

The Contribution of Buddhist-Based Mindfulness Practices on Ethical Leadership: A Qualitative Study of Organizational Leaders in Thailand

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Abstract : Recent public ethical scandals in many organizations around the world have raised concern about organizational ethics, which have, in turn, made ethical behaviors and conducts on the part of leaders become more critical topics in organizational studies. However, current research on the benefits of mindfulness within the workplace contexts has predominantly focused on stress reduction and work performance enhancement, while the aspects of ethical behavior development have been far less investigated in mindfulness research in the organizational and management fields. Only recently has there been an emerging call for organizational researchers and practitioners to study mindfulness concepts and practices from the original Buddhist perspectives given that ethics is regarded as a foundation for Buddhist mindfulness. Yet little, if any, empirical research on the contributions of mindfulness practices to ethical leadership has been done in Eastern Buddhist contexts. Therefore, this study aims to explore the extent to which and how Buddhist-based mindfulness practices can influence organizational leaders' ethical values and practices. On this basis, Thailand was selected as a context of study due to a predominantly Buddhist society and culture. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty executive leaders from various private organizations in Thailand, who practice Buddhist-based mindfulness meditation regularly. The findings from this study shed light on the role Buddhist-based mindfulness practices can play in promoting ethical behavior among executive leaders in Thailand. The results also suggest that ethical values and practices influenced by Buddhist-based mindfulness practices are well aligned with the elements appeared in the inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural ethical leadership framework, namely: humane, justice, sustainability and responsibility, and moderation. This study concludes that the integration of ethical dimensions to mindfulness practices may provide promising opportunities for ethical leadership development, particularly in the context of Thailand. This could contribute significantly to the future development of both organizations and society at large. The study also suggests that mindfulness interventions in organizational contexts should place more explicit emphasis on ethics. This may be done by relating the ethical principles underlying Buddhist-based mindfulness to other ethical systems in different contexts and cultures where they can be aligned.

Keywords : Buddhism, ethical leadership, leadership development, mindfulness, Thailand, training

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