

# **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BUDDHIST INSIGHT MEDITATION PRACTICE FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN A THAI BUSINESS ORGANIZATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purposes of this qualitative research were to study (1) the implementation of spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice for human resource development (HRD) in "A" company, and (2) the impacts of spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice on "A" company and its human resources (HR). The participants were 16 persons of "A" company, consisting of 10 managers and 6 employees. In-depth interviews were used in collecting the data. Data analysis was done by using thematic analysis and classifying the transcribed data in order to determine the emerging themes. It was shown that "A" company had implemented spiritual development for its HR through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice with the motives that the company wished to develop its HR to be able to control their emotions; and to possess happiness, mindfulness, concentration, morality and ethics at work, which would contribute to the growth of the company and the surrounding society as a whole. The process of the spiritual development implementation started with self-development of the top executives. Then the company developed its managers and employees according to the hierarchy and set spiritual development as the organization's policy. The findings also showed that the impacts of spiritual development on "A" company and its HR were composed of two following themes as 1) psychological impact, moral impact and social impact on the individuals; and 2) relationship impact, business ethics impact, work efficiency impact and loyalty impact on the organization.

**Keywords:** Spiritual development, Buddhist Insight Meditation practice, human resource development, business organization.

## INTRODUCTION

Business organizations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are facing greater challenges in this highly competitive work environment. The ability of an organization to compete globally will depend significantly on the quality of its human resources (HR) as people are the most important resource of the organization which brings about the organization's success (Isarasena na Ayutthaya and Hongladarom, 2002). During the Thai economic crisis in 1997, many business organizations could not survive due to the lack of spiritual mindset of their workforces and the declining morality of people in the society. Recently, the study of National Economic and Social Development Board or NESDB (2007) revealed that the morality and ethics index of Thai people was in the state of crisis declining continuously from 60.5% in 2001 to 53.65% in 2006. It also suggested that spiritual development should be urgently promoted to Thai people at all levels, especially in the leaders of the organizations (NESDB, 2007).

As Buddhism is the religion of the majority of Thai people, the use of Buddhist Insight (Vipassana) Meditation as one of the HR activities has been gaining more attention during the last few years in business world to reduce stress and strain, and to improve interpersonal relations and performance. One of the Vipassana Meditation courses, which many Thai business institutions provide for their employees, is Khun Mae (Mother) Siri Krinchai's Mind Development for Wisdom and Peacefulness Course for 8 days 7 nights. Khun Mae Siri Krinchai is a respected lay Buddhist Meditation master. At the present time (Year 2009), she is 92 years of age. She has devoted her life in teaching Buddhist Insight Meditation practice to public for more than 50 years.

A Thai business organization called "A" company has used Khun Mae Siri Krinchai's course to spiritually develop its employees for more than 10 years. Therefore, it is selected as the case study. A qualitative approach is chosen as a methodology for this study as it would provide an in-depth understanding of both individual and organizational

behavior in work psychology (Cassell and Symon, 1994). Hopefully, the results of this study would contribute the knowledge for spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice of HR in Thai business workplaces and the society as a whole.

The purposes of this study were aimed to study the implementation of spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice for HRD in "A" company, and to study the impacts of spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice on "A" company and its HR.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design was a qualitative case study of a Thai business organization in the automotive industry called "A" company. The qualitative method is appropriate for this study as it provides the richness of data and the insights to understand individual and organizational behavior in work psychology (Cassell and Symon, 1994). The case study is used as a research strategy to study individuals' experiences in their unique settings (Berg, 2004).

Participants of this research included 16 persons, consisting of 1 president, 9 managers, and 6 employees of "A" company. The company has provided spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice in Khun Mae Siri Krinchai's course to its HR since 1994. Participants were selected by using purposive and snowball sampling according to the inclusion criteria that they had attended the course at least twice during their work lives in the company and that they were willing to participate and share their experiences in this study.

Data collection was done after the proposed study had been granted ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee, Burapha University Graduate School in June, 2006. The data were collected during the period from September 2006 to April 2007. In-depth interviews were used in collecting the data. Interview guides were semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions

type. The semi-structured interview is the most important form of interviewing in case study research (Gillham, 2000). The questions of interview guides differed in different groups of interviewees. After obtaining permission for data collection from the company, the researcher made the appointments with the participants 3-4 days in advance. The interviews took place in the participants' office. Participants were informed about the purposes of the study, the uses of the interview data, and the time required in the interview including the permission to tape-record their responses before they agreed to take part in the study and signed the consent form. The researcher established and maintained rapport throughout the interview process by sharing her experiences of participating in the spiritual development activity with the participants. Interviews with individuals in person were undertaken to understand human phenomena in the organizational context. The duration of the interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. After the interview, the responses were transcribed verbatim into the interview transcript from tape recordings and interview notes for further data analysis.

Data analysis of this study was done continuously throughout the qualitative study - before data were actually collected during literature review, during data collection period, and continues until a final report was completed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The qualitative data were analyzed by using thematic analysis approach (Lacey and Luff, 2001). The transcribed data was classified in order to determine the emerging themes. Trustworthiness of the study was established by using 4 criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; together with some techniques offered by other qualitative scholars.

## RESULTS

### Demographics of the participants.

The participants comprised 10 managers and 6 employees of "A" company. They were selected by using purposive and snowball sampling. Managers'

ages are between 38-61 years. Seven of them have worked for the company for 11-18 years. Employees' ages are between 25-41 years. Three of them have worked for the company for 9-16 years.

### Implementation of spiritual development in "A" company.

The researcher had analyzed the interview responses and presented the findings according to the research purposes as follows:

1. The motives of the company for incorporating spiritual development into the organization for HRD were to create employee happiness, to enable them to be able to control emotions, to develop mindfulness and concentration at work, and to improve moral and ethical behaviors e.g. honesty, responsibility at work. (The researcher assigned code numbers M1 to M10 for Managers No.1 to No.10 and E1 to E6 for Employees No.1 to No.6, respectively)

*"...We organized this course in order for all of us to have happiness in mind, have personal morality and have mindfulness to hold us from bad conducts..." (M1)*

*"...Those who join the practice will work with more concentration and have better control of tempers when working together or when talking to customers..." (M2)*

*"...Our MD wants us to be more responsible and honest. These are totally beneficial, no bad things but good for employees' minds in order for us to live in this society happily..." (M5)*

2. The process of spiritual development implementation in the company started with self-development of the top executives in Khun Mae Siri Krinchai's course. As they had received benefits from the course, they expanded it for HRD of the organization according to the hierarchy. First, they sent the managers to attend the course, and then later followed by the employees. The company has set the spiritual development to be the company's policy as one of the organization cultures that everyone must adhere to since 2002.

*"...My wife had joined the practice and seen its benefits so she persuaded me to join. She asked*

permission from Khun Mae Siri Krinchai to be the host. So we organize the course every year for our employees and others to join...." (M1)

"...We arranged for employees to participate in the activity from the top down. We believe if the top-level could join, the lower-level would be easy. The leader is important to begin with...." (M1)

"...In the earliest stage, the company arranged for management to join the activity because they could convince their subordinates...." (M3)

"...It is the company's policy. In the job application form, there is a clause asking the applicants if they would be willing to join the Insight Meditation practice. The MD sees this as very important, thus all employees have to attend...." (M5)

## Impacts of spiritual development.

### Impacts on the individuals.

The participants in "A" company reported the impacts of spiritual development on the individuals in three themes as follows:

**1. Psychological impact.** The spiritual practice enabled the participants to have better emotional control, stress control, and thought control.

"...I have gained many benefits from the activity. I feel less hot-tempered and hardly feel angry. Now, I am much less angry or serious, compared to the way I was. If I can control my emotions, everything will be smoothly handled...." (M10)

"...Previously, I was hot-tempered, very moody and retaliatory. I have changed to be in a better mood after the practice. I used mindfulness to always remind myself. Now, I am much calmer and have less anger...." (E3)

"...It makes my mind relaxed and helps reduce stress. It helps to restrain my mind from wandering at work...." (E1)

"...Previously, I was always thinking repetitively of one issue and was pre-occupied with it. Nowadays, I am not as over thinking as before so my mind is calmer...." (M7)

**2. Moral impact.** The participants reported

that they had more morality in their minds. This included gratefulness for their benefactors' kindness and loving-kindness to other people.

"...When the trainer lectured about parental kindness during the ritual of "Monks at home", I missed my parents. They lived in the upcountry. Today, I feel more concerned with them and pay more attention to them. Previously, I seldom missed nor visited them...." (E4)

"...After coming back, I would like to take my dad and mom to join the activity. I also would like to persuade all my loved ones and neighbors to go there because it was good. Some of my customers, after coming back from the activity, came to me to thank the MD, the company and me...." (M3)

**3. Social impact.** The participants had more understanding of others and better adaptation of their social behaviors, e.g., speaking and driving behaviors.

"...Previously, I was not concerned with others' minds; but now, I have more understanding of others. Other people could no longer feel so harmful to me, but if they would, I would do good things to them in return...." (E2)

"...Formerly, I did not know what I said wrong even after 3 days had passed, but now, I know within half an hour. I realize faster when I have said something wrong. I feel guilty and warn myself not to speak such hurtful words again...." (M3)

"...I gossiped and talked about others, and I enjoyed doing this. I never realized it. After the practice, I gained more mindfulness. What I knew, I kept it with me. I should not damage others. I listened to what I was told but would not tell it to others. Now, I only say good things about others...." (M4)

"...After being back from the practice, I am much improved in driving behavior. I am not upset when another driver cuts in front of me. I have become calmer. Driving too fast is dangerous. In the past, I sometimes ran a red light, or when someone cut in front of me, I took revenge...." (E4)

**Impacts on the organization.** The findings regarding the impacts of spiritual development on the organization were grouped into four themes as follows:

**1. Relationship impact.** The participants had better relationships with their superiors, colleagues, subordinates, and customers.

*"...Previously, I usually doubted my superior's decisions while following his instructions. But now, I think that he may have his own reasons so I should follow him and he will not be tired of giving me his explanation. Having Vipassana practice has made me more reasonable..."* (M3)

*"...In the past, I was sometimes selfish. I denied lending any of my tools without caring how necessary it was for my colleagues. After Vipassana, I became less selfish and was more generous. I lent them my tools and also helped them..."* (E4)

*"...Taking Vipassana practice makes me stay calm. Previously, when I saw my subordinates work incorrectly or unsatisfactorily, I called and blamed them immediately. This made them afraid and did not want to ask me questions. Now, I stay calm. Thus, they pay me more respect and attention. After this change, I can work better and so do my staff. They now feel that they can ask and discuss problems with me..."* (M6)

*"...Formerly, when I knew that this customer would come, I wanted to be absent from work and did not want to meet him. It was so boring. But, after the activities, I have more mindfulness. I am more aware of my duties and learn to accept complaints. I prepare my mind well and become calmer while talking with customers, unlike in the past..."* (M5)

**2. Business ethics impact.** The participants had better ethical behaviors, e.g., honesty and sincerity, towards the organization and customers.

*"...All staffs here have already participated in the Insight Meditation practice, so they can be trusted. We have morality and reliability on one another. Some customers asked if they could leave money with our staffs and we confidently affirmed*

*that they could without any worry. Vipassana is good for the organization, the participants, their colleagues and their families..."* (M3)

*"...Joining the practice brings about this good outcome. Our workers are reliable. Neither theft nor the loss of belongings or money occurs in the office. I can leave my valuables in my office and go out. Some found others left belongings; they returned them to the owners..."* (M2)

*"...The customers will feel that our salespersons are sincere. Communications through eyes and words make them feel that they can trust us. I can feel this from several customers. A customer purchased our car at his first visit. Such a prompt decision might make his friend wonder, asking him about such a decision. The customer replied that he bought the car because the salesperson looked sincere and honest. We felt honored and appreciated that response..."* (M3)

*"...Our salespersons got benefits from Vipassana. They have mindfulness and do not urge customers to buy without reasons. We consider our customer satisfaction as the first issue. Profit is the second point. If we earn a profit but our customers do not feel happy, we will not be happy for such money. Our staffs will have this concept with them..."* (M1)

**3. Work efficiency impact.** The participants had more efficiency in their work by working more rapidly and having fewer errors.

*"...After joining in the practice, I gain more mindfulness in arranging documents orderly and can handle them faster. So I am able to know which job is finished, which is not, and know where the documents of such job are placed. Now, my work is well organized and I can work more quickly..."* (M6)

*"...I can work faster and more efficiently. In the past, I was not good at arranging my work, and I was very busy all the time. Now, I gain mindfulness and use it in planning my work. This makes me work better and faster. I know what to do first, and what after, and what is more important to*

do. Previously, I did not plan well, so I could not finish my work. I worked until 8-9 p.m. After the practice, I can finish my work as planned and go back home at 5 p.m....”(E2)

“...This makes me remember. A secretary should not forget the MD’s order. Forgetfulness causes mistakes. One thing I got from the practice is that I have more mindfulness and make fewer mistakes at work. Mindfulness makes me have a good memory. After my first practice, I could write down the dictation very fast. After every practice, I am active and my memory is very good....” (M8)

“... I work better compared to the past. I became calmer and paid more attention to customers’ car repairs. I work more consciously, think more, make fewer mistakes, and have better awareness. Damages have decreased and my work is more complete. When I have more mindfulness, I will carefully check the car and will think more what should be done first....” (E4)

**4. Loyalty impact.** The participants had more loyalty to their organization. They viewed their bosses who practiced Dharma as their role models. They respected and realized their bosses’ kindness. Only a few of the employees resigned.

“...Salespersons here have a low turnover rate. They have worked for the company for over 5 years. Our MD practices Dharma as an example for us. He implants us Dharma during meeting. When the economic crisis occurred in 1997, we had already practiced Dharma, thus our organization was peaceful. No one made a demand. After the economic crisis, the company has not given bonuses for many years and our salaries have remained the same but all of us are happy. No one resigned....” (M3)

“...Employees here rarely quit the company. They love it here and know the purposes of the MD. They work here not only for income, but they also can have their minds trained. It’s a matter of mind. They feel happy while working and taking part in making merit. Our MD is our example. For technicians, their works are physically demanding

so they may be tired. After joining in the practice, they have more awareness.—They drink less and some quit drinking alcohol....” (M8)

“...We have been with the company for a long time. In this room, people have worked over 10 years. We hardly move or change. Our company rarely posts a job application....” (M2)

“...The results seen in our employees are that they are self-sufficient and do not trouble others. They can work well without problems which makes the organization run smoothly. They love to stay with us, love their work, and love the company. They have loyalty to the company and do not want to leave. It has been quite a long time since an employee has resigned....” (M1)

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings showed that “A” company had implemented spiritual development for its HR through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice with the motives and process as follows:

1. The company wished to develop its HR to be able to control their emotions; and to possess happiness, mindfulness, concentration, morality and ethics at work. This was consistent with Khun Mae Siri Krinchai (2005) who stated that the practitioners of Buddhist Insight Meditation would have more happiness of the mind and body, more stability of mindfulness, more realization of moral and righteous deeds, and more progress at work.

2. The process of spiritual development implementation started with self-development of the top executives in Khun Mae Siri Krinchai’s course, which was congruent with Phra Promkunaporn (2004), who described that Buddhism is the religion of self-development. After participating in the spiritual activity, the top executives felt impressed and satisfied with the benefits of the course; which were congruent with the company’s core values, namely, honesty, justice, sincerity, mindfulness and quality of HR. So they introduced Khun Mae Siri Krinchai’s course for the spiritual development of the company’s HR. This result was supported by Parihar’s (2004) study which found that Vipassana

had benefited participants in all aspects of their personal and professional lives, and it should be implemented as a tool for HRD of organizations.

The company had implemented management development first by encouraging the managers of the company to attend the course, in order that the managers would be good role models in spiritual development for their subordinates. This was confirmed by Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2006, p.291) who stated that inspiring leadership of the leaders and senior members was the most important organizational factor in fostering spirit at work. Then the company implemented employee development later by integrating HR spiritual development into the organization's policy. It would become an organizational culture that everyone should adhere to. The result of this study was congruent with the idea of Konz and Ryan (1999, p.203) who said that the organization's spirituality must be enunciated or presented in terms that represent the culture of the organization, which can then be understood or agreed upon by all organizational members.

The findings also showed that the impacts which occurred after the implementation of spiritual development were as follows:

1. The important impact on the individuals was psychological impact that the participants could better control their emotions in 3 aspects: emotional control, stress control, and thought control. The result was consistent with Khun Mae Siri Krinchai (2005) who stated that the practitioners' minds would be cooler and calmer from the practice. They could control their emotions affected by any cause and they would be more aware of the emotions which appeared to their minds by mentally noting them in the present moment as, 'anger, anger', 'thinking, thinking', and so on (Khun Mae Siri Krinchai, 2005).

2. The important impacts on the organization were relationship impact and business ethics impact. It was found that the participants had better relationships with their superiors, subordinates, co-workers, and customers. They had more

understanding on one another, becoming more reasonable, listening more towards one another, and helping more at work. This was congruent with Yanasit (2007) who indicated that Insight Meditation practice enabled people to love one another and have harmony and friendship among themselves, like close relatives. They would also be easily controlled and not create any kind of trouble to the group or society. Moreover, the participants had honesty and moral shame towards the organization and customers. This was consistent with Plamintr (1998) who stated that Insight Meditation helped to purify the practitioners' minds of defilements such as greed, selfishness, hatred, and jealousy, and refrain them from unwholesome deeds.

The impacts of spiritual development on the organization such as honesty and trust, relationship, and work efficiency have contributed to improvements in organizational performance (Krishnakumar and Neck, 2002; Gopalakrishna and Usha, 2005; Parihar, 2004) which is the purpose of HRD according to Swanson and Holton (2001, p.4). The performance indicators improved from the spiritual development activity mostly are performance drivers which create future outcomes and lead to long-term success of the organization (Swanson and Holton, 2001).

As a result, we would like to make a recommendation that HR professionals may use the results of this study to be guidelines to apply within their own organizations in order to create moral and ethical organizations' cultures for their organizations' long-term success. In addition, organizations should support and promote their HR to participate in spiritual development through Buddhist Insight Meditation practice in order to develop their members to be quality people with moral and ethical behavior and to be good citizens of the society as a whole.

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