



MINDFULNESS FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF EMPLOYEES DURING COVID 19: A REVIEW STUDY

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ABSTRACT

COVID 19 pandemic has completely changed the lives of people across the globe. People from different facets of life have been impacted financially, socially, physically, psychologically, mentally, and emotionally. Since March 2020 there was an abrupt and unexpected switch in the lives of people from juggling employment, childcare, personal relationships to household tasks, and family responsibilities altogether. Employees too faced a major shift in terms of their work environment and working hours which further added onto their already high levels of stress and anxiety due to the unprecedented situation. The concept of working from home has been misinterpreted as being available at all times. With all of the pressure, employees appear to be having difficulty managing their time, being productive, and working well in groups without any expectation of employee benefits. Employees struggle to maintain their work and personal life simultaneously as the boundary between work and personal life gets blurred due to COVID 19.

Mindfulness and work life balance play a pivotal role in our lives. Clubbing the two together can be beneficial. By functioning as a link between work and life, mindfulness can help us reclaim our equilibrium. This study aimed to discuss mindfulness as being a potential solution for work life balance and sustainable growth development of employees. The study also focused on adopting mindfulness as an essential HR practice in both the private and government sector in the post COVID era. Further, the future implications and recommendations were discussed.

KEYWORDS: Mindfulness, Work Life balance, COVID 19

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID 19 pandemic has proven to be one of the most devastating and deadly disasters in human history. Global life came to a standstill with major economic and financial losses for organisations worldwide along with significant impact on the psychological, social, emotional and physical domain in the individual lives of people and a great sense of personal loss. Repercussions in both personal and professional lives of individuals was noticed in terms of reduced job and life satisfaction, productivity, motivation to work, and increased levels of stress, anxiety, and work pressure.

1.1 Challenges and consequences

The year 2020 had been a rollercoaster ride for everyone. Human survival was the biggest challenge in the history of mankind. With COVID 19 at its peak, the world had to go through a sense of personal loss and grief on top of that had to

deal with the drastic change in working conditions. Balancing both work and personal life became a major challenge.

There was an abrupt and unexpected shift in the lives of people from juggling employment, childcare, personal relationships to household tasks, and family responsibilities altogether. Shifting everything from offline to online was nearly impossible. COVID 19 imposed burdensome challenges from the world's largest recession to insecurities, panic, anxiety, depression, and severely impacted interpersonal relationships at large. Since the beginning of the lockdown, the term 'personal life' seemed to be absent. Managing both house and work was extremely taxing for employees. As a result of these factors the employees became targets of high blood pressure, wrong sitting postures, strain on the eyes, other physical problems, unhealthy snacking. The sleep pattern was also affected. There were no fixed working hours and irregular salaries. The employee was expected to start in the morning but there wasn't any fixed time



to call it off for the day. The employees were expected to be available for work at all times, even during Sunday and other holidays. Organizations faced huge amounts of loss and many were unable to pay back their debt and provide the due salary to employees. Sudden increase in the exposure to screen contributed to ocular issues. Issues related to job security, life and job satisfaction led to a state of constant fear and anxiety. In addition, the lack of proper ergonomic amenities and facilities further contributed to postural imbalance and vertebral complications.

The personal lives of employees were affected because of work life imbalance. Employees found it hard to give time to their families and loved ones which resulted in straining relationships at large. There were many reported cases of divorce, separation and domestic abuse. All this resulted in anger issues and mental health issues. The quality of life was seriously impacted.

In recent times even though work life balance is being duly promoted by various organizations there is a gap in the ways to implement the same. Employees and top management are both aware of work-life balance as a concept. However, they lack the knowledge on how to practice and implement the same in their lives.

The United Nations has highlighted upon the third sustainable development goal i.e. good health and wellbeing due to drastic effect of COVID 19 pandemic that is alarming and calls for attention. The sustainable development goal in recent times focuses on improving the mental and physical health and wellbeing of people, especially after the bolt from the blue.

1.2 MINDFULNESS: A WAY FOR BETTER WORK LIFE BALANCE

Mindfulness is the basic human ability of being fully present and being aware of where we are and what we're doing. Mindfulness doesn't mean being happy and positive at all times, rather, it is the idea of being present and noticing and observing each and every moment and living each moment without any judgement from self, whether good or bad. Many researches have shown that mindfulness enhances focus and concentration, which helps individuals be more productive at work, as well as be more compassionate and connected, which allows them to enjoy their personal time fully.

Mindfulness aids in the regulation of emotions, as well as reduces stress, anxiety, and sadness. It can help us make better decisions, control our emotions, and be more completely engaged in life as we become more present in our lives and in relation to others. Mindfulness can help to reduce stress and anxiety and conflict, and increase resilience and emotional intelligence, while improving communication in the workplace and interpersonal relations.

Mindfulness and work life balance play a pivotal role in our lives. Clubbing the two together can be beneficial. By functioning as a link between work and life, mindfulness can help us reclaim our equilibrium. Studies have shown that the inclusion of mindfulness into the workplace does not eliminate

conflict or the emergence of difficult issues. When unpleasant situations emerge, however, the group is more likely to skillfully acknowledge, absorb, and respond to them.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tombari (2021) studied how mindfulness helps in positive changes among the employees. A total of 120 employees took part in the study. These findings provide preliminary evidence for mindfulness as a psychological resource that can help employees achieve better job outcomes by increasing positive affectivity and work-life integration. In terms of practical implications, this research implies that mindful employees are better able to maximize positive affect, work-life enrichment, and work outcomes.

Dilshani (2020) studied the impact of mindfulness on work life balance. Cross sectional survey design was used in the study. Work life balance and mindfulness questionnaires were used for the purpose of data collection. A total of 100 participants took part in the study. SPSS was used to analyse data. Results revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between the two variables.

Masood (2020) studied the role of HR in creating workplace mindfulness. Individual differences in the extent to which one is consciously attentive to their work settings, both inwardly and externally, are referred to as workplace mindfulness. Workplace mindfulness is linked to increased job satisfaction and productivity.

Johnson (2020) explored mindfulness training in the workplace. The authors discovered that mindfulness-based training is an effective intervention for organizations to improve mental health, wellness, and performance of employees after reviewing 28 empirical studies. A total of 51 meaningful mindfulness-related training outcomes were identified.

Verweij(2018) investigated an intervention for the medical residents to have a mindfulness based stress reduction by a qualitative study through the means of in depth face-face interviews of residents who took part in MBSR course, Netherlands. data analyzed found to have five dimensions: greater self-reflection, acceptance and non-judgment, increased resilience, and connecting to others. Participants noted that MBSR training helped them improve their workplace awareness, self-reflection, and better tolerance for themselves and others. Participants cited being more adaptable and better at prioritizing and creating boundaries. They enhanced their work-life balance and self-care. Furthermore, people stated that the training increased their awareness of how they communicated. They were more receptive to comments and sought for help more frequently. Finally, they expressed a greater sense of empathy for others.



Pradhan (2016) studied the effect of vipassana meditation on mindfulness and life satisfaction of employees. A total of 150 participants took part in the study. The results revealed that mindful meditation was effective in improving the life satisfaction of employees.

Michel (2014) studied an intervention that taught mindfulness as a cognitive-emotional segmentation approach for work life balance. A randomized waitlist control group design was used to assess the impact of a three week online self- training intervention with 246 staff members actively engaged in a pre & posttest, and 191 participated at a two week follow up. As predicted, experimental group participants in comparison with control group showed considerably less strain based on work family conflict and more of psychological detachment and satisfaction with work life balance.

Chaturvedi (2014) studied the impact of leaders' mindfulness on staff well-being and effectiveness is investigated in this study. They anticipated that managers' attribute mindfulness is linked to several aspects of employee well-being, including work satisfaction and need satisfaction, as well as various aspects of work performance, including in-role productivity and organizational citizenship behaviors. They also looked at whether psychological need fulfilment, a measure of staff well-being, plays a mediating role in the relationship between supervisor mindfulness and performance of employees. In two investigations, evaluate the assumptions the data from both supervisors and subordinates was used.

Fortney (2013) investigated whether mindful intervention led to increase in job satisfaction, work life balance and compassion among primary care clinicians. A mindfulness training course was held for primary care doctors. Modified mindfulness training might be a time-saving strategy for supporting clinician health and well-being, which could impact patient care.

Kiburz(2012) examined the link between trait mindfulness and work family balance with a sample of working parents. As mediators of this connection, sleep quality and vitality are examined. According to the findings, people who practice mindfulness have better work-family balance, better sleep quality, and more energy. As predicted, sleep quality and vitality were found to be mediators in the connection between mindfulness and work-family balance. The findings highlight the need for more research into the advantages of mindfulness in the work-family context.

3. DISCUSSION

This research paper was undertaken to understand if mindfulness can be a potential solution for work life balance of employees during COVID 19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the life of people has changed drastically. The new normal of working online has completely reshaped the working industry. Even though working from home has its advantages like there are no

traveling hours, working comfortably in a home environment etc. yet it has made the lives of employees even more demanding and exhausting. The time people spent traveling and reaching the offices has now been reallocated to spending more time working and meeting the deadlines. The extra working hours have only contributed to escalating stress and heightened levels of anxiety. The idea of personal life seems lost as there isn't any personal life left. Work life imbalance can be evidently seen and experienced by employees. Rawal (2021) studied the work life balance of female school teachers teaching in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. A total of 175 women took part in the study. The results revealed that maximum women reported work life imbalance. The issues reported by women were longer working hours, not much recognition at work and lack of motivation.

The purpose of undertaking this study was to make people aware about mindfulness and its implementation in their lives. As we discussed, more employees are gaining the knowledge of work-life balance as a concept yet they don't know the means to apply it in their life. When we talk about work life balance often it is misunderstood as being perfect at both personal and professional life. Further we were keen to explore the positive psychology aspect and learn more about mindfulness as being one of the many potential applications for a better and maintained work life balance. According to the United Nation's sustainable development goals good mental and physical wellbeing has been given a lot of emphasis especially because of the pandemic.

Different reviews of literature were studied to have a better understanding of the concept of mindfulness, work life balance and how the two can be clubbed together. After analyzing the various research articles it can be said that mindfulness can assist in reducing stress, anxiety, and disagreement in the workplace, as well as promote resilience and emotional intelligence and enhance communication. The introduction of mindfulness into the workplace does not minimize conflict or the emergence of challenging issues. When challenging circumstances do surface, however, they are more likely to be acknowledged, held, and dealt with by the group in a skillful manner. Tombari (2021) studied how mindfulness helps in positive changes among the employees. A total of 120 employees took part in the study. These findings provide preliminary evidence for mindfulness as a psychological resource that can help employees achieve better job outcomes by increasing positive affectivity and work-life integration. In terms of practical implications, this research implies that mindful employees are better able to maximize positive affect, work-life enrichment, and work outcomes. Wells (2020) studied whether online mindfulness training can be helpful for employees working from home. 233 participants took part in the study. The participants were asked to fill out a pre-session questionnaire, take part in a 15-minute session on mindfulness, and then complete a post-session survey. 90% of the participants reported that the training session was very helpful. 76% of employees reported that mindfulness helped them in reducing anxiety and stress. Roy (2020) examined how mindfulness training can be



effective in reducing anxieties of physicians. Mindfulness training was given to physicians for one month. Results revealed that 48% of the physicians reported lower anxiety levels. Female physicians also reported 60% reduction in cynicism and emotional tiredness. Matiz (2020) studied the effects of mindfulness meditation among female teachers during the pandemic. A total of 70 teachers took part in the research study. An eight week long mindfulness course was conducted. After the completion of the course, 85% women reported better work life balance, reduced stress and anxiety.

Although mindfulness may appear to be a simple activity, remembering to remain mindful is not always a piece of cake; this is why adopting more systematic mindfulness meditation techniques can be beneficial. Indeed, implying mindfulness practices on a regular and consistent basis aids in the cultivation of awareness and so helps boost one's levels of mindfulness in the short and long term. Employees dealing with heightened work-from-home problems may benefit from mindfulness practice. Mindfulness can help telecommuting employees in three ways: (1) it can help them unplug from work when they need to, (2) it can help them focus on job activities and thus increase their performance, and (3) it can help them manage Zoom exhaustion or screen fatigue in general.

3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Various mindfulness techniques that can help employees have a better work life balance include - mindfulness meditation, body scan, 3 minute breathing space, mindful check in etc. along with breathing and relaxation techniques can also be helpful. These sessions can be held twice or thrice a day to give them relaxation and focus for enhancing their productivity.
- The government of India can take an initiative to introduce policies that promote the mental health of employees, along with their physical health. Government should provide grants to educate all the employees of various sectors in psychological first aid so they will be well equipped to deal with psychological emergencies. Employee mental health policies should be introduced which can promote in creating healthier workplaces for the employees.
- Government authorities responsible for policy making may amend and execute mental health and wellbeing policies and programmes in the organizational guidelines in all areas of public, private and government sector.
- As organizational employees from all sectors may be empowered healthier headspace with the enforcement of these policies, it will result in better economic output, turnover and reduced absenteeism.

4. CONCLUSION

This research paper was undertaken to understand if mindfulness may be a potential solution for work life balance of employees during COVID 19. The purpose of conducting this study was to

make people aware about mindfulness and its implementation in their lives. Mindfulness is the basic human ability of being fully present and being aware of where we are and what we're doing. The idea of having the right kind of balance between the work life of people and their personal lives is called work life balance. Different reviews of literature were studied to have a better understanding of the concept of mindfulness, work life balance and how the two can be merged together. After analyzing the various research articles it can be said that mindfulness can assist in reducing stress, anxiety, and disagreement in the workplace, as well as promote resilience and emotional intelligence and enhance communication.

With the recommendations discussed above, organizations can ensure sustainable development of employees by including them in the form of HR practices in private organizations and the same could be done in government organizations. This will further make sure that when employees are faced with difficulties they'll be well equipped to deal with it in a better and controlled manner be it from any aspect of life.

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