

Mitigating Workplace Incivility through Mindful Leadership: The Mediating Role of Ethical Organizational Culture

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Abstract

This study is conducted to explore the relationship of mindful leadership with workplace incivility of I.T. professionals. Additionally, it emphasizes on the function of ethical organizational culture as a mediating mechanism on a link between mindful leadership and workplace incivility. The approach selected for the current study was quantitative. The data were obtained from 123 individuals from Pune, working in IT industry. The study shared the findings which suggest that both mindful leadership and ethical organizational culture are negatively linked to workplace incivility. It further indicates that Ethical organizational culture partially mediates the link between mindful leadership and workplace incivility. The study is limited to self-reported data and cross-sectional study design. The outcomes of the study extend mindful leadership literature by demonstrating the relevance of mindful leadership in mitigating negative interpersonal behaviors in organizations and thereby reducing workplace incivility. The partial mediation of ethical organizational culture suggests that mindful leadership works both directly through emotional regulation and behavioral modeling as well as indirectly through shaping ethical climate. This provides a more meticulous explanation of how leadership influences workplace misbehavior.

Keywords - Mindful Leadership, Ethical Organizational Culture, Workplace Incivility

Introduction

In recent years organizations have to operate in a very volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. Leaders of the organizations feel the intensified pressure and emotional strain caused by the high level of global competition, continuous change, heightened stakeholder scrutiny and technological acceleration which again are the result of VUCA environment. To handle this changed scenario a traditional leadership with strategic outlook becomes incompetent and moves towards a moral and relational forces which helps to build the organizational culture. Thus all the activities happening inside the organization are influenced by the leadership behaviour such as setting a direction, code of conduct, decision making, overall policies and procedures (Day & Dragoni, 2015; Day et al., 2014). When leadership fails to acknowledge and address emotional regulation, to being transparent and be a moral coherence, it leads to damaging the standard of an organization as a whole.

Workplace incivility - A low-intensity deviant behaviour

Workplace incivility has been regarded as a norm-violating systematic phenomenon that is caused by the ambiguous intent to hurt a person. This generally rises from a low-intensity deviant behaviour. (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). Incivility may not be easily identified as it is not like aggression or harassment but it is hidden and in subtle, socially normalized behaviours. The list can consist of condescension, public criticism, snide remarks, intentionally ignoring someone, passing hurtful comments, disrespectful treatment, constant interruption etc.

These low-intensity behaviours are substantial causing stress, burnout and low productivity. Many of the earlier conducted researches on incivility has proved that it is consistent and prevalent; up to 98% of employees acknowledged that, at some point in their careers they have experienced the incivility, half of them experiencing it weekly. (Cortina et al., 2001; Schilpzand et al., 2016). A meta-analysis study presented a strong association of experiencing incivility and emotional exhaustion, reduction in job satisfaction, intention to leave & somatic

symptoms (Chris et al., 2023). Incivility continued to exhibit psychological strain, counterproductive work behaviour, diminished creativity and withdrawal (Cortina et al., 2017)

Workplace incivility's theoretical foundation lies in its norm-violation character. Andersson and Pearson (1999) proposed a seminal spiral model which depicts uncivil acts of employees impact negatively on other employees, trigger perceptions of justice and a desire for reciprocation. Incivility, through reciprocal exchanges intensifies into spirals that hinders interpersonal trust and reshape the organizational culture. Earlier conducted research work confirmed that experienced incivility further strongly predicts enacted incivility resulting in contagious and systematic nature (Chris et al., 2023). A conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) depicts that when employees behave in an uncivil manner, it not only irks the other employees but also takes away the sense of respect, trust in the relationship, and emotional safety. Over a time, it starts draining employees and leads to burnout, stress or disengagement. From the perspective of Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) it can be understood how norm-violating actions and events at the workplace trigger emotional reactions, which then influence employees' behaviours and attitudes.

Witness employees too alongside victim employees feel the negative effects, and go through various emotions such as moral outrage or negativity (Reich & Hershcovis, 2014). This indicates that incivility happens at various levels, individual, dyadic, team and organization-wide. Significantly, incivility is not just the product of "negative or bad employees," but it tells us that the relationships are breaking down and the organization is accepting the culture. Incivility even further increases when the organization is going through a major change, has intense job ask, job uncertainty, or inadequate social backing (Torkelson et al., 2016). When disrespect is allowed to enter the organizational culture, the risk of reaching a point where incivility becomes the culture becomes vivid. These insights advice that to fix these issues organization needs a leadership which is aware of the situation and can take unbiased decisions to drive the cultural change and not just traditional disciplinary action.

Mindful Leadership addressing the challenge

Mindfulness is the self-regulatory capacity that enables one to take full advantage of one's potentiality, even in extreme and circumstances. Mindfulness as the capacity to be attentive at the present moment, and aware of experiences in a non-judgmental manner, has been framed as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally (Brown et al., 2007; Bishop et al., 2004). The literature conceptualizes mindfulness as a meta skill enabling people to elevate and expand self-awareness, regulate and manager feelings, develop cognitive flexibility and creativity, and tune better intra- and interpersonal with others (Good et al., 2016). Neuropsychological findings show that mindfulness decreases the activity of the Default Mode Network (DMN) involved in rumination and self-referential processes while enhancing executive control and parasympathetic regulation. According to Goldin and Gross (2010) and Brown et al., 2013, these processes decrease the duration of peak emotional arousal and dampen reactivity.

Ethical Organizational Culture as a Mediator

Leadership behaviour is important, but it is culture that provides the infrastructure through which ethics is able to permeate and operate at different organizational levels. The term denotes to the common perceptions of organizational practices, principles, and procedures that communicate to an employee which behaviours are right and rewarding, while which behaviours are wrong and punishing (Victor and Cullen, 1988; Hunt et al. 1989). According to Schein (2004), Ethical culture refers to substance, practices, rituals and symbols; shared value and expectation; learned assumptions; corporate stories; and structural means to support ethical decision making. The Corporate Ethical Virtues Model (CEVM) (Kaptein, 2008) identifies the eight dimensions of ethical culture: clarity of expectations; congruency of supervisors; congruency of management; feasibility; supportability; transparency; discussability; and sanctionability.

An organization with ethical culture has employees who are less inclined to participate in unethical behaviour in work situations. Poor culture makes workers more prone to strain, burnout and commit misconduct in workplaces.

Leadership shapes the ethical culture of employees. Several researchers discovered that leadership style affects ethical climate (Carlson & Perrewé 1995). Leadership approach has been found to affect the organization widely. Thus, this study proposes a mindful leader who is present in the moment, non-reactive, and empathetic in decision-making will positively influence the organizational culture and respond to toxic/incivil situations in a more thoughtful manner than reacting impulsively, thereby reducing incivility in the workplace.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Mindful Leadership and Ethical Organizational Culture

Leaders shape culture by modeling behaviors, reinforcing norms, and articulating values (Schein, 1985). Mindful leaders show awareness, do not react impulsively, and are sensitive to ethical issues. This helps create fairness, psychological safety, and transparency in relationships.

Since ethical culture grows from consistent leadership behaviors that align with values, mindful leadership is likely to strengthen shared norms of respect, integrity, and accountability.

H1: Mindful leadership is in positive association with ethical organizational culture.

Ethical Organizational Culture and Workplace Incivility

Workplace incivility shows a decline in norms and uncertainty around behavioral expectations (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). An ethical culture clarifies these expectations, supports accountability, and creates shared norms of respect. Research on justice climates reveals that interactional justice and trust in the organization can lessen the impacts of incivility (Miner-Rubino & Reed, 2010). Strong ethical climates can result in less deviant behavior and fewer norm violations (Kaptein, 2008).

In this way, ethical culture acts as a preventive system for maintaining norms.

H2: Ethical organizational culture is in negative association with workplace incivility.

Mindful Leadership and Workplace Incivility

Incivility often arises from poor emotional regulation, stress spillover, hostile interpretations of others' actions and defensive behavior .

Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) argues that stress tends to increase reactive behavior. Mindful leadership disrupts this pattern by enhancing emotional regulation and reducing aggressive reactions.

Mindful leaders take a moment before reacting, manage negative emotions, encourage collaborative conflict styles and model respectful communication. Since passive or harmful leadership can encourage incivility (Cortina et al., 2017), mindful leadership should help reduce uncivil behaviors.

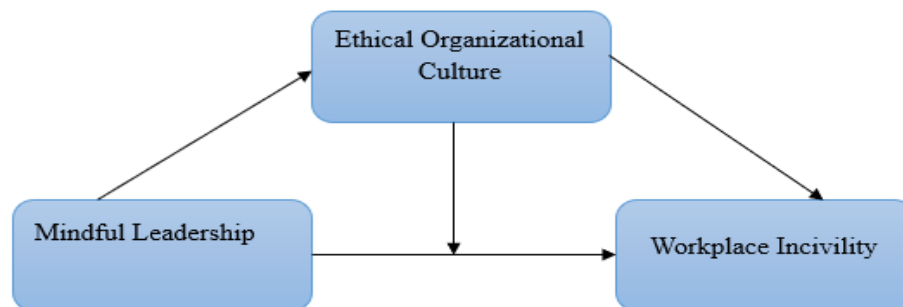
H3: Mindful leadership is in negative association with workplace incivility.

The Mediating Role of Ethical Organizational Culture

The framework of incivility suggests that norm violations increase when cultures allow disrespect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Ethical culture helps regulate norms to prevent escalation. Mindful leadership influences ethical norms through modelling and reinforcement. Ethical culture then governs interpersonal behaviour and limits the spread of incivility. Thus, culture serves as a bridge that connects leadership awareness to behavioural norms.

H4: Ethical organizational culture mediates the relationship between mindful leadership and workplace incivility.

Conceptual Model



There is a direct negative relationship between Mindful Leadership and Workplace Incivility.

Methodology Adopted

For the study, data were gathered from 123 respondents working in the Information Technology (I.T.) field via a survey. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to reach these respondents. The respondents were contacted either in person or via emails and hard copy of the questionnaire or Google form's link was circulated among them.

Before sharing it, the study's purpose was explained to them, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. A total of 250 Google Forms and questionnaires were distributed/shared, of these 123 usable responses were received.

The sample was 74% male respondents, with an average of 33 years. The average work experience was 8 Years. The average tenure in the current company is approximately 4 years.

Measures

The following scales were employed in the questionnaire to measure the study variables.

Mindful Leadership was quantified using 2-scales - 5-item Mindful Leadership Scale (MLS) developed by Reb et al., 2014 and 15-item scale developed by Schuh et al., 2019.

Ethical Organizational Culture was captured using 12-item refined scale of DeBode, Armenakis, Feild, and Walker (2013).

Workplace Incivility was measured using 12-items scale from the study by Handoyo, Samian, Syarifah, and Suhariadi (2018)

Analysis & Results

Table 1 – Mean, Standard Deviation, and Zero-order Correlations across the selected variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Mindful Leadership	Ethical Organizational Culture	Workplace Incivility
Mindful Leadership	3.43	.63	0.71		
Ethical Organizational Culture	3.99	1.19	-.465**	0.94	

Workplace Incivility	4.15	1.49	-.420**	-.449**	0.97
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** A statistically significant correlation was detected at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 2 – Regression Results

	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Unstandardized β	t	R ²	Δ R ²
H1	Mindful Leadership	Ethical Organizational Culture	.872	5.775	.216	.216**
H2	Ethical Organizational Culture	Workplace Incivility	-0.557	-5.501	0.201	0.201**
H3	Mindful Leadership	Workplace Incivility	-1.003	-5.076	0.177	0.177*
H4	Mindful Leadership Ethical Organizational Culture	Workplace Incivility	-0.637 0.399	-2.972 3.574*	0.257	0.080**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 1 reports the mean, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables. Along the diagonal in above table, the alpha reliabilities are reported.

Multiple regression technique was employed to test the hypothesis. The outcomes display complete support for H1, H2 and H3 indicating that indicates that mindful leadership has a significant influence on ethical organizational culture ($\beta = -0.872$, $t = -5.775$, $p < .01$). This indicates that increased stages of mindful leadership are linked to enhanced stages of ethical organizational culture (based on scale coding).

It further claims that Ethical organizational culture predicts workplace incivility notably ($\beta = -0.557$, $t = -5.501$, $p < .01$). The negative beta value specifies that as ethical organizational culture increases, workplace incivility decreases.

Additionally, mindful leadership is significantly negatively influences workplace incivility ($\beta = -1.003$, $t = -5.076$, $p < .05$). This indicates that increased stages of mindful leadership are associated with decreased stages of workplace incivility.

We tested the mediation of ethical organizational culture on the link between mindful leadership and workplace incivility. We regressed ML on WI and added EOC to the regression equation. When EOC was added the impact of ML on WI reduced, indicating the partial mediation.

Discussion

Theoretical Framing

Workplace incivility is a widespread form of low-intensity rule-breaking that involves unclear intentions and absence of mutual respect. Vast number of earlier research has mainly emphasized on its effects, like emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, withdrawal, and turnover, or on how it escalates through reciprocity. Insufficient significance has been given to the way respect norms develop and are maintained within organizations. The

present study adds to existing literature by presenting mindful leadership as a factor that fosters an ethical organizational culture. It shows how an ethical culture can serve as a mediator between mindful leadership and workplace incivility. In this way, the findings shift the view of incivility from being an interpersonal annoyance to a phenomenon shaped by the organizational climate.

Mindful Leadership as a Precursor to Ethical Organizational Culture

Aligned with leadership–culture theory, the findings of the present study indicate that leaders are instrumental while shaping social norms. Mindful leadership, marked by being aware in the moment, regulating emotions, and not reacting impulsively, helps create an ethical organizational culture through consistent behavioural modelling and signalling values. Ethical culture does not seem to be on its own from formal guidelines or compliance systems. Instead, it develops through repetitive leader behaviours that clarify expectations, reduce moral confusion, and reinforce accountability. Mindful leaders who can pause before acting, practice reflective thinking, and communicate calmly establish a consistency in behaviour that employees see as guidance.

These findings add to research on ethical leadership by highlighting mindfulness as a basic cognitive-emotional skill that helps shape an ethical culture. Although past researches have largely addressed moral management and signalling integrity, our results reveal that the self-regulating processes linked to mindfulness are the psychological basis for maintaining ethical consistency. Thus, mindful leadership acts not just as a relational influence but also as a cultural driver that embeds ethical values into shared norms.

Immediate influence of Mindful Leadership on Workplace Incivility

In conjunction with its indirect effects through culture, mindful leadership also shows a immediate inverse relationship with workplace incivility. This direct connection can be understood through self-regulation and emotional control. Incivility often results from impulsive reactions, threats to ego, and biased interpretations of hostility that arise from stress. Mindful leaders, with their ability to pause, reflect, and respond, reduce defensive hostility and stop cycles of escalation. By engaging non-reactively and considering others' perspectives, leaders set behavioral standards and discourage revengeful reactions. These findings align with conservation of resources theory, it posits that incivility drains social and psychological resources, while mindful leadership helps maintain those resources by avoiding unnecessary interpersonal friction. However, while direct modelling affects immediate interactions, sustaining improvements calls for institutional support. This emphasizes the critical role of mediation.

Ethical Organizational Culture as Normative Regulatory Infrastructure

Our results also show that an ethical organizational culture correlates with lower workplace incivility. This supports the idea that incivility arises from a failure to uphold shared respect norms, rather than just individual traits. An ethical culture serves as a framework by defining behavioral limits, aligning stated values with actual practices, increasing the likelihood of accountability, and promoting transparency. Through these methods, an ethical culture clarifies acceptable behavior and reduces the chances that low-level deviance becomes common. Theoretically, this aligns with norm violation theory and research on ethical climate, suggesting that deviant behavior is limited when shared expectations are deeply understood and institutionalized. Therefore, incivility may be viewed as a cultural symptom that arises in settings where there is weak normative regulation. By linking ethical culture to reduced incivility, this study emphasizes that preventing misconduct requires structural changes and not just interpersonal efforts.

Ethical Organizational Culture as the Transmission Mechanism

The mediation results are a key contribution of this study. Ethical organizational culture acts as the pathway through which mindful leadership leads to less workplace incivility. The findings support a step-by-step process: 1) Mindfulness improves leaders' emotional control and awareness of ethical issues. 2) Leaders display consistent, values-based behaviors. 3) Consistent behaviors shape shared expectations. 4) Shared expectations become ingrained as an ethical culture. 5) Ethical culture guides everyday interpersonal conduct. 6) Incivility decreases as respect norms are internalized. This changes the narrative about incivility from a reactive model (incivility leads to retaliation, which escalates) to a preventive governance approach (leadership fosters culture, which regulates norms). By identifying ethical culture as a transmission mechanism, the study shifts mindfulness research from focusing on individual psychology to examining broader organizational systems.

Recommendations

Building Ethical Infrastructure Through Mindful Leadership

The findings show that reducing workplace rudeness requires broad intervention, not just individual behaviour changes. Mindful leadership shapes an ethical organizational culture, which in turn guides interpersonal behaviour. Therefore, organizations need to address issues at both leadership and institutional levels.

Develop Mindful Leadership as a Strategic Governance Capability

Organizations should view mindfulness not just as a personal wellness practice but as a key governance strategy.

They should implement structured, long-term mindful leadership programs that last at least 8 to 12 weeks, train leaders in managing emotions, communicating calmly, and making ethical decisions, include perspective-taking and compassion-based frameworks in leadership training, provide ongoing support through coaching and accountability among peers, assess leaders on how well they model civility, set the cultural tone, and align with ethical standards using 360-degree feedback systems. The approach is straightforward: when leaders improve self-regulation, they reduce reactive behaviour, curb ego-driven actions, and promote respectful engagement. This breaks the reaction cycle that often leads to rudeness.

Institutionalize Ethical Organizational Culture as Normative Infrastructure

The impact of leadership is unlikely to last without a supportive culture. Because ethical culture influences the link between mindful leadership and workplace rudeness, organizations should treat culture as crucial infrastructure. Organizations should establish well-defined standards for dignity and respect, include civility metrics in performance evaluation systems, connect rewards to ethical behaviour and strong relationships, set up clear and safe ways for reporting issues, ensure consistent consequences for disrespectful behaviour, carry out regular audits to assess the ethical climate and identify any erosion of norms. Ethical culture acts as a system of norms: it clarifies expectations, lessens confusion, strengthens accountability, and curbs low-level misconduct before it escalates.

Conclusion

Workplace incivility is not just an annoyance. It reflects as a cultural failure of the organization. This study shows that incivility decreases when leaders are more aware and when ethical foundations are strong. The findings highlight four key aspects. First, mindful leadership shapes ethical culture. Leaders who manage emotions, respond thoughtfully, and act with awareness do more than enforce rules—they shape norms. Consistent demonstration of fairness, openness, and respect creates shared expectations. Culture mirrors leadership focus. Second, an ethical culture guides behaviour. Rudeness thrives in unclear situations and spreads where accountability is weak. It becomes normalized when unaddressed. When ethical standards are clear and enforced, rudeness loses its power. Culture shifts into a mechanism for controlling behaviour. Third, mindful leadership directly lowers instances of rudeness. Managing emotions cuts down on escalations. Non-defensive responses prevent cycles of retaliation. Modelling respect establishes clear boundaries. Leaders set the tone for the workplace. Fourth, and most importantly, ethical culture mediates the link between leadership and behaviour. The influence of leadership lasts only when it is an integral to the organization's fabric. Ethical culture is the

mechanism used to sustain the influence. This establishes a clear pathway: Mindful Leadership leads to Ethical Organizational Culture, which helps in the formation of Norm-Based Regulation, resulting in reduced workplace incivility. This study combines theories on norm violations, escalation, social exchange, attribution, conservation of resources, ethical climate, and leadership into one cohesive framework. Individual regulation connects to interpersonal modelling. Modelling influences culture. Culture supports stable behaviour.

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