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ORIGINAL PAPER

Addressing Unintended Ethical Challenges of Workplace Mindfulness: A Four-Stage Mindfulness Development Model

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Abstract This study focuses on mindfulness programs in the corporate world, which are receiving increasing attention from business practitioners and organizational scholars. The workplace mindfulness literature is rapidly evolving, but most studies are oriented toward demonstrating the positive impacts of mindfulness as a state of mind. This study adopts a critical perspective to evaluate workplace mindfulness practice as a developmental process, with a focus on its potential risks that have ethical implications and are currently neglected by both researchers and practitioners. We draw from a Buddhist perspective that understands mindfulness training as an ethics-based, longitudinal, and holistic path. To this end, we develop a four-stage model to illustrate a potential developmental process for participants in workplace mindfulness programs. This model comprises four stages of preliminary concentration, deep concentration, self-transcendence, and reengagement, each of which has its own underlying characteristics and impacts on individual participants and organizations.

Keywords Mindfulness · Buddhism · Business ethics

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Introduction

Mindfulness practice is increasingly adopted by institutions such as hospitals, MBA programs, high-tech firms, investment banks, and the military as techniques to improve organizational and individual performance and individual well-being. However, we cannot escape the fact that mindfulness is not a simple technique, and that it changes, indeed, restructures, a person's relationship with his or her thoughts, feelings, and sense of self. Seen in this light, mindfulness is not a trivial process and could take mindfulness practitioners into some troubling places as their relationships with their thoughts and sense of self restructure in uneasy ways. In this study, we examine the potential negative and unintended consequences of mindfulness, which are rarely considered in business research. In doing this, we acknowledge the ethical foundations of mindfulness and discuss the ethical challenges of mindfulness practice in the corporate world. We do not want to overplay these consequences or be alarmist about what is, overall, a very positive and constructive practice, and one that the authors regularly attend to. Nevertheless, a fully responsible approach to mindfulness training has to understand its ethical foundations and risks. We also argue that the greatest benefits of mindfulness [including for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable economics] cannot be completely understood without understanding the path to mindful living and what might, for business, be unintended (and possibly ideologically unwelcome) ethical consequences of encouraging it. To provide a comprehensive view of workplace mindfulness, we propose a four-stage explanatory model of mindfulness development that illustrates positive, negative, and unintended impacts of mindfulness programs on employees and organizations as well as on the world beyond organizations.

Business ethics research is moving to new conceptual approaches such as wisdom (Zacher et al. 2014), behavioral ethics (Cropanzano and Stein 2009), and Eastern philosophy (Koehn 1999; Mulla and Krishnan 2014). This study extends the Eastern philosophy branch of business ethics in a new direction by considering the negative consequences of mindfulness. Most research on the relationship between mindfulness and business ethics demonstrates the positive effects of mindfulness on business ethics, including ethical decision making (Lampe and Engleman-Lampe 2012; Ruedy and Schweitzer 2010; Moberg and Seabright 2000), ethical organizational culture (Kasser and Sheldon 2009; Valentine et al. 2010), moral imagination (La Forge 2000; Waddock 2010), and business ethics education (La Forge 1997). The overwhelmingly positive view of the impact of workplace mindfulness practice on business ethics points to the benefits of taking a critical perspective in evaluating workplace mindfulness programs. This study makes a theoretical contribution to the literature by looking into the potential unintended consequences, ethical challenges, and risks for organizations that introduce mindfulness training to employees.

Besides offering a critical perspective, this study also extends the business ethics literature by pointing out ways to benefit from Eastern philosophies by using Buddhist knowledge of mindfulness practice to address corporate mindfulness' inherent ethical risks. Whereas mindfulness training has recently taken off in the corporate world, it has been a long-standing practice in Buddhism, which views mindfulness as a process, practiced in a holistic way, together with other Buddhist practices and, very importantly, within its ethical framework. Mindfulness practices seek to bring about a calm and equanimous state characterized by sustained emotional balance and psychological well-being by attending to the present moment. Such a state of being creates the conditions in which acting with compassion and experiencing profound insights about self and the external world are encouraged (Gunaratana 2002; Marques 2012). Compassion and enlightenment, however, are largely neglected by workplace mindfulness researchers and practitioners.

In modern workplaces, mindfulness is often instrumentalized and offered not as part of a spiritual or ethical whole, but simply as sets of techniques for eliminating some specific problems such as stress or achieving some outcomes such as enhanced productivity. Buddhist mindfulness meditation, however, often takes up a "no-gain" approach (Magid and Poirier 2016) to realizing an "egoless" state of existence that is not self-centered and that reduces human suffering and dissatisfaction that are products of ego (Epstein 1988). This is in contrast to the goal of workplace mindfulness programs that take a "for-gain" approach (Magid and Poirier 2016) and advocate for mindfulness as a tool to gain, for example, a calmer yet stronger and more productive "self"; that is, the focus is strengthening one's sense of self rather than reducing it. What lies at the center of Buddhist mindfulness is an ethical framework consisting of universal and transcendent ethics, such as human flourishing and altruistic concern for the world, including all sentient beings. The Buddhist approach to mindfulness training includes training to establish appropriate intentions prior to mindfulness practice. In contrast, Western workplace mindfulness is often viewed as an ethically neutral state and most workplace mindfulness research does not mention the ethical superstructure of Buddhist mindfulness.

Recognizing the problematic ethical contradictions between Western workplace mindfulness and Buddhist mindfulness, scholars have called for organizational theorists to draw directly from Buddhist forms of mindfulness (Purser and Milillo 2015; Weick and Putnam 2006). We concur with these calls to draw directly from the Buddhist perspective (Brazier 2013; Davis and Thompson 2014; Dreyfus 2011; Vago and Silbersweig 2012), a perspective that is rooted in an accumulation of more than 2500 years of experience in mindfulness practice. Inspired by the authors' own long-standing personal mindfulness practices, we argue that workplace mindfulness poses a number of ethical challenges to organizations because mindfulness can damage employee well-being if practiced without caring and knowledgeable trainers who understand its Buddhist ethical anchors in the Eightfold Path that includes right views, right intentions, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness, as well as knowledge of what psychological problems can arise from mindfulness practice (Lindahl et al. 2017). Potential harms of mindfulness training are discussed in Buddhist literature. Preventive measures and solutions to these problems are documented and summarized as guidelines (Nan 2009). For example, meditation should be interrupted immediately if the trainer notices the meditator starting to experience potentially damaging feelings such as illusions or deceptions, which are documented in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, an influential Mahayana Buddhist sutra (Lindahl et al. 2017). More importantly, ethical education, as stated in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, is a critical part of mindfulness training, including as a preventive measure to its potential harms.

If organizational scholars wish to understand workplace mindfulness practices thoroughly, tapping into the rich theoretical and experiential knowledge about Buddhist mindfulness is a critical step. Thus, we draw on Buddhist perspectives about mindfulness training as an *ethics-based*, *longitudinal,* and *holistic* developmental pathway. We elaborate a four-stage model to discuss Western workplace mindfulness practice as a developmental pathway for its participants. Our model comprises four stages which

employees in workplace mindfulness programs might experience over time: preliminary concentration, deep concentration, self-transcendence, and reengagement. The workplace mindfulness development model proposed in this study contributes to the literature by (1) articulating the potential ethical risks of workplace mindfulness practice, (2) systematically comparing the differences between Buddhist ethics and corporate values in relation to mindfulness practice, and (3) suggesting a developmental perspective on workplace mindfulness over time and the different ethical risks associated with different developmental stages.

Our view is not that all Western mindfulness programs need to strictly adhere to ancient Buddhist doctrines, but that organizations and participants in these programs can benefit from being informed about mindfulness's Buddhist roots. We also keep in mind that Buddhism is not a single, uniform spiritual tradition but that many different Buddhist traditions have spread globally, taking various interpretations and ways of implementing core Buddhist teachings (McMahan 2008). This variation in the Buddhist traditions includes a range of views on mindfulness and its practice, including various forms of meditation and somatic practices. Following previous studies on workplace mindfulness, we focus on the most common type of mindfulness meditation, which entails sitting quietly and observing one's moment-to-moment experiences. The theoretical arguments in this study, however, may also apply to other forms of mindfulness training. Both the terms "meditation" and "mindfulness training/program" are used in this study, with the former referring to the practice of mindfulness meditation itself and the latter to training programs in which employees are instructed in mindfulness practices.

The rest of this study is organized as follows: First, we discuss the philosophico-ethical foundation of mindfulness in the East and its development in the Western workplaces, with a focus on the potential ethical challenges of workplace mindfulness programs and conflicting elements between Buddhist ethics and Western workplace mindfulness programs. We then introduce a four-stage model that explains workplace mindfulness development. Finally, we discuss the managerial implications of our model and future research questions.

Workplace Mindfulness: Eastern Origin and Western Development

Mindfulness was first conceptualized in a range of Eastern spiritual texts such as Buddhist (e.g., the *Abhidhamma*) and Taoist scriptures (e.g., *Tao Te Ching*) and involves having an open mind that is aware and attentive to what is taking place in the present (Brown and Ryan 2003). Mindfulness as a quality of mind is often described as something that can be cultivated through meditation (Kuan 2008), which is a central component of mental and physical training in ancient Eastern traditions (Smith and Novak 2003). In the West, various definitions of mindfulness have been advanced. One of the most widely cited Western definitions of mindfulness was developed by Kabat-Zinn (1994, 2003), who defined mindfulness as the nonjudgmental focus of one's attention on the experience that occurs in the present moment. This definition has provided important conceptual contributions to subsequent research and work related to Western mindfulness practice. However, mindfulness is translated from the Sanskrit word *sati*. Sati literally means "remember," with connotations of remembering the Dharma and remembering with a clear and calm mind through the cultivation of the mind/consciousness. The Dharma points to this cultivation through practices that stabilize the mind in the present while also developing attitudes and intentions that are consistent with the ethical framework of compassion set out in the Dharma. The positive benefits of mindfulness to individual well-being and to the community are amplified by ethical, altruistic, compassionate ways of engaging with the world.

Although conceptualizations of mindfulness in the West may have departed somewhat from Buddhist ethics, mindfulness is increasingly valued in modern psychology and psychotherapy (Kang and Whittingham 2010). Much discussion circulates about the role of Buddhist mindfulness and contemplative practices in psychotherapy, particularly regarding the confluences and divergences of Eastern traditions and Western psychotherapy (Bogart 1991), and their impact on people's psychological, behavioral, and cognitive states. In particular, a number of psychologists and psychotherapists who are informed by Eastern spiritual traditions, such as Jack Engler, Ken Wilber, Mark Epstein, and David Loy, have contributed to a fertile dialog between Eastern spiritual traditions (especially Buddhism) and Western views of the "self" (i.e., the individual's conception of being a separate and distinct person with a unique identity), which provide important theoretical foundations to the four-stage model of mindfulness that we develop herein. Because the discussion of mindfulness meditation and its impact on one's perception of "self" is very limited in management studies, we use a number of concepts developed in psychology, to help advance understandings of mindfulness in workplaces.

Following its popularity in psychology, the concept of mindfulness was introduced into the management literature and receives increasing attention from business practitioners and organizational scholars (Hülsheger et al. 2013; Dane 2011; Ray et al. 2011; Reb and Atkins 2015; Vogus and Sutcliffe 2012; Weick and Putnam 2006; Weick and

Sutcliffe 2006). Ellen Langer's functional description of mindfulness as "a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context with active distinction-making and differentiation" (Langer and Moldoveanu 2000, p. 220) is representative of Western thinking and has been widely adopted by organizational researchers (e.g., Fiol and O'Connor 2003; Weick et al. 1999). Studies on workplace mindfulness tend to focus on the positive effects of mindfulness practice in the functional domains of attention, cognition, emotion, behavior, and physiology, which influence a wide variety of workplace outcomes (e.g., Akinola 2010; George 2000; Lord et al. 2010), such as improved coordination (Weick and Roberts 1993), increased creativity (Langer 2005), heightened adaptation (Vogus and Welbourne 2003), and lower stress (Davidson et al. 2003).

A number of studies have been conducted to explore the relationship between mindfulness and business ethics. As shown in Table 1, several quantitative studies investigate mindfulness as a state. Ruedy and Schweitzer (2010) study the mechanism through which mindfulness affects an individual's awareness of his or her present experience and ethical decision making. Two studies by Valentine et al. (2010) and Kasser and Sheldon (2009) investigate how mindfulness interacts with other organizational elements including organizational ethics and employee well-being. A series of theoretical papers has discussed how mindfulness practice helps development of ethical vision (La Forge 2000), shapes business ethics education (La Forge 1997; Lampe and Engleman-Lampe 2012), and cultivates moral imagination (La Forge 2004; Waddock 2010). These studies make significant contributions to our understanding of the positive association between mindfulness and business ethics. However, the ethical risks of workplace mindfulness training and a developmental perspective of workplace mindfulness remain largely undiscussed in this literature but pose significant questions for both organizations and individual participants. This study therefore extends the literature by using its critical lens to provide a developmental framework for workplace mindfulness.

Potential Ethical Challenges of Workplace Mindfulness Programs

A major ethical risk of introducing mindfulness training to workplace arises from potential negative psychological impacts of such training on well-being. These impacts are rarely mentioned in modern workplace mindfulness programs, many of which focus only on the pleasant or superficial benefits of such training. Ethical risks also arise from using mindfulness as a stress reduction or relaxation method to increase productivity (performance) by stealth, which we call "soft" work intensification.

In the wider management literature, only a few studies mention the impact of mindfulness training on one's unconscious and when they do so they use "scientifically" neutral terms such as "nonconsciously based phenomena" or "internal phenomena" (Dane 2011, p. 1001). In clinical

Table 1 Key studies on mindfulness in the business ethics literature

Authors	Study	Mindfulness as a state/practice	Main argument/finding
Ruedy and Schweitzer (2010)	Quantitative	State	Mindfulness is associated with lower incidence and magnitude of unethical behavior, increase in the importance of moral identity, and a principled approach to ethical decision making
Valentine, Godkin and Varca (2010)	Quantitative	State	Organizational ethics is positively correlated with organizational mindfulness, which is negatively correlated with role conflict
Kasser and Sheldon (2009)	Quantitative	State	Mindfulness is found to be a mediator between time affluence and subjective well-being, which should be one of the goals of ethical businesses
Moberg and Seabright (2000)	Theory	State	Mindfulness, in contrast to mindlessness, leads to moral sensitivity, one of the essential components of moral imagination process
La Forge (1997)	Theory	Practice	Non-discursive and discursive meditation is useful in helping students become ethical people
La Forge (2000)	Theory	Practice	Three kinds of meditation (non-discursive, semidiscursive, and discursive meditation) are proposed as the starting point for the recovery of meaning in business life by enabling moral imagination and restoration of ethical vision
Waddock (2010)	Theory	Practice	Reflective practice such as mindfulness meditation improves one's capacity to "see" the three main capabilities of moral imagination, systems understanding and esthetic sensibility, all of which are related to the emergence of wisdom
Lampe and Engleman-Lampe (2012)	Theory	Practice	Mindfulness meditation is useful to improve ethical decision making as it increases personal awareness, and cognitive and emotional regulation

psychology, however, a number of studies have discussed the negative effects observed in the clinical use of meditation (Epstein and Lieff 1986; Miller 1993; Urbanowski and Miller 1996; Lindahl et al. 2017). Informed by psychology, we argue that workplace mindfulness programs may trigger a number of negative psychological problems, if conducted without caution, including (1) unveiling of traumatic memories; (2) depression caused by deceleration; (3) existential meaninglessness; and (4) anxiety caused by conflicts between mindfulness practice and corporate requirements.

Unveiling of Traumatic Memories

As concentration strengthens during meditation, the meditator often enters a state of calmness, relaxation, and equanimity. However, as the background "chatter" of the mind quiets, a common experience is the unveiling of past memories and associated emotions that are long forgotten, or, in some cases, repressed (Miller 1993). The unveiling of repressed trauma can be overwhelming to the meditator and cause serious psychological damage if not treated properly (Urbanowski and Miller 1996). Moreover, the process of "letting go" of one's self and ego and the openness to the unconscious that meditation provides may also contribute to the negative experiences of those who have unresolved unconscious issues, which may emerge in the form of an upsurge of fantasies and delusions (Epstein and Lieff 1986), leading to undesirable outcomes such as aggressive behaviors.

Depression Caused by Deceleration

Mindfulness interventions in a workplace can momentarily slow down perceptions of time and the pace of work, creating fertile ground for deceleration (Kristensen 2016). Whereas deceleration may create more time for a more relaxing and pleasant work atmosphere, it may interrupt the routines and structure of a highly demanding job, which helps some employees to manage their depression by providing them "something to do" in every moment (Oliffe et al. 2013) and to present a non-depressive persona. Hence, busy daily activities at work may serve as a defense mechanism against depression, and depression could be triggered if mindfulness practice interrupts a busy routine (Bogart 1991).

Existential Meaninglessness

Workplace mindfulness programs may prompt questions on the meaning of one's job, or even existential questions about the meaning of one's life (Neck and Milliman 1994; Kahnweiler and Otte 1997). Some meditators may experience a sense of fragmentation and anxiety as a result of insight into the impermanent nature of the self and the external world that are associated with decentering the self (ego) (Epstein and Lieff 1981). Unveiling traumatic memories may also lead participants to ask questions such as "What have I done in my life to attract such pain?" or "Who am I that I should experience these traumas?" These questions may trigger existential anxiety (Wilding et al. 2005), and failure to answer them may lead to confusion, self-doubt, and a sense of existential meaninglessness (Parry and Jones 1986).

Anxiety Caused by Conflicts Between Mindfulness Practice and Corporate Requirements

The inherent nature of mindfulness practice and ethics is potentially in conflict with many corporate demands, especially within for-profit organizations and in highly competitive environments. For example, paying attention to the present and letting go of the tyranny of the past and/or fear of the future, which is fundamental to mindfulness training, might be one of the greatest challenges for managers, who feel their main responsibility is to keep things under control and constantly plan for the future (Rooney et al. 2010). While mindfulness practice allows managers to reduce their desire to achieve personal success (e.g., "letting go"), companies conduct performance reviews or reward programs that encourage the same managers to pursue personal success through competition with others. As a consequence of these contradictory values embedded in meditation and daily corporate life, employees may be confused and frustrated as they advance along the meditative path. Participants may also experience anxiety or feelings of failure if they do not achieve the results from meditation that they hoped for (Lazarus 1976), which are often highlighted at the beginning of mindfulness training programs but may take individuals a long time to realize.

The potential occurrence of the above negative psychological impacts becomes more pronounced when they emerge in an interrelated way. The unveiling of traumatic memories may trigger a sense of existential meaninglessness, which is one of the major causes of depression (Meyer and Garcia-Roberts 2007). Participants who experience these consequences can be confused and feel helpless if they are not informed of potential problems and instructors are not equipped with the knowledge to solve those problems. It is the duty of organizations to understand these risks and plan accordingly when introducing mindfulness practice to employees. Currently, however, little attention is given to negative aspects of workplace mindfulness programs. Many workplace mindfulness trainers may not be properly informed about these issues. This is not surprising because Western practice and research on mindfulness is a relatively recent phenomenon

and has largely ignored the theoretical knowledge about mindfulness practice contained in the Buddhist canon (Davis and Thompson 2014; Purser and Milillo 2015). Yet, overlooking the negative impacts of mindfulness practice leads to the ethical risk of an organization compromising its duty of care to its employees. Obtaining a deeper understanding of mindfulness practice is, therefore, necessary and requires a sound understanding of Buddhist knowledge of dealing with the potential negative impacts of mindfulness practice.

Ethical risks also arise from using mindfulness as simply a stress reduction or relaxation methods (although both things are good), and in service of creating "soft" work intensification. Work intensification is an unwelcome feature of contemporary workplaces that threatens well-being. The focus of workplace mindfulness programs on increased work performance by reducing stress is, perhaps, misguided, particularly if the goal is actually to increase productivity rather than well-being. In such cases, the organization is asking employees to change, but underlying values, assumptions, patterns of organizational behavior, and management attitudes remain the same. If employees increase productivity and in doing so take on more work, stress levels will likely remain unchanged. In this scenario, having recognized the stress of employees, managers are negligent in failing to deal compassionately with it.

Three Traditional Emphases of Buddhist Mindfulness Practice

To advance our understandings of the risks discussed above, we draw from the Buddhist perspective and elaborate on three aspects: ethical requirements, longitudinal development, and the holistic approach. Although the most striking difference between Buddhist mindfulness and Western workplace mindfulness is the Buddhist emphasis on the ethical foundations of mindfulness, Buddhism also stresses a committed and longitudinal approach to developing mindfulness through a holistic process. Importantly, these three dimensions of Buddhist mindfulness are related to solutions to deal with the potential risks of mindfulness practice, as discussed below.

Ethical Requirements of Mindfulness

Workplace mindfulness is often presented as an ethically neutral activity, characterized primarily by a nonjudgmental focus on one's attention to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn 1994). Majority of Western studies tend not to refer to mindfulness's ethical and spiritual core, with a limited number of exceptions (Table 1). In contrast, ethics lies at the center of Buddhist mindfulness and the core of Buddhist ethics is an altruistic concern for the welfare of all sentient beings (Flanagan 2011; Forbes 2014). Coming to meditation with appropriate intentions and attitudes is indivisible from Buddhist mindfulness, and therefore, Buddhist masters stress the importance of ethics-based mind training. Purser and Milillo (2015) developed a Triadic model (Fig. 1), which reflects the fundamentals of Buddhist mindfulness set out in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (*The Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness*), one of the most widely studied discourses in the Pāli Canon of Theravada Buddhism and one of the foundational texts for guiding mindfulness meditation practice. The ethical dimension of mindfulness is clear in this model and so, too, is the connected imperative of liberation from the causes of suffering (discontent). The Triadic model is also indicative of the level of commitment and effort that are central to Buddhist ethics and mindfulness.

Buddhist meditation can lead to enlightenment, or self-transcendence, that allows one to go beyond habitual perceptions or conceptions of self and world (e.g., attachment to the material world), culminating in peak experiences with profound insight (Garland 2007). Enlightenment consists of multiple dimensions of realization about the impermanent nature of oneself and the world. Much attention is also given to the concept of "emptiness," which is characterized by clarity, openness, and an experience that removes the idea of a substantially existing individual (i.e., self or ego) and the substantiality of external phenomena (La Forge 2000; Welwood 2014). According to Buddhist teachings, practising meditation without understanding its nature may lead to "fire and devil" (Hong 2005, p. 269). "Fire and devil" are understood through modern terms such as "delusion" and "anxiety," which are negative emotional and psychological experiences that damage the meditator's well-being (Epstein and Lieff 1981). In Buddhist meditation, as one makes progress and obtains deep concentration, he/she is closer to the realization that the self or ego is impermanent, and that the illusory construction of the fixed and egoic self is the source of suffering or discontent. Buddhist teachings warn meditators about the dangers that may occur during this process. This is consistent with findings of the negative impacts of Western meditation practice in psychology (Epstein and Lieff 1986; Miller 1993; Urbanowski and Miller 1996; Lindahl et al. 2017). Existential meaninglessness, one of the negative impacts we discussed earlier, is addressed in the Buddhist tradition by stressing the importance of a meditator's realization of the impermanent nature of one's self, which is the critical realization to removing suffering and creating happiness. By embracing the emptiness of one's self (i.e., the understanding of impermanent nature of oneself and the unhelpfulness of egotistical drives), the meditator is able to ground his/her

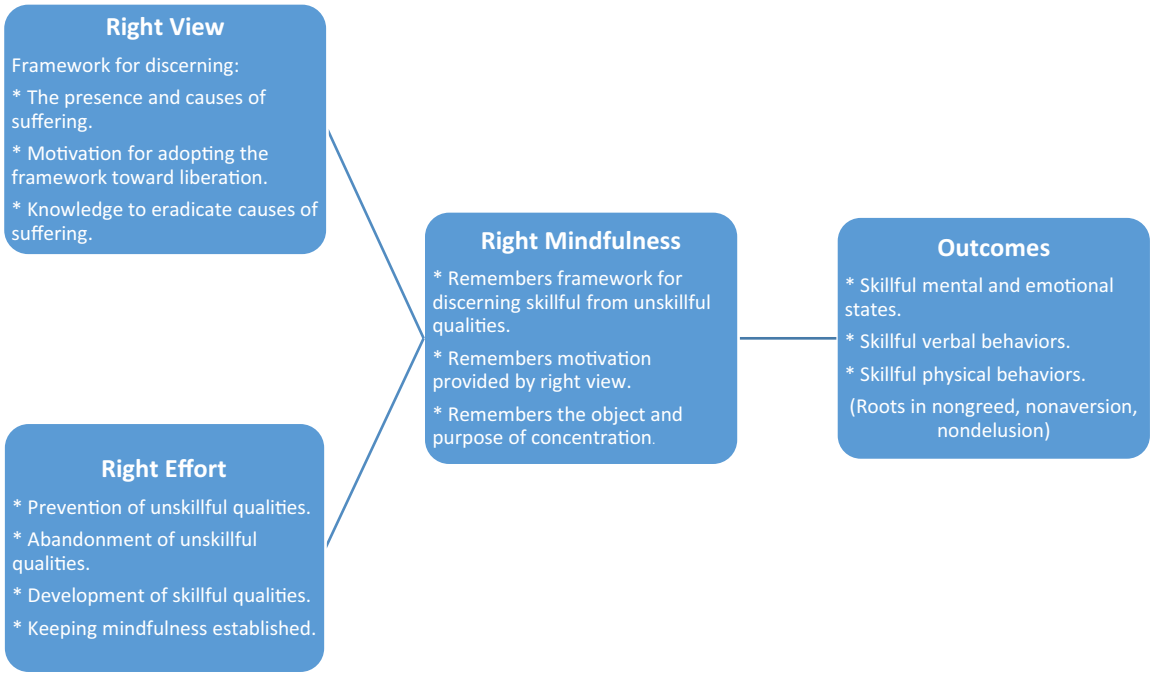

Fig. 1 The Triadic model of Buddhist mindfulness (Purser and Milillo 2015)

existential meaning in being a force for compassion and happiness.

In Western culture, however, emptiness is usually perceived as a negative experience and is associated with existential meaninglessness (Epstein 1988). This difference between Buddhist and Western perceptions of "emptiness" is discussed by existential-humanistic psychologists who support the idea that Buddhist awakening is indivisible from the realization that the self or ego is illusory (Aronson 2004). For example, social comparison (Richins 1991), the toxic phenomena that marketing uses to encourage consumers to compare themselves to "ideal" or high-status people who are shown using a product to convince consumers that they will become more like the ideal person if they consume that product (Chae 2015) would not work for an empty or egoless person. We note that social comparison through marketing and advertising is the cause of much unhappiness and suffering (Chae 2015).

Meditation provides a way of letting go of one's ego by transformation of ego consciousness into a universal consciousness (Odanjnyk 1988). Ego transcendence also helps to bring about a decreased preoccupation with one's personal problems, discontents, and suffering (Deikman 1982), but the path to this kind of consciousness can be difficult. If a workplace mindfulness program aims to remove suffering in the form of, for example, stress, achieving emptiness might, therefore, be ethically awkward for an advertising agency that promotes consumption by manipulating consumers to make destructive social comparisons.

Longitudinal Development of Mindfulness

Most Buddhist traditions emphasize mindfulness training as a longitudinal developmental practice (Brown 1977), involving focused and disciplined engagement over a prolonged period of time. Buddhist literature clearly documents the different stages a practitioner moves through over time. The *Vissuddhimaga* of Theravadan Buddhism, for example, describes eight levels of *jhanas* (concentration stages) (Goleman 1984). Mahamudra Buddhism describes a cartography of cognitive and affective changes during which specific levels of concentration are achieved in meditation (Brown 2006). In psychology, scholars have paid attention to this longitudinal dimension and studied mindfulness as a process. Brown (1977, 2006), for example, uses classical Tibetan meditation texts to specify a set of time-dependent variables that change during the process of meditation practice. Garland et al. (2015) developed a process model of meditation in which mindful positive emotion regulation unfolds over time toward eudaimonic well-being. In a study across multiple meditative traditions including Tibetan Mahamudra, Hindu Yogasutras, and Theravada Vipassana, Brown (1986) summarized a systematic progression of spiritual development, i.e., a "path," which provides an important theoretical foundation for our

mindfulness development model for the modern workplace.

The organizational literature on workplace mindfulness tends to focus on mindfulness as content or a psychological state, rather than mindfulness as a process, a preference that reflects its grounding in Western scientific thought (Weick and Putnam 2006). Similarly, workplace mindfulness practice sees meditation as an exercise for relaxation or stress reduction, or as a performance enhancement technique, instead of as a gradual process associated with profound personal insights and eudaimonic outcomes. Viewing mindfulness as a state fails to understand its process and may blind us to any psychological and spiritual turmoil during its practice and the support needed from the trainer. A major aim of the stage model we develop is to incorporate the longitudinal aspect of mindfulness into our understanding of workplace mindfulness practice.

Holistic Approach of Mindfulness

Buddhist mindfulness's holistic approach uses the mutual reinforcement of mindfulness practice with many other factors (e.g., physical, emotional, cognitive, spiritual, ethical, social) of a practitioner and stresses that all these factors should be dealt with together so that the meditators way of life achieves balance and harmony. As suggested by Purser and Milillo (2015), the development of Buddhist mindfulness is contingent on a balanced and integrated application of the Eightfold Path factors (right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration) and their ethical requirements. The other path factors not only serve as necessary support for establishing right mindfulness (Brahm 2006), but also underscore the entire soteriological system of the Buddhist path that aims at effecting deep transformations of mind and behavior toward greater psychological well-being, ethical behavior, and social responsibility. Buddhist mindfulness training is integrated into the meditator's daily activities, with explicit and detailed disciplines to follow throughout one's life. For example, Buddhist traditions require a meditator to reduce his/her personal desire and adopt a prudent lifestyle with minimum material consumption, which is consistent with the Buddhist principle of letting go of selfishness (but is also at odds with individualistic, consumption-oriented economies).

While much is made of the attentional enhancement benefits of mindfulness in the business literature, other path factors such as right speech, right action, and right livelihood have received little or no attention, yet they are also influential in establishing right mindfulness. When mindfulness training is viewed as a compartmentalized tool for enhancing attention and performance, the focus shifts to the outcomes desired by the organization. However, isolation of mindfulness practice from other factors may reduce its effectiveness. Going further, as practitioners develop insight, empathy, and egolessness they may reject the values or low ethical standards of their organization, or indeed, of capitalism. On a larger scale, if such growth occurs across the national workforce, a serious value misalignment would occur dividing organizations from the workforce. Therefore, it is important for researchers and practitioners to discuss these issues more thoroughly. To do so, we will now elaborate a four-stage model to explain workplace mindfulness development and to help us explore how contemporary workplace mindfulness is connected to the ethical, longitudinal, and holistic path of Buddhist mindfulness.

Four-Stage Model of Workplace Mindfulness

To enrich our understanding of workplace mindfulness practice, the four-stage model (1) incorporates ethical considerations in explaining the impacts of workplace mindfulness programs; (2) describes a developmental path with multiple stages that employees may go through in workplace mindfulness programs; and (3) provides a comprehensive and holistic view that acknowledges both positive and negative impacts of workplace mindfulness practice on both the individual and organization.

Our model views mindfulness training as a developmental path along which the practitioner may enter different psychological and mental states. Although a simple description of such a path cannot accurately capture the nuances of Buddhist mindfulness process, previous studies have elaborated clearly definable sequence of stages (Brown 1986; Epstein and Lieff 1981; Purser and Milillo 2015), including (1) preliminary ethical training to develop ethical discipline, integrity, and virtues (sīla) as preparation for mindfulness practice; (2) preliminary mind/body training to allow beginners to develop concentration that allows moment-to-moment observation (samādhi); (3) more intense practice to obtain deep concentration with support of experienced teachers; (4) further practice to obtain deep concentration but without support of teachers; (5) ordinary insight meditation to gain self-transcendence toward profound insights and wisdom (paññā), and (6) extraordinary mind and enlightenment (nirvāna). As suggested by Brown (1986), the developmental stages are broadly similar across religions and cultures, representing natural human development available to anyone who practices. Because some participants may be involved in workplace mindfulness training for a substantial length of time from tens, hundreds, to even

thousands of hours (Good et al. 2015), there is a possibility that workplace meditators can enter into the later stages.

As shown in Fig. 2, our model starts with "preliminary concentration" as Stage 1 instead of "ethical training." Stage 1 is then followed by Stage 2 (deep concentration), Stage 3 (self-transcendence), and Stage 4 (reengagement). This model captures the stages and points to the significant impacts of each stage on an organization and its employees. Reengagement, for example, is elaborated as the final stage to describe the organizational and social influence of an enlightened individual who experienced later stages of his/her mindfulness development. Figure 2 also depicts the different potential routes along which a participant may progress in workplace mindfulness programs. For example, some participants may proceed from Stage 1 (preliminary concentration) to Stage 2 (deep concentration), while others, however, may remain at Stage 1 without going any further in their mindfulness cultivation.

Stage 1: Preliminary Concentration

The initial stage of workplace mindfulness practice often focuses on concentration and so participants are likely to experience an improved level of concentration as well as more positive emotional states (Weick and Putnam 2006). As illustrated in Fig. 2, taking the time to practice paying attention to and being aware of present events and experience improve attention qualities, cognitive capacity and flexibility, emotional reactivity and tone, and self-regulation, all of which positively influence workplace productivity (e.g., Akinola 2010; George 2000; Lord et al. 2010; Ocasio 1997). Hence, mindfulness practice at Stage 1 is generally beneficial both to employees' well-being and to organizations, although the ethical risk of "soft" work intensification presents at this stage. We suggest that an ethics framework for mindfulness is introduced in parallel with the first stages of learning concentration skills. Many participants remain at this stage, but others may continue to advance along the developmental path. Thus far, however, workplace mindfulness research and practice focuses on Stage 1, without considering mindfulness training as a process in which participants can enter further stages (shown in Fig. 2).

Stage 2: Deep Concentration

We name Stage 2 "deep concentration" because over time meditators progressively improve their ability to enter into

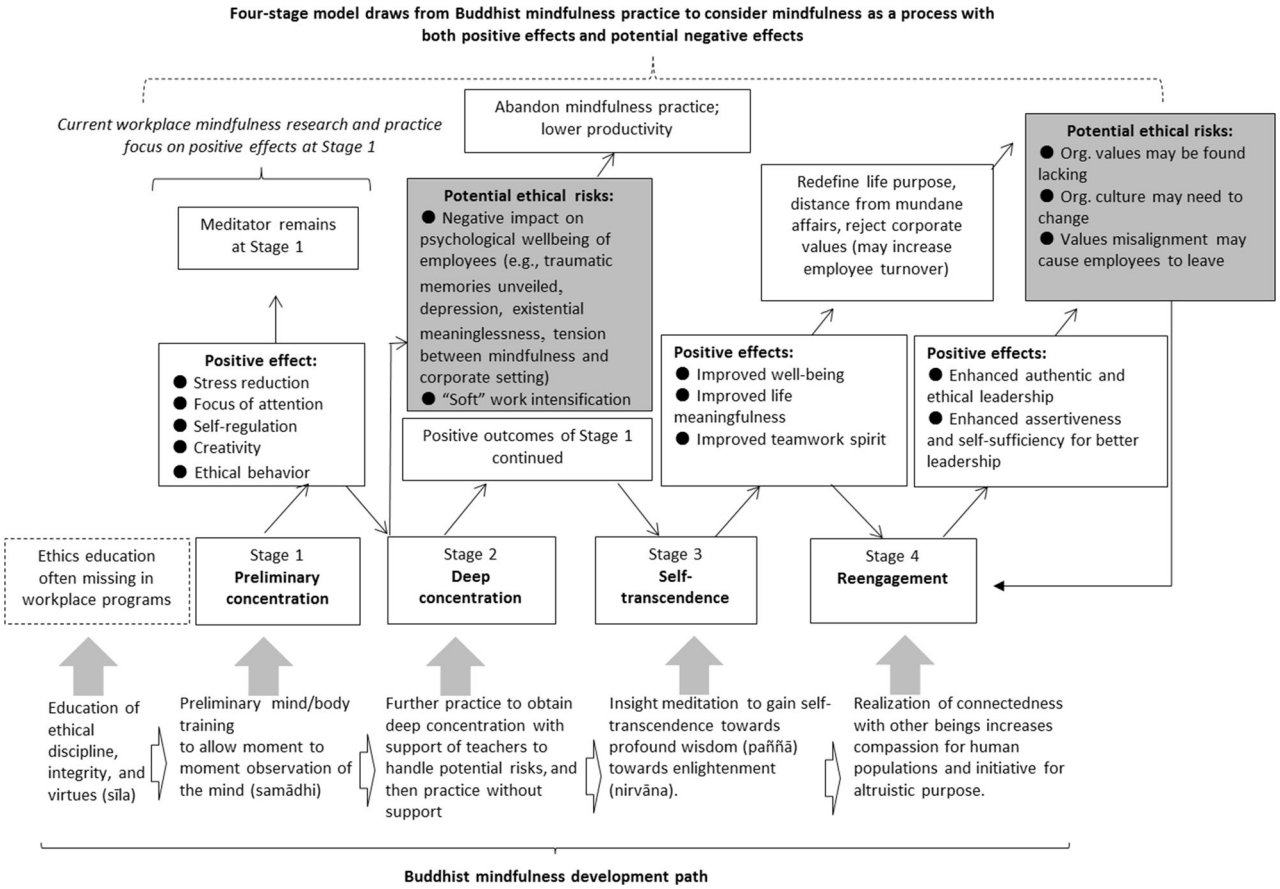

Fig. 2 Four-stage model of workplace mindfulness development informed by Buddhist perspectives

a deeper state of mindfulness characterized by uninterrupted concentration and the ability to minimize mind wandering (Thompson 1994). With their minds less occupied by constant thoughts and images, the meditator may experience a further increase in positive emotions such as tranquillity, bliss, and rapture (Lesh 1970).

Many meditators will experience a relatively smooth Stage 2 with continued and deepened positive effects they obtained at Stage 1. For some who arrive at Stage 2, however, meditation can become unpleasant and agitated by the psychological problems we discussed earlier, or other psychological or physical irritations (Lindahl et al. 2017). As a result, many people abandon their practice in frustration at this point. In the Buddhist tradition, those who wish to overcome these difficulties require the support and guidance of an experienced teacher (Nan 2009). Once the meditator stabilizes his/her practice and gains enough insight and ease with their deep mindfulness, they may enter into an enlightened state with or without support. In Western workplaces, however, little support is likely to be available for those who encounter problems and corporate mindfulness trainers may not be equipped theoretically or practically to deal with these problems. At this stage, Western mindfulness training is exposed to the ethical risk of organizations compromising their duty of care for participants. An additional risk is that without appropriate guidance and support, fewer people will move to Stage 3, which is where much of the ethical development takes place. In particular, it is the stage where the formation of attitudes and dispositions that will lead mindful people to spontaneously act ethically is done. An ethical question is if organizations fail to adequately facilitate moving employees to Stage 3 have they failed to offer adequate ethical training and is that important?

Stage 3: Self-Transcendence

After Stages 1 and 2, some meditators may experience deep spiritual states such as self-transcendence, a highly subjective experience with different understandings in Eastern traditions and Western philosophy and psychology. To Buddhist meditators, the purpose of meditation is to arrive at this stage in which the meditator obtains a full (and humbling) realization of the ultimate reality of oneself and the universe. Different words and phrases, such as enlightenment or awakening, are used to describe deep spiritual developments in which one obtains a new insight or a perspective. Loy (1996a, b), in contrast to the Buddhist outlook, uses a more inclusive definition of self-transcendence, i.e., to be the state in which an individual experiences detachment from external definitions of the self and dissolves rigid boundaries between self and other. As the "self and other" duality dissolves, one feels the warmth of one's existence united with others by compassion.

We posit that only a small number of participants in workplace mindfulness programs experience Stage 3, because, for the majority of individuals, self-transcendence and the deep insights that come with it require adequate perceptual training (Epstein and Lieff 1981), which is not possible to offer in short workplace mindfulness programs. For participants who become more deeply involved in meditative practice (outside of work), however, the chance for self-transcendence exists. The key feature of self-transcendence is the ability to extend oneself beyond personal concerns and take on broader perspectives and purposes (Coward and Reed 1996). Hence, we suggest that self-transcendence may have a positive impact on teamwork and ethical behaviors in the workplace because one tends to be less self-oriented and to care more about others. On the other hand, with a broader life perspective, one may reconsider the purpose of his/her life and find their current job meaningless or unsatisfactory. Some may find that their self-transcendence leads to a new set of personal values that are not aligned with their organization's values, and this may be indicative of deep cultural and behavioral problems in an organization that speak to the need for significant change. Further, a number of people who have obtained profound self-transcendence may choose to distance themselves from the busy mundane world to explore further inner meanings. As a result, these individuals are more likely to make changes in their career or even leave their organization. Hence, the impacts of Stage 3 on the organization are mixed. For organizations, and in particular, those with low ethical standards, another risk of introducing mindfulness practice to its employees is that it may actually increase its staff turnover because of misalignment of organizational value and employees' newly developed ethical visions (La Forge 2000). Despite their potentially significant influence on employees and organizations, such risks are unlikely to be discussed when organizations are considering introducing mindfulness programs.

Stage 4: Reengagement

Buddhist philosophy focuses on remedying the causes of worldly suffering and oppression. Importantly, this philosophy stresses social engagement after one's awakening through the realization that the illusion of separateness of oneself from others (Gould 1995) is false. Those who have gone through significant self-transcendence facilitated by meditation may engage with others more effectively with their new realization and insights (Noble 1987). Individuals who have had peak experiences such as transcendence are found to be less authoritarian and dogmatic, and more ethical, assertive, imaginative, and self-sufficient (Noble

1987; Wuthnow 1978), with a greater sense of meaningfulness in life; each of these outcomes is very desirable for individuals and organizations.

Meditation allows one to understand what habitual (and unhelpful) mind-states (including the emotions and attitudes) one holds on to and to understand that those mind-states, as well as phenomena in the external world, are impermanent. According to Ray (2004), perceptions are often finely tuned by enlightenment to an extent that such persons may no longer view mental states or external forms as solid and durable. In other words, an enlightened person has realized something fundamental about the process by which the perceived world comes into existence in our ordinary awareness. This is a powerful realization because people with such awareness will be more ethically courageous in seeking to improve the external world, knowing that what exists in the world exist only in a relative sense and can, therefore, be changed. Courage to change the world is essential to sustainable business and social innovations. Hence, those who have reached self-transcendence and have re-engaged with their organizations and the wider community with an enlightened mind may demonstrate a higher level of creativity, initiative, and leadership. Some may reorient their life priorities and leave their organization, but they may join other organizations or start their own to maximize their contribution to society. But should a responsible organization be assisting people to make this kind of personal transformation and become enlightened leaders, and if they do not, is that an ethical failure?

As summarized in Fig. 2, the current perspective on corporate mindfulness only focuses on Stage 1 (without including ethics) and the positive effects of preliminary concentration. Incorporating a Buddhist perspective, the model draws our attention to ethics education as a prerequisite of mindfulness practice, as well as Stages 2, 3, and 4 and their potential impacts and ethical risks, which warrant further study.

Discussion

The mindfulness literature is rapidly evolving with over 4000 scholarly articles published (Black and Slavich 2016). However, despite the significant growth of research on mindfulness practice, our understanding of workplace mindfulness remains in its "infancy" (Hülsheger et al. 2013; Badham and King 2016). As workplace mindfulness programs such as Google's "Search Inside Yourself" are introduced to a substantial number of employees, i.e., more than 1000 Google employees (Financial Times, 2012), it is important for both scholars and practitioners to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of workplace mindfulness.

A number of questions are worth asking to inform future research and practice. What should the future of workplace mindfulness be? What are the individual and organizational effects of when someone in a workplace mindfulness program achieving Stage 2 or beyond and finds it deeply troubling? How can organizations reduce the ethical risks that come with the negative psychological impacts of mindfulness practice? Are workplace mindfulness trainers responsible for and equipped to deal with this? What kind of training or knowledge should a mindfulness teacher have? How much responsibility should mindfulness trainers accept for adverse outcomes? Can workplaces, rather than just individuals, be mindful? Is Buddhism's religiosity alienating or offensive to some organizational member? Is secular or agnostic Buddhism (Bachelor 2012) appropriate for integrating mindfulness in contemporary organizations? How can the Buddhist community contribute to solving the ethical risks of mindfulness practice?

To answer these questions, more attention is needed to understand Stage 2 and beyond in our model. Stage 2 is difficult and is a point at which it may seem to many to be too hard to continue or as if the process is not working. Our purpose is not to be alarmist and suggest mindfulness programs present a threat to most people, but we do want to take a step back and look at what happens when one reaches a stage in mindfulness practice when troubling and difficult thoughts and emotions arise. A fundamental point of mindfulness is to not ignore or attempt to bury problems like bad memories or painful realizations. The point of mindfulness in this regard is to acknowledge and accept without judgment that these thoughts or realizations are there. The difficulties are part of the process of restructuring practitioners' relationships with their thoughts and sense of self. It is, in other words, a transition phase. Clearly, though, there is a chance that some deeper and significant psychological pathology might emerge where some form of counseling is necessary. Making HR managers and training specialist aware of these unintended consequences of mindfulness training will enable organizations to better evaluate and prepare for them. Mindfulness trainers should demonstrate adequate knowledge and experience in the fields of psychology or of the Buddhist philosophy and practices of mindfulness. Before starting such training, for example, a pre-screening questionnaire may help the trainer to identify individuals at risk of the negative effects of mindfulness training. Populations of individuals at risk include those with a history of psychosis, severe personality disorders, significant recent loss, severe depression, a history of physical or sexual abuse, and active substance abuse (Miller 1993). Identifying these participants helps the trainer to clearly inform participants of the likelihood that painful thoughts may arise, and the

trainer is prepared to support those who decide to continue the practice.

Going beyond Stage 2 is an organization prepared for a situation where having reached Stage 3 or 4 an employee rejects corporate values? Is this an outcome workplace mindfulness programs anticipate and welcome? Should HR departments and ethics managers deliver mindfulness training if it works to alter a capitalist mindset or employees' incentive to be productive? As detailed by Ruedy and Schweitzer (2010), ethics managers can use mindfulness training to enhance ethical decision making and behaviors. The inherent compassion and focus on sustainability (broadly construed) of mindfulness may be a suitable driver of better and more authentic CSR practices. In CSR parlance, blended value that blends economic, social and environmental value creation, which is a much more difficult challenge than only creating economic value, may be assisted by workplace mindfulness in ways that traditional capitalism is not. As informed by Stages 3 and 4, ethics managers may also need to review their business ethics standards and CSR strategy to evaluate if the new insights and personal values gained by mindful employees are all aligned. HR managers can also review the career options available within the organization for those who obtain significant insights during their mindfulness practice and wish to alter their career path to reflect their new outlook.

When we draw from Buddhist philosophical and ethical principles to inform our knowledge and practice of workplace mindfulness, perhaps a more fundamental question is: Is mindfulness inherently incompatible with capitalist philosophy? The idea of mindfulness as a means to increase performance and competitiveness or even to "build a better you" is linked to ego building and is at odds with Buddhism's orientation of letting go of attachment to ego and egotistical endeavors. Many of the benefits of mindfulness are directly related to letting go of these attachments.

The paradoxical relationship between capitalist philosophy and Buddhist mindfulness can be informed by a Heidegger (1962) being and doing perspective: Workplace activity is a way of doing, and Buddhist mindfulness is a way of being. The nature of most organizations is profit seeking, yet the mindful way of being is compassionate and generous and is not exploitative. If workplace mindfulness programs remain true to this authentic version of mindfulness, it would require massive realignment of organizations' work and impacts on the world. Intention, attention, and attitude are the core of the practice of mindfulness (Shapiro et al. 2006). Development of intention, attention, and attitude are long-term projects of individual practitioners. This is consistent with the emphasis in the Triadic model (Fig. 1) to the committed and sustained effort required to develop a mindful way of being. Liberational intentions, compassionate attitudes, and enduringly mindful attention to the present are each difficult enough to achieve on their own, and it takes a serious commitment to developing them all simultaneously. When the task is to develop and sustain these aspects of Buddhist mindfulness in the context of capitalistic intentions, questions about appropriating mindfulness in contexts where right effort and right work do not fit easily are worth careful consideration. Right work and right effort are important ethical elements of mindfulness practice and any sober analysis would struggle to see, for example, how turbocharging bullish Wall Street traders' activities with mindfulness skills are right work or right effort. Similarly, workplaces that adopt mindfulness to increase work intensification for employees who are already stressed, unhappy, and unhealthy are out of step with Buddhist mindfulness. This is particularly so for organizations that implement mindfulness but do not set about changing an organization's practices, values and culture that are the cause of the stress, unhappiness and poor health in the first place. The commitment needed to become mindful in an authentically Buddhist way in corporate circumstances is difficult for an individual to do, especially when confusing or difficult moments arise for participants during practice.

To suggest a way forward for those who are caught in the conflicts between corporate values and Buddhist values, we propose a path through which a novice practitioner can develop at each of the four stages of mindfulness development, from doing to being. As shown in Fig. 3, progress is slow at first but gradually accelerates. Although the curve of the trajectory is smoothed in the figure, it will be much less smooth in practice.

Implications

Linked to a micro-examination of mindfulness (Gärtner 2011), this study has been interested in the difficult or personally troubling side of mindfulness meditation practice. To date, business research paints a picture of mindfulness as a skill that is all sunshine and light. Although we agree that there are many workplace and personal benefits linked to mindfulness, we want to open up the difficult and disturbing side of it to exploration. An important direction for future research is empirical analyses that explore more fully the nature, antecedents, and consequences of the variables included in our model. More research is needed to address questions such as (1) what are the factors that lead to negative effects of workplace mindfulness; (2) how do the variables in our model interact with other organizational variables, such as work meaningfulness or employee turnover; and (3) considering both

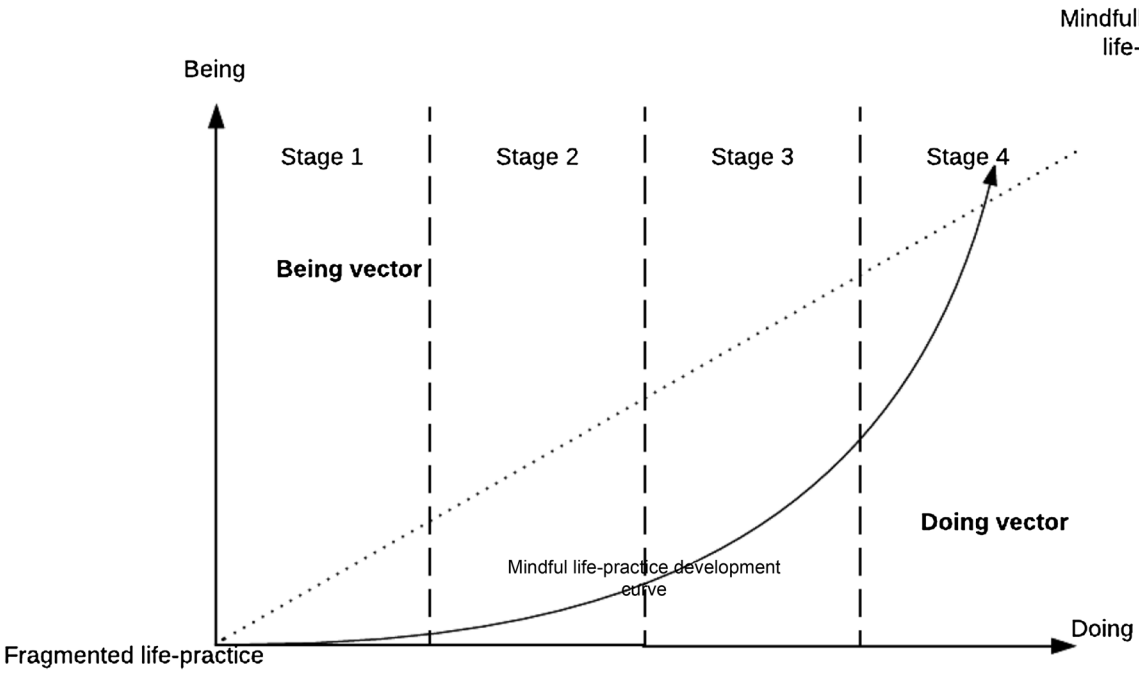

Fig. 3 Mindfully integrated life-practice doing-to-being trajectory

positive and negative impacts and risks of mindfulness training, how can organizations better institutionalize a collective mindfulness through concerted training and development efforts?

If we can be polemical to stimulate debate, we would suggest that workplace mindfulness may become the new yoga. The global yoga industry embraces a wide range of yoga practices, many of which have little to do with psychological, spiritual, or ethical development that are central to yoga traditions. Mainstream yoga focuses on identity, physical health, and recreation. Of course, this is not all bad, if any practice improves well-being, it is making a useful contribution to people's lives. But should workplace mindfulness do more than help people relax or deal with stress or improve performance? Whatever the answers to such questions might be, managers should take pause to consider workplace mindfulness programs in the broader light we present. Other management issues that are beyond the scope of this study include how to create organizational culture and climate change to support individuals being mindful for mindful organizations. This change process may also need to be supported by new approaches to organizational learning (Garvin 1993; Kongsbakk and Rooney 2016), wise leadership (McKenna et al. 2009), and organizational wisdom (Limas and Hansson 2004).

Conclusion

In view of the increasing interest in workplace mindfulness, this study explicitly acknowledges a Buddhist perspective in a four-stage model that enhances our understanding of workplace mindfulness practice. Our model does this by acknowledging mindfulness training as an ethical, longitudinal, and holistic practice. It also does this by recognizing mindfulness practice as a developmental process that evolves through different stages, each of which generates a distinct set of opportunities and ethical challenges for both organizations and individuals.

In specific terms, we are mostly interested in the problems and ethical risks associated with Stage 2 and beyond and how workplace mindfulness programs can deal with them. However, we are also interested, more broadly, in the incommensurability of ancient mindfulness practice and its ethics with much of the modern business world. We think mindful living is possible in a modern business world and that it can bring positive benefits to the world, but how business can change to find some kind of balance across this duality remains a difficult and unanswered question. Mindful business is not going to be business as usual, and Buddhist economics is not the economics of environmental exploitation, rampant competition, or unfairness (Sivaraksa 2011). So although the changes practitioners may experience in the mindfulness development path may be orthogonal to the desires of their organization or even of capitalism itself, they may be well oriented to the values of

authentic CSR and sustainable business that are better aligned with the future.

Beyond all this is the focus in Buddhism of avoiding a slavish adherence to ideology or faith and to remain open-minded. The Dalai Lama consistently argues that knowledge and not faith should guide how we think about what Buddhism is and what its practices should be like (Gyatso and Lama 2005). This opens the door for any kind of intelligent and informed reconsideration of what "correct" or ethical mindfulness practices should be like. This includes what mindfulness means in a corporate setting. Moreover, there is a great tradition in Buddhism of debating important matters and we, as scholars, can be part of a debate about corporate mindfulness.

Buddhism's respect for knowledge gives it a distinctively empirical leaning, even if Buddhist epistemology extends beyond what a Western (scientific) epistemology admits as evidence. This is an invitation for scholars to do empirical research on mindfulness in organizational settings and, indeed, to expand the scope of our research epistemology (see Rooney 2013a, b) to include direct knowing that mindfulness fosters and which is essential for wisdom and enlightenment (Rooney 2015; Zhu et al. 2016).

Finally, it is clear from our experience in the classroom that including mindfulness as part of our business ethics, CSR, and leadership teaching is readily accepted by students. So there is much that we can do as scholars to contribute to and enhance what is already happening.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Both authors declare that he/she has no conflict of interest with any organization or individual.

Ethical approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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