

## Another benefit of mindfulness: Ethical behaviour

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### **Abstract**

*Severe ethical lapses have damaged the reputation of established corporations in the last decade worldwide. This study aims to investigate the relationship between mindfulness and ethical behaviour. Mindfulness refers to being here and now. Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory was translated into Turkish and used for measuring mindfulness. Ethical Behaviour was assessed with Ethical Behaviour Rating Scale. Data were gathered from 250 white collar employees working in İstanbul. Results indicate that mindfulness has significant relationships with ethical behaviour. This study provides a unique theoretical contribution by examining the link between mindfulness and ethical behaviour among white collar employees. Since mindfulness is a skill, cultivating employee's mindfulness through training programs is among the practical suggestions.*

**Keywords:** *Mindfulness, Ethical Behaviour, Acceptance, Awareness, Moral life.*

### **1. Introduction**

Mindfulness refers to being here and now, emotionally and intellectually. The term has originated from Buddhism. However, it has been secularized in the last fifty years and draws the researcher's attention which results with lots of research.

One of the first researchers who examine mindfulness in a scientific way is Kabat-Zinn (1990). He defined mindfulness as "a particular way of paying attention. It is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p.12). According to Kabat-Zinn (2005) mindfulness generates a moral life since mindful mind and heart contains such qualities as generosity, trustworthiness, kindness, empathy, compassion, gratitude, joy in the good fortune of others, inclusiveness, acceptance, and equanimity (p.103). However, the popularity brings a disadvantage; a misuse of the concept which Purser and Loy (2013) defines as "McMindfulness" (Hyland, 2015). It refers to ignoring the ethical basis of mindfulness and benefit from it for the sake of some fields such as military (as improving soldier's attention) or capitalist welfare (increasing productivity). It would be more appropriate to do mindfulness studies without moving away from its core meaning. The aim of the study is bridging this gap by investigating the relationship between mindfulness and ethical behaviour.

### **2. Literature review**

Jankowski and Holas (2014) claimed that two orientations exist for interpreting mindfulness: clinical psychology approach and self-determination approach. Kabat-Zinn who is the pioneer of

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the clinical psychology approach, developed Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) to treat stress-related physical and psychological problems. Clinical psychology approach handles mindfulness as a skill that can be developed with a practice on meditation. State mindfulness is a term that is utilized for referring clinical psychology approach. On the other hand, in Self Determination Approach (Brown & Ryan, 2003) mindfulness is defined as “an open or receptive awareness and attention which may be reflected in a more regular or sustained consciousness or ongoing events and experiences” (p.822). Although two approaches are similar in terms of their emphasis on awareness and attention, Brown and Ryan (2003) suggest that mindfulness enhances well-being by saturating autonomy, competence and relatedness needs. Mindfulness is seen as a trait that may occur naturally when a task is done with curiosity and intrinsic motivation. Trait mindfulness is used to define self-determination approach. This study embraces trait approach of mindfulness.

Mindfulness catches the attention of researchers from different disciplines such as clinical psychology and social psychology. Mindfulness was found beneficial in terms of sleep quality and sleep duration (Hülshager et al., 2014) and cognition (Zeidan et al., 2010). Significant relationships were found between mindfulness and self-control (Wittmann et al., 2014) and self-compassion (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011). In organizational psychology research, significant relationships were found between mindfulness and emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt & Lang, 2013), vitality, sleep quality and work-family balance (Allen & Kiburz, 2012), and safety behaviour (Zhang & Wu, 2014). Mindfulness was found negatively associated with deviance and emotional exhaustion (Reb, Narayanan, & Ho, 2015).

Mindfulness is expected to be related also to ethical behaviour. As stated by Kabat-Zinn mindfulness directs individuals to a moral life as the term is based on a philosophy which governs individuals to be sensitive to others who avoid ignorance. Mindfulness may be positively related with ethical behaviour as it influences the way individuals perceive themselves. With an experimental manipulation, Ruedy and Schweitzer (2010) found that cheating didn't differ between individuals with low and high mindfulness levels but the amount of cheating did. In other words, mindful individuals cheated less than mindless ones. The authors argue that mindfulness leads individuals to be more sensitive related to their self-concept in terms of ethical behaviour. Few amounts of unethical behaviour may be tolerated by them if it doesn't threaten their self-concept.

Mindfulness may also improve ethical decision making. Shapiro, Jazaieri, and Goldin (2012) claimed that it promotes individuals to embrace a more objective point of view instead of a subjective perspective.

Previous research showed that ego depletion results with more unethical behaviour (Mead et al., 2009). Ego depletion is “a state in which the self does not have all the resources it has normally” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007, p.2) which result with performance decline in a subsequent task. Yam, Chen and Reynolds (2014) found that social consensus moderates the relationship between ego depletion and unethical behaviour; ego depletion end up with more unethical behaviour of lower social consensus (behaviours that involve more disagreement about its unethicity), but less unethical behaviour of higher social consensus (behaviours that everyone generally agrees are unethical). The authors suggest that depletion has a larger effect on automatic (unethical behaviour of lower social consensus) than controlled behaviour (unethical behaviour of high social consensus). Since mindfulness prevents automatic behaviour and associated with self-control

(Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Lakey et al., 2007) it may, directly and indirectly, prevent ego depletion which ends up with more ethical behaviour.

Lastly, mindfulness may compensate the effects of cognitive complexity on moral choices as it improves self-regulation (Bishop et al., 2004), awareness and attention (Vallabh & Singhal, 2014) which prevents selfish interests.

In conclusion, mindfulness may lead individuals to be sensitive about their self-concept, provide an objective point of view and prevent the negative effects of ego depletion. Besides, it may develop moral reasoning and balance cognitive complexity. These associations may generate more ethical behaviour. Therefore, the aim of the study is to test whether mindfulness predicts ethical behaviour.

H1: Mindfulness contributes positively to ethical behaviour.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants and procedure

The sample (N = 250) consists of white collar employees working in the service sector in İstanbul. Participants are composed of employees aged between 21 and 58 (55.2% was female, 38% was male).

Data were gathered through convenience sampling method in three ways. First, an online survey was prepared. It was sent to employees and also shared in a professional network. Second, a number of companies were selected and surveys were sent. Access to the companies was reached through personal contacts. Lastly, surveys were distributed in evening MBA programs with a permission of the lecturer. After they finished, they were thanked, debriefed and the surveys were collected. Data were collected in eight weeks.

#### 3.2. Scales of measurement

##### *Mindfulness*

Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) was used which is developed by Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmuller, Kleinknecht and Schmidt (2006). The original FMI (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001) has 30 items and it measures mindfulness levels of individuals with meditation practice. Walach et al. (2006) revised it to 16 items-format for assessing mindfulness levels of population with no meditation experience. Walach et al. (2006) proposed that the construct of the scale is one-dimensional. Turkish translation of the scale was applied by the authors and controlled by a group of academicians with mindfulness knowledge. The six-point scale was utilized ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Cronbach alpha value of the scale is .86.

##### *Ethical behaviour*

Ethical Behaviour Rating Scale (Blasi, 1980; Hogan, 1973) has 15 items and the items measure fairness, right and wrong judgment, group allegiance, decentred logic, trustworthiness, loyalty, honesty, empathy, helpfulness, contrition, participation, independence, altruism, cooperation, and respectfulness (Hill & Swanson, 1985). The six-point scale was used ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Translation of the scale into Turkish was applied by Kapıkıran (2007) and determined as a valid and reliable instrument. Minor change was done in item 10 for converting the scale in

accordance with organizational setting (Original item: “Participates in activities and or discussions in the class”) Cronbach alpha value of the scale is .89.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analyses for the scales

For both scales, exploratory Factor Analysis was done by using Principal Component Method with varimax rotation.

#### 4.1.1. Factor and reliability analyses for FMI

Factor analysis for 14-item FMI extracted two factors explaining 51.38 percent of the variance (KMO = .87, Bartlett Sphericity Test = 1055.497,  $p < .001$ ). One item (item 13) is excluded from the analysis because of the low factor loading. The first factor named as *nonjudgmental acceptance* and is composed of seven items. The second factor referred as *commitment to experience*, consists of six items (see Table 1). Walach et al. (2006) found four factors in the long version of FMI but suggest that it is better to use mindfulness as a one-dimensional construct in both short and long versions. By using confirmatory factor analysis, Kohl et al. (2009) compared two dimensional (named as presence and acceptance) and one-dimensional solution and inferred that the former fits better to the data and the latter is sufficient for practical applications. Hence, the two-dimensional structure obtained in this study is consistent with the finding of Kohl et al. (2009).

Table 1. Factor and reliability analyses for FMI

Item no	Mindfulness	Factor Loading
<b>Factor name: Nonjudgmental acceptance (Explained variance = 28.21; <math>\alpha</math> = .85)</b>		
I12	I experience moments of inner peace and ease, even when things get hectic and stressful.	.80
I9	I am friendly to myself when things go wrong.	.78
I10	I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.	.77
I11	In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting.	.75
I14	I am able to smile when I notice how I sometimes make life difficult.	.72
I6	I see my mistakes and difficulties without judging them.	.50
I8	I accept unpleasant experiences.	.41
<b>Factor name: Commitment to current experience (Explained variance = 23.17; <math>\alpha</math> = .75)</b>		
I7	I feel connected to my experience in the here-and-now.	.70
I5	I pay attention to what's behind my actions.	.65
I1	I am open to the experience of the present moment.	.65
I2	I sense my body, whether eating, cooking, cleaning or talking.	.64
I3	When I notice an absence of mind, I gently return to the experience of the here and now.	.63
I4	I am able to appreciate myself.	.62
<b>KMO = .87; Bartlett Test Chi Square = 1055.497 df = 78 <math>p &lt; .001</math></b>		

#### 4.1.2. Factor and reliability analyses for EBRs

After excluding item 11 as it decreases the reliability of the scale three factors were inferred explaining 60.03 percent of the variance (KMO = .90, Bartlett Sphericity Test = 1440.701,  $p < .001$ ). The first factor named as moral trait is composed of four items. The second factor named as concern for others, consists of four items. The third factor, participation and cooperation has six items (see Table 2).

Table 2. Factor analysis and reliability results of ethical behaviour scale

Item no	Ethical Behaviour	Factor Loading
<b>Factor name: Moral trait (Explained variance = 20.94; <math>\alpha = .85</math>)</b>		
13	Verbalizes judgments on rightness or wrongness of certain behaviours	.82
14	Will act in defense of a friend	.79
12	Is trustworthy; has not been known to cheat	.72
11	Speaks out for fairness for others as well as self	.68
<b>Factor name: Concern for others (Explained variance = 20.45; <math>\alpha = .77</math>)</b>		
I14	Treats others with respect	.80
I15	Verbalizes logical reasoning beyond a completely selfish point of view	.75
16	Understands or shows an effort to understand	.72
15	Can be depended on to be honest	.60
<b>Factor name: Participation and cooperation (Explained variance = 18.64; <math>\alpha = .80</math>)</b>		
I13	Can be counted on to cooperate in small group activities	.73
18	Verbalizes loyalty to a group or institution	.71
I10	Participates in activities and or discussions in the workplace	.71
19	Will admit a mistake	.54
I12	Shows a genuine concern for the welfare of fellow humans	.50
17	Is willing to help someone in need whether good friend or not	.40
<b>KMO = .901; Bartlett Test Chi Square = 1440.701 df = 91 <math>p &lt; .001</math></b>		

#### 4.2. Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables

Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlation coefficients can be seen in Table 3. Results indicate that each dimension of mindfulness is significantly related with dimensions of ethical behaviour. The most powerful correlation is between commitment to experience and concern for others ( $r = .50$ ) whereas the least powerful correlation is between nonjudgmental acceptance and moral trait ( $r = .21$ ). Moreover, the relationships of commitment to experience with dimensions of ethical behaviour are stronger than those of nonjudgmental acceptance.

In this study, it was seen that dimensions of each variable are also significantly related to each other. Since the strongest relation is lower than .70 ( $r = .64$ ), no multicollinearity risk was suspected. Demographic variables have weak correlations with ethical behaviour. Education is significantly related with moral trait and concern for others. Total tenure is significantly related with moral trait.

Table 3. Correlations among the variables

VARIABLES	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Education			.03	.10	.01	.18**	.07	.14*
2.Total tenure	7.29	6.35	1	.02	.02	.16*	.08	.09
3. C.Experience	4.59	0.72		1	.53**	.44**	.48**	.50**
4. N.Acceptance	3.80	0.87			1	.21**	.34**	.27**
5.Moral trait	4.87	0.82				1	.62**	.64**
6. Participation	4.59	0.77					1	.63**
7. Concern for others	5.19	0.67						1

Note: Education is involved in the analysis as a dummy variable. 0 = Bachelor's degree, 1 = Master degree.

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

#### 4.3. Hypothesis testing

For testing the hypothesis, the contribution of mindfulness on ethical behaviour was analysed with simple regression analysis. Results indicate that mindfulness has significant and positive contribution on moral trait (Adjusted  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F = 36.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), participation/cooperation (Adjusted  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $F = 59.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and concern for others (Adjusted  $R^2 = .18$ ,  $F = 51.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results support Hypothesis 1.

Table 4. Simple regression analysis for mindfulness and ethical behaviour dimensions

	Ethical Behaviour		
	Moral trait	Participation/cooperation	Concern for others
<b>FMI</b>	$\beta = .37^{***}$	$\beta = .46^{***}$	$\beta = .43^{***}$
<b>R</b>	.37	.46	.43
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	.14	.21	.18
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	.13	.20	.18
<b>F</b>	36.68***	59.21***	51.09***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Then, multiple regression analysis was applied with entering the dimensions of mindfulness as independent variable. For the threat of multicollinearity, VIF values were examined and it was seen that VIF values are around 1. Therefore, multicollinearity assumption was met. Results show that only commitment to experience has significant contribution to moral trait (Adjusted  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $F = 28.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ) participation and cooperation (Adjusted  $R^2 = .23$ ,  $F = 35.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and concern for others (Adjusted  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $F = 40.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The contribution of commitment to experience on concern for others ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is higher than moral trait ( $\beta = .45$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and participation and cooperation ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 5. Multiple Regression analysis for dimensions of both mindfulness and the ethical behaviour

	Ethical Behaviour		
	Moral trait	Participation and cooperation	Concern for others
Commitment to experience	$\beta = .45^{***}$	$\beta = .41^{***}$	$\beta = .51^{***}$
Nonjudgmental acceptance	$\beta = .01$	$\beta = .13$	$\beta = .01$
<i>R</i>	.45	.49	.51
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.20	.24	.26
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.20	.23	.26
<i>F</i>	28.81***	35.45***	40.67***

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ 

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study is to examine the association between mindfulness and ethical behaviour. Results indicate that mindfulness explains variance in ethical behaviour; the more mindful the individuals, the more they behave ethically. The relationship between mindfulness and ethical behaviour can be explained with self-regulation theory and moral emotions. Self-regulation occurs when one has standards, monitor his/her actions and operate accordingly (Baumeister, Heatheron & Tice, 1994; Carver & Scheier, 1982) and it is seen as the strongest path for being a successful and an agreeable person (Baumeister et al., 1994). It is a cognitive process in which mindful individuals may be better at. Moral emotions may be stimulated as a result of being mindful. We think that the link between mindfulness and ethical behaviour occurs as a combined effect of self-regulation and stimulation of moral emotions.

Self-regulation is a process that is controlled by the individual itself to outrival an impulse's natural consequence rather than hindering the impulse from taking place (Baumeister & Heatheron, 1996). Three components of self-regulation were described within a feedback-loop framework by Carver and Scheier (1982). The first component is standards. One must have standards which refer to goals that are pursued. Then monitoring should occur, one watches his/her actions and states. Lastly, operating works; when the desired end isn't achieved, the individual acts to change the present situation (Baumeister et al., 1994). An overweight person who is on a diet, a student who work hard for pursuit of an academic degree and a partner who tries to manage his/her romantic relationship during a conflict all have a common attribute. They regulate their behaviours and avoid desired impulses like eating snack, watching favourite TV series or misbehave. Self-regulation failure results with not only individual problems like obesity, default at school or partner abuse but also as Bauemister et al. claimed (1994) it is the main cause of destructive, illegal and antisocial behaviour. In our opinions, mindful individuals are expected to be better at self-regulation as they behave coherently to their moral standards, monitor their feelings and actions and accommodate their behaviours. Mindful individuals may reveal suitable behaviours that match with the context rather than acting like an automatic pilot or pursuing to gratify immediate desires.

Regression analysis results for each dimension of mindfulness and ethical behaviour indicate that commitment to experience is associated with all ethical behaviour dimensions. When the

correlation analysis is examined, both nonjudgmental acceptance and commitment to current experience are found to be related with ethical behaviour dimensions (see Table 3). However, when two dimensions of mindfulness are entered with ethical behaviour dimensions into the regression equation, the contribution of commitment to experience become prominent and the contribution of nonjudgmental acceptance becomes weaker. Thus, the increment on ethical behaviour should be investigated particularly on the commitment to experience concept.

Previous studies indicate that mindfulness is associated with self-control (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Lakey et al., 2007; Wittman et al., 2014). Although self-control and self-regulation are similar concepts and self-control is a concept used in self-regulation framework, the former refers to inhibiting strong impulses but the latter involves decreasing the intense consequences of that impulse with an effective management (Schanker, 2016). Self-control is called moral muscle as it determines moral acts, but just like muscle, when it is surcharged, it may lose its strength (Baumeister & Exline, 1999; Mead et al., 2009). Mindful individuals may be better in self-control. However, commitment to current experience dimension may be more related with self-regulation as it involves a cognitive aspect which includes attentiveness and awareness about oneself and the present situation. On the other hand, nonjudgmental acceptance involves non-reactance and acceptance which may be more related with self-control. We think that the prominent effect of commitment to experience on ethical behaviour is related with successful self-regulation as the individual internalizes his/her actions rather than a mere control.

Also when one has higher awareness and experience to the current situation, this may stimulate moral emotions which refer to “those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of the persons other than the judge or agent” (Haidt, 2003, p.853). Such emotions which may motivate one to act morally as compassion and love (Cova, Deonna, & Sander, 2015), may be stimulated with mindful awareness.

Education is positively related with moral trait and concern for others. Previous studies have conflicting results for the relationship between education and ethical judgments (Chiu, 2003, Swaidan et al., 2003). Pan and Spark (2012)’s meta-analysis reveal that those who have more education have less strict ethical judgment. Although our results may seem incompatible with this meta-analysis, actually it isn’t. Pan and Spark (2012) suggest that education may trigger individuals to interpret events with a broader perspective which matches with Kohlberg (1981)’s moral development theory. Individuals with more education may behave more ethically as our study shows, but at the same time their judgment may be less strict than the others. In this study, participants education level mainly differ between bachelor’s and master degree. Future studies may analyze whether the education gap (Primary school vs master degree) create a stronger difference in terms of ethical behaviour.

One of the core aspects of mindfulness is an increased awareness of being in here and now rather than live like a mindless automatic pilot. Mindfulness contains to experience the current situation directly, but not ruminating about its implications or any other meanings (Teasdale et al., 1995). Therefore, when a mindful employee goes through a situation, as she/he is aware of the requirements of the present moment, she/he may probably respond ethically. Since mindful individuals have less ego concerns and selfish desires, positive association between mindfulness and moral trait aspect is expected. However, the absence of the relationship between nonjudgmental acceptance and ethical behaviour dimensions may direct future studies. Utilization of other mindfulness scales, measuring the mediating effects of emotions and experimental manipulations

may draw a more thorough picture. This study is cross-sectional therefore no causality can be drawn.

## 6. Implications

Mindfulness requires being conscious about the current situation, attentive to the environmental cues and having acceptance to the imperfections that life brings which may be either one's own failures or other's flaws. Previous research suggests that promotion of eudemonic living which is cultivated by mindfulness result with more social responsible actions (Ryan & Huta, & Deci, 2008). This study contributes to the literature as it reveals the benefits of mindfulness on ethical behaviour in workplace. Also, this study appears as a criticism to the exploitation of mindfulness concept. We claim that researchers should protect the essence of the concept which involves a long-lasting philosophy directing individuals for universal welfare. Removing the ethical aspects of mindfulness and utilize it for the sake of shallow purposes may result with "the potential for something priceless to be lost" (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p.4).

## 7. Practical suggestions

The results of this research reveal that commitment to experience, a dimension of mindfulness, is a beneficial concept for organizations as it improves ethical behaviour. Mindfulness may be critically important for work contexts where sensitive treatment and pro-social behaviour become crucial such as health or education sector. Therefore, HR staff may combine mindfulness test into their personnel selection tools. As mindfulness is a state as well as a trait, organizations may provide mindfulness training to their staff. Meditation and yoga are popular ways to trigger state mindfulness. However, as Troyer (2011) revealed religion/spiritual discipline and martial arts may also be alternatives to increase the level of consciousness.

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