

# CORPORATE YOGA

## *A Primer for Sustainable and Humanistic Leadership*



Shiv Tripathi  
Wolfgang Amann

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# FOREWORD

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As globally active scholars and advisors, we have been working towards more sustainable leadership practices and management education for years. We have jointly been actively involved in United Nations-sponsored initiatives on PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education) and have delivered numerous faculty development workshops in a variety of countries. With this book, we aim to take all contributions a step further.

Over the years, we have seen both the untapped potential as well as the stark limitations that traditional leadership books, along with currently dominating approaches to leadership development, have. Many of our societal and corporate problems have become global changes. We seek to contribute to the leadership development debate by an invitation: to henceforth also search globally for inspiration on how to address challenges.

With corporate yoga, we present a fresh and new solution to a number of leadership and sustainability dilemmas. In our view, corporate yoga has significant potential to overcome many of the shortcomings we currently encounter in corporations, business schools, and universities.

By transferring insights from yogic thinking into the corporate world, new solutions can be designed and executed in order to build more sustainable leadership in our corporations.

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During our journeys of discovery, we had the pleasure and honor to discuss our emerging thoughts with a number of corporate, political, and higher education leaders and experts. We are grateful for their time and constructive feedback.

We are equally grateful to HEC Paris and the Qatar Foundation for the generous research funding support we have received.

While concluding this work, we want to remember the contribution of a great thinker and scholar the late Ram Kumar Tripathi whose thoughts on yoga as a philosophy of ethical action constitute the foundation of the concept of Corporate Yoga. We also thank Prof. Rakesh Chandra Sharma, supervisor of a related doctoral work of one of the authors at Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidpyapith, Varanasi.

We are also grateful to our publisher, IAP, for this new opportunity to cooperate, and to Ilse Evertse and her associates for their editing support in helping us finalize this book. (Needless to say, all errors and omissions are for the authors' accounts.)

Our thanks to our wives, Anita Tripathi and Shibani Khan, and our families, for their ongoing support.

*Prof. Shiv Tripathi and Prof. Wolfgang Amann, May 2017*

## CHAPTER 1

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# WHY WE NEED YOGIC CORPORATE ACTION

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### AN EYE-OPENING RECENT EXAMPLE

Albert Einstein once stated that we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. Yet, we seem to hold onto many of the more or less harmful practices in companies and business schools that contributed to the crises and signs of unsustainability we encounter internationally. Is it not the time to hit the reset button—to fundamentally rethink leadership practices and educational foundations? One recent example, among many (unfortunately), has been Volkswagen. Although caught in the act with clear, objective hard evidence, the company has been trying to deny or downplay any wrongdoings when installing illegal engine software that reported lower than de facto emissions of many offered diesel models. As a result, authorities and buyers thought more environmentally friendly and economical cars were in use than is in fact the case.

“We did not lie...”<sup>1</sup>, claimed Volkswagen CEO Matthias Muller; the company just installed a software that was not legal, he tried to say. For years, the company

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/11/462682378/we-didnt-lie-volkswagen-ceo-says-of-emissions-scandal](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/11/462682378/we-didnt-lie-volkswagen-ceo-says-of-emissions-scandal)

thought it could only reach its strategic goal of becoming global number one in the industry by cheating and misinforming authorities and customers. There is increasing evidence that other industry players had similar deceitful initiatives in place.<sup>2</sup>

Over months, the total number of fines and payments for out-of-court settlements have increased drastically. Some predictions of the scandal's repercussions said \$20 billion, others \$18 billion. Others, in turn, even saw the company as a whole as endangered. Investigations have revealed that the scandal was not masterminded and implemented by a small group of two to three people alone. First arrests took place and numerous leaders, managers, and engineers already had to leave the job.

This surprising and expensive scandal revealed a number of gaps. First, there is a gap between the fleshy sustainability reports and reality. Thus, there is a gap between words and actions. Second, there seems to be a gap between the company's strategy and the purpose companies ought to fulfill in society. The expected deliverables go beyond being a vehicle that generates shareholder value. We need companies that we can rely on and can trust. We need companies that don't try to get away with sneaky, deceitful behaviors and illegal software but that do the right thing even when not scrutinized during every second of their existence.

Third, there is a gap between the belief that a company as important and famous as Volkswagen could get away with such practices on one side and the cut-throat industry rivalry, attentive media scene and regulating as well as controlling government authorities. It was not only irresponsible, but also almost delusional to believe that such practices would go unnoticed and, once discovered, would lead to anything less than massive repercussions, such as defecting customers, lawsuits, and large fines.

More importantly, however, this example is evidence of a massive gap between current leadership practices and the ways leaders ought to behave, based on significantly different values. This brings us to the core purpose of this book. Corporate strategies have widened the scope. They understand the world as a global chessboard on which companies move the pieces. Companies allocate resources internationally to build new chains and webs around the world. Yet, have we developed the best executive education instruments and practices to render the leaders fit for such tasks? Let us not forget that executive education is now a global, \$14 billion industry in the US alone.<sup>3</sup> Have business schools provided the concepts, seminars, and armies of graduates who can help organizations achieve better, more sustainable goals in more acceptable ways?

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/innovations/wp/2017/01/12/epa-fiat-chrysler-used-software-to-cheat-on-emissions-tests/>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. McNulty, E. (2017). *Leadership development's epic fail*. Retrieved from [http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/leadership-developments-epic-fail/?utm\\_source=Publicaster&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Gen+5%2f2%2f17+-+Epic+Fail&utm\\_content=Leadership+Development%E2%80%99s+Epic+Fail](http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/leadership-developments-epic-fail/?utm_source=Publicaster&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Gen+5%2f2%2f17+-+Epic+Fail&utm_content=Leadership+Development%E2%80%99s+Epic+Fail)