

‘Mindful’ human resource management: combining Buddhist principles of enlightenment with diversity management

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Abstract: Over the last two decades, numerous organisational scholars have emphasised the importance of enhancing ethics and workplace diversity within organisations. The aim of the present article is to present a workplace diversity perspective on human resource management by advancing the notion of mindful human resource management that builds upon Buddhism’s notions of wisdom, ethical conduct, and concentration, thus facilitating a steady form of attention and a non-judgmental state of mind. We propose that combining the three characteristics of the Buddhist path can help human resource managers to be more ethically minded, diversity conscious, compassionate, and caring in their decisions and actions.

Keywords: mindfulness; diversity management; Buddhism; human resource management.

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1 Introduction

HRM commonly refers to the strategically coordinated management of staffing as well as tasks like staff assessment, reward, and education (cf. Fotinatos, 2018). On a more profound level, however, HRM is first and foremost a people-oriented discipline, since any organisation is ultimately an aggregation of people – people whose services are essential to success, and who thus require the feeling of belonging to an organisation that genuinely cares about all employees regardless of race, gender, class, age, education, etc. (cf. Bos-Nehlses et al., 2017). Over the last two decades, as the demand for equal treatment among the West's diverse populations has grown louder and louder, there has been an equivalent call within corporate culture for management training programs that emphasise, honour, and promote organisational values such as diversity, equity, and inclusiveness. This shift away from exclusive focus on such things as setting policies, strategic planning, and wage negotiations can be seen in progressive corporations like Apple, Twitter, and Amazon, which expect their human resource managers to build a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace and workforce (Aust et al., 2020; Storey, 2007; Wilton, 2016). Taking Apple as an example, here are some quotes from their webpage on diversity (<https://www.apple.com/diversity/>): “at Apple,... we draw on the differences in who we are, what we've experienced, and how we think”; “apple has a very accepting culture. Everyone here really values individuality”; “we are championing equal pay around the globe”; “a more diverse future begins with more opportunities”.

The question then becomes what type training programs can most effectively equip HR managers with the attitudes and abilities that are necessary to create a workplace atmosphere that truly reflects the above described values? The unique contribution of this article is to present a possible answer to this question by introducing mindful human resource management (MHRM) a model that combines mindfulness¹ techniques and the Buddhist principles of wisdom, ethical conduct, and concentration with diversity management in order to establish more ethical, empathetic and compassionate interactions between HR managers and employees. Our contention is that the cultivation of these important human qualities will reduce the tendency of HR managers to make unjust, prejudicial distinctions in the hiring and/or treatment of diverse employees – i.e., distinctions based on factors such as gender, race, age, class, and disability. As Purser and Milillo (2014) note, “a radical [human resource] management perspective aimed at emancipation can benefit from Buddhist mindfulness by reducing ego-based desire, anger, and delusion – the core defilements underlying power, domination, and callous indifference (p.16)”.²

We begin with a brief discussion on methodology, followed by sections on human resource management, mindfulness, diversity management, and MHRM. The remaining three sections examine the connection between HRM/DM and the three divisions of Buddhism's³ ‘Noble Eightfold Path’, namely wisdom, ethical conduct, and concentration.

2 Methodology

2.1 *Method versus methodology*

The use of ‘methodology’ instead of ‘method’ supports Madison's (1988) claim that *method* generally focuses the researcher's attention on exact knowledge and procedure,

whereas *methodology* allows good judgment and reasonable principles to guide the research process. The methodology of this article's literary analysis consists of:

- 1 conducting narrative readings of Buddhist, mindfulness and HRM texts
- 2 examining Buddhist *sati* as it pertains to HRM and diversity
- 3 conducting a critical examination of mindfulness as both an ancient discipline rooted in Buddhism (*sati*) and a modern form of neo-Buddhist practice with the potential to foster a more enlightened generation of HR managers.

2.2 *Search strategies*

At present, scholarly discussions on the application of Buddhist mindfulness (*sati*) to the field of HRM appear to be extremely rare, as can be confirmed by reviewing periodicals and publications dealing with HRM. In September 2019, we made a systematic search of scholarly journals. The search was made by using the Encore search engine and employing the terms *mindfulness* and HRM as search strings in an attempt to determine whether or not there were articles that linked mindfulness to work within HRM – a search that yielded a total of only eight articles. This small number leads us to conclude that the practice of mindfulness basically remains outside the field's paradigmatic lens. Or could it be that HRM scholars and professionals are sceptical when it comes to implementing mindfulness techniques because of the criticism this form of training has received in a number of publications (e.g., adverse effects of mindfulness on some psychological conditions, mindfulness being superior to other methods of stress reduction and life quality management, mindfulness being promoted as a panacea rather than as a vehicle for transformation) (e.g., Badham and King 2019). Here, it is essential to maintain a critical as well as an open mind, since numerous studies have found that mindfulness often works to increase reflexivity (e.g., awareness of one's own words and actions and their impact on 'others') and enhance relational resilience (e.g., mutually empowering, growth fostering connections with Others) both of which improve the quality of one's social interactions and performance (e.g., Chaskalson, 2011; Dane, 2011; Muhr, 2008).

2.3 *Theoretical considerations*

Despite the fact that the phenomenological approach is not directly employed in this article, it should be mentioned that the ensuing discussion has been influenced by the belief that in the study of mindfulness and HRM, experiential data and subjective interpretation have great value. Brown and Cordon (2009) observe in an article that directly relates to mindfulness that the Buddhist notion of *sati* and Husserl's phenomenological attitude have four features in common. The first consists of a central interest in the experience of the present moment. The second involves the understanding that entering the moment requires the suspension of habitual, automatic ways of processing experience and the adoption of an experiential openness which attends to that which is occurring moment by moment. Both disciplines, in other words, aim to bring a freshness and clarity to subjective experience by focusing attention on the way things appear before consciousness in the moment. This leads to the third shared feature, which is that one's attention to the moment should be unimposing and actively receptive to all that enters consciousness. Finally, both disciplines claim that concentration on the present

moment can be enhanced, lengthened and deepened by practice [Brown and Cordon, (2009), pp.65–66]. Brown and Cordon summarise the similarities between these traditions by noting that both take a ‘view from within’ the conscious mind’s dual modes of processing experience (2009, p.76).

3 Human resource management

The modern features of HRM stem from the 20th century human relations movement and have evolved from an administrative to a technological-advancement practice (e.g., e-HR, e-training, e-recruitment, and virtual teams) (Fregnan et al., 2020; Tubey et al., 2015; Yuan, 2011). Essentially, it can be said that HRM consists of the following four competencies:

- 1 handling economic matters such as payments, investments, pension plans and overall economic well-being
- 2 recruiting new employees (i.e., hiring processes)
- 3 managing employee separation processes (i.e., legal processes with regard to the termination (firing) of employment)
- 4 raising corporate morale (i.e., encouraging a high working morale, quality of performance and a healthy work environment).

In addition to these, HR managers also must attend to the various needs and requests of both the staff and the trade unions (cf. Torrington, 2009). As Wilton (2016) notes, “HRM encompasses not only those activities that are the responsibility of designated HR departments or specialists but also those activities that are carried out by managers in all areas of the business who are responsible for the management of co-workers” (p.5). The term HRM is used to refer, first, to all procedures and practices used to manage the relationship between employer and employees, and second, to denote a distinctive approach that is qualitatively different from traditional management practices. Storey (2007) defines HRM as a “philosophy of people management based on the belief that human resources are uniquely important in sustained business success”. Storey then goes on to note that “an organization gains competitive advantage by using its people effectively, drawing on their expertise and ingenuity to meet clearly defined objectives. HRM is aimed at recruiting capable, flexible and committed people, managing and rewarding their performance and developing key competencies” (p.32). HRM, in other words, refers to a philosophy of talent management that combines enhancing organisational performance with enhancing the employee’s experience of and capacity for work (the ‘mutual gains’ perspective) (cf. Jyoti and Rani, 2014). From a Buddhist perspective, mutual gains, we assert, means to foster ethical and spiritual maturity based upon the noble eightfold paths. In pursuit of fulfilling these aims, a key concern of this article is how to promote a more diversity-minded workplace philosophy among human resource managers. Concretely speaking, the present article attempts to present a view that highlights the importance of pluralism in the workplace in the broad sense. By the term ‘diversity-mindedness’ we mean “an understanding of diversity and identities as socially (re)produced in on-going, context-specific processes” [Dennissen et al., (2018), p.221]. The following section explores diversity management in greater detail.

4 Diversity management

This section discusses the meaning of diversity management (DM) and how it relates to Buddhism, mindfulness, and HRM. In a recently published article, Carstens and De Kock, (2020, p.3) define DM as “a planned and systematic managerial process aimed at creating an organizational environment where all employees contribute to organizational effectiveness.” Along narrower lines, Akobo and Damisah (2018) aim to assist African-based corporations to develop diversity strategies that address the cultural and social identities of individuals within a select group of sub-Saharan African countries. While interesting and useful, specific analyses such as these fail to consider broader intersectional analytical categories such as class, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, and occupational status. This article attempts to view DM as an overarching concept within which intersectionality is subsumed (cf. Hearn and Louvrier, 2015). It is our contention that the inclusion of intersectionality leads DM in the direction of Buddhism, mindfulness and HRM, as will become clear below.

In a diversity-minded conception of HRM, the perceived self is placed between two organisational categories, that is, internalisation (*incorporation*) and externalisation (*excorporation*). On the one hand, HR managers must work to improve an organisation’s internal milieu (incorporation) by striving to secure a highly diverse workforce. In this regard, HR managers are duty-bound to handle key components such as recruitment, wages, rehabilitation benefits, etc. in an entirely equitable manner that eliminates any form of discrimination or exclusion based upon the intersectional categories mentioned above. Beyond this, however, HR managers also must monitor the external organisations, corporations, suppliers, etc. that their company deals with (*excorporation*) in order to ensure that those entities meet diversity requirements and are not involved in ethically dubious practices (e.g., child labour, poor wages, sexual harassment).

Here, it can be mentioned that mindfulness methods can potentially enhance one’s ethical awareness, heighten one’s ability to perceive a given situation from multiple perspectives, and increase one’s sense of social responsibility toward others and the world (cf. Zeynep et al., 2017). Buddhist thought characterises this as a form of external interaction that can entail a commitment to various types of activism in the here and now [González-Lopez, (2011), p.450]. The Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hahn has termed this ‘engaged Buddhism’ in the sense that it induces us to actively respond to the vital issues of our time – e.g., climate change, the abuse of the environment, social alienation, world conflict and so forth. This sort of awareness of our ‘global milieu’ is at least something that HR managers should strive for, although it may not be essential in terms of their general job description [Hahn in: González-López, (2011), p.450].

5 Mindfulness in general and in relation to the workplace

Over the last several decades, mindfulness training has grown to become one of the most widespread practices in the West, representing an increasing number of therapies, self-help regimes and forms of intervention. Today, a rapidly growing body of evidence seems to indicate that mindfulness is an effective and beneficial form of treatment for a variety of mental and physical conditions (Baer 2003; Didonna 2009; Grossman et al., 2004). In addition, the public marketplace has made room for a burgeoning amount of literature on the role of mindfulness both in the management of illness and in the positive

cultivation of health and wellbeing. In Buddhism, mindfulness is best understood as both an attentional process and an attitude based on open-minded curiosity and an intention to be kind and compassionate toward Others (Hyland et al., 2015). Belief in the potential contribution of mindfulness to HRM practices is largely prompted by an awareness of the inherent transformational power of the human mind, as has been illustrated by Benefiel (2005), Kabat-Zinn (2003) and others. This is confirmed by the fact that both the study of mindfulness and the study of organisations consider an understanding of the human mind to be most important in terms of improving human functioning (Becke, 2014). The assumption here is that individuals are capable of developing internally by adjusting and regulating their own actions and attentiveness – improvements that carry the potential of increasing both individual and organisational output (e.g., innovation, creativity and employee attraction) (cf. Pattnaik and Jena, 2020). One of the unique features of mindfulness practice is its capacity to increase the individual's internal focus by fostering self-awareness in the present moment (cf. Nilsson, 2020). By focusing on the present moment, human resource managers are afforded the ability to see whether their intended actions and intentions line up with their factual performance. Moreover, the ability to focus on the present moment (known in mindfulness as the *being-mode*) enables HR managers to act rather than react to the things happening around them (Nilsson and Kazemi, 2016) – something that increases their ability to handle situations from a heightened state of awareness rather than on autopilot (cf. Grossman et al., 2004). In this regard, Hyland et al. (2015, p.594) note that “awareness of self and others is an inherent element of mindfulness, so an increase in mindfulness will correspond to an increase in self-awareness”. Mindfulness has attracted the interest of academic disciplines such as psychology (e.g., Baer, 2003) medicine (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2013) religion (e.g., Gethin, 2011) and organisation studies (e.g., Dane, 2011) each of which has approached the subject with questions arising from their own theoretical lens. It can be noted, for instance, that researchers in organisation studies have tended to focus on how individuals, with the help of mindfulness regimes (i.e., body scanning, meditation, yoga and mindfulness in everyday life [e.g., acceptance, letting go, being-mode], can enhance their performance in areas such as decision-making, task performance and the lowering of perceived stress. In general, practitioners learn to take care of the body and mind by becoming more aware of what is happening in the here and now (i.e., the present moment). This form of mindfulness is described by Badham and King (2019) as mindfulness of individual experience, and in the mindfulness literature it is known as a self-regulating practice – something that generally appeals to those that desire to live and think according to their own lights (Nilsson and Kazemi, 2016). In contrast to this, there is mindfulness of collective experience, which encompasses the relational, group, and institutional dimension. Within an organisational framework, focusing on collective experience means viewing an organisation as a social system with the aim of developing a common (or shared) sense of awareness and a common (or shared) capacity for social action (Badham and King, 2018). From a Buddhist perspective, collective mindfulness additionally means to foster ethical and spiritual maturity based upon wisdom and social awareness. Badham and King go on to describe two further contrasting forms of mindfulness: mindfulness for substantive goals, on the one hand, and mindfulness for instrumental goals, on the other. Using mindfulness for substantive goals means to reflect on one's own purposes with the aim of transforming self-centred desires to those that are less selfish and more considerate of the communal whole. Using mindfulness for instrumental goals, on the other hand, focuses on both individual and collective

performance and well-being as well as on organisational success. The instrumental forms or applications of mindfulness have been criticised for a neglect of ethics, which we view as essential to the concept of mindful HRM and workforce diversity. Seen from this point of view, mindfulness has multiple orientations. This article will touch upon mindfulness as a substantive as well as collective practice in HRM.

6 Conceptualising mindful human resource management (MHRM)

Before conceptualising MHRM, a word about the terms ‘mindful’ and ‘HRM’ is in order. The term ‘mindful’ emerged in the mid-14th century and has taken on diverse meanings, depending on whether it is used in a western/westernised or in a Buddhist context (cf. Mikulas, 2011; Sun, 2014). For purposes of this article, ‘mindful’ can be understood as *self-awareness*, which here refers to a mind that is fully present in the here and now, thus facilitating its own reflections on and reactions to external stimuli, with the primary aim of making thoughtful decisions. As to the term ‘HRM’, it was defined in Section 3 as a “philosophy of people management based on the belief that human resources are uniquely important in sustained business success” [Storey, (2007), p.32]. Drawing together these two definitions mindful HRM should be understood as the ability of HR managers to cultivate ethically minded *intentions* that are marked by *attention* and *awareness* in the present moment. The italicised words in this delimited understanding of MHRM are analysed below.

6.1 *Intention*

Actions refer to the results stemming from the HR managers’ intentions and the choices they make on a daily basis. When HR managers are held accountable for their actions, it is the *intention* (a primary mental factor that triggers an action) as well as the choices that underlie those actions that must be considered (cf. Gabriel, 2015). Briefly put, an intention concerns something that we want to enact or prevent from being enacted, and this intention should be attached to an ethical-intersectional mindset that is focused on the present moment. This points toward another important issue, namely that of cultivating mindful HR managers that are dedicated to empowering those who are under their care (cf. Brandt, 1994). According to Thomas et al. (2004), the term ‘ethical mindfulness’ refers to a form of training that causes one to think and behave with greater concern and compassion towards Others, creating an ethical consciousness. We argue that good results in the workplace are significantly affected by intentions and actions that are more or less anchored in the HR manager’s top-down attention and awareness (Hanson, 2020; Ruedy and Schweitzer, 2011). According to Buddhism, right intention is the ability to do good and to avoid evil actions. In this regard, right intention serves as a forerunner to thoughts that get us to act. Simply speaking, right intention acts as an ethical light that tells us what to do before we act. Both intentions and actions assume attention.

6.2 *Attention*

The term attention can be likened to a lamp that illuminates what is important for the conscious mind to notice prior to focusing on that object. Buddhism’s psychological and philosophical teachings regard attention – i.e., the mind’s tendency to be always focused

on something – as one of its universal features (Boccio, 2004). Concretely speaking, “attention is one of the cardinal functions of consciousness without which there cannot be perception of any object” [Thera (1962), p.24, in Gethin (2011, p.266)]. Specifically, attention refers to the activity of focusing on selected aspects of reality, and thus determining that which is to be included in one’s awareness of one’s environment (Brown and Ryan, 2004). Such internal mental shifts can change HR managers’ perceptions of the other, their actions, and the outcomes which may arise therefrom. Attention can also be viewed as a form of practice that improves self-regulated activity (Shapiro et al, 2006). In Buddhism, according to the *Adhidhammic* analysis, attention is viewed as being present in all mental states [Anālayo, (2010) p.59].

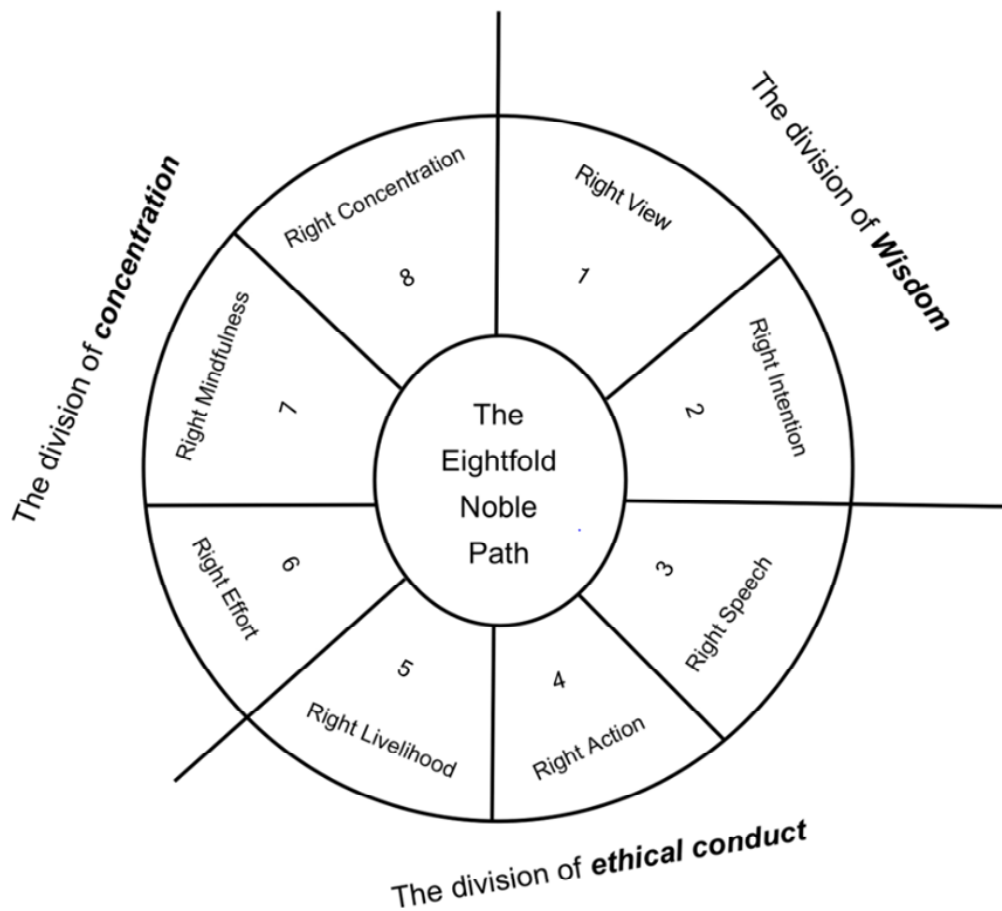
6.3 Awareness

The term *awareness* refers to the adoption of a consciousness that is in keeping with one’s ethical intentions and intersectional awareness. Without an ethical and intersectional awareness, the risk of causing harm to others (e.g., different races, cultures, ethnicities and or religious beliefs) and to the surrounding environment is clearly heightened (cf. Ahmad 2015; Gabriel 2015) as can be readily confirmed by observing the present state of world affairs (e.g., human-caused climate change, civil wars, etc.). For Kabat-Zinn (2013) awareness is a way of bringing a systematic consciousness to the experience of living that makes life more real. In short, it is a way of becoming ethically minded and more present in or mindful of the moment (Nilsson and Kazemi, 2016). The here and now is the only place in which quality can be experienced (Cacioppe, 1997). According to Kuan (2008), Buddhism’s conception of awareness (or *sati*) has four different contexts of meaning:

- 1 *simple awareness*, consisting of the moment-to-moment application of bare attention (viewed as the common Western understanding of mindfulness) (p.41)
- 2 *protective awareness*, consisting of the exertion of control and restraint over the stimuli of the six sense modalities (i.e., sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and mind) (p.42)
- 3 *introspective awareness*, consisting of the vigilant monitoring of the presence or absence of the various mental states that ‘colour’ the mind at every moment (p.51)
- 4 *deliberate awareness*, consisting of the conscious effort to form inspiring conceptions (or recollections) (p.52).

An example of this last type of awareness can be found in *metta* meditation’s conscious attempt to develop loving kindness towards all sentient beings, without boundary or discrimination [Kang and Whittingham, (2010), p.166]. In the *Satipatthana-suta*, the present moment is framed *as sati* and awareness: “Sati as present moment awareness is similarly reflected in the presentation of the *Patisambhidamagga* and the *Visuddhidamma* according to which the characteristic quality of *sati* is presence (*uppatthana*) whether as a faculty (*indriya*) an awaking factor (*bojjhanga*) a factor of the noble eightfold path, or at the moment of realization” [Anālayo, (2010), p.48].

Figure 1 The noble eight-fold path consists of three major divisions



Notes: The first division, wisdom, consists of right view and right intention, the second division, ethical conduct, consists of right speech, right action and right livelihood, the third division, concentration, consists of right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

The next sections will discuss and problematise Buddhism’s noble eightfold path (nep) which consists of three major divisions. The first division, *wisdom*, consists of right view and right intention. The second division, *ethical conduct*, consists of right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The third division, *concentration*, consists of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. we begin with a discussion on how to become an attentive and responsible HR manager by developing right mindfulness, right concentration, and right effort.

7 NEP Division one: wisdom

7.1 Path 1: right view

Broadly speaking, ‘right view’ in Buddhism relates to the attainment of wisdom (i.e., knowledge of the four noble truths and the nature of suffering). Of course, pursuing ‘right view’ (attaining ‘wisdom’) in the traditional Buddhist sense is an activity that is impracticable in most, if not all, Western corporate environments and incompatible with the job descriptions of most, if not all, corporate managers, including human resource

managers. In terms of the application being discussed in this article, it is obvious that the traditional Buddhist notion and objective of 'right view' will have to be adjusted and adapted to the business environment and the priorities of HR managers. How then can mindful 'wisdom' be incorporated into and be practiced in the management of human resources? Through formal techniques such as mindfulness meditation and body scanning, as well as mindful attitudes such as acceptance (a non-judgmental state of mind) and letting go (being with things as they are) the HR manager develops the 'management wisdom' to slow down, reflect upon the judgments and potential prejudices that might affect their decision-making, and cultivates a sense of personal responsibility and respect for differences between peoples ethnicity, gender, age and class (cf. Chia and Holt, 2007). Right view will keep the mind of HR managers free from confusion when it comes to potentially distressing verbal communications such as those involving double binds. Double-bind communications contain conflicting meta-command messages that present a dilemma in which the other person's response will be wrong no matter what, presenting a paradox for which there is no solution (Cassinelli, 2011). This kind of communication creates confusion and most often leads to misunderstandings and/or misinterpretations of reality. From a Buddhist perspective, right view means learning to cut through the illusory separation between the self and others and eliminating ignorance, lust and aversion, which are related to suffering (cf. Wallace, 2006). Establishing a connection between self and other is necessary in order to sustain a caring attitude and thereby enhance diversity-mindedness among human resource managers (Becke, 2014). In this regard, feedback is an essential corrective in all types of caring and responsible communications. It is particularly important for one to respond with helpful questions that display one's agreement with or rejection of statements made by others or to demonstrate that one has understood or not understood a given communication (Paloutzian et al., 2003; Shafir, 2003). By cultivating mindfulness and a caring attitude in terms of diversity-mindedness toward others, the *mindful* human resource manager is in a better position to engage in the kind of challenge dialogue that Friedman (1993) recommends for the elimination of bias. The essence here is to "look and listen fully and respond in the moment directly and clearly" [Cacioppe, (1997), p. 342]. We now turn to a discussion on right intention.

7.2 *Path 2: right intention*

Our interactions with others are often judgment-based. As such, what others say and do can often influence our feelings and actions in good and bad ways. The ability to adopt a non-judgmental attitude is thus among the primary aims of mindfulness training and one of the most difficult lessons in life (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In our interactions in the workplace, for example, we experience things, people, and actions that we quickly judge to be either good or bad. In situations such as these, there is a need to calm down, stop, and make use of our sense of mindfulness. Otherwise, we can easily become mindless and pronounce either good or bad judgments in a reactive manner – i.e., on automatic pilot, as already noted above. But how can the link between right intention, diversity management and HRM be described? While HR managers are continuously making assessments, they might feel better about this task by stopping, stepping aside, and letting the positive and negative experiences pass without judging them (i.e., avoiding prejudice and bias). Viewing this from a workplace diversity perspective, this means being able to see and think about a situation by considering the interests of others apart from one's own

selfish needs (White 1999). As feminist philosopher Ruddick (1989, p.151) declares, “I now care about my thinking and think about what I care about – about lives and what endangers them.” In Buddhism this is known as ‘right intention’. Hence, thinking is a forerunner to action, and for that reason non-judgmental attitudes need to be cultivated through the practice of loving-kindness meditation and compassion in an effort to do no harm. Building upon this understanding of wisdom in MHRM, HR managers need to become proactive by supporting the development of an intersectionally oriented workplace culture. Such a shift, however, needs a harmonious HR manager with good communication skills, who can make use of the second division of NEP – i.e., *right speech, right action, and right livelihood* – to develop a diversity-minded workplace environment.

7.3 *Problems and critiques*

With regard to the matter of wisdom, MHRM proposes that cultivating the right view can help to develop more sensitive, caring, and responsible communications skills, giving rise to a more nuanced and considerate interpersonal dealings with Others. One such skill or technique is that of ‘active listening’, which requires the HR manager to attend to the present moment and pay close attention to what is said and the way it is said so as to accurately understand the meaning of the utterance [Atkins and Parker (2011), p.531]. However, it also must be pointed out that the ability to ‘actively listen’ to the Other can be challenging in today’s high-paced corporate milieu, especially in relation to the fact that workplaces are increasingly characterised by diversity in various respects. Thus, the exchange between even a mindful HR manager and the employees can be easily misinterpreted for a variety of causes originating from either the receiver or the sender of the communication. On the receiver end of the equation any number of factors can be there on any given day that reduce the HR manager’s ability to actively listen – e.g., job stress, multitasking, multiple meetings with disgruntled employees. And on the sending end of the equation, the ability to communicate can be disrupted by such factors as anger and frustration over company treatment, meagre communication skills, and a reluctance to speak plainly.

8 **NEP Division two: ethical conduct**

8.1 *Path 3: right speech*

Language has the power to either bolster or crush an individual’s self-esteem and self-reliance. Words also are capable of having a long-term negative impact on others. Thus, HR managers must carefully monitor their own speech by avoiding what is described in Buddhism as the four evils of the mouth – lying, deceitfulness, slander, and improper language – and must make sure that their speech adheres to organisational standards and remains non-harmful. Mindful HR managers should thus choose their words carefully and should know how to use language to create a diversity-minded workplace culture characterised by good relationships and results. With right speech, mindful HR managers are able to encourage their followers to develop their skills and to feel joy in their performance (Burgoon et al., 2000). According to the Buddha, apart from possessing high moral character, leaders should also be kind and gentle in their speech,

thoughts, and actions (Bhatta, 2000). In this connection, the link to diversity management perspective seems obvious. Hence, White (1999) advises us that “to practice right speech in organisations is to speak only the truth and only that which is helpful to others. It is easier to practice right speech if one remains in the present time, speaking of the relevant here and now and avoiding hearsay, rumor, and gossip” (p.117). In order to succeed in this task, however, mindful HR managers also require knowledge about right action.

8.2 Path 4: right action

Among those that have worked for some time as HR managers, it is not uncommon to experience feelings of indifference after interacting with scores of other persons each day for years on end. Indifference involves, among other things, a diminished sense of interest in one's daily duties, in the proficiency with which they are performed, and in the individuals that are supposed to be the focus of one's attention (i.e., a person being perceived and treated more as an object than as a subject. Objectification of others is that the 'other' (e.g., because the other has another gender, class and or ethnicity) is viewed as being less important than oneself and/or used as a means to an end. Objectification creates an imbalance in social interactions (i.e., asymmetric relationships) which can pave the way for discrimination and abusive behaviours. Aversion (the next obstacle on the path towards empathetic social interactions) consists of intense feelings of dislike and/or hostility towards others (e.g., based on class, race ethnicity) that infuses one's interpersonal dealings with a hostile tone. Like many other emotions, hostility can be a response to a situation that seems stressful or provocative. Most HR managers, we can assume, at one time or another have experienced negative emotional states such as hostility, but taking the next step and acting upon them is an entirely different matter. The aversion relationship entails the elements of distance and objectification to an extreme degree, and thus it stands at the opposite end of empathy. Here, it is important to understand the essential distinction between the Western notions of sympathy and empathy and the Buddhist notion of compassion. In the health care literature, sympathy is conceived as a feeling of pity toward the misfortunes of others, especially those that are perceived to have been treated unfairly. Empathy, on the other hand, involves the capacity to sense another person's emotions along with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling. Because of this distinction, many scholars have concluded that 'sympathy' involves a lesser, more shallow and distant form of caring (Thomas et al., 2009): one feels the needs, concerns, sufferings, etc. of another, yet one's response can be devoid of authenticity in the sense that it can contain a degree of condescension as opposed to being an honest and sincere encounter between two equal persons. Many Western scholars regard empathy (not sympathy) as the most genuine and immediate feeling toward another person, resting upon “the ability to identify with and understand the situations, motives, and feelings of others” [Hurlbut, (2002), p. 314].

This brings us to the notion of compassion, which in Buddhist teachings can be understood as an active, outwardly expressive and more universal form of empathy, resulting from the understanding that all living beings (down to the worm in the field) are equally part of a greater whole, and thus deserving of our respect, our love, and our kind consideration (Nilsson, 2014). Buddhist compassion consists of a state of mind that is highly attuned to the sufferings of others and that is dedicated to the amelioration of all such sufferings (Rinpoche, 2010). One way of achieving such a compassionate state of mind is through the practice *mettā* meditation – i.e., loving-kindness. (For a conceptual

analysis of the terms sympathy, empathy, compassion and caring, see Schantz, 2007). The term *mettā* is said to derive from Theravāda Buddhism (*Mettā Sutta*) and to be identical with compassion (Gombrich, 2006). Among the many meditational exercises in Buddhism, *mettā* meditation holds a vital place (Anālayo, 2010). According to Wallace (2006) *mettā* meditation is especially helpful for balancing our emotions and opening the heart. *Mettā* meditation is considered a powerful tool that enables the mindful HR manager to overcome the various challenges that are encountered in the course of practicing mindfulness and in managing others. Primarily, however, *mettā* meditation is said to change the egocentric mind into one that is more giving and caring (cf. Jordt, 2007; Nilsson, 2014).

8.3 *Path 5: right livelihood*

In Buddhism, practicing *right livelihood* means avoiding work that might hurt living beings and/or the environment (cf. Morin, 1999). In organisations, right livelihood can include providing the personnel with mindfulness training, as this sort of body-mind development improves not only the health and well-being of the personnel, but also the effectiveness and ethical awareness of HR managers and others, along with the quality of their interrelations (Chaskalson, 2011; Weick and Putnam, 2006). Such exercises also can provide an opportunity for human resource managers, department heads, and employees to come together outside the workplace and engage in a useful collective activity that is unrelated to ordinary job assignments. If HR managers are educated about the virtues of these sorts of mindfulness activities and are able to develop programs that enable all co-workers to become closer – to become more of an organisational family – the overall workplace atmosphere will display a greater degree of compassion, honesty, generosity, diversity-acceptance and cooperation on the one hand, and manifest a lesser degree of callousness, deceitfulness, and self-centredness on the other. This, of course, will obviously serve to increase the overall corporate productivity and success. The endeavour to see others on their own terms is typical of those that practice right livelihood and/or adhere to diversity management. In closing this section, it can be emphasised once again that practicing right livelihood helps one to develop qualities like compassion, empathy and a sense of responsibility and diversity-mindedness towards others.

8.4 *Problems and critiques*

As mentioned above, the development of an ethics-of-care dimension in HRM goes together with the personal growth that is entailed in *mettā* meditational practices, which are meant to facilitate empathetic, compassionate interactions with others as well as the discovery of new levels of understanding relative to oneself and others. It would be well to remember, however, that Buddhism is not the only religious tradition that emphasises compassion and brotherly love. In Christianity, there is the notion of agape, or selfless, unconditional love, best exemplified by the love of a mother for her child, while in Islam there is the notion of *rahmah*, meaning mercy, grace, and compassion for all creatures in the universe; and among Hindus, compassion (*karunya*) is considered a cardinal virtue – something to be consciously cultivated and practiced on one's life. Mindfulness (*mettā* meditation) in other words, represents only one way of developing and enhancing this important human quality, and one that many with a Western theistic orientation apparently tend to resist due to its association with the New Age movement (Hathaway

and Tan, 2009). This, of course, is a limitation when it comes to application. Another potential drawback with making use of Buddhist principles to enhance HRM involves the fact that the traditional Buddhist practice of the noble eightfold path is very much a sole enterprise that is extremely focused on the individual practitioner's inward journey. As such, it is not a well-suited discipline when it comes to the matter of focusing on and developing relational competence, which is among the most important features of a mindful approach to HR management (Nelson, 2009). This, however, is exactly why we have recommended that Buddhist principles be combined with diversity management thinking. It is this combination that to some degree mitigates Buddhism's inward-directed tendencies and enables principles such as compassion, loving-kindness and thus diversity-mindedness to be applied in a practical way to everyday human interactions in the workplace.

9 NEP Division three: concentration

9.1 Path 6: right effort

To be an HR manager requires both engagement and stress resistance (cf. Fotinatos, 2018). To shoulder this task, HR managers should have both formal qualifications such as HRM training and informal qualifications, which can include social competence. Social competence, in the context of right effort, is based on four elements: *attentiveness*, *responsibility*, *competence*, and *responsiveness* (White, 1999). *Attentiveness* (i.e., the cardinal function of consciousness) is the same as being in a mindful state – i.e., being present in the moment and attentive to others with a caring and compassionate mind. *Responsibility* means to attend to and maintain one's obligations, promises, and commitments to others; *competence* refers not only to how HR managers handle themselves in the workplace, but also to how they are able to maintain an attentive, responsible, compassionate and intersectional state of mind toward others (Ciulla, 2009); and finally, *responsiveness* means to embody an ethics of caring in one's relationships with others (White, 1999). In short, responsiveness entails cultivating the good that is already present in all of us (i.e., *right effort*) (White, 1999).

9.2 Path 7: right mindfulness

Regardless of one's views on meditation, the practice has been shown to reduce workplace stress through its effect on the sympathetic nervous system as well as to enhance empathy, compassion and energy that will enable concentration at work (Fotinatos, 2018; Glomb et al., 2011; Petchsawang, 2008). For this and other reasons, mindfulness meditation constitutes an important tool for HR managers that can enhance diversity mindedness and improve the quality of work. Right meditation in this context involves setting aside time to go to the mental 'gym', which entails regularly dedicating a certain portion of the workday to the practice of meditation – something that can be performed comfortably while laying down or sitting in a chair at the office. HRM can be a challenging task that can easily cause the average HR manager to function in the *doing-* rather than the *being-mode*, and when the *doing-mode* becomes too dominant, HR managers risk entering a mindless rather than a mindful state of consciousness with regard to their work – something that can have a negative impact on the morale of their

personnel (cf. Allen and Knight, 2005). Mindfulness meditation also can be of importance to HR managers because the practice tends to activate the being-mode, bring *awareness* to the body, and strike a needed balance between attention and relaxation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Wallace, 2006). This notwithstanding, one must bear in mind that in daily life the *being-mode* is not an on/off switch, but rather something that is instilled and sustained in the mind after years of training, helping one to become more aware of how behaviour impacts one's thought processes, one's values and one's work environment in a holistic way. According to DeGraff (2012), right mindfulness is not merely a 'path factor' that leads to right concentration, it is an integral part of right concentration itself, as will be elaborately explained in the following section.

9.3 *Path 8: Right concentration*

In mindfulness, breathing is the anchor that controls and regulates our thoughts and feelings, both of which have a great impact on our actions and work performance (Bodhi, 2011; Petchsawang, 2008; Thānissaro, 2012). Breathing exercises such as those practiced during meditation and body scanning, or in daily mindfulness routines, help us drive away and/or ignore the intrusive thoughts and feelings that hinder our body from being calm and concentrated (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Hence, Gilbert and Tirch (2009) claim that fifteen minutes of focused breathing, together with mindfulness training, leads to the regulation of emotions and, by extension, to the lessening of negative thoughts. By restraining our attention so that it does not run amok and pull us out of balance, this particular form of training also provides us with the ability to see things as they are (i.e., letting go) – impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without essence (Bodhi, 2011; Gombrich, 2006). Weick and Putnam (2006, p.277) put it this way: "Concentration and mindfulness work together to control attention. Concentration excludes mental hindrances or interferences leading to a calmer, focused mind (i.e., a present-centred focus). Mindfulness notes when we lose either our momentary focus or longer-term focus and reminds us to refocus"; and Thera (2010, p.7) puts it more metaphorically, noting "right concentration is the intensified steadiness of the mind comparable to the flickering flame of a lamp in a windless place". In this connection, a mindless HR manager is someone that is out of balance and acting on autopilot. When this occurs, the HR manager loses their concentration on the present moment and on building caring interpersonal relationships. To be more specific, 'mindlessness' is often indicative of the human tendency to operate on autopilot, whether by stereotyping, performing mechanically (by rote) or simply not paying attention (Khanna and Greeson 2013; Levinthal and Rerup, 2006). Being mindful, on the other hand, is the opposite of mindlessness, meaning that one is able to sustain a high level of attention that is focused on the pure experience of that which is occurring in the present moment without the necessity of evaluating that experience (Levinthal and Rerup, 2006). Thus, it is important for an HR manager to strive for greater mindfulness – meaning, in this context, an awareness that is as free as possible from biases, prejudices and stereotypes (e.g., woman are best suited for roles that demands support and nurturing (Maheshwari, 2019).

9.4 *Problems and critiques*

In terms of *concentration*, MHRM proposes that right mindfulness can help to reduce stress levels and improve one's ability to act in the being- rather than the *doing-mode*

(Kabat-Zinn, 2013). There is a problem, of course, with over-idealising residence in the being-mode, which in the abstract sounds good but in terms of practical reality must at different points give way to doing, as when making important business decisions regarding future corporate plans, expenditures, and so forth. Disney World is obviously different from a Tibetan Buddhist monastery, having different purposes, aims, and priorities that must be addressed on a daily basis. Too much of the being-mode at the wrong place or time can result in an HR manager quickly searching for another job. The aim should be to strike a practicable balance between the two states while keeping one's feet on the ground. There is also a potential problem with the term 'right mindfulness' in the sense that it characterises a state of consciousness that is almost impossible to achieve for anyone other than a trained Buddhist monk. In traditional Buddhist thought, right mindfulness is characterised by qualities like diligence, clear knowledge, and a mind that is free from desire and detached from the world, thus enabling the practitioner to reach nirvana – a state beyond birth and death. Obviously, when applying such a term to the everyday reality of human resource managers, we are talking about a different level of right mindfulness, one that has more routine aims. In other words, what is 'wrong mindfulness' for Buddhist monks may be 'more than sufficient' mindfulness for HR managers – a level of mindfulness with the more modest aim of enabling them to be better at their job. Thus, we argue for a more this-worldly form of 'right mindfulness', which will grant HR managers the ability to pay more attention in the present moment, thus bringing a greater sense of ethical intention and diversity-minded awareness to all the activities and responsibilities that are theirs to fulfil each day.

10 Concluding remarks

While traditional Buddhism (in any of its forms) and modern Western mindfulness are in many important ways fundamentally different from each other, the latter being a largely watered down and superficial version of the former, the two share a fundamental view of humanity that links them in ways that are of relevance to the creation of a corporate culture that values and promotes diversity and inclusiveness on all organisational levels. This objective, of course, has become one of the primary responsibilities of today's HR managers.

In this regard, even a beginner in mindfulness understands from the start that every conscious being is equally worthy of respect and consideration regardless of the physical, psychological, and circumstantial differences that often distinguish one person from the other—i.e., differences of gender, race, class, age, national origin, sexual orientation, culture, education, and so forth. From the perspective of both traditional Buddhism and Western mindfulness these sorts of distinctions are never viewed as defining when it comes to the treatment of other human beings. Thus, by developing this vision, mindfulness practitioners increase their ability to see beyond these superficial distinctions in their approach to other human beings. The link between the inculcation of this understanding among HR managers and the creation of a corporate culture that celebrates diversity and inclusiveness should be obvious. Such insights could diversify our understanding and study of HRM. Clearly, a tremendous amount of empirical research will be required before we can say anything definitive about the profits of incorporating mindfulness into the daily work of HRM. Based on what we have proposed in this paper, we suggest that future studies develop and validate a measure of HRM practices based on

the components of NEP. This would be the first step to evaluate the effectiveness of mindful HRM on various organisational outcomes.

If an organisation wants to develop a culture that is committed to long-term diversity and inclusiveness, its transformative journey must begin by developing a corps of HR managers that can rise above the judgmentalism, pettiness, narrow-mindedness, and egoism that to one degree or other plagues us all. In this article we have proposed that one way of achieving this aim is by combining diversity management with mindfulness techniques and the Buddhist principles of wisdom, ethical conduct and concentration. The more that HR managers are able to treat all corporate personnel with empathy and compassion, the more that they are able to promote equality, celebrate diversity and develop an inclusive corporate culture, the more they will be able to set the right tone for their organisation's future.

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Notes

- 1 Mindfulness is defined as a particular type of social practice that leads its practitioners to an ethically-minded awareness that is intentionally situated in the here-and-now (Nilsson and Kazemi, 2016).
- 2 The oldest written references for the notion of mindfulness or sati in the Pāli language can be found in the so-called Pāli Canon of the Theravada Buddhist branch. Theravada is the oldest Buddhist school, which today is practiced in Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. All other Buddhist traditions, such as Tibetan or Zen have their origin in this tradition (Schmidt, 2011).
- 3 The term 'Buddhism' is not intended to imply that there is 'one Buddhism' or to privilege one particular interpretation as 'traditional'. Rather it is used to denote teachings derived from the Buddha.