

Review Article

Buddhist Principles, Mindfulness with Organizational Management: A Conceptual Literature Review

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Abstract

Modern organizations are increasingly confronted with issues surrounding ethical choices, employee welfare, accountable leadership, stakeholder interactions, and unpredictability. These advancements have sparked interest in management viewpoints that go beyond just efficiency and financial outcomes. Buddhist philosophy has garnered interest in this regard for its focus on ethical behavior, mindfulness, compassion, self-discipline, responsible living, and the appropriate use of resources. Buddhist teachings emerged from a philosophical and religious background instead of being developed as a structured management theory. Consequently, a direct correlation between Buddhist principles and modern management concepts could lead to conceptual and contextual misrepresentation. This research seeks to explore how certain Buddhist concepts can be linked to modern organizational leadership and management while maintaining their original Buddhist significance. The research employs a conceptual literature review and textual analysis of selected Buddhist canonical texts and pertinent management literature, drawn from library resources. A systematic conceptual mapping method was employed to explore the initial significance of each Buddhist principle, its foundational ethical or psychological mechanism, its potential connection with a modern management framework and the limits of that comparison. The analysis highlights the possible importance of mindfulness (*sati*) for managerial awareness and self-regulation, ethical conduct (*sīla*) for responsible leadership, loving-kindness (*mettā*) for compassionate and interpersonal leadership, equanimity

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(upekkhā) for balanced reactions, right livelihood (sammā-ājīva) for responsible business practices, and mutual employer-employee responsibilities for employee relations. Current studies also show growing interest in mindfulness within organizational and leadership research. The research finds that these connections ought to be viewed as conceptual and interpretive rather than as proof that Buddhism constitutes a modern management theory. The suggested framework offers a more careful foundation for linking Buddhist principles to organizational management while preserving their original philosophical and ethical context.

Keywords: Buddhism, Buddhist ethics, employee relations, leadership, mindfulness, organizational management, right livelihood

1. Introduction

Management involves organizing individuals and assets to achieve organizational objectives. Traditional management studies focused on functions such as planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling, whereas subsequent organizational research has increasingly explored leadership, employee welfare, corporate culture, ethical practices, and stakeholder relationships. Contemporary organizations operate under conditions of technological change, uncertainty, social expectations and complex stakeholder relationships. Consequently, organizational effectiveness cannot be understood solely in terms of financial performance. Ethical judgment, employee well-being, responsible leadership, and the capacity to respond constructively to change have become increasingly important dimensions of management (Patnaik and Marinescu, 2019). In this context, different philosophical viewpoints have gained interest. Buddhism is notably significant as it encompasses comprehensive teachings on ethical behavior, mental development, personal relationships, ways of earning a living, altruism and the responsible management of material resources. A conceptual analysis by Weerasinghe et al. (2015) discovered potential connections between Buddhist principles and domains such as interpersonal relationships, ethical conduct, leadership, conflict resolution, team development and performance oversight. Their review highlights the need for greater conceptual clarity in connecting Buddhist principles to modern management frameworks. Mindfulness is a key aspect through which Buddhism has influenced organizational studies. Research in organizational studies has explored mindfulness at both the personal and group levels, revealing connections with awareness, self-regulation, and organizational outcomes (Sutcliffe et al., 2016). Recent studies have also investigated

mindfulness in the context of leadership development, finding connections to self-regulation, emotional control, leadership relationships, and various leadership outcomes (Tenschert et al., 2025). Nonetheless, modern organizational mindfulness should not be equated with the Buddhist idea of *sati* immediately. Buddhist philosophy and modern management theory stem from distinct historical and intellectual backgrounds. Buddhist teachings mainly focus on issues related to human behavior, mental growth, suffering, causes, and freedom, while management theory concerns itself with organizing resources and activities within organizations. Consequently, a Buddhist principle should not be labeled as equivalent to a contemporary management concept solely on the basis of conceptual resemblance (Takei, 2020).

In light of evidence from Sheth (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated how fragile business is. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 highlighted the direct relationship between environmental sustainability and business activities. Similarly, Kriger (2017) found that Buddha is a peerless environmentalist who protected nature as a sacred treasure. Mindfulness has attracted significant attention in the field of organizational research. Modern organizational research typically defines mindfulness as a characteristic that entails attention and awareness of current experiences, affecting self-regulation, emotions, cognition and behavior. This paper, therefore, does not claim that Buddhism offers an established management theory. Instead, it explores whether chosen Buddhist principles can offer conceptual and ethical resources for leadership within organizations. As pointed out by Takei (2020), management is important for any organization to achieve its goals by using the limited resources. The Buddha saw life in reality from every angle as he saw change, the law of cause and effect regaining supremacy over the entire life.

Buddhism, through its recent spread, has become an increasingly popular religion worldwide (Brox et al., 2017). In Sri Lanka, where Buddhism is the religion of the majority of citizens, Buddhist teachings can play a significant role in changing people's behavior. Thus, our everyday lives are inseparably disheveled with organizations (Weerasinghe et al., 2015). This paper suggests that business organizations should follow the Lord Buddha's doctrine when managing their activities. As Sheth (2020) indicates, the purpose of business is more than business. Further, Essen (2009) showed in his findings that production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life. It is to nurture all of its stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, and the community) and not just investors. This is still common in many small-town manufacturing companies whose families and their families, live in the community. Further, the *Vyaggapajja sutta* suggests which moral/ethical professions individuals should choose, such as Agriculture (*Kasiyā*), Retail (*Vanijjāya*), Dairy (*Gorakkhena*), Defense Services (*Issathena*), Government Services (*Rajaporisena*), Craft industry (*Sippannatena*). As seen in the *Kāmabhogi Sutta* and *Rāsiya Sutta*, business operations should be conducted ethically. This is evident in the expression of “*Dhammena bhoge pariyethi asāhasena*” through *Rāsiya Sutta*. The research problem is to study whether the management theories and concepts used by the Lord Buddha could be applied to business management. Buddhist philosophy offers valuable

insights into ethical conduct, responsible leadership, and balanced decision-making. However, the application of Buddhist teachings to modern business management remains relatively underexplored. As a result, there is a need to examine how Buddhist principles can be integrated into organizational management practices. While mindfulness has gained increasing visibility in organizational research, a significant portion of the modern management literature treats it as an individual psychological concept in the workplace. This body of work offers insights regarding attention, emotion regulation, employee well-being, and leadership. Yet, it does not fully encompass the wider ethical and philosophical background from which Buddhist mindfulness originated. This leads to two significant issues. Initially, Buddhist teachings can be interpreted anachronistically by ascribing modern management ideas to ancient Buddhist writings. Secondly, the initial ethical and philosophical significance of Buddhist principles might be diminished when they are mainly viewed as tools for enhancing organizational performance. This study thus focuses on the following research question.

This study seeks to examine how selected Buddhist principles may be conceptually related to contemporary organizational leadership and management practices while maintaining a clear distinction between their original Buddhist meanings and their modern organizational applications. Specifically, the study aims to clarify the conceptual differences among Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist ethics, Buddhist mindfulness, and Buddhist-inspired management; identify selected Buddhist principles relevant to organizational leadership and management; and examine the mechanisms by which these principles may contribute to leadership awareness and responsible resource management.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted as library research, collecting data from various sutras in the Buddhist canon. The management concepts used by the Buddha were collected, referring to Canon (*tripiṭaka*) and other related books. After analyzing the collected data, they were further considered to assess their applicability in managing a business organization.

2.1 Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and Scopus to identify relevant studies on Buddhist principles and organizational management. Studies were included if they were published in English, were academically relevant to the research topic and directly addressed Buddhism and management issues. Studies unrelated to the research objectives, duplicate records and sources lacking sufficient academic information were excluded. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the authors have documented the databases they used in their literature search.

*("mindfulness" OR "mindful leadership" OR "Buddhist mindfulness")
AND ("management" OR "leadership" OR "organization" OR "business"
OR "human resource" OR "ethical decision*")***

A literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and Scopus to identify relevant studies published in English. The search covered literature published from 2005 to 2025, encompassing foundational and contemporary studies on Buddhism, business, economics, leadership, mindfulness and organizational management. Studies were included if they were published in English, were academically relevant to the research topic and directly addressed Buddhism and management issues. Studies unrelated to the research objectives, duplicate records, and sources lacking sufficient academic information were excluded. The relationship between Buddhist principles and modern organizational management requires careful conceptual analysis, given their origins in distinct historical and intellectual contexts. Buddhist principles mainly focus on moral behavior, mental development, human actions and freedom from pain, while modern management theories emphasize the organization of individuals and resources to meet business goals. Consequently, this research does not consider Buddhist teachings to be synonymous with contemporary management theories.

The goal of this literature review is not to show that Buddhist principles forecast contemporary management theory. Instead, it explores whether specific Buddhist principles can offer ethical, psychological, and philosophical insights that might enhance modern organizational management.

2.2. Analytical Procedure

The chosen sources underwent analysis through four stages. Initially, pertinent Buddhist principles were recognized. Secondly, their initial significance and textual context were analyzed. Third, every principle was conceptually linked to a modern management framework. Fourth, the constraints of the comparison were considered.

The analytical process was therefore,
Buddhist principle → Original textual meaning → Underlying mechanism → Management construct → Possible organizational relevance → Limitation of comparison.

This procedure was adopted to prevent the consideration of Buddhist teachings as direct counterparts to modern management theories.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Contemporary Management Constructs

Management in this study is considered the process of coordinating organizational resources, people, and activities to achieve organizational objectives. Hence, this study focuses on selected management constructs that are directly relevant to examining the applicability of Buddhist principles. Planning and decision-making involve setting organizational objectives, evaluating alternatives and selecting appropriate courses of action. Organizing concerns, allocating responsibilities and resources, and coordinating activities. Leadership focuses on influencing and guiding employees while maintaining effective interpersonal relationships. Ethical management emphasizes responsible and fair decision-making toward employees, customers and other stakeholders. Human resource management concerns the effective management of employees, including their development, relationships and well-being.

Robes (*Cīvara*) are the clothing of Theravada Buddhist monks (*Bhikkhūs*) and nuns (*Bhikkhunīs*). They are among the four necessities (*catupaccaya*) of monastic life, namely robes (*cīvara*), alms food (*piṇḍapāta*), lodging (*senāsana*), and medical equipment (Nguyen & Phuc, 2017). Over 2,500 years ago, the Buddha Preached in Chullavaggāpali about how to use the robes. Discarded items should not be left but should be restored. Monks and nuns should make maximum use of the robe.

Table 1. Conceptual mapping of buddhist principles and management constructs.

Buddhist principle	Originality	Mechanism relevant to management	Related management construct	Interpretation
Mindfulness (<i>sati</i>)	Awareness	Increased awareness of thoughts, emotions	Self-awareness, emotional regulation	Mindfulness may support managerial awareness and decision-making
Ethical conduct (<i>sīla</i>)	Regulation of conduct and avoidance of harmful action	Moral restraint and responsible behavior	Ethical leadership, organizational ethics	Buddhist ethics can provide an ethical perspective for managerial conduct
Loving-kindness (<i>mettā</i>)	Goodwill and non-harm toward others	interpersonal concern	Compassionate leadership	A relational approach to leadership
Equanimity (<i>upekkhā</i>)	Balanced and non-reactive mental orientation	Reduced impulsive emotional reactions	Emotional regulation	support balanced responses to organizational situations
Right livelihood (<i>sammā ājīva</i>)	Earning a livelihood without harmful conduct	Ethical consideration of how economic activity is conducted	Responsible management	Provides an ethical lens for evaluating business activities
Employer-worker responsibilities in the Sigālovāda Sutta	Reciprocal duties and welfare	Fairness, care in employment relationships	Human resource management	Provides an ethical basis for considering responsible treatment of workers

Generosity (dāna)	Giving and reduction of possessiveness	Reciprocal behaviour	Organization al citizenship	May contribute to a broader understanding of organizational responsibility
Wise use of wealth	Responsible acquisition, use and preservation of resources	Moderation and long-term orientation	Sustainable/r esource management	Offers an ethical perspective on wealth and resource use

3.2 Managerial Attributes

There are attributes that persons should possess when performing farming, merchandising, defense-related, or any other profession. According to the Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.20, the qualities cakkhumā, vidhuro, and nissayasampanno are discussed in relation to desirable qualities of an individual (Bodhi, 2012). Business managers could influence their people, establish trust, and maximize the company's potential by acquiring the following managerial qualities:

- i) Competent in the works (*Dakkho hoti*)
- ii) Not being lazy (*Analaso*)
- iii) Act in a strategic manner (*Thatrāpayāya vīmansāya samannāgato*)
- iv) Being skillful in each task (*Alaṃ Katun*)
- v) Organizing Ability (*Alaṃ samidhātum*)

The relevant section of Angutthara nikāya Tikanipātha is quoted, which lists the competencies a businessman should possess, such as,

- a. Trader should be wise (*chakkhumā*)
 - The merchant should have good knowledge in terms of the merchandise (*pāpanika paniyan jānāti*)
 - Must know how to purchase merchandise in terms of quality and other aspects (*evaṃ ketham*)
 - Must know how to determine the selling price of the merchandise (*etthakaṃ mūlaṃ bhavissati*)
 - Must know the profit at the time of selling (*etthako udayoti*)
- b. Businessman knows wisdom (*vidhuro*).
 - Knowledge of selling the right goods to customers and purchasing quality goods, Knowledge of identifying the required goods for the customer (*Pāpaniko kusalo hoti paniyam kethuñcha vikkinitum ca*)
- c. A leader should be a trustworthy person
 - Apparently, the Aṅguttara nikāya sutra says (Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.20) that those who give funds to businesses/businessman should have a trust in the business.

Consequently, the chosen teachings from the Aṅguttara Nikāya are examined at two separate levels. In the initial stage, their significance is examined within the Buddhist ethical and social framework where they were imparted. At the second level, their foundational concepts are analyzed in relation to modern business management.

The Buddhist point of view takes the function of planning in Mahākandhaka Bodhi katā “*Athako bhagavā ratthiyā pattaṃ yāmaṃ paticchasaṃuppādaṃ*” which means that work should be done with prior planning. Moreover, Bodhi katā stated “*yaḍā have pāthu bavanti dhamma- āthāpino jhāyatho brāhmaṇassa*” which means, “Who can reach the state that someone has reached?”

The significance for management planning lies not in a direct correlation between Buddhist teachings and modern planning functions, but in the potential of Buddhist principles to add an ethical dimension to the planning process. Modern management offers structured approaches for establishing goals, predicting outcomes, assessing options and executing strategies. At the same time, Buddhist principles may promote greater focus on intention, results, accountability, and the potential impacts of management choices on others. Accordingly, this study does not treat the Pāli expressions as direct equivalents of modern management concepts. Rather, cakkhumā may be considered in relation to commercial awareness and informed decision-making, vidhuro in relation to practical competence, and nissayasampanno in relation to trust, credibility, and stakeholder support. These are contemporary interpretations of the passage's managerial relevance and should not be understood as literal translations of the original Pāli terms.

3.3 Vision

From an organizational standpoint, the wider Buddhist focus on purpose, values, intention and the impacts of actions might offer a philosophical foundation for contemplating organizational direction. Leaders should consider not just what an organization aims to accomplish, but also the values and outcomes associated with following that path. In this regard, Buddhist philosophy provides an ethical perspective for conversations about organizational mission and vision.

Lord Buddha's propagation of Dhamma was a classic demonstration for the resource arrangement to accomplish the goals and objectives in the Buddhist order. Mahāvagga Pāli Māra katā clearly mentioned it as

*“Charatha bhikkave cārikam bahujaṇa hitāya bahujaṇa sukhāya
lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukāya devamanussānaṃ”*

In the case of creating different designations in the Buddhist order, A suitable structure for managing human resources and physical resources has been mentioned in Chullavagga-pāli. All individuals must have a very good understanding of the theories and morality to obtain positions in the Buddhist order.

“Yo na chandāgatiṃ gaccheyya, na dosāgatiṃ gaccheyya, na mohā gati gaccheyya, na bhaya gatiṃ gaccheyya, uddiṭṭhānudiṭṭhañca jāneyyamaṃ” Senāsana gahapaka, Bhattuddesaka, Senāsana paññapaka, cīvāra paṭiggāhaka, patta gahāpaka, Nawakammika

3.4 Mindfulness and Organizational Leadership

Mindfulness has emerged as a recognized subject in organizational psychology and management studies. Sutcliffe et al. (2016) recognized both individual and collective aspects of mindfulness in organizational studies and highlighted the importance of exploring mindfulness at various organizational levels. Recent studies have explored mindfulness in leadership, highlighting attention, awareness, authenticity, self-regulation, and relationship-related outcomes as important aspects. A systematic review by Tenschert et al. (2025) also revealed that leadership development focused on mindfulness is linked to self-regulation, emotional management, and constructive workplace relationships. These results offer a foundation for reflecting on the potential significance of Buddhist mindfulness in leadership. Nevertheless, this study does not equate Buddhist sati with modern mindfulness in the workplace. Rather, mindfulness is regarded as a Buddhist concept whose potential significance for organizations may involve increased awareness of thoughts, feelings, motivations, and behavioral reactions.

3.5 Motivational strategies used by the Buddha

The Buddha, the best teacher ever, was able, through his teaching methods, to attract the masses to his fresh and broad philosophy. In addition to his extraordinary ability as the Buddha, the motivational strategies he employed also greatly supported the popularization and realization of his philosophy by others. The study by (2021) found that authentic leaders work to develop greater authenticity and to know their followers holistically, as they empathize with them. It has further stated that the management approach used in Buddhism could be seen as softer, emphasizing personal emotions, since it requires more attention as people interact with each other to avoid confrontation.

3.6 Right livelihood and Ethical Business

Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) offers a crucial Buddhist framework for evaluating ethical economic practices. In AN 5.177, the Buddha points out five types of commerce that a layperson ought to shun: dealing in weapons, trafficking in people, selling meat, distributing intoxicants, and handling poison (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2010).

The importance of this lesson for modern management is fundamentally ethical. It establishes a foundation for evaluating whether economic activities are carried out in a manner that causes damage. This can be connected to ethical business practices and responsible management. Nonetheless, right livelihood shouldn't be characterized as a comprehensive Buddhist business-management approach.

Research by Sumit (2021) shows that everybody wants to be rich quickly, at all costs and by any means available, whether by rightful or wrongful methods. Hence, the world is so caught up with accumulating wealth by any means. Buddhism has taught how to conduct business activities in accordance with its values. As indicated by the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, *unethical practices should be discouraged in trade activities*. Weighing fraudulently (*Thulākūṭa*), replacing gold with inferior materials (*Kansakūṭa*), cheating when measuring the grain (*Manakūṭa*), Accepting bribes (*Ukkoṭaṇa*), deception through tricks (*Vañchana*), selling the fake items as showing genuine items (*Nikati sachiyyoga*), and putting to death (*Vadha*). In the explanation given by “*Lābhena Labhaṃ nijigissanata*” means don't become only profit-oriented.

3.7 Human Resources Management

The Sigālovāda sutta of the Dīgha nikāya is widely influential in HRM. One aspect concerns the responsibilities of the employer to the employee, such as:

- i) Assignment of work based on the strength of the employee (*Yathābalaṃ kammanta saṃvidhānena*)
- ii) Providing the foods and paying the salaries accordingly (*Bhattavatananuppadānena*)
- iii) Offering health facilities (*Gilānupaṭṭhānena*)
- iv) Encouragements through special treatments (*Rasānaṃ samvibhāgena*)
- v) Providing proper leaves (*Samaye vossaggena*)

3.8 Wealth Management

Buddhist principles regarding household well-being cover the ethical acquisition and maintenance of wealth. The Dīghajāṇu (Vyagghapajja) Sutta recognizes sustained effort, alertness, supportive companionship and equitable livelihood as factors that enhance household well-being (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1995). It also covers safeguarding legitimately obtained wealth and ensuring expenses align with income.

Anguttara nikāya is concerned with wealth management and savings. Wealth should be divided into four parts and utilized. One portion for consumption (*Ekena Boghe Bhuñjeyya*), two portions for investment (*Dvīhi kammaṃ payojaye*), one portion for disaster situations (*Cathuttaṃ ca nidhāpeyya Āpadāsu bhavissati*)

Chakka sutta points out four facts that should be considered to get the development, including selection of a suitable place (*Patirupadesawaso*), good associations (*Sappurismsevo*), crafting one's personality (*Atthasammāpanidi*), and previous kamma (*Pubbecca Katapuññatā*)

When the business is conducting business, the owner should associate with good friends who give good advice. According to Prayukvong (2005), Positive relationships with 'good friends' will create direct and indirect benefits, such as improved ways of doing certain tasks or the avoidance of risks, and this factor can be likened to social capital.

Table 2. Buddhist domain and relevance to management.

Buddhist domain	What it means in this study	Possible management relevance
Buddhist philosophy	Broader principles concerning human existence, conduct, suffering, causation, and liberation	Provides philosophical perspectives for organizational behaviour and decision-making
Buddhist ethics	Principles concerning intention, conduct, non-harm, responsibility, compassion, and right livelihood	Ethical leadership, responsible management, employee relations
Mindfulness (sati)	A specific aspect of Buddhist mental cultivation involving awareness	Self-awareness, attention
Monastic administration	Responsibilities, and procedures governing the Saṅgha	Limited insights into roles, coordination, and organizational arrangements
Buddhist economic teachings	Ethical acquisition, use, preservation, and allocation of wealth	Responsible resource use, ethical economic activity
Buddhist teachings on social relationships	Reciprocal responsibilities among individuals and social groups	Employee relations

5. Conclusion

This research explored the potential conceptual significance of chosen Buddhist principles for modern organizational leadership and management. The examination shows that mindfulness, ethical behavior, loving-kindness, equanimity, appropriate livelihood, mutual employer–employee obligations, generosity, and responsible wealth use can offer valuable perspectives on organizational conduct and management. The most prominent conceptual links manifest in domains such as ethical behavior, employee well-being, responsible living, self-management, and sustainable resource utilization. For instance, the Sigālovāda Sutta offers clear

instructions regarding mutual employer-employee obligations (Kelly et al., 2005). In contrast, the Vanijja Sutta presents a moral framework for assessing types of economic activities (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2010). Modern organizational studies further validate the significance of mindfulness for awareness, self-regulation, and leadership outcomes (Sutcliffe et al., 2016). However, the relationships found in this research are not consistent. Buddhist teachings must not be seen as direct parallels to modern ideas, including strategic vision, organizational oversight, planning, or human resources management. Instead, the results endorse a differentiation between the initial Buddhist concept and its modern organizational understanding. The main contribution of the research is a conceptual mapping framework that links Buddhist principles to potential management applications while maintaining their original philosophical and ethical context. Further empirical studies are needed to explore whether, and under which organizational circumstances, Buddhist-inspired practices affect leadership behavior, employee well-being, ethical decision-making, and organizational outcomes.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations for this study include both practice recommendations and those for future research. In practice, initiatives are needed at the business school level itself to train business managers. Business management degree programs should link Buddhist teachings to entrepreneurship. Also, business schools can offer courses that are based on mindfulness and self-reflection. To think and reflect on business practices, it is better to provide soundproof meditation rooms. This recommendation is in line with the critique provided by Vallabh and Singhal (2014), which stated that practical wisdom will be an added advantage for individuals working in highly competitive business environments. Also, being more sensitive and mindful of society and the environment would further encourage employees to explore other ways to apply practical wisdom at work. This paper invites future researchers to complement a qualitative study on Buddhism and personal beliefs in the workplace. Research participants could be free to express their views, which would, in turn, enhance the reliability of the data gathered. On the other hand, research linking sustainability and Buddhism is an alternative approach to enhance business sustainability

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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