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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MINDFULNESS AS A BOOSTER FOR WORKPLACE WELLBEING: ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND EFFECTS

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Abstract

The demanding and stressful nature of the workplace environment have become detrimental to the physical and mental health of the workers, especially in the present scenario. Work overload, deadlines, sudden and rapid changes in the workplace all have negatively contributed towards the wellbeing of the workers. This has led to an increase in various illnesses, both physically and mentally and has also impacted the organization leading to conflicts, employee turnover, unionism and many more such issues. As such, different efforts are undertaken to improve occupational wellbeing. One such intervention involves being Mindful or completely focused and conscious at work. Mindfulness is the non-judgmental awareness of and attention to present moment experiences. The concept of 'Mindfulness' has drawn considerable interest among organizational scholars and practitioners. It is largely beneficial for workers' wellbeing as according to several researches, it is seen to be associated with job satisfaction and low burnout. However, this concept is still lacking importance. In the light of today's complex society, an understanding of 'mindfulness' at work has gained utmost importance. The presented paper discusses this concept taking into consideration a number of factors such as implementation of mindfulness and its qualities. The paper also discusses the significance and effects that mindfulness has upon the workers. Apart from this, the implications of mindfulness in the emerging workplace and employee wellbeing are also presented.

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Introduction:-

Work can be demanding, exhausting and increasingly stressful, irrespective of its origin, types and location. This can, in turn, pose a serious threat to workers physical and mental health leading to workplace absences, financial costs (due to productivity loss and turnover) and unfavorable effects on wellbeing of workers. In such a case, the question of 'workplace wellbeing' becomes a major concern for both the individual and the organization.

Wellbeing refers to the subjective evaluation of one's current status in the work. According to Diener, Wellbeing is a combination of positive affect (in the absence of negative affect) and general life satisfaction (subjective appreciation of life's reward). The experience of pleasure and the appreciation of life's rewards leads to happiness and wellbeing in an individual's life. This concept originated during the Greek period, when Aristotle talked about

Eudemonia, which meant the condition of human flourishing or of living well. Aristotle held that Eudemonia comprises happiness and meaning, stated in a simple formula, Wellbeing=happiness + meaning. Here, one must understand virtue and social implications of daily life and those who seek wellbeing must be authentic and live according to their real needs and desired goals (Waterman, 1993). Wellbeing, or to be precise, Psychological Well-being, is the extensiveness of positive attributes contributing to psychological growth and development in life's challenges (Diener, 2009; Lundqvist, 2011). Stress, burnout and exhaustion in the workplace can have detrimental effects on the wellbeing of both workers. It can then lead to negative health outcomes like various cardiovascular diseases. Work stress can cause depression and anxiety leading to poor wellbeing in the workers. High stress often makes an employee less resilient, threatening his/her wellbeing (Andrea, Bultmann, van Amelsvroot& Kant, 2009; Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). Decrease in commitment and job related satisfaction, increase in employee turnover and negative attitude, all are the causes of low wellbeing. Moreover, decline in worker's wellbeing may decrease productivity and job performance (Rusk & Waters, 2015). So it is important to monitor well-being, as it has major impacts upon organizational outcomes and productivity and also upon individuals' lives.

There are several ways that can help improve the wellbeing of the workers, like by increasing awareness of mental health, building better work culture, early interventions etc. However, one of the most important activity and interventional ideas through which workplace wellbeing can be maintained is the practice of Mindfulness, which means to be aware of and to pay attention to the present moment. (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Mindfulness is comparable to the age-old process of cultivating awareness in Buddhist tradition and to the modern therapeutic technique of increasing attention in order to identify distorted thinking. There exists a difference between Westernized and Buddhist tradition of Mindfulness. In the West, it is a construct which is viewed as only one component on the road to true enlightenment. In addition, in the East, Mindfulness must be introspective in Buddhist teachings as more of an external awareness of surroundings in Western culture (Keng et al., 2011). Mindfulness is defined as an "inherent ability of the mind to pay attention to present moment experiences adopting an attitude characterized by curiosity, openness and acceptance" (Bishop, et al., 2004). The roots of term mindfulness go back to the period of Brahmanism traditions in India and originated in the Buddhist period during 500 B.C.E. Kabat-Zin (1982) was the one who made this term popular in the West when he innovated the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. Mindfulness is a frame or quality of the mind and also a mediational form enabling one to cultivate it. In the words of Kabat-Zin (2003), Mindfulness is the "awareness that arises through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmental to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment". Mindfulness, as a form of meditation, is a psychological functioning, focusing on regulating the attention and awareness (Lomas, Ivtzan& Fu, 2015) aiming to voluntarily control the psychological processes, thus promoting wellbeing (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). A recent research study (2009) showed that being mindful about various aspects of our lives can lead to great health and wellbeing. Thus, Mindfulness is an active search for novelty, where one is sensitive to context and perspective and is focused in the present.

Mindfulness At Workplace

The practice of Mindfulness was initially limited to Clinical settings. The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program given by Kabat-Zin (1982) was used to treat chronic pain. In mental health problems, such as depression, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was used (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002). Mindfulness is also seen to have an impact on coping with distress and disability in everyday life (Grossman et al, 2004).

However, it was only in the 1990s that Mindfulness based practices began to be used in the Occupational settings. Workplace is a potentially valuable setting for promotion of good health and wellbeing (Lomas, et.al, 2017). Practicing mindfulness improves wellbeing and job performance and also enhances resilience (Shapiro et al., 1998). Amy Wrzesniewski, a positive psychologist, conducted research on how people function optimally at work (2009). She found that a third of the hospital cleaners in a metropolitan medical center considered their work a "calling" and therefore did everything they could to make the health care experience positive for patients and staff. These members essentially reconstructed their jobs by mindfully making moment-to-moment choices about what was worthy of attention, thereby also exercising some control over their duties. Their mindfulness resulted in benefits for others. Each day the cleaner found novel ways to improve the hospital environment. Therefore, there appears to be a growing interest in including Mindfulness practices at the workplace for promoting the overall wellbeing of the workplace.

Literature Review:-

Grieve, M.J. (2018) conducted a study on “Workplace Environment and Mindfulness: Improving Wellbeing and Performance”. Participants were from an Undergraduate state university. Results found that mindfulness had significantly high task likeability, performance and positive mood leading to improved overall wellbeing. However, no effect of enriched rooms was observed in the study.

Jamieson & Turkey (2016) conducted a systematic review of 40 studies of mindfulness in the workplace and concluded that there is sufficient evidence of a relationship between mindfulness practices and improvement in employee wellbeing.

Koncz et al (2016) conducted a Mindfulness pilot study at Sydney University using the “Stress Release Program (SRP)”. Results found significant improvement in employee wellbeing and engagement with a reduction in workplace distress. It was thus regarded that mindfulness may be an important and effective wellness program for students in universities.

Lomas, T., Medina, J.C., Ivztan, I. & Rupprecht, S. (2017) conducted a study on “The impact of mindfulness on wellbeing and performance in the workplace: An inclusive systematic review of the empirical literature”. The study found that Mindfulness had a positive relationship with the majority of the variables including workplace performance and wellbeing. It was seen to be associated with 31 different measures of positive wellbeing with a majority in relation to MBI.

Peters, F. (2018) conducted a study on “Mindfulness at work: Assessing the impact of practicing mindfulness in the workplace on engagement, wellbeing, happiness and positivity”. A sample of 54 was recruited through the Edith Cowan University staff Health and Wellness Program, Live Life Longer. The results indicated a significant difference in Wellbeing ($F(1) = 2.142, p = .437$), indicating that mindfulness can be a useful resource for employee health and wellbeing.

Research Studies In India

Kumar & Sulphrey (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between Workplace mental wellbeing, spirituality and Mindfulness”. A cross-sectional study design was adopted; and the sample size was 333 full time employees working in diverse industries. Results revealed a significant relationship between the three variables. It was also found that both mindfulness and spirituality led to wellbeing in the workers.

Singh, S. & Priyanka (2020) conducted a study on “Mindfulness promotes health and wellbeing-a review”. Results shows that mindfulness is effective in dealing with various mental and physical health issues, in daily life and at the workplace as well. It also found that mindfulness generally improves our performance and wellbeing offering benefits to one.

Mindfulness As A Booster For Workplace Wellbeing: The Current Scenario

Working pattern and the work scenario have changed rapidly in the past few years, especially after the pandemic. Earlier it was seen that no matter how big or small the task was people paid full attention to it while working. They gave their 100% and left no stone unturned to make it a success. From the work of a woodcutter to that of a carpenter people were fully mindful of their tasks. But the trend is now changing. It is seen that most people at their workplace work only for the sake of money at the cost of their self respect. Life has become more materialistic. For instance, if you ask an HR person whether he has recruited a candidate for a particular post, even after completing his task he might not remember it and checks whether it is done or not. People are so not being focused, delaying their tasks in their job and are being so lazy and following a sedentary lifestyle that it is negatively affecting both their mental and physical health leading to poor wellbeing. They are suffering from several cardiovascular diseases like high blood pressure and also mental issues like irritability, frustration, anger etc. Thus, it has become an utmost important that we practice mindfulness at our home and also at the workplace which will make clear that things change and loosens the grip of our evaluative mindsets so that these changes need not be feared.

Mindfulness is an important wellbeing facilitation tool in the workplace. It can positively affect wellbeing as it supports psychological need satisfaction and self-directed functioning. It is a personal resource for employees with high responsibility (Brow & Ryan, 2003). By self regulating and fulfilling various psychological needs like autonomy and competence Mindfulness can help increase wellbeing at the workplace. It increases positive emotions,

purposefulness and coping thereby helping the individual appraise the stress more positively. This conscious awareness and focus in the present can lead to fulfilling the basic needs and in turn improving psychological well-being in the workplace.

Since 2014, there is an increase in research around mindfulness interventions in the workplace. For instance, Hyland (2015) held the view that mindfulness is beneficial to the workplace as it helps to manage stress, reduce burnout, improve leader's development, enhance engagement and help in coping with change. He also found that mindful workers are more productive, engage in work and effectively do their tasks. Another research found that employees working on a part time basis are less hostile in their workplace when they practice mindfulness. A study, found that when an employee is willing to accept his/her feelings and emotions it leads to better mental health, performance and wellbeing.

Practicing mindfulness can also help improve relationships at work by helping regulate the negative work responses. It makes an employee accept criticisms in a constructive manner and take feedback from others with less emotional reaction. Mindfulness also leads to better decision making while doing work. It is seen to have a positive effect on job performance, satisfaction leading to overall workplace wellbeing. This in turn leads to low absenteeism and employee turnover. As per two studies it was found that those in higher position, especially the supervisors when given mindfulness training were more focused and aware leading to employee wellbeing. Another study found that outstanding work performance was the result of practicing mindfulness.

Due to an increase in absenteeism, staff turnover, sick leaves etc., in recent times, there is a growing concern among the organization. In order to reduce all these, there is an increase in research on workplace mindfulness training. These researchers found that practicing mindfulness led to low stress during multitasking and high concentration without their attention being diverted. Some other studies also found that those practicing mindfulness have less emotional exhaustion and better work-life balance.

Excessive work demands from tasks, projects, deadlines, superiors etc. causes stress in the workers impacting the overall physical and psychological well-being. As per a study, participants exposed to excessive psychological demands in the workplace were twice prone to anxiety and depressive disorders. Due to the evidence of strong relationship between Mindfulness and Workplace wellbeing including its positive effects, this topic is gaining emerging importance in the present scenario.

Qualities Of Mindfulness

Mindfulness in practice is parsimoniously described as attending non-judgmentally to all stimuli in the internal and external world, or workplace to be precise. As such, Shapiro et al, 2002, gave some mindfulness qualities. It includes-

1. Acceptance- openness to seeing and acknowledging things as they are in the present moment.
2. Patience- being calm and showing forbearance to self, others and the present moment; letting things unfold in its time.
3. Openness- focusing on the feedback in the present moment, seeing things as if it is completely new.
4. Gentleness- being soft, considerate and tender
5. Empathy- feeling and understanding others' situations in the present moment.
6. Loving-kindness- being considerate and tender towards others, compassionate, forgiving and unconditional love.

Some other qualities include- gratitude, trust, generosity, letting go etc. An individual who possesses such mindfulness qualities, both at the individual and organizational level, are seen to have an improved overall wellbeing.

Significance Of Mindfulness In Workplace Wellbeing

According to Mark Williams, Clinical Psychology Professor at Oxford University, people spend a huge amount of time running from one task to another in their workplace thinking that they are working effectively. But this is not the case. Instead these people are working against the grain and getting exhausted. In such a work culture stress is regarded as the badge of honor. In a complex world, where we live today, workers are expected to give more time and effort, working for long hours and having excessive workloads, and in return they earn less. Such a scenario is negatively affecting the workers health and wellbeing. This is where mindfulness enters the picture, having ample benefits for those practicing it and playing a significant role in the wellbeing of the workplace.

Practicing Mindfulness not only leads to a variety of physiological and neurological benefits in the workers life but also brings a positive impact upon the workplace. It drives many of the healthy aspects of the workplace including Wellbeing as one of its major contributors. Many studies show a link between mindfulness and a healthy workplace and personal relationships. It increases empathy in the workers while they are interacting with others. Mindfulness also boosts the creative nature of an individual enabling them to generate novel ideas.

In the present scenario, organizations are becoming more interested in the workers' wellbeing due to the cost associated with an unhealthy workplace. Employee turnover, absenteeism, lack of interest and productivity all are costing the organization. All these are caused due to employee stress, burnout and various mental health issues that they face in the workplace. The number of sick leaves taken in the last few decades has doubled. According to several researches conducted, it was found that the cause of such leaves is due to mental health related issues.

The way of dealing with such situations is essential to the wellbeing of the workers. Mindfulness at work can make one resilient by enabling the employees to understand emotions, levels of stress etc. Mindfulness training, according to several researches, is positively related to reduced burnout, stress and increased wellbeing. Various other researchers are of the view that those practicing mindfulness at work have better well being due to increase in emotional resilience, stable work-life balance and high performance in the job.

Mirabai Bush, mindfulness expert, famous for introducing it to Google, held the view that practicing mindfulness at the workplace will not guarantee conflict resolution or difficult issues from coming up. But those who are mindful are more likely to skillfully acknowledge and respond, which helps them in developing the internal resources which will lead to an increase in ability to deal with stressful and difficult situations.

Mindfulness boosts the workers' awareness of their tasks and makes them less prone to stress and burnout. For instance, if a worker is angry with his colleague, mindfulness will give him the tool to take a deep breath and respond to the situation calmly instead of lashing out at him/her.

Mindfulness contributes to low blood pressure, reduces continuous pain and leads to better physical health; it also improves sleep cycle and immune functioning leading to wellbeing in personal life as well as workplace wellbeing. As such, Mindfulness plays a significant role in workplace wellbeing.

Implementation Of Mindfulness At Workplace

People can practice Mindfulness both at home and at work. One can start it right in the morning, after waking up or in the evening by putting aside 20-30 minutes for Yoga, exercise and meditation. This calms an individual and increases awareness, strengthening the heart and creating openness to self and others. Doing yoga and meditation helps to improve wellbeing and promotes a positive mood. One can also practice gratitude and journaling to promote wellbeing.

People can even practice mindfulness, informally, at work. For instance, if one feels grumpy towards a co-worker, he can try to acknowledge that the other person is also a human being and may be having a tough day; he/she can offer the co-worker a cup of coffee and talk to him.

However, some tried and tested ways to implement Mindfulness at work are-

1. Starting off the day well- According to several researches, right after we wake up we release stress hormones as we automatically think about the work day that lies ahead, check our phones etc. ThichNaht Hahn, father of mindfulness, held that we should guard our morning and start it gently. One must train oneself to take some deep breaths right after waking up and live the entire day with passion.
2. A pause to breathe- When an individual is working in an organization, he/she must always try to take a few minutes and close their eyes, relax and sit upright. He/she must focus on the breath and simply maintain an ongoing attention on the breath: inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale.
3. Stretching to de-stress- Stretching not only helps with physical health but also boosts mental health. Stretching reduces muscle tension and is seen to increase serotonin levels, hormone stabilizing mood, reduce stress and improve wellbeing.
4. Practice S.T.O.P- When experiencing stress at work one can practice STOP, which is a form of Mindfulness, implying:
Stop, take a momentary pause.

Take a breath, feel your breathing sensation.

Observe, acknowledge what is happening inside.

Proceed; Check self briefly continue doing what you were doing.

5. Conscious Choices- It includes turning off pop-up notifications, seeing the phone only when it's urgent, answering emails during dedicated periods of time, finishing one task before starting the other.

Certain Organizational Roles to implement Mindfulness at Workplace includes-

1. Webinars or seminars can be organized by the organization for its employers and employees where they can learn the basics of mindfulness and also practice it.
2. Facilitated programmes can be organized where there are teachers or facilitators. Employees can attend classes and be trained on it.
3. Self learning through the use of digital apps. Here employees can learn at their own pace and master the art of mindfulness.
4. Providing breaks and vacations can also help a lot.

Alidna, 2018, gave some ways to implement Mindfulness in the workplace for improving wellbeing. It includes:

1. Be consciously present- rather than behaving passively in the workplace one must pay full attention to what is going on inside him/her and also in the workplace. For example-while writing a report, mindfulness means giving that task your full attention. Set a moment, right in the beginning to make clear decisions as to what is to be done.
2. Use short mindful exercises at work- like stretching; taking deep breaths in between, practicing gratitude etc. It optimizes overall functioning leading to better wellbeing.
3. Be a single-tasker- Don't multitask and try to keep a mind journal, write there what exactly is to be done. And also note when you are single tasking and when you are multitasking. Reflect on it.
4. Slow down- Try to do things slowly. It helps to be more efficient, happier, productive and healthy at work.
5. Adopt a growth mindset- Don't judge the innate talent or intelligence. Be open to new possibilities. For instance, if one receives negative feedback while working instead of becoming sad he/she must realize that there are new possibilities.

Some other ways include- try to see things from others perspective, notice the little things at your workplace, make stress your friend, feel gratitude and so on. Apart from that, if possible organizations can organize workshops and training sessions where workers are given skill training on mindfulness and its implementation.

Effects Of Mindfulness On Workplace Wellbeing

The continuous practice of Mindfulness at the workplace leads to the development of deep insight into the nature of consciousness, mental processes, reality and also the development of optimal states of psychological well-being and consciousness (Walsh, 1983) through opening up. In study, effects of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction were examined for an eight week period on stress hardiness and coherence in hospital patients. The result found was that there was an improvement in both, over the course of intervention. Mindfulness practices also decrease the tendency to respond automatically to different situations. Practicing mindfulness is also seen to be related to better spatial abilities; increase in and potential increase in brain's Neuroplasticity.

Researches on Mindfulness have identified some important effects of mindfulness leading to Workplace Wellbeing-

1. Reduce Rumination - In a study, 20 new meditators were asked to practice 10-day intensive mindfulness meditation retreat. Results reported these 20 meditators had a significantly higher self reported mindfulness and decrease in negative feelings and emotions. They also reported significantly better working memory and were able to sustain attention while performing a task in the workplace.
2. Stress reduction- in 2010, a meta-analysis was conducted on 39 studies using Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. Results showed that these therapies altered cognitive and emotional processes and also led to decrease in work related stress. Mindfulness practices were also seen to decrease anxiety and negative affect.
3. Boost Working Memory- a study was conducted to see the benefits of mindfulness meditation among military groups for an eight week period of training and also a non-meditating military group and civilian. Those who were non-meditating their working memory decreased. Within the meditating military group, working memory increased.
4. Focus- several researches found that those practicing mindfulness had better focus and were able to suppress distracting information. They were able to perform all tasks efficiently and remained more focused on the tasks.

5. Less emotional reactivity- researchers found that mindfulness practices helped workers to cut off from the emotionally disturbing situations and focus more on cognitive tasks.
6. More Cognitive flexibility - researchers found that those who practice mindfulness developed skills like better self observation, decision making, problem solving etc. It neurologically disengages the automatic pathway.
7. Other benefits- Mindfulness is seen to enhance morality, intuition, self insight all related with the prefrontal area of the brain. It also increases immune functioning. It improves wellbeing and reduces mental distress and also leads to a happy and well-satisfied life. Being mindful helps an individual to be fully engaged in the present moment and to do the task with full attention, enabling them to deal with adverse events. Many people also find themselves being less worried about the past and future, and are better able to feel connected with present moment.

Conclusions And Implications:-

Due to the rapid changes in the workplace and also the complex nature of different occupations, the practice of Mindfulness has become utmost important. Both at individual and organizational levels it plays a significant role leading to the wellbeing of the workplace. On the individual level, using mindfulness can increase awareness, strengthen our health, such as lower blood pressure, chronic pain, and also creates openness to self and others. On the organizational level, practicing mindfulness on a regular basis can boost employee satisfaction, commitment, productivity and also reduce absenteeism, turnover, etc. Therefore, Mindfulness practices contribute to the overall Individual Wellbeing and thus is regarded as a major contributor towards Workplace Wellbeing.

In the present scenario, due to the excessive workload, stress, laziness and also due to spending a lot more time on screens, people are becoming mindless. They are passively zoning out to everyday life. The "Automatic Pilot", repetition of behaviors, has been activated in most of us. This Atomicity of behavior provides quick, well-done responses to familiar situations. For example, if our cell phone rings when we are working, many people will automatically reach for their phone and answer it, irrespective of the importance of the work they are doing. Since such quick well rehearsed behaviors are easiest so we resort to it, instead of being mindful. This is mostly seen in the workplace environment. It is for this reason; the practice of mindfulness has gained importance lately.

Mindfulness is a tool that helps us battle our evaluative nature and lead us to make fewer unnecessary judgements. It acts as a booster leading to wellbeing, both physically and mentally. Being mindful of the tasks that one performs in the workplace will help individuals evaluate the situation and respond calmly, instead of being lashing out or overreacting. This helps maintain the work culture and also improves workplace relationships, helping people communicate and promote a happy and healthy environment. Mindfulness is an important wellbeing facilitation tool in the workplace and is a personal resource for most of the employees. It leads to less emotional Reactivity, more cognitive flexibility and better health promoting Wellbeing.

The challenge that remains to address is the proper implementation of Mindfulness practices in the Workplace for promoting Wellbeing. No doubt, a large number of individuals try practicing it but remaining consistent with the practices, instead of giving up in the middle, is a major concern that must be addressed. It's true that in the beginning practicing mindfulness can be a bit difficult in the beginning due to the Atomicity of our behavior. However, daily practices and being focused will definitely lead to its proper implementation.

Another challenge that involves is that it is not only the contribution of individuals alone in the workplace that will help promote wellbeing. It is seen that there are little or no contributions from the organizations towards implementation of mindfulness. Most of the workplace are becoming competitive, thinking their workers to be machines and making them do extra tasks leading to stress and poor health in them. This is where the workplace must realize the importance of Mindfulness. The organizations too should contribute towards it for proper implementation. It's true people cannot devote too much time practicing mindfulness, due to the rapid pace of changes going on. But organizations can arrange for certain programmes or training sessions and also give individuals breaks in between so that they can reflect back and also act mindfully. Individuals and organizational contributions in a true sense will promote Mindfulness leading to workplace wellbeing.

Mindfulness is something which everyone can practice. Based on various researches, it can be seen that mindfulness could truly revolutionize the way companies interact and operate.

However such practices in the workplace are largely undocumented. This field still needs more research and evidence to prove how beneficial mindfulness practices can be towards workplace wellbeing. Mindfulness practices

are going to be an important tool needed to gain full potential on the workers. The world continues to change and will so happen in the coming days which are no doubt going to affect the mental health of the workers. Therefore, In order to adjust to such changes, occupations will have to change their ways and as such implement Mindfulness in their workplace which has major positive effects and will definitely lead to Workplace Wellbeing.

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