

Buddhist Principles of Self-Management: Integrating Morality, Mindfulness, and Wisdom into Modern Leadership and Organizational Practice

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Abstract

This paper offers a redefined, self-management through the lens of ethics, drawing on the early Buddhist canonical texts. By employing a qualitative thematic methodology from focused studies of the, Dīgha Nikāya; Majjhima Nikāya; and, Aṅguttara Nikāya, this study seeks to define self-management as a cohesive, systemic construct that consists of ethical discipline (sīla), mental discipline (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā), and is undergirded by mindfulness (sati) and non-attachment (virāga). The findings reveal that self-management as ethical self-governance is early Buddhism's perspective as opposed to the understanding of self-management as a neutral and psychological phenomenon. Sila establishes, the self-restraint, moral accountability and trust in the social system; samādhi helps to stabilize attention along with the regulation of emotional reactivity; and paññā assists in turbulent times with respect to the reflection under conditions of, complexity and ambiguity. Sati serves as ethical vigilance; allowing persons to unwholesome volitional impulses, and unwholesome, voluntary impulses to act, while virāga counteracts ego involvement, fixation on outcomes, and, assists, with ethical consistency under pressure. These sets are viewed as operating situationally



as system. Re-establishing both the ethical and epistemic coherence of Buddhist self-management, this study provides a conceptually sound alternative to the more instrumental and reductionist interpretations of mindfulness and emotional regulation. In leadership and organizational studies, it advances an integrated model of ethical self-regulation that considers the interplay of the three components of Buddhism, i.e., morality, emotional regulation, and wisdom, without collapsing Buddhist doctrine to instrumentalist ends.

Keywords: *Buddhist Ethics; Buddhist Self-Management; Ethical Leadership; Mindfulness; Non-Attachment; Organizational Behavior; Wisdom*

INTRODUCTION

The ways in which people control their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors have been the object of religious, philosophical and psychological speculation throughout history and across the globe. In early Buddhist literature, self-management is not conceived as a skill or technique focused on efficiency and performance, but as a self-governing practice that is normative and ethical and is centered around the cultivation of morality (*sīla*), mental focus (*samādhi*), and insight (*paññā*) (Gethin, 2011; Mônica Souza Neves-Pereira et al., 2018; Robinson & Jayatilleke, 1969). These three dimensions are an integrated whole. The ethical dimension directs and stabilizes attention, the disciplined (focused) attention fosters reflective awareness, and wisdom directs and informs the right action (judgment) and the right action (judgment).

Sīla is the ethical dimension of a person's speech, action, and livelihood; it is moral self-restraint that involves self-regulation of behavior such that no harm is done to self or to others, which in turn fosters trust, moral accountability, and social cohesion (Keown, 2013a; Rāhula, 1974). In the Buddhist ethical framework, *sīla* is not simply a matter of compliance; it is the intentional cultivation of an ethical disposition that determines how a person relates to others as well as to the established social and institutional order (Mahathero, 2025;

[Shulman, 2024](#)). This ethical disposition is considered to be a prerequisite of any lasting self-discipline.

Samadhi is applied to means of mental discipline or an individual's ability to stabilise and focus their natural disposition to pay attention. It is not about a person's ability to complete tasks or performance; it is about the ability to elicit a person's full attention, without cognitive distractions, emotions, or reactivity to thoughts, and to help an individual to stay calm in stressful or difficult situations ([Gethin, 2011](#)). In relation to Buddhism, samadhi is said to be a fruit of skilful (in the positive sense) actions/behaviour. It can also be said to help an individual remain unmovable or still longer during those times of their meditative practice - it aids in the ability to be unmovable longer while in a meditative state ([Glushich et al., 2025](#); [Robinson & Jayatileke, 1969](#)).

The word paññā can be understood as knowledge or wisdom. It is the knowledge of impermanence, conditionality, and the interrelatedness of phenomena. In circumstances where a person is required to demonstrate wisdom, it is those situations that occur under a condition of high complexity and uncertainty ([Wallis, 2019](#)). Technical knowledge or instrumental reasoning does not encompass the whole of panna. It is the combination of ethical reasoning, and understanding the implications of actions, which is also required in a high degree of self-regulation and leadership decision-making ([Keown, 2013b](#)).

The three dimensions should be seen as an integrated, interdependent system rather than as separated components. Ethical discipline (sīla) controls behaviour and intention. Mental discipline (samādhi) centres and calms, and wisdom (paññā) directs focus and clarifies decisions. They all function together as an ongoing, self-governed ethics process ([Bucknell & Stuart-Fox, 1983](#)).

Two regulatory principles closely connected to this triad are mindfulness (*sati*) and non-attachment (*virāga*). *Sati*, which is often translated as mindfulness, refers to active awareness in the present moment of and attention to the body, emotions, and mind. In early Buddhism, *sati* served the function of ethical vigilance that would enable one to identify an impulse, whether that be one of desire, aversion, or anxiety, as a precursor to an unwholesome action (Anālayo, 2003; Ereshefsky, 2020). Such a function is use is quite distinct from most present-day instrumental notions of mindfulness, which are built upon a detachment from moral responsibility (Kelly, 2023).

Virāga or non-attachment, refers to the gradual downward shift in the intensity in craving, ego involvement, and a fixation on a particular outcome. *Virāga* aims to develop a more psychological balance that allows the person to act with intention but without the need to engage in obsessive efforts or *atirahs* (Story, 1976). In the context of self-management, *virāga* is responsible for the reduction of performance-related anxiety and the defensiveness that enables ethical consistency when under pressure (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

Compared to integrated ethical frameworks, the paradox of the self in contemporary leadership and organisational behaviour views self-management mostly in functional and instrumental ways. Emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and self-leadership, for example, have been understood as competencies that increase productivity, flexibility, or resilience (Bowers, 2018; Esteves et al., 2025; Thien & Tu, 2019). Even though this body of literature contributes to the understanding of emotional self-awareness and the control of one's attention, it typically and usually presents these capacities, the possession of which can be decoupled from an ethical perspective, as instruments to increase performance. Self-management in the psychological sense is usually understood to be only psychological

self-adjustment, rather than a self-regulatory, self-governing and morally oriented process (Doornich & Lynch, 2024; Shonin et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2025).

That is especially so for organizational mindfulness. Grounding mindfulness in ethics or wisdom is uncommon. It is common to see mindfulness techniques marketed for their ability to reduce stress or enhance productivity, without any mention of ethical restraint or wisdom, (Akgün et al., 2025; Anālayo, 2003; Urrila & Mäkelä, 2024). In contrast, Buddhist leadership literature has a particular interest in the elements of compassion or awareness, and treats *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* as being either unrelated or only loosely connected, as opposed to being an integrated ethical-cognitive system (Ranawakaarachchi, 2019). Such perspectives tend to obscure the ends toward which the self-management of Buddhist philosophy is directed.

The self-cultivation most clearly set out in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, and *Aṅguttara Nikāya* is also the most systematic. Here, the cultivation of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* is posited as sequentially and interdependently integrated. Each of the three supports the others. The ethical restraint of *sīla* provides the mental stability necessary for the development of insight of a wisdom-immanent (Bomhard, 2023; Nanamoli, 2009). This model also relationally, socio-ethically and socio-authoritatively (the ethical exercise of authority) goes beyond the individual (Bomhard, 2023).

The importance of this integrated model stands out in today's organizational contexts that involve ethical uncertainty, emotional pressure, and the need for competing performance (output) in the setting. Ethical self-discipline, emotional self-regulation, and attention focus; all manifest themselves under pressure and appear to improve one's reflective judgment in a complicated setting. This is backed by research in the field of organizational psychology (Mayer et al., 1995). At the same time, organizational/corporate leadership has failed to

touch on the individual self-regulative process of ethical self-discipline in her models (Lorenz, 2025).

The current study provides a thematic reconceptualisation of Buddhist self-regulation grounded in early primary sources, and in this regard, makes a different and original contribution. This study does not seek to propose an original form of leadership or management practice. It examines instead how in the system of moral self-control, *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* interrelate, as do *sati* and *virāga*. (Divino, 2023). The study, by analysing specific discourses of the *Dīgha*, *Majjhima*, and *Aṅguttara Nikāyas*, elaborates how early Buddhism understands self-management and articulates this in a way that contemporary discourse on leadership and self-regulation, as well as organisational behaviours, can draw upon the Buddhist legacy without pragmatism or utilitarianism of the Buddhist tradition (Divino, 2023).

The study's focus fills an obvious gap in the available literature. Previous studies on Buddhist leadership and mindfulness have either been focused on a doctrinal exposition and lack engagement with organisational contexts (Husgafvel, 2018; Perera et al., 2025), or have reframed unrelated Buddhist ideas for the purposes of management and lost the ethical and epistemic integrity of those ideas (Shulman, 2024). This study, by engaging with psychological and management literature, preserves the normative integrity of early Buddhist ethics.

The developed framework re-establishes ethical depth, reflective awareness and moral responsibility to the discourse of self-management and enhances interdisciplinary engagement in Buddhist studies, leadership, and organisational behaviour.

The objectives of the study and the guiding research questions for the study is discussed in the next sections.

Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

Addressing the conceptual gap in current literature, this study aims to develop an understanding of self-management, from an ethical perspective, grounded in the early Buddhist canonical texts, and to evaluate its significance in the current leadership and organisational settings. Instead of considering Buddhist principles as mere psychological methods, this study intends to formulate the structured ethical reasoning and analyse how these aids contemporary articulations of self-regulation, leadership, and the flourishing of employees in organisations.

Accordingly, the aims of this study are as follows:

1. To explore the self-management conceptualisation in early Buddhist canonical texts through the constructive synthesis of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, supported by *sati* and *virāga*.
2. To analyse how these principles function collectively as a system of ethical self-regulation rather than as independent practices.
3. To assess the relevance of this conceptual system to the modern leadership and organisational behaviour, and emotionally self-regulated discipline.

Aligned with these aims, this study seeks to answer these research questions:

1. RQ1. How do early Buddhist canonical texts view self-management through the constructive synthesis of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*?
2. RQ2. What regulatory functions do *sati* (mindfulness) and *virāga* (non-attachment) serve in facilitating ethical self-regulation?
3. RQ3: In what ways can the integrated model of Buddhist self-management contribute to present-day conceptualisations of leadership and organisational self-regulation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scriptural Foundations of Buddhist Self-Management

Texts from early Buddhism view self-management as a process that cultivates oneself ethically, rather than a technique for controlling one's behaviour. The early Buddhist texts in the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya and Aṅguttara Nikāya consistently point to *sīla* (ethical discipline), *samādhi* (mental discipline), and *paññā* (wisdom) as forming a triadic structure within which the basis for personal development can be realised (Berounský, 2014; Jayatilleke, 2013). In these texts, the three elements work in relation to one another in a symbiotic fashion rather than appearing as independent of one another. For example, while moral restraint helps to provide a stable object of mental attention, mental discipline helps to provide a basis for developing clear-sightedness through reflective insight.

Sīla: Ethical Discipline/Self-Regulation

Sīla is referred to in the texts of early Buddhism as behaviour that helps to regulate people's actions, speeches, and intentions away from causing harm and toward supporting social trust (Keown, 2013b; Rāhula, 1974). In contrast to morality grounded in rules, *sīla* is grounded in one's intentional restraint based on awareness of the consequences of one's actions. The Sigālovāda Sutta, and similar discourses, show how ethical conduct is central to the role of responsible householders and citizens, as well as to leadership, governance, and the accountability of relationships (Buddhaghosa, 1991; Mahathero, 2025). By establishing a basis of ethical behaviour, ethical conduct provides the basis for stabilising the cultivation of the mind through developing insight.

Samādhi: Developing Attention to the Present Moment & Emotional Regulation

Samādhi is a systematic process whereby one learns to develop sustained attention through mental training, focus on one's place in the moment, and serenity of mind and body. The primary purpose of developing samādhi is to eliminate distractions, perturbations, and impulsiveness so that we can obtain a reflective perspective on our experiences (Bhojani et al., 2023; Cousins, 1973; Gethin, 2011). Another important point related to samādhi is that ethical behaviour is critical, as samādhi does not remain stable or have much depth if one does not practice ethical behaviour (Ben-David, 2024; Jayatilleke, 2013).

Paññā: Understanding Reality (Impermanence, Interdependence) & Making Sound Judgements

Paññā refers to an understanding or insight into the realities of the universe, including impermanence, interdependence, and causation, which then translates into a way for one to make wise and ethical decisions (Shonin et al., 2015). In early Buddhism, wisdom is practical wisdom, or insight, rather than just intellectual knowledge; it is used to assist in making decisions about a given situation where the future is uncertain and complex. This study, by engaging with psychological and management literature, preserves the normative integrity of early Buddhist ethics (Anālayo, 2003).

Sati and Virāga as Supportive Regulative Functions

Mindful awareness (sati), the steady monitoring of one's own mental and emotional condition, acts to deflect an individual's impulsive response by conscious reflection (Vajiranana, 1962). Both canonical texts related to the ethics of mindfulness indicate that sati is more ethically based in vigilance than it is simply a capacity for focused attention. In addition to this process of ethically based vigilant awareness, virāga, or non-attachment, also aids in diminishing the

influence of ego on one's desire to achieve an objective, allowing for a decisive course of action without having an excessive emphasis on the outcome of success or failure ([Analayo & Kabat-Zinn, 2019](#)). Combined, both sati and virāga support ethical self-regulation through behavioural reinforcement.

Psychological Approaches to Self-Management in Buddhism

Buddhism has been applied to contemporary psychology most noticeably in the areas of mindfulness, emotional control, and mental wellbeing. Mindfulness based Interventions (MBIs) have been found to have beneficial outcomes on stress, emotions, and cognitive flexibility ([Keng et al., 2011](#); [Khanal, 2025](#)). Research has been done on emotional intelligence that similarly explains how self-awareness and emotional control contributes to effective leadership and good relationships ([Cásedas, 2021](#); [Goleman, 1995](#)).

More critical researchers point out that contemporary psychology has taken mindfulness from its ethical, wisdom, and grounding origins. [Purser \(2020\)](#) says, "instrumental mindfulness" views mindfulness as just an awareness of being present and that this has pragmatic uses to improve one's efficiency, thereby entirely losing the ethical dimension of mindfulness. There have also been Buddhist scholars who have argued that a definition of sati (mindfulness) and its practical meaning is incomplete without sīla (moral conduct) and paññā (wisdom) ([Barker, 2021](#)).

There have also been research studies that examined the limitations of these studies on resilience and burnout, and how they apply to mindfulness and emotional regulation. Studies show that MBIs and emotional regulation help individuals cope. However, these studies may overlook, and if they do not integrate the ethical dimensions, may neglect, some of the more profound underlying causes of moral distress and existential discontent ([Jain & Madarasm, 2025](#)). It appears that the potential exists for constructing a

comprehensive model that integrates psychological self-regulation, ethical self-regulation, and reflective wisdom in developing powerful means of fostering psychological resilience (Oh et al., 2022).

Organizational and Leadership Perspectives

Recent studies on leadership and organizational behavior have acknowledged the significance of rationale, emotional intelligence, and reflective judgement. Ethical leadership research show that reasoning and consistency promote trust and psychological safety, as well as fostering commitment to the organization (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). With regard to this, systems-oriented leadership research emphasizes the use of reflective awareness as a tool to manage and navigate complexity and change (Fry & Kriger, 2009).

Developing the understanding of the collective reflective practices that embody organizational adaptability and the avoidance of errors (Sutcliffe et al., 2016), the research on organizational mindfulness makes relevant extensions. However, organizational literature tends to think of mindfulness as a practice of awareness, whereas the actual practice of mindfulness is better conceptualized as a practice of ethics or ethical practice. This indicates that the organisational interpretations of mindfulness overlook agency, ethics, power dynamics, and decision-making ethics (Oredo & Dennehy, 2023).

Research on Buddhist leadership integrates compassion, mindfulness, and service to address this concern by incorporating these elements into management practice (Shrestha, 2026; Vu & Gill, 2019). Nevertheless, such research frequently emphasizes a limited set of virtues and overlooks the all-encompassing ethical structure of *sīla-samādhi-paññā*. Without this all-encompassing view, Buddhist leadership is likely to reduce itself to merely an inspirational discourse

and not a meaningful discourse on ethical self-discipline ([Chirinang et al., 2025](#); [Suebkrapan et al., 2025](#)).

Synthesis and Research Gap

The intersections of the scriptural, psychological and organizational literature have a common thread. Buddhism and self-management have typically been studied as a tenet of a faith system that lacks relevance as a belief system, or instead of a doctrine, inconsistently integrated into contemporary structures that leads to its ethical fragmentation. While some psychological and organizational fields touch upon some of the morally disciplining and persona-wise judge mentally regulating components related to emotional control, they predominantly ignore these elements. On the other hand, the opposite holds true. The majority of organizational studies concerning Buddhism deal with the phenomena of doctrinal purity, but they very seldom examine thoroughly current organizational issues ([Dockett et al., 2004](#); [Husgafvel, 2018](#); [Sion, 2017](#)).

This is the first research, which has taken the *sīla*, the *samādhi*, and the *paññā* as a whole, with *sati* and *virāga* backing them up. This is the first study of its kind to look at the *sīla*, the *samādhi*, and the *paññā* as a whole, with *sati* and *virāga* as support. From the perspective of academia, self-management is synonymous with behavioral modification, and is ethically neutral.

METHOD

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative thematic approach with a normative and interpretive framework. The study does not intend to quantify variables or evaluate potential relationships but aims to reconstruct certain ethical constituents in early Buddhist canonical literature and evaluate their applicability to present-day leadership

and organisations. In this context, such a methodology would be justified for studies that explore more philosophical, ethical, and conceptual frameworks, rather than empirical ones (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2023).

The study adopts a canonical and normative interpretive framework, which engages with the early Buddhist texts as not simply historical documents, but as ethical and self-regulatory resources. This framework facilitates an analytical approach to the texts, whilst paying due regard to their normative and ethical integrity.

Data Sources and Text Selection

The Dhiga Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, and Anguttara Nikaya, form the basis of the primary data for this study. These three Nikayas are selected for three interrelated reasons. Firstly, they are some of the most respected and accepted compilations of the Buddha's teachings. Moreover, they contain comprehensive conversations on the ethics of self-governance and leadership, mental discipline, and wisdom in relation to the theories of governance and social and role relational responsibility. Secondly, they contain discourses directly addressed to non-monastic social and organizational units, i.e., the household, the ruler, and the community. Thirdly, the Anguttara, Majjhima and Digha Nikayas exhibit doctrinal and thematic consistency and coherence across discourses and as such, strengthen the study's credibility and analytical rigor by allowing for comparative thematic analysis (Das Alte Testament Deutsch, n.d). The analysis is based on authoritative English translations and reputable secondary commentaries in Buddhist studies to guarantee the highest accuracy of the texts and the highest reliability of the interpretations, as the disciplines of the commentaries are the most respected in the field of Buddhist studies.

Thematic Analytical Procedure

The study adopted an adapted thematic analytical procedure within a textual and philosophical framework. This procedure was organized into four sequential stages. First, the researcher conducted close readings of selected canonical texts to identify elements associated with moral conduct, mental discipline, wisdom, mindfulness, and non-attachment. This stage emphasized deep textual immersion so that the concepts could be understood within their doctrinal, ethical, and contextual settings. Second, the researcher applied thematic and inductive coding to classify recurring moral and psychological elements across the texts. The codes were not imposed in advance but emerged through repeated engagement with the canonical materials, following the principles of reflexive thematic analysis and qualitative interpretation outlined by [Braun & Clarke \(2006\)](#) in relation to interpretive research.

In the third stage, the researcher grouped related codes into broader thematic categories. This process generated five central concepts: *sīla*, *samādhi*, *virāga*, *paññā*, and *sati*. These concepts were not treated as isolated ideas, but as interdependent elements within a comprehensive moral and psychological system. The analysis also avoided reducing Buddhist themes to contemporary categories such as leadership, emotional intelligence, or organizational behavior. Instead, the study interpreted them through a conceptual dialogue between Buddhist moral philosophy and modern organizational thought. This approach was consistent with qualitative and interpretive scholarship, particularly the framework proposed by [Creswell & Poth \(2023\)](#), because it preserved the ethical integrity of Buddhist thought while allowing careful engagement with modern managerial and leadership discourse.

Research Questions and Objectives Alignment

The methodological design purposefully matched the study's objectives and research questions. RQ1 asked about the construction of self-management and how it is illustrated in early Buddhist texts. This was answered by conducting a close textual analysis of the canonical discourses on ethical conduct, mental development, and wisdom.

RQ2 asked about the roles of mindfulness and non-attachment as a form of self-regulation. This was answered by conducting a thematic analysis of texts on being aware of one's attention and being detached from one's desires. RQ2 asked about the relevance for contemporary leadership and organizational contexts. This was answered by interpretive analysis of canonical concepts and the corresponding ones in management and organizational theories. This methodology explains the study's objectives, the analytical approach, and the interpretive findings.

Methodological Rigor and Validation

Researchers employed various strategies to enhance rigour in this qualitative textual analysis. Initially, they employed cross-sectional triangulation by interacting with both primary canonical texts and relevant secondary sources in Buddhist studies. This practice helps to keep doctrinal consistency and limit unusual and possibly unreasonable interpretations (Delhey, 2016). Second, they made the process of reading, coding, and building themes more open and formalised the record-keeping for each step. This benefits the reader in comprehending the study's argument (Naeem et al., 2023). Thirdly, internal consistency can be evidenced by the congruence of construct definitions in the literature review, findings, and discussion (Ahmed et al., 2025; Neri De Souza et al., 2016). Ultimately, it was imperative to engage in reflexive awareness by acknowledging and assuming

responsibility for the researcher's interpretative role. This means understanding that meaning is created by carefully reading the text, not by randomly putting together pieces of information (Lim, 2025).

Interpretive Limits and Limitations

Claim limits are built into the study to avoid overextension of study claims. The study is not an attempt to empirically generalize findings, nor would it be an attempt to argue that the principles of Buddhist self-management can be applied, uncritically, in all organizational settings. The analysis is not empirically driven and not behaviourally oriented. It is ethical.

We value the proposal that different interpretive frameworks, such as historical, contextual, or critical approaches, may provide additional insights into the application of Buddhist principles in modern organisations. We acknowledge the usefulness of these frameworks for future research, but we do not analyse them thoroughly in this context.

RESULTS

Sīla as the Foundation of Ethical Self-Regulation (RQ1)

The analysis of early Buddhist canonical texts shows how sīla acts as the mechanism of self-management. Ethical discipline of speech, action, and intention, determines the individual's relation to others and social structures (Keown, 2013b; Rāhula, 1974). Discourses to householders and rulers, while giving instructions, state that ethically limited speech and action are the foundations of social trust, and, in relation to others, the legitimacy and moral authority of governance (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012; Mahathero, 2025).

The research shows that sīla is more of an internalised regulatory system, not an externally imposed moral system. Within the canon, ethical conduct is always framed as self-restraint determined by the

awareness of consequences. This supports the view that self-control is based in moral intention rather than in sheer obedience (Halbfass, 1992; Jayatilleke, 2013; Keown, 2013a).

Samādhi and the Stabilization of Attention and Emotion (RQ1)

Thematic analysis also indicates that samādhi is seen as the cultivation of mental stability and the maintenance of concentrated attention. According to Shankman (2008), Cousins (1973), and Gethin (1998), classical writings suggest a reflective mind with a structured thought stream and no distractions.

It is crucial that samādhi is preceded by sīla, as mental discipline without sīla is ineffective and insubstantial (Harvey, 2013; Jayatilleke, 2013). While still maintaining an ethical stance, which is often lacking in practical descriptions of mental training, these studies corroborate recent psychology findings on emotional control and stable attention (Purser, 2020).

Paññā as Reflective Wisdom and Judgment (RQ1)

One of the most important findings is the ability of paññā to serve as reflective wisdom that informs ethical decision making. Wisdom in canonical texts is described as knowledge of impermanence, causation, and interdependence, which is then followed by intelligent action in a given situation (King, 2016). Paññā, rather than a reference to some abstract theory, is the synthesis of ethical practical reasoning and a comprehension of the ramifications (Divino, 2023). These findings are indicative of self-management and the ability to integrate ethical self-control and mental clarity to facilitate wise decision making. This is particularly insightful to leadership roles that demand ethical consideration and situational awareness.

Sati as Ethical Awareness and Self-Monitoring (RQ2)

Sati (mindfulness) as a continuous process of ethical awareness and self-monitoring. The canonical sources stress mindfulness as the ability to process mental states like desire, aversion, or fear prior to them causing a reaction and therefore advocate for ethical restraint (Ditrich, 2016, 2022). These results differentiate canonical mindfulness and the more current interpretations of organizational mindfulness as being a passive, non-judgemental mindfulness technique, which lacks a moral dimension (Barker, 2021). In primitive Buddhism, sati is always associated with ethical purpose and wisdom discernment (Deroche, 2021).

Virāga and the Regulation of Attachment to Outcomes (RQ2)

Another emerging pattern is virāga or non-attachment, which regulates craving, ego involvement, and fixation on results. It is noted in the canonical texts that psychological suffering, reactive behavioral patterns and attachments, while the absence of attachment fosters clear mental states and ethical adherence (Bodhi, 2010; Bomhard, 2023). The findings clearly show that, unlike disengagement, virāga promotes a form of action, referred to as committed action, which is performed without being psychologically attached to the outcome. This becomes even more applicable to leadership and management theories in environments with a strong and unpredictable pressure to perform

An Integrated System of Ethical Self-Management (RQ3)

The findings suggest that sīla, samādhi, paññā, sati, and virāga are part of a unified, integrative system of ethical self regulation. Instead of being seen as disparate or isolated practices, ethical self regulation involves self-restraint, emotional self regulation, self-discipline, judgment, wisdom, and self monitoring through mindfulness, and non-attachment diminishes ego-driven reactivity

(Gethin, 2011; Harvey, 2013). This structure of integration differs from the disintegrated, contemporary approaches that treat mindfulness or emotional intelligence as a separate, isolated, and distinct competencies (Goleman, 1995; Purser, 2020).

Synopsis of Principal Outcomes

The analysis has produced three above all else findings:

1. In terms of early Buddhism, ethical self-management is self-regulated from the inside and not controlled from the outside;
2. Ethical emotional self regulation is not about performance; and
3. Self-management is about relationships, and it is contextual, reaching beyond the individual's self interest to the leadership, and the social trust (Harvey, 2013; Keown, 2022).

DISCUSSION

This study aims to reconceptualize self-management via an interdisciplinary reading of early Buddhist canonical texts and to assess its relevance to modern leadership and management. The findings suggest that Buddhist self-management should be understood not as a set of individual psychological skills but rather as an ethical self-regulation system underpinned by *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, along with *sati* and *virāga*. This section reviews the findings in the light of the existing literature and elucidates its theorisations.

Reconceiving Self-Management as Ethical Self-Governance

A key aspect of this study is to reposition self-management as an ethically self-governed process, as opposed to an activity that has a self-contained set of value-neutral skills. The self-management construct, in its most recent iterations, has been approached in a means-end fashion, instrumental in the attainment of a goal (Cásedas, 2021; Goleman, 1995). Such frameworks consider emotional and

attentional control but, to most degrees, elude the ethical consideration.

Current findings contradict this isolation by showing that, in primitive Buddhism, the practice of ethics (*sīla*) is the prerequisite for the growth of mental stability (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) (Harvey, 2013; Jayatilleke, 2013). This reasoning means that self-regulation cannot be achieved by means of psychological control only, but requires the presence of an ethical commitment that self-controls in ways that govern the intention, the actions, and the decisions of the self. From a leadership standpoint, this perspective rebalances the literature on moral disconnection and ethical erosion in the performance-oriented culture of organizations (Bass & Bass, 2008).

Mindfulness Beyond Instrumentality

The findings clarify the ethical function of *sati* and contribute to ongoing debates on mindfulness. Research on organizational mindfulness shows that attentional awareness enhances adaptability, error reduction, and well-being (Sutcliffe et al., 2016). Critical scholars, however, caution that mindfulness is often used as a managerial tool without ethical responsibility, a process referred to as “instrumental” or “McMindfulness” (Purser, 2020).

This study validates the critique by demonstrating that, contrary to the by now commonly held view, canonical mindfulness involves some form of ethical vigilance. *Sati*, as described by Anālayo (2003) and B. Bodhi (2010), involves the ability to identify unwholesome mental states before they manifest as actions, thereby, facilitating the needed moral restraint and reflective response. Such a perspective bolsters the assertion that mindfulness practices in organizational settings, to be of genuine value, must be coupled with some ethical framework that would elevate the practice to the level of organizational leadership integrity and workplace well-being.

Wisdom (Paññā) and Leadership Judgment in Complex Contexts

A further noteworthy aspect of the study is the description of paññā as a type of reflective wisdom that is particularly pertinent to leadership judgment. The development of leadership study acknowledges the prominent role of judgment, the ability to make sense of a situation, and systems thinking, especially when addressing complexity and ambiguity (Fry & Kriger, 2009). Nevertheless, such symptoms tend to leave the specifics of how reflective judgment gets internally developed and neglected.

Findings seem to indicate that paññā fills this gap by merging ethical reflection and the insight of the three marks of existence (Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 2013). Such a wisdom type enables a leader to navigate competing priorities, foresee the consequences of decisions made over the long term, as well as avoid decision-making that is inflexible, or driven by self-interests. Therefore, Buddhist wisdom can be seen as a contemporary leadership theory that is integrated with ethical perspectives on situational, adaptive, or flexible judgment.

Non-Attachment (Virāga) and Sustainable Leadership

The role of virāga adds further depth to the discussion of sustainable leadership and resilience. Chronic performance pressure and fixation on outcomes have been connected with burnout, anxiety, and defensive coping (Jain & Madarasmī, 2025). Mindfulness and emotion regulation, while suggested as potential solutions, can be inadequate when leaders are psychologically over-identified with the outcomes

The findings show that virāga enables committed action, free from compulsive attachment to success and control (Thien & Tu, 2019). This understanding reframes resilience as the balance to act ethically, and without hesitation, as well as psychologically. Such

knowledge aids in the evolution of sustainable leadership and resilient ethics.

Balancing Buddhist Ethics and Modern Organizational Theory

All the findings, combined with their interpretation, indicate that Buddhist self-management presents the most comprehensive alternative to the current state of the leadership systems. Most other models of self-management dissociate ethics, emotional intelligence, or mindfulness and consider them as distinct, individual components. Buddhist self-management offers a model that places all these components in one ethical framework. This model addresses one of the most pertinent issues in organizational theory today, which is offering a fully developed construct of self-regulation that incorporates the ethics of emotional control and judiciousness.

Positioning the leadership research at the intersection of ethical self-control rather than simplistic behavioral self-regulation or mere self-enhancement gives the research the confidence to engage with Buddhist thought in contemporary management theory (Keown, 2022). It should be noted that this is not an unqualified appropriation of religion into management, but rather a considered contact that is ethically principled and contextually adaptive.

Synopsis of Theoretical Contributions

The discussion above outlines three significant theoretical contributions. To begin with, the study reframes self-management as an integrated ethical process, as opposed to a mere collection of performatives, technical competencies. It then re-establishes the ethical and wisdom-based elements of mindfulness and emotional self-regulation in relation to the context of leadership. Introducing non-attachment as a crucial but largely overlooked aspect of sustainable leadership and the flourishing of organizations is the third contribution. These contributions advance the existing body of

scholarship by presenting an ethically oriented and textually grounded contribution to the discourse of self-regulation in present-day organizational contexts.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The most important theoretical contribution of this study is that it redefines self-management as a whole system of ethical self-governance instead of a set of separate psychological skills. Most of the current theories about leadership and how organisations work see ethics, emotional regulation, mindfulness, and judgement as separate and unrelated parts (Bass & Bass, 2008; Goleman, 1995). This research opposes such fragmentation by arguing that early Buddhist philosophy views these capacities as collective and interdependent processes organized by *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

This integrated model enhances leadership theory by providing a normatively anchored self-regulation model that explains the synergistic development of ethical behavior, mental composure, and wisdom. This model is the first to address the organizational scholarship gap on the psychological mechanisms that cause ethical leadership and moral reasoning to evolve (Harvey, 2013; Keown, 2022).

The study enhances mindfulness research by reviving its ethical and epistemological dimensions. By limiting *sati* to ethical vigilance rather than neutral awareness, the findings challenge instrumental interpretations of mindfulness and bolster nascent critiques of organisational mindfulness that promote ethics-inclusive methodologies (Anālayo, 2003; Purser, 2020). The inclusion of *virāga* further enhances the theory by introducing non-attachment as a vital yet insufficiently explored component of sustainable leadership and ethical resilience.

Implications for Future Research

The results have provided a number of clear pathways for further research. To begin with, further studies might be able to operationalize the proposed *śīla-samādhi-paññā* model within the multiple domains of public administration, pedagogy, healthcare, and corporate leadership. In the case of leadership and decision-making, aspects related to ethical discipline, attentional stability, and wise, judicious decision-making might be investigated through mixed-methods or qualitative empirical methodologies.

In addition, it might be possible, through cultural sensitivity, to construct, and then through ethical self-governance, to articulate, or to juxtapose, or to situate in alignment or contrast with frameworks of emotional intelligence, self-leadership, and moral identity (Karn, 2024) which enables comparative studies without the charges of contextualization of Buddhist principles.

Third, research could be conducted to look at the impact of mindfulness (*sati*) and non-attachment (*virāga*) on leader resilience, ethical inconsistency, and burnout over time. This would contribute to the concerns relating to the sustainability and well-being of leadership roles (Jain & Madarasmī, 2025).

Finally, in the field of comparative philosophy, the Buddhist paradigm of ethical self-management might be examined in conjunction with other ethical systems. It might be fruitful, for instance, to juxtapose Buddhist self-management with virtue ethics or with care ethics, thereby broadening the interdisciplinary focus in leadership and organization studies.

Practice Implications for Leadership and Organizations

The findings offer a commanding lesson regarding the practice of leadership development in that skill-based training ought to be complemented by some form of ethical self-regulation. Mindfulness

and emotional intelligence training could be enhanced by the incorporation of *sīla* (ethical self-discipline) and *paññā* (reflective self-wisdom) to ensure that self-awareness is accompanied by moral accountability.

The framework can be piloted in a cross-section of organizations by applying ethical self-governance to peer reviews of ethical self-governance, mentoring, and self-governance in decision making. For example, ethical human resource practices that combine *sīla* (self-restraint) and accountability in ethical standards can be combined with leadership coaching that focuses on using *samādhi* (mental and emotional regulation) to make decisions that are stable emotionally. Decision-making reflection groups may assist leaders in contemplating the lasting consequences and relational dimensions of their decisions, thereby promoting ethically self-regulated *pūñña*.

The principle of non-attachment (*virāga*) can help reduce anxiety about performance and the fear of failing. Purposefully attuned leaders with a non-result obsessive disposition may be more comfortable with ambiguity, less defensive, and more likely to create a climate of psychological safety. In this regard, self-management and self-governance within a Buddhist framework not only enhances individual leadership efficacy, but also preserves and ethically enhances the organizational culture.

Societal and Educational Implications

There are societal implications as well, even outside the sphere of organized practices. Self-governance with an ethical, mindful, and wise model can also assist in public leadership, teaching, and community organizing roles, where the effects are more pronounced. This model authorizes leadership with social trust, and as a result, social good.

The proposed framework offers a more integrated approach to teaching leadership and management where ethical self-regulation is

incorporated as a fundamental skill. Rather than teaching ethics, mindfulness, and leadership as distinct and separate silos in a curriculum, they can be integrated more holistically in a way that acknowledges and represents their interconnectedness, which is of particular significance in times of ethical ambiguity, societal fragmentation, and institutional distrust.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to reconceptualize self-management by formulating a systematic and integrated reading of early Buddhist core texts and to investigate the applicability of this framework to present-day leadership and organizational contexts. Using a thematic approach to selected texts of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, and *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the study articulates that Buddhist self-management is the practice of a one systematic ethical self-governance and it is not a fragmented collection of techniques.

The findings, together with the discussion, demonstrate that ethical practice is the bedrock of enduring self-control; mental stability is the condition for reflective participation; and wisdom is the means for determination in complex and ambiguous situations. In the context of ethical self-management, mindfulness goes beyond mere attention, being more about vigilance and non-attachment; and provides regulation of ego involvement and fixation to certain outcomes. All these elements fused together form a self-governed process of self-management that extends beyond personal welfare to include the credibility of leadership, the responsibility in relations and the integrity of the organization ([Gethin, 1998](#); [Harvey, 2013](#)).

This study has, therefore, restored the ethical and epistemic coherence of Buddhist self-management, contributing to leadership and organizational studies in a scholarly way in a number of ways. The first merit highlights a conceptual advance in modern theories

that typically splinter ethics, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and related areas (Bass & Bass, 2008; Goleman, 1995). The second provides a clearly defined and directionally positive foundational model that is based on how ethical leadership capacities can be self-developed rather than imposed from the outside. The third offers a theoretically strong, non-reductionist alternative to instrumental mindfulness, placing self-awareness in moral responsibility and wise discernment (Anālayo, 2003; Purser, 2020).

It is important to note that the study does not propose that Buddhist ideas be transplanted into modern organizations without critique. Rather, it advocates for a self-reflective and interpretive approach that maintains the normative ethical elements of the early Buddhist tradition while also highlighting the differences between the ancient philosophical frameworks and the modern organizational contexts. In this way, the research provides a cross-disciplinary contribution to the interplay of Buddhist studies, leadership, and organizational behavior.

Study Limitations

While the study made a contribution, it also has a number of self-reported shortcomings. The first is that the study has a conceptual and textual analysis and has not included any empirical studies in any organizational context. Therefore, while the findings may not be statistically generalizable, they are meant to provide a basis for theory and normative implications.

The study also prioritizes certain early canonical texts and does not engage deeply with later Buddhist traditions or frameworks in comparative religion which, in other ways, could expand the understanding of self-management and leadership from different angles. Third, while some contemporary organizational literature has been reviewed critically, the study does not seek to examine the

relevance of the Buddhist self-management approach in particular cultural or institutional settings.

Future Research

The aforementioned limitations reveal numerous opportunities for future research. Empirical research could focus on the different organizational types and cultural settings to examine the self-management of leadership, which is ethically principled. The study of the relationship between mindfulness, non-attachment, ethical consistency, and resilience of leaders over time could be the subject of longitudinal research (Jain & Madarasmī, 2025). In leadership studies, the theoretical pluralism can be enriched by further research comparisons on the Buddhist ethical self-governance in relation to other normative traditions, such as virtue ethics or care ethics.

Furthermore, leadership education and professional training may benefit from future research on the integrated framework's pedagogical applications, particularly in examining ways to cultivate ethical self-regulation as a core rather than secondary skill.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Data curation: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Formal analysis: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Funding acquisition: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Investigation: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Methodology: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Project administration: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Resources: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Software: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Supervision: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Validation: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Visualization: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Writing - original draft: M.S., R.N., & S.J.; Writing - review & editing: M.S., R.N., & S.J. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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This study was approved by Department of Management, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Meghalaya, Tura, India.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained before participants filled out the questionnaire for this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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