to what the organization is, the being mode, the ground from which strategy, structure and systems emerge and by which the yang is nurtured. Superordinate goals spell out the organization's values, what it is and wishes to be. Without the sense of a larger purpose for the organization's existence that Superordinate goals provide, the productive and creative energies of organization members are not synergistic – without yin, yang cannot be productive.

Leadership

The literature on leadership is dominated by the notion of a balance between yang and yin. "The case for a two-dimensional view of leader behavior can be traced back to the late 1940s" (Robbins, 2000, p. 448). Effective leaders, in context-independent theories, blend task orientation – yang – with people orientation (yin), initiating structure with consideration. Effective leaders operate in the yang mode when they exhibit the "take charge" qualities of "defining and structuring group-member work assignments" (Robbins, 2000, p. 448) and push for the accomplishment of goals. They exhibit yin qualities when they nurture employees and promote harmonious interpersonal relationships, when they make room for emotional fragility in the workplace and show empathy for subordinate feelings and moods, even if these are patently "irrational" and organizationally irrelevant.

Which of these styles is effective? Blake and Mouton (Robbins, 2000, p. 449) insist that the 9,9 or balanced style is superior, and have counseled and trained thousands of managers to adopt this approach. But if this universalistic idea is unpalatable, we still find, in the contingency or situational theories, confirmation of the idea that the required yin–yang balance varies from one situation to another. When the context is characterized by a predominance of yin attributes – just being there, no clarity or structure – a task oriented, yang, take charge or "hard" style is called for. When the situation is suffused with yang attributes – rational procedures exist to accomplish the task, authority relationships are clear, the leader is perceived to be strong – a yin

or relationship oriented style is more effective. Since no situation is unambiguously one or the other, the key task of the leader is to discern the yin–yang balance in the situation and respond with the appropriate emphasis: an imposing, take charge style when yin energy predominates, and a soft, "feminine" style when the situation is mostly yang. "Task-oriented [yang] leadership leads to greater employee satisfaction when tasks are ambiguous [yin] than when they are highly structured; people-oriented [yin] styles result in high performance and satisfaction when subordinates are performing structured [yang] tasks." (Robbins, 2000, p. 458). And again: "Subordinates with an external locus of control [that is, dominated by yin essence; see above] will be more satisfied with a directive [yang] style." (Robbins, 2000, p. 458).

How much participation from subordinates should a leader invite? Vroom-Yetton is a good example of the principle that the required yin–yang balance varies from situation to situation. The five options vary precisely in the proportions of yang and yin: from a yang dominated autocratic style to full participation, in which the leader literally throws the decision into the laps of the subordinates. The questions the model asks to determine the most effective style are means to determine the yin–yang balance in the situation. Does commitment in subordinates need to be nurtured? If yes, more participation is called for, more yin is needed. Is the problem well structured – does it embody the benefit of having been previously subjected to analysis, to yang energies? The whole process of following the flow chart is an evaluation of the yin–yang balance in the situation, which then points to the yin–yang balance the leader's behavior must exhibit. Leaders are effective when they balance yang and yin and when they compensate for imbalances between the two in the situations they encounter.

Motivation

The interplay between yin and yang is evident at the root of popular theories of motivation. For example, Maslow (Robbins, 2000, p. 408) proposes a hierarchy of needs. Lower order needs represent yang, since they have an external, "materialistic" focus: food, water, shelter are necessary to nurture the

body and call for reaching out into the environment to acquire the necessary objects. Higher order needs have a yin, internal focus: esteem needs and self-actualization have more to do with nurturing the spirit and call for a certain state of being rather than actions involving manipulation of the environment. The direction and intensity of motivation should be determined, from the Taoist viewpoint, by the dynamic interplay and balance between the yang needs and yin needs. It is worthwhile to note that Maslow's suggestion that lower-order needs must be satisfied before higher-order needs become operative has not been supported by research. In contrast, Alderfer suggests (Robbins, 2000, p. 410) that yang needs (existence, growth) and yin needs (relatedness, growth) operate simultaneously. Alderfer also suggests that the frustration of higher-order or yin needs prompts demands for greater satisfaction of yang needs. As the Taoist perspective would suggest, however, this does not produce harmony but a (dysfunctional) focus on lower-order needs such as pay and benefits.

Henry Murray's theory of manifest needs includes the idea of an interaction between the yin and yang composition of the person with the yin-yang characteristics of the environment. Needs "are activated by cues from an individual's environment. So an employee with a high need for achievement would pursue that need only when the environmental conditions were appropriate" (Robbins, 2000, p. 410). Similarly, McClelland's needs again fall neatly into yin (affiliation) and yang (achievement and power) categories.

Theory X assumptions would lead managers to an over-emphasis on yang style of management, while a theory Y manager would take a more nurturing, yin attitude. Equity theory posits a balance between what one does (yang) with what one receives from the environment (yin). If what one does is not commensurate with what one receives, in comparison to other actors in the environment, feelings of inequity are created and action may be taken to restore the yin-yang balance. The equitable yin-yang balance is a function of the yin-yang balance experienced by others. Finally, expectancy theory suggests an interaction between yang perceptions of self-efficacy (effort-performance expectancy, "I can do this") with the rewarding, yin qualities of the work environment (performance-reward expectancy).

Conclusions and directions for future research

This paper seeks to suggest the universality of ancient principles of Taoism by applying just one such principle to the field of Organization Behavior. It is thus an exploratory conceptual effort, not intended to be comprehensive in terms of either Taoism or Organization Behavior. There may be other aspects of Taoism that may provide insights into Organization Behavior, and there may be many other aspects of Organization Behavior that could be usefully viewed from Taoist perspectives. This paper has illustrated the potential of applying a yin-yang perspective to a few concepts assumed to be of enough validity that they are included in introductory textbooks in Management and Organization Behavior. It has revealed the presence of a yin-yang dynamic implicit in many of these concepts. It has illustrated the power of interpreting existing theories through the yin-yang dichotomy by suggesting new ways of looking at these concepts. It has suggested a general principle of yin-yang balance as an essential dynamic for performance and harmony in a wide variety of contexts. This may prove to be a useful general guide for managerial problem solving: evaluate the yin and yang elements in the situation and design a response to address the dynamic balance between the two. Additionally, this general principle provides a new approach for the evaluation of existing concepts as well as the development of new concepts.

Future research opportunities are vast. This paper has sacrificed depth for breadth of coverage: each concept discussed somewhat cursorily above can be subjected to a thorough Taoist analysis. The ideas suggested here can be extended to explore other concepts and theories in Organization Behavior but also in Management and Organization studies generally. For example, organization structure concepts of differentiation and integration mirror almost perfectly the accommodation-assimilation discussion above: differentiation is yang and integration is yin. The need for differentiation arises as a response to a change in the yin-yang balance in the environment. The organization makes an assimilation to the challenges provided by the environment – a new position is created or a new set of problem solving procedures tagged on to the existing set. Differentiation in turn creates a need for integration – the ad hoc solutions must be accommodated and absorbed into the fabric

of the organization. As another example, decision making requires rational analysis (yang) but also needs to be balanced by intuition (yin).

In contexts where dysfunction exists, the general principles suggested here can provide a diagnostic framework, since according to Taoism dysfunction is usually a symptom of a yin–yang imbalance. Development and refinement of empirical verification of the yin–yang concepts is an urgent need if these ideas are to prove useful. New theories can be subjected to the analysis suggested in this paper to evaluate validity and suggest refinements. Finally, the yin–yang perspective can be used as a starting point for the creation of new concepts and theories.

Taoism contains many ideas other than yin–yang, so another avenue for further research can come from exploring Taoism more comprehensively. Even the yin–yang perspective presented here is incomplete: for example, Taoism suggests that yin contains the seed of yang and yang contains the seed of yin. That is, yang can give rise to yin and vice-versa. The application of this idea could yield further insights even from the limited number of concepts reviewed here. The Taoist perspective is perhaps ideally suited for cross-disciplinary studies and theory building, since it points to processes supposedly fundamental to all natural phenomenon. Finally, Taoism shares many concepts with many other spiritual and cultural traditions. The *shiva-shakti* duality in Hinduism, for example, is identical in many respects with yin–yang. The explorations of these connections and the cross-cultural similarities and contrasts in organizations can provide rich and fascinating insights.

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