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Expert Column

Mindfulness In The Workplace

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Globalization has led to the increase in the standards of living around the world, but not all of its effects are positive for everyone. Globalization has also increased the competition between organizations which influences the way we work. Previous findings showed that global forces have an impact on burnout and job satisfaction via increased demands and reduced resources. Acknowledging this problem, large industries such as Apple, Nike and Google have offered mindfulness programs to their employees in order to enhance their performance and well-being.

Mindfulness is defined as a state of paying attention in the present moment, on purpose and in an accepting and kind way. It is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or

overwhelmed by what's going on around us. The mindfulness-based intervention was actually founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the microbiologist working in University of Massachusetts Medical school who has a passion and an inkling that lots of benefits would come of it. The mindfulness-based intervention is typically comprised of a mixture of mindfulness practices, such as secular meditation, psycho-education and group interaction. The practices derive a significant element of Buddhist traditions but has been modernized by Western teachers in order to be acceptable in their society.

Several studies have been conducted to incorporate the mindfulness – based intervention at the workplace especially in the Western countries. In a meta -analysis study published in 2017, it was found that mindfulness interventions had a positive effect on psychological symptoms, burnout, and job performance. The effectiveness of mindfulness towards mental health has been proven; nonetheless its efficacy on physical health is still lacking. Several studies have been conducted on physical health specifically on cardiovascular diseases (CVDs). CVDs are among the stress associated diseases whereby mindfulness programs are believed to control the risk factor of CVDs (stress). Previous findings showed that the mindfulness intervention has led to stable improvement of self-efficacy and quality of life among CVD patients. Other physical health that are related to work such as musculoskeletal disorders have been put in the limelight. However, the evidence of effectiveness has yet to be determined.

The rise of mindfulness is undeniable but how is this resonance with the Islamic tradition? Even though this idea of mindfulness has a combination between Buddhism and westerners where it involves meditation but according to the review the mindfulness component also has a lot to do with Islamic lifestyle. A practical example of a mindfulness intervention is by practicing daily activities attentively. Participants are encouraged to select at least one daily routine activity and make a deliberate effort to bring awareness of the moments to each action performed. Common examples of selected routine activities might include eating, making drinks or bathing. The rationale behind this practice is to encourage participants to integrate awareness into their daily lives, which increases the tendency to be more aware of bodily thoughts and sensations and reduces reactive automaticity. There are similarities in the concept of Islam where, for example, when waking up, eating food and bathing, Muslims are encouraged to recite litanies. Reciting an associated litany would potentially be a cue to perform the act with a heightened sense of momentary

awareness.

Another major component of mindfulness is the idea of cultivating an attitude of acceptance and the capacity for letting things be as they are. The cultivation of this capacity involves bringing a gentle, friendly awareness to whatever thoughts, feelings and physical sensations that accompany the stressful/uncomfortable situation. In Islam, this concept is known as patience (Sabar). The concept of patience (Sabar) has been mentioned in the Quran in more than 70 places, indicating its importance as a virtue within Islam. The Islamic concept of patience is also resonant with the idea of situational acceptance and choosing not to act.

In conclusion, mindfulness programs in the workplace not only have a positive impact on individuals but also benefits the organization. To practice mindfulness is not a contrast in Islamic belief, however, modifications should be implemented and further work is needed to evaluate the effectiveness and acceptability of such an adapted approach.

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