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## Vision-based leadership: the answer to the fast changing retail industry in Thailand?

### Abstract

Leaders are widely exhorted to espouse vision, but very little is known about how effective visions are characterized and realized. Extending previous research, the present study tests a proposed vision theory in Thai apparel retailers, taking into consideration effects from vision communication, organizational alignment and motivation of staff.

Visions characterized by brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability and desirability or ability to inspire are directly predictive of enhanced customer satisfaction and indirectly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction. Such visions and their being communicated are directly predictive of increased motivating behavior among store managers, in turn positively affecting staff and customer satisfaction. Organizational alignment is indirectly predictive of enhanced staff and customer satisfaction.

**Keywords:** visionary leadership, vision, vision communication, organizational alignment, motivation.

**JEL Classification:** M12.

### Introduction

The Thai retail industry is an industry of change because competition gets tougher with unexpected and uncontrollable negative factors (e.g. higher fuel prices, escalating violence in the largely Muslim South and political uncertainty) that continue hurting the economy and consumer confidence (Economic Review Year-End, 2006). Sales of almost all retail operators retreated to single-digit growth after staying in double digits every year since the 1997 Asian economic crisis. Alternative selling channels (kiosks, homeshopping, internet retailing, service stations, vending and direct selling have also been introduced (Euromonitor International, 2006). Given the rapidly changing context, some retailers have gone completely out of the industry, while others have been taken over in recent years.

What kind of leadership is appropriate for Thai retail managers in such a time of change? To many scholars, vision-based leadership is recommended for organizations to remain competitive in the fast changing world (Avery, 2004; Bass, 1990; Conger, 1991; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Tichy and Devanna, 1986). In particular, vision is viewed as crucial in a time of change that can become quite disorienting and confusing for some organizational members because vision, as a navigator, is seen to possess potent orienting capacities (Davis and Meyer, 1998). It plays a key role in providing a connection to a sense of purpose and meaning greater than oneself, and can serve as a beacon of inspiration during the time of change and disruption.

Although vision-based leadership has been extensively studied, research on vision itself has generally focused on four aspects: development, articulation, communication, and implementation (e.g. Nanus,

1992; Quigley, 1993; Robbins and Duncan, 1988; Sashkin, 1992; Wall, Solum, and Sobol, 1992; Westley and Mintzberg, 1989). Little research has examined what constitutes a vision and how its components might simultaneously affect organizational performance, a missing area that is important to enhancing organizational effectiveness for both scholars and practicing managers. This indicates a room for the present study.

Since vision-based leadership was endorsed in the Thai culture (Den Hartog et al., 1999) and the impact of vision and how it is realized have been little investigated in the Thai retail sector, a structural model, relating theorized vision and vision realization factors to leadership outcomes of customer and staff satisfaction, is developed and tested in Thai retail stores. Relevant literature, hypotheses, methodology, findings and managerial implications are discussed.

### 1. Vision and attributes

Despite its apparent importance, vision is still not defined in an agreed upon manner. It is frequently confused with, or even deliberately combined with, mission, goals, strategy, values and organizational philosophy (Kantabutra and Avery, 2002). In Lip-ton's (1996) view, for example, mission was defined as the purpose of an organization, strategy as a basic approach to achieving the mission, and culture as the values of an organization that support purpose and strategy. Other scholars stated that vision needs to come first in order to subsequently drive development of mission and strategy (e.g. Hay and Williamson, 1997; Parikh and Neubauer, 1993; Zaccaro and Banks, 2004). In their view, vision, mission and strategy are three separable components. In addition, vision is also seen as closely related to organizational goals and strategy (e.g. Levin, 2000; Schoemaker, 1992). Adopting a practical approach, Baum,

Locke and Kirkpatrick (1998) defined “vision” as whatever each leader defines it, given that it is the leader’s actual vision that guides his/her choices and actions. Given that each leader develops a vision in his/her own way, either rationally and objectively, or intuitively and subjectively (Nanus, 1992), it is unrealistic to expect visions to conform to a standard definition. More recently, Mumford and Strange (2005) suggest that vision is ultimately a cognitive construction or a mental model, a conceptual representation used both to understand system operations and guide actions within the system. Therefore, a vision is operationally defined in the present study as *a mental model that each store manager defines*, given that it is the store manager’s actual mental model that guides his/her choices and actions.

In terms of what constitutes vision, many leadership authors (e.g. Locke et al., 1991; Baum et al., 1998) have proposed different attributes for effective vision. However, none has fully explained how such vision creates an impact on organizations. In his quest for effective vision, Kantabutra (2003) has proposed a vision theory which fills in the gap among the prevailing vision-based leadership theories (Bass, 1990; Conger, 1989; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Tichy and Divanna, 1986; Westley and Mintzberg, 1989) by asserting that seven vision attributes of brevity, clarity, future orientation, stability, challenge, abstractness and desirability or ability to inspire interact to affect overall organizational performance initially through the attributes’ interactive effects on organizational members.

According to Kantabutra’s (2003) vision theory, a brief vision alone will not create a significant impact on overall performance because it may not be clear to followers as to what is required to be done to foster change, or it may not challenge the followers to do their best. A clear vision alone will not create a significant positive impact on follower satisfaction because it may be too lengthy, making it difficult for a leader to articulate it frequently. A vision may be too concrete, specific and not abstract, thus making it difficult for the leader to form effective teams across the organization to carry out the vision. Moreover, abstractness reflects stability in the vision because it implies no drastic change over time, positively affecting follower satisfaction. An unstable vision can suggest to followers a lack of managerial integrity and commitment to the vision. An abstract vision also allows followers to use their individually creative interpretations to guide their work, enhancing their self-esteem and satisfaction. A brief, clear, abstract, challenging, and stable vision will not draw follower commitment in working toward the vision unless it is desirable or has an

ability to inspire. Undesirable vision is an obstacle to develop a shared vision. An inspiring vision that is only clear, brief, abstract, challenging, and stable will have no power to attract affective commitment from followers because it does not offer a perspective of a better future. Without a view of better future, followers are unlikely to be drawn from where they presently are to work towards the vision.

More recent research has endorsed Kantabutra’s (2003) vision theory as Kantabutra and Avery (2007) found in their study of Australian retail stores that visions that were not characterized by all seven attributes rendered no significant effect on leadership outcomes of staff and customer satisfaction. In a search for an effective leadership approach, the present study tests Kantabutra’s vision theory in the fast changing Thai retail industry. It is anticipated that in combination the seven vision attributes would enhance the effectiveness of vision. Moreover, vision must be realized in various ways, the topic of the following section.

## 2. Realizing vision

Once an effective vision is developed, the vision must be *communicated*, followers must be *motivated* to carry out the vision, and organization arrangements must be *re-aligned* to allow followers to work toward the vision. Each theme and how a theorized effective vision plays a role in it are discussed in detail below.

**2.1. Vision communication.** Visionary leaders communicate their visions to promote changes and broaden support. Vision communication has been emphasized throughout the leadership literature as a key to successful implementation of a vision (e.g. Avery, 2004; Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Conger and Kanungo, 1987). How do these leaders communicate their visions? Leaders must communicate their visions in ways that reach out to organization members, gripping them at heart and making them want to get involved in carrying out the visions (Sashkin, 1985). In doing so, they must focus attention, communicate personally, demonstrate trustworthiness, display respect, and take risks. Although many ways of communicating vision exist, visions continue to be communicated predominantly in the traditional form of brief, highly elevated vision statements (Larwood et al., 1995).

Effective visions help to facilitate the vision communication process. Followers can understand a brief vision message more quickly than a lengthy one (Downs and Conrad, 1978). More critically, a brief vision allows for massive, continuing, frequent communication which is needed for a vision to be successful (e.g. Kotter, 1995; Yukl, 1998). A top

manager needs to communicate a vision frequently to people at all organizational levels to gain support from organizational members so that change can be successfully initiated (Witherspoon, 1997). In his/her attempt to frequently communicate a vision, a manager needs to speak about the vision briefly and concisely so that employees can grasp the message immediately. Employees can then use the brief vision to guide daily operations, critical in enhancing their satisfaction. Satisfied employees, in turn, create satisfied customers (Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 1997). Lending support to this view, speaking about brief and concise messages was reported as most important for effective subordinates who were doing what they were supposed to be doing (Downs and Conrad, 1978). When the subordinates continuously receive the vision message, and genuinely desire to achieve it, they are likely to do their best within their roles and responsibilities to make it a reality (e.g. Kotter, 1995; Yukl, 1998).

Similarly, a clear vision of what an organization could accomplish or become helps employees understand the purpose, objectives, and priorities of the organization (Yukl, 1998), particularly in today's often-dispersed organization in which a top manager needs to communicate to make sure employees down the line are guided by the same vision. A vision should be unambiguous enough to serve as a guide to strategy and action, and to be internalized by those whose efforts are needed to turn the vision into reality (Nanus, 1992). Clear messages were also reported as most important for effective subordinates (Downs and Conrad, 1978), because they then could do what they were supposed to be doing.

Vision communication in this present study is operationally defined as the extent to which a store manager was perceived by his/her staff to communicate his/her vision through (a) *spoken*, (b) *written*, and (c) *technology-mediated* channels.

**2.2. Motivation of followers.** Visionary leaders motivate their followers to implement their visions, particularly in times of difficulty (e.g. Awamleh and Gardner, 1999). They motivate and communicate, the process that requires social skills, trust, a focus on results, and other conditions for a highly spirited organization (Maciariello, 2006). The process also includes providing equitable rewards that balance the merits of the individual with the needs and stability of the group. In general, motivation comes from people decisions, job design, high expectations for performance, and sound decisions on compensation and rewards (Maciariello, 2006). More specifically, visionary leaders increase people's expectations about the relationship between their efforts and

accomplishments particularly when followers meet the leader's high expectations. In doing so, followers' perceived self-efficacy, a strong source of motivation (Bandura, 1986), is enhanced.

Effective visions help to motivate followers in various ways. Vagueness or abstractness in a vision suggests a longer-lasting goal, and thus a longer-lasting organization which is desirable for followers (Canetti, 1960). Abstractness can also be more inclusive of all organizational interests, and therefore allows for individually-creative interpretations (Tarnow, 1997). Motivating followers, the individually-creative interpretations permit them considerable autonomy and discretion in their work decisions, and use of the vision to guide their actions and decisions, given that considerable autonomy and discretion in employees' work were said to be important in visionary organizations (Collins and Porras, 1994).

Challenging visions also help to motivate followers. The greater the discrepancy between a vision and its organization's status quo, i.e. the more challenging the vision, the more likely is the attribution that the leader has an extraordinary vision, not just an ordinary goal (Conger, 1999), and the more likely followers are to attribute extraordinary vision to the leader (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). By presenting a very discrepant and idealized vision, a leader provides his/her followers with a sense of difficulty and challenge, and a motivating force for change (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). This is because a maximum discrepant position within the latitude of acceptance puts the greatest amount of pressure on followers to change their attitudes (Hovland and Pritzker, 1957; Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). Since vision represents a perspective from the leader, and his/her hopes and aspirations, it tends to be within the latitude of acceptance, notwithstanding the extreme discrepancy. By having a challenging vision, followers will also be able to raise their self-esteem in their attempt to achieve the vision (Gecas and Seff, 1990), which in turn motivates and satisfies the followers (i.e. Maslow, 1943).

In addition, effective visions also motivate followers by inspiring them with a better future. Endorsing the concept of future-oriented vision, Bennis and Nanus (1985) reported that all of the effective leaders in their study had a vision of a desirable and possible future for their organization. This report makes much sense because a vision has no power to inspire people or attract commitment unless it offers a view of the future which is clearly better for the organization, the followers, and/or the society in which the organization operates (Nanus, 1992). A desirable or inspiring vision in turn motivates followers and draws their affective commitment to achieving or

ganizational goals, in turn affecting overall productivity, because inspiration is a form of motivation (Morden, 1997). In addition, an inspiring vision creates a spark of excitement that lifts the organization out of the mundane (Parikh and Neubauer, 1993), nurturing a more pleasant workplace for followers. This in turn enhances follower satisfaction. Leaders need to make sure that their followers know why their jobs are important (Morden, 1997). Inspiring visions are seen as the best way to help to motivate the followers to grasp the meaning and outcome of their work (Morden, 1997). When followers see the meaning and outcome of their work, they will be more satisfied, and thus frequently more productive.

Additionally, vision is widely recognized as a tool for leaders. By communicating an unstable vision, a leader is perceived as inconsistent, something which outstanding leaders should not do because outstanding leaders do not “flip-flop” on positions but stand firm, having once taken a position (Bennis, 1984; Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Consistent behavior also reflects leadership’s integrity (e.g. Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Locke et al., 1991). Numerous studies (e.g. Bass, 1990; Kotter, 1988) found that effective leaders were consistently viewed as credible and outstandingly trustworthy. A manager’s integrity is, therefore, critical because employees recognize very soon the extent to which a manager really stands behind the vision, not only within his/her mind, but also with his/her heart (Parikh and Neubauer, 1993). By expressing an unstable vision, the manager’s integrity can be questioned by employees. The moment employees start doubting the seriousness of the manager toward implementing the vision, cynicism is invariably the consequence (Parikh and Neubauer, 1993), negatively affecting their morale.

Motivation in this study is operationally defined as the extent to which a store manager was perceived by his/her staff to (a) *act as a role model* for staff, (b) *build staff self confidence*, (c) *create challenges* for staff, and (d) *reward* staff who act consistently with his/her vision.

**2.3. Organizational alignment.** Visionary leaders align organizational systems to support their visions (e.g. Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Locke et al., 1991; Nanus, 1992). These organizational systems include, for instance, the recruiting system, a teamwork focus, reward strategy, performance evaluation and job design. They alter existing organizational infrastructure to suit their visions because it is seen as critical to achieving their strategy (e.g. Priem and Rosenstein, 2000). The organization infrastructure should allow decisions to be made at the lowest

level possible, consistent with minimizing the number of people that must be consulted to make decisions (Maciariello, 2006). Structuring is also said to be a core leadership task. Effective leadership must ensure that its organization’s structure supports its strategy (Locke, 2003). Such an alignment frees energies which up to then may have been consumed by internal friction and political infighting. Indeed, the process of developing vision and strategies, aligning relevant people behind those strategies, and empowering individuals to make the vision happen, despite obstacles, is seen as leadership (Kotter, 1999).

Visionary leaders tend to reshape social contexts in many ways to suit their vision. Many do it especially through their decisions and commitments about the following: (a) who they choose to assign to groups and tasks; (b) the amount and types of resources and support services they make available to work groups; (c) the design of incentive systems; (d) the way jobs are structured and allocated among workgroups; (e) the choice of people to head the teams; and (f) the goals and expectations associated with each organizational unit (Nanus, 1992). Together, the vision and the contexts help to direct the energies of the people toward a common goal, to build a shared commitment to the vision, and to empower people to act to make its attainment possible.

Strategic management scholars have also long proposed a connection between organizational alignments and performance (e.g. Miles and Snow, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979). Ideally, organizational systems should be internally consistent with a vision (e.g. Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Locke et al., 1991; Nanus, 1992), while simultaneously fitting the external environment facing the organization (Mintzberg, 1979). The fit, between the organizational systems and orientation of an organization with the various external variables, and the predispositions of its members, affects organizational performance (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967).

In order to realign organizational systems and shape social context effectively, the future direction or the prime goal in a vision must be clear. When a vision is clear, decisions about the alignment of such organizational systems as identifications of markets, performance evaluation criteria, job assignments, budget priority and resource allocations will also be effective. As mentioned earlier, clear messages were reported as most important for effective subordinates (Downs and Conrad, 1978), because they then could do what they were supposed to be doing. Since a vision is seen as a manager’s base for organizational realignment (e.g. Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985), a vision which changes dramatically over time negatively affects on-going implementa-

tion of the vision and employee satisfaction. Many activities which are being implemented toward achieving the previous vision will be suspended, wasting organizational resources and efforts. Unstable visions also bring about confusion among employees who are working toward a vision, eventually leading to poor employee satisfaction, productivity, profitability and overall organizational performance.

Organizational alignment in this study is operationally defined as the extent to which a store manager (a) *reassigned his/her staff* as needed to support his/her new vision, and (b) *set up new staff evaluation criteria* according to the new vision.

### 3. Leadership outcomes

Without suggesting that they exhaustively explain overall organizational performance, *customer and employee satisfaction* are adopted in the present study as two leadership outcomes. Applied studies have shown that a supervisor's leadership style is related to the job satisfaction of subordinates (Bass, 1985). Indeed, employees were more satisfied under visionary leadership than under other leadership styles (Bass, 1985). More relevantly, adopting employee satisfaction as a leadership outcome is consistent with Kantabutra (2003)'s vision theory which asserts that visions characterized by the seven attributes positively influence overall organizational performance initially through employees.

Employee satisfaction is also regarded as being closely related to customer satisfaction, another measure of leadership outcome. Numerous publications suggest that employee satisfaction leads to satisfied customers (e.g. Atchison, 1999; Faye and Diane, 1995), simply because customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction develops when a customer comes in contact with an employee of a company (Evans and Lindsay, 1996). Endorsing this view, recent marketing research found that satisfied employees had a positive impact on customer satisfaction (e.g. Homburg and Stock, 2005; Kantsperger and Kunz, 2005).

Customer satisfaction in the present study is operationally defined as the extent to which a customer was satisfied with (1) *availability of employees for information and advice*, (2) *friendliness of employees*, (3) *overall decoration of store*, (4) *presentation of goods*, (5) *cleanliness of the store*, (6) *quality of goods*, (7) *richness of choice*, (8) *waiting time for checkout*, (9) *methods of payment*, (10) *price labeling*, (11) *availability of special offers and sales*, (12) *shopping hours*, (13) *prices*, and (14) *shelf/rack layout* (Hackl, Scharitzer and Zuba, 2000).

Employee satisfaction is operationally defined in the present study as the extent to which an employee

was satisfied with (1) *dollar remuneration*, (2) *fringe benefits*, (3) *autonomy* (job-related independence, initiative, and freedom), (4) *task requirements* (job activities that must be done), (5) *organizational policies*, (6) *interaction* (formal/informal, social and professional contact at work), (7) *professional status*, (8) *quality of supervision*, (9) *colleagues*, (10) *recognition of success*, and (11) *career advancement* (Slavitt, Stamps, Piedmont and Hasse, 1986).

### 4. Structural model

Since relationships among vision and realization factors above are not yet well understood, Figure 1 depicts a structural model, derived from the literature review. Effective visions characterized by the seven attributes are postulated to directly create an impact on vision communication and motivation of staff. Motivation of staff is then postulated to create a direct impact on staff satisfaction. Vision communication is also postulated to impact staff satisfaction *directly* and *indirectly* through motivation of staff. Similarly, organizational alignment is postulated to impact staff satisfaction *directly*. Staff satisfaction is postulated to create a direct effect on customer satisfaction.

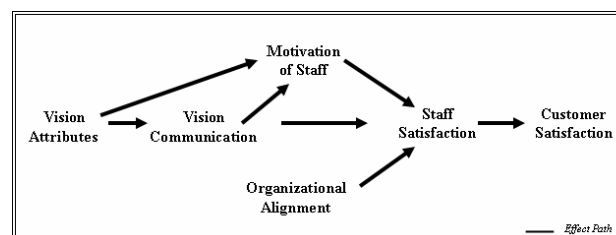


Fig. 1. Structural model linking vision and realization factors – leadership outcomes

Based on the structural model, the following hypotheses are advanced. Since the literature continues pointing out the positive impact of vision-based leadership on performance, directional hypotheses are adopted in the present study.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Vision attributes is indirectly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Vision communication is directly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: Organizational alignment is directly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.*

*H<sub>4</sub>: Motivation of staff is directly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.*

*H<sub>5</sub>: Vision attributes is associated with enhanced vision communication.*

*H<sub>6</sub>: Vision attributes is directly predictive of enhanced motivation of staff.*

*H<sub>7</sub>: Vision communication is directly predictive of enhanced motivation of staff.*

*H<sub>3</sub>: Staff satisfaction is directly predictive of enhanced customer satisfaction.*

## 5. Method

The sample is drawn from apparel stores in the Bangkok, Thailand, that sell brand-new, finished clothing products for individual use, excluding shoes and accessories. Both independent stores and those belonging to a parent company are sampled. All are located in a shopping mall and have their own identity, being in a clearly-defined walled area.

Twelve shopping centers in Bangkok major shopping areas are selected. The major shopping areas are systematically chosen to eliminate human bias. In choosing, three shopping malls directories are consulted. Small shopping malls considered too small are eliminated. All qualifying stores in each centre are approached. Of these, 126 stores (88.7%) agree to participate, with 16 stores (11.3%) declining. From the participating stores, store managers, and up to half of each store's total staff members are interviewed. Based on the number of staff determined for each store, the same number of customers is also interviewed for each respective store. Store managers, staff and customer samples are opportunistic as they comprise those who are willing to participate in the study.

Store managers refer to full-time store employees who manage their own stores and are stationed there daily. The latter criterion is important because the study is interested in the effects of one manager's vision only. Staff are employees working under the store managers, and customers are individuals who are observed buying a product or service during the researcher's visit. If no customer is observed buying during the researcher's visit, the researcher returns later until the determined number of customers agrees to participate or three visits are made to the store. Two hundred and fifty one staff members and 258 customers are surveyed.

## 6. Data collection and analysis

Three separate questionnaires are used for store manager, staff and customer respondents. A nine-point ordinal scale underlay all questionnaire items measuring the six domains in Figure 1. Store managers, and their staff and customers are interviewed by three trained researchers. Response rates for staff and customers are 66.40% and 68.25% respectively. Those who refused are not reapproached.

The questionnaires are initially developed in English, and are translated into Thai for respondents by

a bilingual professional translator. The Thai questionnaires are translated back to English by a different bilingual professional translator to ensure face validity. The English translation is consistent with the original English version. The store manager questionnaire collects data on vision and organizational alignment, including demographic information, questions on the store manager's vision. Store managers are asked to describe their visions on a space provided. A vision is defined for them as a future envisioned for their stores and how they would like to see their stores develop in the future. Questions measuring vision communication and motivation are included in the staff questionnaire. Staff also respond to six components of job satisfaction based on criteria developed by Slavitt, Stamps, Piedmont, and Hasse (1986). The customer questionnaire collects data on 14 items measuring customer satisfaction with services at the store using criteria from Hackl, Scharitzer, and Zuba (2000).

Store manager vision statements are rated by three independent raters, using a 5-point ordinal scale, where 1 indicated absence of each vision attribute and 5 indicated strong presence of each vision attribute. While rating, each rater keeps referring to vision prototypes adapted from Baum et al. (1998). All inter-rater reliability values for vision attributes exceed 0.8, the criterion for acceptable reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Where managers report no vision, zeros are assigned to the vision attributes. It must be noted here that the present study addresses the vision rating limitation of prior studies by Baum et al. (1998) and Kantabutra (2003) by having staff respondents to indicate the extent to which their store managers' visions are inspiring and challenging. Doing so is more accurate than having outside independent raters to rate the two vision attributes since staff respondents know the status quo of their stores better.

Based on (a) Kantabutra (2003)'s vision theory which asserts that all seven attributes need to interact to enhance the vision effectiveness, and (b) the previous finding (Kantabutra and Avery, 2007) that vision attributes not characterized by all of the seven attributes rendered no significant effect on staff and customer satisfaction in Australian retail stores, all seven vision attributes scores are combined to form the Vision Attributes variable in the present study.

Combining scores of sub-variables to form each of the other independent measurement domain constructs is considered justified, because they are adjusted according to results of a confirmatory factor analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1. Communalities and rotated component matrix for vision communication, organizational alignment, and motivation. Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
v_com1	1.000	.681
v_com2	1.000	.850
V_com3	1.000	.879
v_org1	1.000	.842
v_org2	1.000	.838
v_mot1	1.000	.917
v_mot2	1.000	.931
v_mot3	1.000	.904

Note: extraction method: principal component A.

Rotated component matrix<sup>a</sup>

	Component		
	1	2	3
v_com1	.782		
v_com2		.856	
V_com3		.927	
v_org1			.903
v_org2			.905
v_mot1	.913		
v_mot2	.950		
v_mot3	.930		

Note: extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization. <sup>a</sup> Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

All factor loadings load at 0.7 or higher, but that of motivation item 4 which is dropped. Two theoretically assumed constructs are adjusted for the Thai sample set as follows. According to the factor analysis, the first vision communication item is more significantly related to the Motivation of Staff construct than the Vision Communication construct. Therefore, the first vision communication item of spoken communication is included in the Motivation of Staff construct. It can be explained that when store managers speak about their inspiring and challenging visions to their staff, the staff can be motivated.

As for the Organizational Alignment construct, both items of reassignment of staff as needed to support the new vision and setting up new staff evaluation criteria according to the new vision are combined to form the Organizational Alignment construct. Written and technology-mediated vision communication items are combined to form the Vision Communication construct.

As for the dependent variables of Customer and Staff Satisfaction constructs (see Table 2), customer satisfaction items 7 and 8 are dropped from the Customer Satisfaction construct because they do not load at 0.7 or above. Similarly, staff satisfaction items 3, 6, 8, and 9 are dropped from the Staff Satis-

faction construct because of the same reason. All remaining staff satisfaction items are combined to form the Staff Satisfaction construct.

Table 2. Communalities and component matrix for customer and staff satisfaction. Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
ssat1	1.000	.551
ssat2	1.000	.688
ssat4	1.000	.695
ssat5	1.000	.730
ssat7	1.000	.684
ssat10	1.000	.591
ssat11	1.000	.777
csat1	1.000	.561
csat2	1.000	.574
csat3	1.000	.783
csat4	1.000	.757
csat5	1.000	.672
csat6	1.000	.711
csat9	1.000	.535
csat10	1.000	.659
csat11	1.000	.618
csat12	1.000	.661
csat13	1.000	.605
csat14	1.000	.715

Note: extraction method: principal component A.

Rotated component matrix<sup>a</sup>

	Component	
	1	2
ssat1		.742
ssat2		.816
ssat4		.830
ssat5		.854
ssat7		.823
ssat10		.768
ssat11		.875
csat1	.734	
csat2	.744	
csat3	.881	
csat4	.870	
csat5	.817	
csat6	.843	
csat9	.725	
csat10	.804	
csat11	.771	
csat12	.813	
csat13	.777	
csat14	.845	

Note: extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser Normalization. <sup>a</sup> Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

After all of the adjustments and combinations, construct validity for all constructs is therefore sufficiently present.

Cronbach's alphas are employed to confirm the reliability of Vision Attributes, Vision Communica-

tion, Organizational Alignment, Motivation, and Customer and Staff Satisfaction variables (see Table 3). All variables indicate Cronbach's alpha values exceeding or close to 0.7, an acceptable reliability value (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha, and correlation values for major variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Attributes	Communication	Alignment	Motivation	St_sat	Cu_sat
Attributes	126	12.0413	10.52001	0.677	0.729(**)	0.911(**)	0.893(**)	0.210(*)	0.217(*)
Communication	126	4.9159	5.77585	0.729(**)	0.833	0.685(**)	0.840(**)	0.287(**)	0.184(*)
Alignment	126	9.3413	7.91572	0.911(**)	0.685(**)	0.811	.810(**)	0.188(*)	0.149
Motivation	126	14.8881	14.88387	0.893(**)	0.840(**)	0.810(**)	0.942	0.289(**)	0.204(*)
St_sat	126	43.819	11.09309	0.210(*)	0.287(**)	0.188(*)	0.289(**)	0.914	0.157
Cu_sat	126	83.0905	12.77099	0.217(*)	0.184(*)	0.149	0.204(*)	0.157	0.951

Since the literature consistently indicates that visionary leadership positively impacts leadership outcomes, one tailed tests are adopted at the 5% level of significance for testing Hypotheses 1-8. It must be noted that the reported significant values are for two-tailed tests. Therefore, they are halved for one-tailed tests in the present study.

### 7. Results

Store managers are with the stores for 12-18 months on average. Staff members work in their stores for an average of 18-24 months, indicating a high likelihood that all staff members must have been influenced by their store managers' leadership. Stores average 5.57 ( $\pm 2.8$ ) staff members. Of 126 stores, 77 (61%) store managers report having a vision for their store. Example vision statements are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Store manager "vision" statements

Example Store Manager Vision Statements		
	Thai (Original)	English
1	การตลาดต้องมีในเรื่องของโปรโมชั่น, การนำสินค้าให้ตรงกับสิ่งที่ต้องการอะไร, การบริการของพนักงานต้องยิ้มแย้มแจ่มใส, การทักทายลูกค้า และการจดจำลูกค้า เพื่อให้เกิดความเอาใจใส่ลูกค้า และเห็นความสำคัญของลูกค้า	Marketing must include promotion. Provide goods that customers want. Service with friendly staff who greet customers. Remember customers so that we can treat them well. See that customers are important.
2	อยากพัฒนาคุณภาพพนักงานด้านบริการให้ดียิ่งขึ้นไป และแบบสินค้าใหม่ตามแฟชั่น และร้านค้าที่สวยงาม	Want to develop quality of staff further. Fashionable goods. Beautiful store.
3	ต้องการสร้าง brand ให้เป็นที่ยอมรับของ consumer	Want our brand to be recognized by consumer.
4	อยากให้ร้านเป็นที่ยอมรับของลูกค้า และลูกค้ากลับมาซื้ออย่างสม่ำเสมอ	Want our store to be recognized by customers. Customers always come back to us for repeated purchase.
5	บริการลูกค้าที่เข้าภายในร้านอย่างเต็มที่ทุกคน ถามความต้องการของลูกค้าว่าต้องการสินค้าอะไร ติดต่อลูกค้าเมื่อมีสินค้าใหม่เข้ามาเพิ่ม	Best serve customers who visit the store. Ask which goods they want. Contact customers when there are new arrivals.
6	ขายได้วันละ 200,000 บาท	Make a sale of 200,000 baht per day.
7	ตั้งเป้าและทำให้ได้	Set a target and achieve it.
8	xact จะต้องเป็นสินค้าที่ทุกคนรู้จัก เป็นผู้นำแฟชั่นในด้านเสื้อผ้า อนาคตอาจจะไม่ได้มีแต่เสื้อผ้านับมา จะต้องมีรองเท้า xact เข็มขัด xact และมีอีกหลายอย่าง xact จะต้องเป็นเสื้อผ้านับมา ไม่ได้แต่ประเทศไทย จะต้องเป็นที่รู้จักของคนทั่วโลก	xact must be a product that everyone recognizes. Is a leader in fashionable clothing. In the future, there may not be only dresses but shoes and belt and etc. xact must be the leading apparel provider not only in Thailand, but it must be recognized by people around the world.

Averaged total scores and pooled standard deviations for the major dependent and independent variables are presented in Table 3 above.

In testing Hypotheses 1-8, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is considered. Since the sample

size of the present study does not meet the minimum sample size of 150 as required by SEM (Hair et al., 2006), the multiple regression analysis is instead adopted. It must be noted that a significant direct effect or significant direct relationship is defined in the present study as an effect from an observed in-

dependent variable that is still shown “significant” at  $p < 0.05$  when all other observed independent variables are simultaneously put into a regression analysis.

In testing Hypotheses 1-4, the regression results reveal no significant direct effects on Staff Satisfaction. However, Vision Attributes ( $p = 0.018, \beta = 0.21$ ), Vision Communication ( $p = 0.001, \beta = 0.287$ ), Organization Alignment ( $p = 0.035, \beta = 0.188$ ) and Motivation ( $p = 0.001, \beta = 0.289$ ) indirectly affect enhanced Staff Satisfaction. In testing Hypothesis 5, Vision Attributes is significantly associated with enhanced Vision Communication ( $p = 0.000, \beta = 0.729$ ).

In testing Hypotheses 6 and 7, the regression results reveal two direct significant effects from Vision Attributes and Vision Communication on enhanced Motivation of Staff (see Table 5).

Table 5. Regression table between vision attributes, vision communication, and motivation ( $R^2 = 0.872$ )

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Constant)	-.423	.723		-.585	.559
Attributes	.846	.066	.598	12.782	.000
Communication	1.042	.121	.404	8.645	.000

Note: <sup>a</sup> dependent variable: motivation.

In testing Hypothesis 8, the regression results reveal a direct, significant association between Vision Attributes and enhanced Customer Satisfaction (see Table 6). All other variables of Vision Communication ( $p = 0.040, \beta = 0.184$ ), Organizational Alignment ( $p = 0.096, \beta = 0.149$ ), Motivation ( $p = 0.022, \beta = 0.204$ ) and Staff Satisfaction ( $p = 0.080, \beta = 0.157$ ), are significantly, but indirectly associated with enhanced Customer Satisfaction.

Table 6. Regression table between vision attributes, vision communication, organizational alignment, motivation, staff satisfaction and customer satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.036$ )

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error			
1 (Constant)	75.020	4.731		15.858	
Attributes	.571	.340	.470	1.677	.096
Communication	.137	.363	.062	.378	.706
Alignment	-.467	.346	-.290	-1.352	.179
Motivation	-.057	.215	-.066	-.264	.792
St_sat	.131	.107	.114	1.227	.222

In conclusion (see Table 7), Hypotheses 2-4 are not supported while Hypothesis 1 is supported. Hy-

potheses 5, 6 and 7 are also supported, while Hypothesis 8 is not. Vision Attributes creates a direct effect on enhanced Customer Satisfaction, while Vision Attributes and Vision Communication are also directly predictive of improved Motivation of Staff. Vision Communication, Organizational Alignment, Motivation of Staff are indirect predictors of enhanced Customer and Staff Satisfaction, while Vision Attributes is an indirect predictor of enhanced Staff Satisfaction.

Table 7. Summary of hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Supported?
H <sub>1</sub> : Vision attributes is indirectly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.	Yes
H <sub>2</sub> : Vision communication is directly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.	No
H <sub>3</sub> : Organizational alignment is directly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.	No
H <sub>4</sub> : Motivation of staff is directly predictive of enhanced staff satisfaction.	No
H <sub>5</sub> : Vision attributes is associated with enhanced vision communication.	Yes
H <sub>6</sub> : Vision attributes is directly predictive of enhanced motivation of staff.	Yes
H <sub>7</sub> : Vision communication is directly predictive of enhanced motivation of staff.	Yes
H <sub>8</sub> : Staff satisfaction is directly predictive of enhanced customer satisfaction.	No

Discussion and conclusions

Visions characterized by the seven attributes indirectly predict improved Staff Satisfaction. Moreover, such visions are significantly associated with Vision Communication in the present study. It can be drawn at this point that the seven vision attributes create an impact on improved Staff Satisfaction through Vision Communication, and that the brief, clear, challenging, abstract, stable and desirable or inspiring attributes play a role in facilitating the vision communication process by the store managers. Clearly, Kantabutra’s vision theory (2003), asserting that the seven vision attributes affect overall organizational performance initially through the attributes’ interactive effects on organizational members, is supported. Since the present study only identifies significant relationships between Vision Attributes and improved Staff Satisfaction, how each vision attribute creates an impact on staff satisfaction is still largely unknown. Future research might want to qualitatively investigate this area.

Somewhat surprisingly, visions characterized by the seven attributes directly predict improved Customer Satisfaction, since the present study assumes that visions affect Customer Satisfaction indirectly through Staff Satisfaction. Therefore, future research may want to explore further how customers are directly affected by store manager visions, given that customer satisfaction is critical to overall store performance.

Vision Communication is an indirect predictor of enhanced Staff and Customer Satisfaction in the present study. Many previous studies (e.g. Howard and Bray, 1988; Kotter, 1995; Westley and Mintzberg, 1989) that found important relationships between vision communication and performance outcomes are endorsed by the present study since both staff and customer satisfaction are widely regarded as performance outcomes. Given the indirect, positive impact from Vision Communication on Staff Satisfaction, scholars (e.g. Awamleh and Gardner, 1999), who assert that visionary leaders link follower needs and values to a collective vision through a vision communication process to mobilize them to freely and willingly pursue the vision, are endorsed. It makes much sense because when a store manager communicates his/her vision to staff, staff will then try to do within their roles and responsibilities to turn the vision into reality, the process by which they can enhance their self-esteem. However, investigation is needed into how store managers communicate their visions, particularly in terms of message content and delivery.

In terms of Customer Satisfaction, it can be drawn that visions indirectly create an impact on improved customer satisfaction through staff satisfaction. This is because customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction develops when a customer comes in contact with an employee of a company (Evans and Lindsay, 1996). Since the delivery of service occurs during the interaction between contact employees and customers, the attitudes and behavior of contact employees can influence customer perceptions of the service. Supporting this view, recent research in marketing found that satisfied staff had a positive impact on customer satisfaction (e.g. Homburg and Stock, 2005; Kantsperger and Kunz, 2005).

Interestingly, Vision Attributes and Vision Communication are directly predictive of Motivation of Staff. This suggests that vision characterized by the seven vision attributes and written and technology-mediated communication could indeed directly, positively influence the extent to which store managers speak about his vision to staff, act as a role model for staff, build staff self confidence and create challenges for staff in Thai retail stores. Scholars suggest that vision is an important motivational tool for visionary leaders (Shamir, House and Arthur, 1993). Visionary leaders articulate the vision to make visionary goals seem very worthwhile achieving for their followers. Accordingly, store manager visions characterized by the seven attributes and their being communicated might have directly facilitated the motivation process, given that Kantabutra's vision theory (2003) asserts that the seven vision attributes improve vision effectiveness. In

particular, Vision Attributes and Vision Communication are significantly associated in the present study. As store managers communicate their vision through written and technology-mediated channels, they might also at the same time have motivated their staff by speaking about vision with staff, acting as a role model, building staff self confidence and challenging staff with challenging visionary goals. This needs further investigation.

Motivation of Staff is an indirect predictor of enhanced Staff and Customer Satisfaction in the present study. It is interesting that Motivation of Staff does not directly affect Staff Satisfaction, possibly because effects for the other variables of Vision Attributes, Organizational Alignment and Vision Communication might have overshadowed the Motivation effect. This leaves an area for future research. On the other hand, it is understandable that Motivation of Staff does not directly affect Customer Satisfaction. The indirect effect on Customer Satisfaction might have been created through Staff Satisfaction. Overall, scholars who assert that visionary leaders motivate their followers to implement their visions, particularly in times of change and difficulty, are endorsed by the present study (e.g. Awamleh and Gardner, 1999). More specifically, Maciariello (2006) who asserts that motivation comes from people decisions, job design, high expectations for performance, and sound decisions on compensation and rewards is also supported.

Organizational Alignment is indirectly predictive of enhanced Staff and Customer Satisfaction. When store managers reassign staff as needed to support their visions (i.e. reassigning friendly staff to welcome customers) and set up new performance evaluation criteria according to the visions, staff might have been more satisfied simply because they are reassigned jobs that are more suitable to them and are rewarded accordingly. Similarly, when both staff assignments and performance evaluation criteria are realigned with visions, customers might have been affected positively, indirectly through satisfied staff. Scholars (e.g. Priem and Rosenstein, 2000) who suggest that visionary leaders alter existing organizational infrastructure to suit their visions because it is seen as critical to achieving their strategy have gained support. Moreover, scholars (e.g. Kotter, 1999; Locke, 2003) who state that structuring is a core leadership task are supported. However, the process of aligning relevant staff behind their visions still needs more research.

Understandably, staff Satisfaction indirectly predicts enhanced Customer Satisfaction in the present study. This finding is supported by numerous publications which suggest that employee satisfaction

leads to satisfied customers (e.g. Atchison, 1999; Faye and Diane, 1995), simply because customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction develops when a customer comes in contact with an employee of a company (Evans and Lindsay, 1996). More specifically, recent marketing research which found that satisfied employees had a positive impact on customer satisfaction (e.g. Homburg and Stock, 2005; Kantsperger and Kunz, 2005) also endorses the finding in the present study.

### Managerial implications

The present study has endorsed vision-based leadership as an effective leadership approach for Thai retail managers to deal with the fast changing Thai retail industry. Clearly, Thai apparel store managers should espouse a vision. Their vision should be characterized by brevity, clarity, future orientation, abstractness, stability, challenge, desirability or ability to inspire. To improve staff and customer satisfaction, they should communicate their vision

via written and technology-mediated channels, and motivate their staff by speaking about their vision with staff, acting as a role model, building staff self-confidence, and challenging staff to do their jobs better. In addition, they should also reassign tasks to staff to suit their vision, and adjust staff performance evaluation criteria according to their vision.

Thai apparel store managers should specifically focus on crafting their visions to contain the seven vision attributes since visions characterized by brevity, clarity, challenge, abstractness, stability, desirability or ability to inspire and future orientation are a direct predictor of enhanced customer satisfaction. In particular, such a vision also increases the motivating behavior among store managers, in turn positively affecting both staff and customer satisfaction. Mastery of vision communication is also critical since vision communication also increases the motivating behavior among store managers, positively affecting both staff and customer satisfaction.

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