

Circumstances and Current Problems of Executive Meditation Practitioners in the Case Study of Buddhamahametta Foundation

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to study the circumstances and analyse the problems of executive meditation practitioners at the Buddhamahametta Foundation. This study is the qualitative research and there are 10 key informants participating who are executives with more than 5-year experience in management. The target group must have experience in regulating protocol of the company. Executives were selected from various business sectors such as hotel, commodity products, power energy, and hospitality. The in-depth interviews were conducted individually with video tape recorded. The study adopted a narrative approach to provide a context for their explanations. The information collected from the interviews were analysed and summarized into key issues. All key informants signed the consent form to provide their information publicly.

The research results were found that the executives faced with the following problems which are stress, can't stop thinking, loss temper, seek an acceptance, worry about uncontrollable external factors, can't control their words, and weight gain. The common problems among executives are stress, loss temper. Plus, they always speak uncarefully and their conversation always hurt other people. After the study was conducted, it is beneficial to further study. For instance, Buddhamahametta Foundation could implement the future mindfulness-based course that is suitable for executives and help them solve the recent problems.

Keywords: Executive, Meditation Practitioners, Problems, Stress

Introduction

Mindfulness-based programs become an explosion of interest these days (Loucks et al., 2022). Several meditation retreats for mindfulness-based course have been setup nowadays. In fact, the findings reveal that mindfulness-based interventions affect to health behavior changes (Roche et al., 2019). Positive behaviour changes also bring wellbeing and quality of life to socials and community. The paper studies the case of Buddhamahametta Foundation. The Foundation was established on April 7, 2015, at Chiang Rak Noi, Ayutthaya, by Phrakhruwinaihorn Kittiched Siriwattago, Ph.D. The objectives of the foundation are to promote the practices of Buddhism and to promote mindfulness practices. It operates as

a non-profit entity and a mindfulness-based center for all denominations of Buddhist practitioners. Buddhamahametta Foundation started its first mindfulness-based course on May 29, 2018, which was also Vesak Day. The course was well-received with 666 practitioners on the day; as a result, more courses were being held between August to December. There was a total of 12,388 meditation practitioners and the number was growing until it was held off in March 2020 due to the pandemic spread of the Corona Virus, COVID 19.

Many practitioners encountered with physical or mental illnesses (Hardy, 2015). The Foundation has been keeping records of examples of people who received dhamma training and had recovered from various diseases such as insomnia. Nowadays, many people have insomnia due to stress from work and/or current economic situation. For example, a woman practitioner, who is the director of accounting at a large company, has been working under a high-stress level and suffered from insomnia for many years. After attending the dhamma course, her insomnia condition has improved. She sleeps easier and no longer needs to resort back to sleeping pills. Moreover, she can manage both her work and family life more efficiently and live a more balanced and happier life. An example of a mental health practitioner is a middle-aged businesswoman who is in the logistics business. She admitted that she had contemplated suicide because she was not able to find any solution to the economic recession that hit her business. The thought of ending her life in order to escape from these hardships often arose in her mind. After attending the dhamma course, she discovered that committing suicide is not the only way out. She started to find happiness again and the feeling of distress gradually disappeared.

The study decided to select executives as key informants. This is because after executives attended the mindfulness-based programs (Jiwattanasuk, 2021), they have become better and try to ask their employees and families to participate mindfulness course as well. This could be improved both individual and social lives.

Executive managers play the significant role in the organization (Baek et al., 2021). They would be a significant influence on their employees and their families. If they received training activity that emphasizes on the development on individual's skills as leader and manager. Soft skills such as communication and empathy are also importance. For example, the study from Tian (2020) states "the meaning of professional competencies as a high level educated or special trained ability and one of the umbrella term's branches, so-called soft skills as abilities to collaborate co-workers". That study mentions that a successful project manager requires soft skills to communicate among the team. Skea (2021) explains organization change usually comes from the leaders. Organizational executives would lead the company.

Before the foundation designs special mindfulness-based course for executives, it is important to illustrate the present situation of executive practitioners such as current issues or concerns. Subsequently, the aim of this paper is to study the circumstances and make analysis the problems of executive meditation practitioners at the Buddhamahametta Foundation. After that, results of the study could be beneficial to the foundation in order to develop mindfulness-based course in the future.

Research Methodology

This research is quantitative study. and there are 10 key participants who are executives from various sectors such as hospitality, healthcare, retail, power energy, and so on. Details are described as follows:

Key Informants

Adults were recruited from practitioners who have attended the mindfulness course in Buddhamahametta Foundation. Of these participants must be described themselves as “Thai”. The sample was mostly made up of working adults who were in full-time employment in management or executive level for at least 5 years. The target group must have experience and participate in regulating protocol of the company. All participants were provided written, informed consent. This research collected the data directly from the target group which was the group of 10 executives.

Research Instruments

In order to find out the problems that the executives have, research study used an in-depth interview. All participants were interviewed individually. All interviews were tape recorded.

Data collection

This study employed a narrative approach to encourage informants to articulate their experiences in their own words and to provide a context for their explanations. By using a narrative approach, more information was collected with a respondent narrowly focused or closed questions. The narrative approach can encourage participants to disclose more. The key questions are as follow:

1. In previous life, what was your problems that you have been tried to solve with?
2. What is the cause of the problems? How the problems impact to your life?
3. How did you deal with the problems?

Data Analysis

After the interview, the information was gathered and sorted out into the key points to serve for the desires of key informants. Thereafter, the summary of key problems could be beneficial to further study such as the developing mindfulness-based course that can help them to solve the problems.

Results of the Study

Being the executive is challenging at time in order to manage a lot of staffs, handle suppliers and manage customer satisfaction. Moreover, for middle level management, they have additional responsibility to report to higher management and it could put them under pressure to meet higher management's expectation.

As mentioned earlier, research methodology is the qualitative method. Key informants are interview individually.

Transcripts of all key informants could be summarized as follows:

Key Informant 1:

She/he is Vice President of a large scaled real estate company, set foot in the real estate industry thirty-two years ago with forty-six full-time and additional several part-time employees at the present. The organization manages multiple projects at the same time and the biggest challenge in this industry is meeting the deadline. As the Vice President of the company, she/he needs to deliver on her/his promise to the clients and complete the project on time. It is a big burden that comes with the title.

In order to achieve this, establishing a clear flow of communication between parties involved in the project to ensure a smooth process from the start to the end is vitally important. However, this is not easy in practice. She/he is constantly under a high level of stress and often loses her/his control when communicating with her/his subordinates about keeping up with the timeline or solving problems that occurred at the office and on construction sites. The trigger point that brought her/his into dhamma was the tension that arose within her/his from personal financial circumstances over twenty years ago. She/he found out about Buddhamahametta Foundation about 2 years ago and started practicing meditation here since.

She still gets stressed and loses temper on her/his workers from time to time over the tight timeframe. Even though ideally, her/his aim is to handle stressful situations that arise from work with loving-kindness and understanding but, realistically, when things don't work out as planned it is very difficult to do so.

Key Informant 2:

She/he is a Director of Business Development and a successor to the business. The company manufactures and distributes electronic products using sub factories to make parts and currently has over two thousand employees in the organization alone. Being the only successor to the large-scale family run business, she/he is under the pressure to grow as quickly as possible to understand the business and gain trust from her/his employees. With only seven years of work experience in the executive field compared to the others, trust issues and performance issues make her/him feel that the workload is too heavy for her/his capability. She/he feels that her/his involvement in the company's succession

plan, company's structures and strategies is getting bigger everyday as the previous generation who is currently running the company is getting very old.

She/he has to deal with guilt that arises within her/him when she/he cannot meet the high expectations from other people. Moreover, being praised by other people lifted their mind up and often felt saddened when no compliments were given. She/he was also constantly worried about being overweight, but it was unavoidable as entertaining clients was a main part of their business. She/he thinks a lot about the future and her/his stress level rises gradually, which causes a drop in her/his overall mood. She/he also gets angry and frustrated when her/his employees cannot commit to the work they promised to deliver. Luckily, she/he has been practicing vipassana meditation for thirteen years straight with this being her/his fourth year as the disciple of the master. Even though she/he still finds it difficult to separate her/his emotions from the mind; she/he acknowledges the function of the principle. Being the only successor to large-scale family run business She/he was under the pressure to grow as quickly as possible to understand the business and gain trust from the employees. She/he often felt that the workload was too heavy for her/his capability and had to deal with guilt that arose when She/he cannot meet with high expectations. Moreover, being praised by other people lifted their mind up and often felt sad when no compliments were given. She/he was also constantly worried about being overweight, but it was unavoidable as entertaining clients was a main part of their business.

Key Informant 3:

She/he works as a Human Resource manager at a well-known hospital for about six years and is in charge of the payroll and welfare of the organization. Currently, there are 298 staffs working at the hospital. As a HR manager and being liable for the overall welfare, she/he is also responsible for the development of human resource's yearly plans and strategies. As the HR manager, she/he also serves as a mediator between the organization and employees in order to satisfy the needs and happiness of both parties, but it is quite a difficult task. The major problem she/he constantly encounters in her/his daily work life is the conflict of interests between the organization and the employees. This is caused by the distress of the employees who are getting underpaid and feel undertreated by the organization. Employees often come to her/him to negotiate for a possible pay rise or better benefits. Most of these employees are in low-ranking positions and paid minimum wage, which is barely enough for them to make ends meet. However, the hospital also does not have enough budget to allocate towards pay raises and benefits for its employees; as a result, these employees are often in debt. Having debts affects their overall mental health and ability to perform well at work. The situation between the organization and the employees causes stress and her/his mood to swing and often gets

mood. The situation between the organization and the employees caused mood swings and turned into a temperamental person. She/he was also a drinker and would quarrel with their spouse after their drinking session every night. This affected their family's relationships severely.

Key Informant 4:

She/he is an owner and a managing director at a beauty clinic in Thailand and also an advisor to the board of directors at an ethanol company. With her/his background as a financial consultant; her/his role at the company is to assist the company in the process of entering the stock market. She/he has been practicing mindfulness on and off for over twenty years and started practicing mindfulness-based course with the master about three to four years ago and her/his perspective on dhamma has changed since. She/he claims that her/his main problem arises from the beauty business. Above all the problems, the mismanagement of the employees has the biggest impact on her emotions as it affects the clients and the overall business. Even though she/he may seem to live a happy life, there is always a tinge of worries and stress at the back of her/his mind. Sometimes she/he would even feel a minor depression growing inside her/him. With limited time resources, she/he relies on just one personnel, the manager, to handle the staff and has been receiving information from one perspective. And because of her/ his high egoistic personality, she/he lets go of staff quite easily without trying to fix the cause of the problem or train them to be a better person. She/he feels that if she/he is able to let go of her ego, ask the staff for their needs and communicate with them wisely she/he would be able to handle the business better than before.

Key Informant 5:

She/he is an owner and a chief officer at a large-scale family business. She/he used to work at a bank before joining the family business and has been working as a financial executive to this company for over twenty years. As an owner, every problem that arises within the company would go straight to her/him first. The company has about two thousand employees all over Thailand. Thus, he/she has to deal with many meetings and make decisions regarding the policy of the company on a regular basis. She/he acts as a consultant to the company as well as plans the growth and the company's overall visions. Oftentimes it is very difficult for her/him to manage her/his emotions when problems arise especially with her/his employees and her/his family members. Luckily, the practice of meditation has been a part of her/his life for the past ten years. She/he used to practice walking meditation and sitting meditation which helps to ease her/ his temper and moodiness at that moment. She/he would feel calmer and more at ease after each course, but once she/he goes back to face reality, the hot temper returns. She/he has been very hot-tempered since she/he was young and even till today most of her/his staff are scared

of her/him because of this. She/he feels that after she/he met the master, she/he is able to control her/his emotions better. She/he praised the master's teachings on bowing with mindfulness and paying respect to the Buddha. This simple act gives her/him the chance to recollect the Buddha and it softens her/his mind from all the chaos. Her/his problems from work and home didn't vanish, but it doesn't trouble her/him like it was before. It is also much easier and faster for her/him to let go and stop bringing the problem back to her/his home.

Key Informant 6:

She/he works at a hospital as a senior manager for the past 15 years, where she/he is in charge of the service aspect of the hospital. Her/his roles include maintaining the overall image of the hospital, taking care of the VIP patients, providing training courses to workers, and reporting on their performance. Given her/ his nature as a perfectionist, she/he has a high standard for everything such as exceptional performance from her/his team. This has certainly become a burden on her/his daily life and her/his health. To address the issue, she/he has turned to dhamma and has been practicing vipassana meditation for some time. However, she/he was very specific with her/his choice of mindfulness- based centers. The venue had to meet her/ his standard in terms of cleanliness and facilities.

Every time she/he came back from mindfulness-based retreats, her/his stress level subdued and she/he felt a sense of relief. She/he even hosted vipassana meditation courses to help others attain dhamma. Despite being an avid practitioner of vipassana, she/he noticed that many of her/his bad habits were still present. When she/he was back at work and things did not go as she/he had anticipated, she/he would often lose temper on her/his staff. She/he would use strong words and talk to her staff rudely without caring about their feelings. Thus, most of her/his staff are always under a high level of stress. But after she/he met the master, her/his life has taken a turn for the better. She/he has gradually started to let go of her/his ego, manage her/his perfectionism, and no longer berate her/his staff but instead supervise them with loving-kindness. She/he has also brought many of her/his staff to the master and many have received dhamma that will navigate them through the ups and downs life will throw upon them.

Key Informant 7:

She/he is a managing director at a sport center and event halls. She/he has hundreds of employees, but about 10 under his control and owns a logistic company as well. She/he has encountered many difficulties throughout her/his career, but she/he has always been resilient no matter how bad they were. Her/his main issues may arise from work, but she/he projected many negative feelings to her/his family members back at home

Stress built up from work over these years was an undercurrent that had put a great strain on the relationship with his family. Her/his family members often had to endure her/his anger from work. She/he also exercised her/his authority based on what she/he thought was right rather than listen to what other members had to say. When her/his children talked back, she/he would retort to show them that her/his words were final. It was hard to communicate without having the conversation turned into a quarrel that, in the end, hurt all the parties emotionally and mentally. Everyone in the family was afraid of her/him, especially her/his kids. She/he soon recognized that what set her/him back was her/his emotions.

Key Informant 8:

She/he holds a managing director position at a few hotels. But in reality, she/he owns the company and looks after the success and well-being of the company's assets which focuses on two hotels with over 50 employees under her/his care. Her/his life was filled with many critical life-changing events and found herself on the hospital bed several times in the past due to the stress from work-life that eventually led to insomnia. Hotel business is a daily-run business which needs close attention. Being a business owner often comes with a burden and given the nature of her business, she/he consistently needs to revise the sales plan to match with the constant change in the price of raw materials. This requires her/his to be responsive towards her/his task and she/he expects the same from her/his workers too, however; it is not always the case.

When workers come to work with personal issues occupying their minds, it can affect their work performance. Thus, aside from taking care of the business side of the work, she/he also needs to deal with her/his workers, understand their lives, help to solve their personal issues, and keep them happy in order for the work to flow well. She/he also faces many uncontrollable issues such as economic stagnation and COVID pandemic that forced her/his to temporarily close her/his business are also the leading causes of her/his chronic stress. She/he is also the parent of two stubborn kids who grew up doing things their way, which worsened her/his health conditions, but they have changed to become better persons because of the dhamma given by the master.

Key Informant 9:

She/he is a managing director at a jewelry manufacturing and distributing company. She/he works for the family business and is responsible for the sales department, dealing with international clients and looks after the finance aspects of the company.

Her/his role is to oversee staff in the sales team as well as messengers. However, her/his sales staff are not the easiest to work with. These sales reps need to regularly visit existing customers, schedule to meet potential clients and deliver the product, so they are often not in the office most of the time. However, when she/he calls for in-house

meetings to get updates, many do not turn up although they have completed their daily duty. Moreover, they offer credit terms to customers without complying to the company minimum order policy because they want sales volume so that they can obtain more commission. The stress that rises from the business and family often leads to insomnia.

The main problem is dealing with staff who feel they are privileged to do anything they want. She/he has been trying to find different ways to handle the situation without creating any more friction between the workers and herself and was so fixated that it has taken a toll on her/ his mental health. After having met the Master and practicing mindfulness-based course two years ago, she/he has started to incorporate the master's teaching in her/ his daily life. The most important teaching is to let go. Instead of being stressed, she/he has learned to let go, compromise whenever she/he can, and send loving-kindness to her/his workers.

Key Informant 10:

She/he works as the director of a beauty product distribution company. There are about 200 to 300 people under her/his supervision and part of her/his role is to inspire her/his team members, help sets their objectives and build skills necessary to progress in life; in another words, she/he teaches, give speeches, and motivate people to want to live a better life through their career.

She/ he practiced mindfulness-based course with the master for the past three years, and she/he is still struggling with balancing the teachings of dhamma and her/his role as a director. She/he is always looking for ways to increase sales in the real world, setting high standards for her/his employees, but she/he believes that dhamma is about letting go of everything.

When she/he first met the master, she/he did not understand the concept of letting go of all defilements such as greed, hatred, and delusion where these conditions are important in human life. Not to mention incorporating dhamma into her/his daily life, particularly in the area of her/his work since she/he is required to drive her/his team members to increase sales and meet the target. Oftentimes, it would create friction and pressure for her/him.

From the research result, it is found that working in the tight time frame or under the uncontrollable factors for example economic impact, COVID- 19 pandemic or facing multiple problems at the same time would impact on their well-being (Brand et al., 2020). Their problems can be summarized into 7 points as below.

1) Stress: most of the key informants have to deal with stress in the office as well as at home. Executives faced difficulties with limited timeline and consequently they could not deliver project on time. They always get stressful from work.

2) Can't let go of thoughts: The sample group can't put the thoughts or worries down especially when they face a stressful situation or a problem.

3) Loss temper: This happens often as a consequence of when the sample group has a stress and can't let go of thoughts for example when they can't complete the work within the deadline time.

1. Seeking an acceptance: Some of the sample group is afraid of not getting acceptance from his subordinates. This may make employees disobey him and would impact on the outcome of the company.

2. Uncontrollable external factors: There are various uncontrollable factors for example economic situation, COVID-19 pandemic including family matter such as disobey children. This has raised a question to executives on how they can handle the situation in order not to affect the work.

3. Controlling the words: Without mindfulness, the executives may have said something that may cause a problem to subordinate or others. They may use displeasing words, and this would hurt the listeners. This could make their employees to be discouraged and lose motivation at work. And the worst is that the employees may not to want to work for the executives anymore.

4. Weight Gain: Since executives mostly have many business meals with their employees or customers, it is hard for them to control the weight. If they eat too much, this can cause them to gain weight and it would impact on their appearance and their physical well-being.

The common problems of executives illustrate as below:

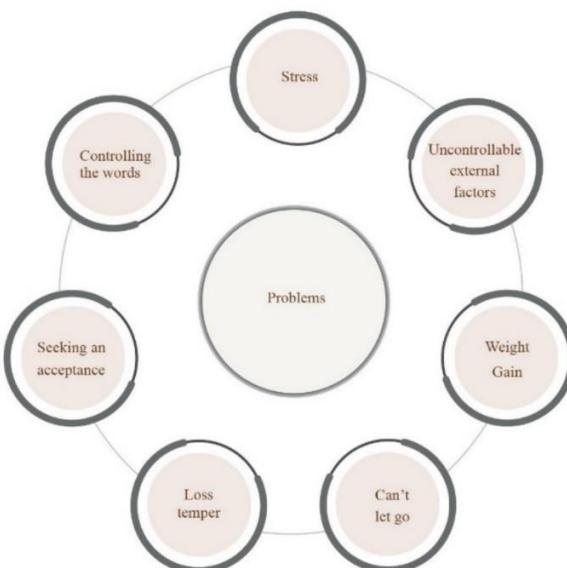


Figure 1: The diagram to illustrate common problems of practitioners (executives)

Discussions

According to the research result (Jiwattanasuk, 2021), it was found that the problems of meditation practitioners (executives) were stress, can't let go of thoughts, losing temper, seeking an acceptance, facing uncontrollable external factors, unable to control their words, and weight gain. This outcome accomplishes the objective of this paper to study circumstances and analyze the current problems of executive practitioners in Buddhamahametta Foundation. The common issues among executives from the in-depth interview can be summarized as follows:

1. Many executives face difficulties with stress (Jiwattanasuk, 2021). This is because executives have a lot of responsibility and work under pressure and tight timeline hence it causes them to be stressful. They were in a thinking loop and can't let go. Moreover, they are unable to control emotions. For example, one key informant said that She/he used to face difficulty with the project that could not deliver on time. She/he got stress and lost her temper. Some of the key informants could not sleep well because of stress. This circumstance happens to her/his several times. This point corresponds to the research work of Hamdan (2012). That paper mentions stress is associated with pressure to accomplish job assignments and limited time. This stress effects on both individual and organization. Such research studies stress in workplace and demonstrates the consequences of individual stress with impact on an organization. Another study from Maddock and Pariante (2011) also states that stress has become a long with modern life. This impacts on their physical (Yaribeygi et al., 2017) and mental well-being (Schneiderman et al., 2005). Additionally, some of key informants who are stressful cannot sleep well. This also in line with the paper from Alotaibi, A. D., Alosaimi, F. M., Alajlan, A. A., & Bin Abdulrahman, K. A. (2020). The study inform that stress is associated with quality of sleep.

Accordingly, from Jiwattanasuk (2021) one key informant mentioned his or her stress also impact on her/his family life. Several times after She/he finished her/his work and came back home, She/he always quarrelled with her/his son. Such stress made her/him could not balance her/his family life. This event is in line with the study from Brennan (2021). The study states that work-life balance is related to job and other important things in life such as family. Sometimes She/he gets stress when She/he works too much. It is out of balance. This also impacts on emotionally actions with her/his children.

2. The analysis of this paper has founded that executives face difficulty to communicate with their employees. They always speak and their word hurts their subordinates. This is in line with the study from Awan, Ahmed, and Zulqarnain (2015). That paper studied the impact of project managers' communication and interpersonal skills. The study collected 178 project managers working in organizations and indicated

that if such managers improve their interpersonal skills and communication, the successful project will incur. In several times, project managers always had poor communication and could not control their words. This would impact to their jobs and the relationship among the team. The study from Tahir (2020) also confirmed that if project managers improve their soft skills such as interpersonal skill, this skill will enable them to get successful projects. Moreover, the study from Dyer (2017) supports the fact that poor conversations also impact others and work efficiency.

3. Executives mentioned they have difficulties on uncontrolled factors in this COVID19 pandemic. One of key informant is the owner of hotel business. Of course, She/he has no choice to control the economic turmoil from COVID19 pandemic. Moreover, two of key informants work in hospital companies. The fact that uncontrolled factors affect to executives is in line with the study from Donthu and Gustafsson (2020). Such study mentions Covid19 pandemic not only has consequences for society, but also economy. This issue impacts on businesses, employees, and business leaders.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Implementing the Research Results

From the research results, it is recommended the following institutions to apply as follows:

1. Buddhamahametta Foundation – After this paper indicates the current problem of executive practitioners, Buddhamahametta Foundation can apply the mindfulness-based courses that is suitable for executives. The designed course should help executives to solve their problems. The study from Szoke and colleague (2021) mentions mindfulness interventions could reduce stress. Moreover, mindful eating can also help to control weight gain (Bryan, S., Parasher, R., Cahil, T., and Zipp, G., (2013).

2. Organization – The analysis of current issues of executives helps the organization in case that the company would like to improve executives. For example, organization should apply the policy to develop executives' skills such as interpersonal skill and stress management.

3. Other mindfulness-based practice retreat – As per research findings, apart from Buddhamahametta foundations, the other meditation centers can gain the benefits from this research as well. They can leverage the mindfulness-based course to solve the current problems of executive practitioners.

Recommendations for Further Research

From the research, there are a few points that will be further researched in the future as follows:

1. Further study about the mindfulness practice course developed for executives: Such study could help executives solve the current problems such as stress and loss temper.
2. Further study involved with the soft skills improvement of executives: Mindful speaking practice could improve executive's communication with others
3. Further study about Stress Management: After the research results show the common problem of executives is stressful. There are several future papers studied about stress management apart from mindfulness- based course. Examples include relaxing music, exercise, and healthy food.

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