EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF MINDFULNESS ON INDIAN EMPLOYEES' ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to examine the role of mindfulness in enhancing employee engagement. With this aim, the data has been gathered using non-probability sampling techniques on Indian service sector employees as the key participants. Further, results have been analyzed using the Jamovi software (version 1.8.4.0) by conducting a regression analysis. Results of the study revealed a favorable association between mindfulness and employee engagement. Thus, along with filling the gap in the prevailing literature regarding limited research on these variables' association, implications have been highlighted from a managerial perspective. This highlights that managers should focus on the ways of enhancing mindfulness among the employees which will be beneficial for both organization and employees.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Employee engagement, India, Service sector employees

INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is a rising concern within companies and has now become crucial (Besieux *et al.*, 2018). But, according to a recent Gallup research (2020), over 51% of employees are not interested in their work, and 13% are actively disengaged, with the number of disengaged employees fluctuating as well. However, despite the fluctuations, only 36% of the workforce are found to be engaged in their duties. With the percentage of not engaged employees' being so high, employees seeking new job opportunities to search for better work is also increasing (Harter, 2020). Thus, it is vital to focus on the ways which will help in enhancing employee engagement. Indeed, employee engagement is linked with various favorable results, it enhances employees" job satisfaction, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior (Saks, 2006).

Among the numerous variables associated with employee engagement, mindfulness being an individual resource plays an important role in enhancing it (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2016). Despite being

responsible for making employees engaged, the relationship of these two variables has not been examined to a great extent (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019), thus requiring more research on their association. Further, a review of the existing literature on this area revealed that no researcher to date has attempted to research the impact of mindfulness in influencing employee engagement in India. Relying on these gaps, the current study aims to examine the impact of mindfulness on employee engagement by researching Indian service sector employees, to ascertain that just like the employees of other countries, do Indian employees need to be mindful to be engaged in their work.

Following this, the paper has been accompanied by a review of literature on mindfulness and the means through which it has been related to employee engagement. This has been followed by a hypothesis developed based on the relationship being empirically searched by several authors, and data collection methods along with the measuring instruments used. Later on, the paper has been concluded by explaining the results, implications, limitations, and future research agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Employee Engagement

Employees‟ engagement towards their work is a crucial indicator linked with organizational success (Malinowski & Lim, 2015). Thus, organizations can focus on engaged employees as a means for their long-lasting survival. Here, employee engagement has been defined as "the harnessing of organization members‟ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990). Further, Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) explained engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption."

Employee engagement is associated with a positive outcome like engaged employees perform better than disengaged ones (Harter, 2020), engagement helps in enhancing organizational citizenship behavior (Sun & Yoon, 2020), and engaged personnel is more pleased with their life (Chughtai, 2018). Similarly, engaged employees perform better and use to show behavior which even though

is not part of their task and which highlights their level of commitment towards the work (Buil *et al.*, 2019). Even though employee engagement is linked with numerous favorable outcomes, but there has been a rise in the number of disengaged employees in the total workforce, due to which unhappiness is spreading in the workplace. The reason behind it is, as individuals are not engaged in their work, they use to leave the workplace for the better job opportunities (Harter, 2020). Thus, finding the ways to decrease the disengagement among employees are necessary for the organizations, and mindfulness plays a significant role in enhancing employee engagement (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2016).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness, focusing on "experiencing the present" rather than "wishing the present to be better" (Gunaratana, 2002), has been defined as "paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Further, it can be considered as a characteristic that varies from person to person (Brown & Ryan, 2003). However, Bishop *et al.* (2004), has explained that mindfulness comprises of two core sub-dimensions. „Self-regulation‟ being the first sub-dimension is associated with being focused for a long time, and „orientation to experience‟ as an eagerness to learn about the path in which the mind wanders when it is unbound. Notably, mindfulness has been linked with several key outcomes, making it an important dimension on which organizations and managers should rely while recruiting the new workforce. Such outcomes associated with being mindful are, mindful individuals, use to experience positive emotions and it favorably impacts their psychological capital (Malinowski & Lim, 2015). Moreover, mindful individuals maintain their work-life balance, are satisfied with their job (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2016).
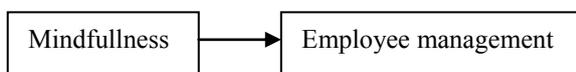
Mindfulness and Employee Engagement

Mindfulness being a state of being aware of and receptive to the current moment (Osman *et al.*, 2016), plays an important role in influencing employee engagement, with a favorable association between these two being observed by several authors. Like, Gunasekara and Zheng (2019) found that mindfulness is significantly related to engagement. Moreover, different sub-constructs of mindfulness are also substantially linked to work engagement. However, mindfulness indirectly

affects engagement through positive emotions (Malinowski & Lim, 2015). Furthermore, psychological capital also mediates the relationship partially (Kotzé, 2018). Likewise, in a longitudinal study being conducted by Matsuo (2020) mindfulness was found to be indirectly associated with engagement with employee's strength use mediating the relationship between the two. Furthermore, a positive association between mindfulness and engagement is there such that mindfulness is associated with enhancing employee engagement which favorably impacts employee's well-being and helps in enhancing their satisfaction level (Zivnuska *et al.*, 2016). This ensures that organizations can rely on mindful workforce for its success and focus on the ways that helps in making them mindful.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Role on employees' mindfulness in enhancing employee engagement towards their work can be explained using Conservation of Resource Theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 2001)), which denotes that, individuals focus on conserving the resources they have and tries to achieve the goals set by them. As the accumulation of such resources helps in building pleasant emotions within an individual **(Zivnuska** *et al.***, 2016).** Notably, mindfulness at work is a skill that can be utilized to accumulate resources over the course of a career, and it contributes to increasing employees" engagement. Thus, the following hypothesis is framed (See Figure 1) based on the impact of mindfulness in enhancing employee engagement (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019; Malinowski & Lim, 2015; Zivnuska *et al.*, 2016):

H_1: There is a favorable association between mindfulness and employee engagement.

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Figure 1: Hypothesized model representing Mindfulness and Employee Engagement Association

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Key Participants

The study has been conducted in India with service sector employees as the key participants. Further, data has been accumulated using non-probability sampling techniques. The data collection has begun by contacting the manager of numerous organizations via mail with a request to allow collecting the data from their organizations either through online or offline mode. But, as the authors" have not received a favorable response from their side, so data collection has been carried out by contacting the employees of various service sector industries via Linkedin, and through contacting them personally. Thus, by doing so, requests have been made to the respondents to fill the online questionnaire and they have been assured regarding the anonymity of their responses. Therefore, relying on this, the final data comprises 271 responses being considered for analysis.

The results have been ascertained after deleting incomplete responses and the ones which are outside the scope of the current study. Data analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents were male (76%), and 30.6% were married. Moreover, among the total respondents, the majority of them lie in the 26-30 age group (41.3%) and having graduation degrees (43.9%). A detailed description of the respondents has been provided in Table 1, and the survey plot (See Figure 2) denotes the gender-wise distribution of the respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' Details

Levels	Frequency	% Total
Marital Status		
Married	83	30.6 %
Unmarried	188	69.4 %
Age		
Under 25 years	103	38.0%
26-30 years	112	41.3 %
31-40 years	53	19.6 %
41-50 years	3	1.1 %
Educational Qualifications		
Graduation	119	43.9 %
Post-graduation	102	37.6 %
Professional degree	50	18.5%
Organizational Tenure		
0-5 years	218	80.4 %
5-10 years	48	17.7 %
10-20 years	4	1.5%
20-30 years	1	0.4 %
Type Of Industry		
Finance/ Accounting/ Auditing	42	15.5 %
Banking and Insurance	91	33.5%
IT & ITES	75	27.6%
E-commerce	8	3.0 %
Telecommunication	21	7.7 %
Logistics	2	0.7 %
Tourism and Hospitality	25	9.2 %
Others	7	2.58%

Note: Total number of respondents (N)= 271.
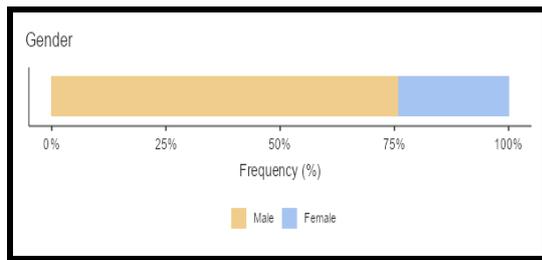
Figure 2: Survey Plot denoting Gender of Respondents in terms of Percentage.

Measurement Scales

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been measured using Feldman et al (2007)'s Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R) comprising of ten statements. The information was gathered using a 5-point Likert scale and respondents have to mark the appropriate option from „*strongly disagree'* to „*strongly agree'* depending on their experiences in the current workplace. Further, Cronbach's alpha value was calculated to assess the scale's overall consistency as well as the overall dependability of each factor of productivity values (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Results of reliability analysis revealed that Cronbach's α value of mindfulness scale is 0.659, thus denoting the acceptable level of reliability (Hulin *et al.*, 2001). However, some of the statements have been removed due to low factor loadings (See Table 2), which resulted in the change in the α value to 0.694.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been measured using nine items scale developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006), known as Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES). Just like mindfulness, data regarding employee engagement have been collected on a 5-point Likert scale. Employees marked their responses based on their perception regarding their engagement towards their work with 1 representing „strongly disagree" and 5 „strongly agree".

Cronbach's α value of the engagement scale is 0.724 which has been changed to 0.744 after deleting of few statements from the scale. However, along with calculating the reliability of each scale individually, the overall reliability of both the scales has also been calculated before and after item deletion. Thus, the overall Cronbach's α value of the scale is 0.800, thus denotes that the overall reliability of the scales is good (Hulin *et al.*, 2001).

Table 2: Reliability Analysis using Cronbach's alpha (α)

Constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's α Value	No. of Items Deleted	Cronbach's α Value
Mindfulness	10	0.659	2	0.694
Employee Engagement	9	0.724	3	0.744
Overall	19	0.799	14	0.800

Note: No.= Number, Overall here denotes the combined reliability of both the scales.

RESULTS

Analysis Technique

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been conducted using Jamovi software (version 1.8.4.0) to access the model fit by incorporating Hu and Bentler (1999)'s two-index presentation strategy. Among the three key index presentation strategies recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) (See Table 3), a combination of RMSEA and SRMR has been used in the current study (See Table 4). As represented in the results, the overall model is considered as fit as the RMSEA value is 0.06, and SRMR= 0.05, thus the values are within the threshold limit.

Table 3: Hu and Bentler's Index Presentation Strategy

Index	Criteria
NNFI and SRMR	NNFI ≥0.96, and SRMR ≤0.90
RMSEA and SRMR	RMSEA ≤0.06, and SRMR ≤0.90
CFI and SRMR	CFI≥0.96, and SRMR≤0.90

Note: SRMR= Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, NNFI= Non-Normed Fit Index, CFI= Confirmatory Fit Index

Table 4: Model Fit Indicators

Indicators	Criteria	Value Obtained	Criteria Achieved
RMSEA	≤0.06	0.06	Yes
SRMR	≤0.09	0.05	Yes

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The results of descriptive statistics comprising of Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and correlation (r) have been presented in Table 5, which have revealed the positive relationship between mindfulness and employee engagement (r= 0.513).

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics

	M	SD	Mindfulness	Employee Engagement
Mindfulness	4.00	0.530	-	
Employee Engagement	4.11	0.611	0.513***	-

Note: *** p < .001, N= 271

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Regression analysis technique has been incorporated in this study, to check the hypothesis formulated (See Table 6). Thus, the hypothesis postulated ascertaining the favorable association between mindfulness and employee engagement has been supported ((β=0.264, p=<0.001)). This indicates that mindful employees are engaged in their work as compared to the employees who are not mindful.

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Standardized Regression Weights	Adjusted R²	p	Hypothesis Supported
M→EE	0.264	0.261	<0.001	Yes

Note: M→EE= Mindfulness→ Employee Engagement.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study aims at investigating the direct impact of employees' mindfulness on their engagement level. As expected, mindfulness helps in enhancing employee engagement. These results are similar to the findings of Zivnuska *et al.* (2016), thus explains the commendable role of mindfulness in making employees engaged in their work. Therefore, an organization can rely on mindful individuals for its long-term existence. These results have been accompanied by theoretical and managerial implications.

Theoretical Implications

In the current era where the disengagement level among the employees is rising (Harter, 2020), it is imperative to focus on the ways that will help in reducing such disengagement. The significance behind the need to enhance employees' engagement lies in the never-ending importance of employee engagement which can be highlighted using its relevance in reducing employees" organizations' quitting intentions (Saks, 2006). Further, the ongoing issue regarding the dearth of research on mindfulness and engagement association (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019) makes it mandatory to pay attention on this slightly studied but crucial aspect. Moreover, according to the authors' apprehension, there is a lack of research on these variables' association concerning Indian employees. Thus, the study helps in fulfilling this gap in the prevailing literature too.

Along with this, the study has contributed to the engagement literature and COR theory, by ascertaining how mindfulness enhances Indian employees' engagement. This indicates that mindful individuals are more likely to be involved in the work they do, which directly influences their engagement level.

Managerial Implications

The current empirical study helped in ascertaining the importance of having mindful employees in the organization. Thus, relying on it, it can be identified that if an organization has mindful individuals, such organizations will perform better as indicated by the favorable association between mindfulness and employee engagement. Therefore, if an organization wants its employees to be engaged in their work, they should focus on the mindfulness level of the employees working with them. For this, HR managers can ascertain numerous ways of improving employees' mindfulness, one of the ways of doing so is by organizing meditation sessions (Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019). Further, it is crucial to have time-to-time interaction between managers and the employees, to find out the probable reasons that may be a hindrance in effective working and which may be responsible for affecting the mindfulness level of individuals.

Moreover, to ensure that employees experience the current moment, the way it is, managers should ensure that employees will get sufficient resources required for effective working. Apart from this, family problems or some other sort of issues that an employee may be experiencing can be the reason behind employees not being able to focus on the present moment. So, there should be a friendly environment in the organization and friendly relation should be there between managers and employees which will help them in sharing every sort of problems. This will help them in being more mindful and which will eventually help them in focusing on their work.

LIMITATIONS

The current study has several shortcomings, which provide a base for conducting future research on this relevant but little explored area. Firstly, the current empirical study is cross-sectional in nature, so future researchers can opt for a longitudinal research design on mindfulness and employee engagement relationship. Secondly, as the study has been conducted focusing on the gap of having a dearth of research on these variables" association in

the Indian context, so direct relationship among these variables has been examined. Thus, the role of mediating and moderating variables is out of the scope of the current study, which can be focused on by future researchers by ascertaining probable mediating or moderating variables affecting the mindfulness and engagement relationship. As it may be possible that engagement has been affected by employees' mindfulness but some variables may be mediating the relationship.

Furthermore, it may be possible that the effect of mindfulness on engagement is more for married employees than unmarried employees. Therefore, these relationships and gaps can be taken into consideration by future researchers. Thirdly, as the study has been conducted on service sector employees, so there is a possibility of getting different results if the same has been conducted on manufacturing sector employees. So, future research can pay heed to research by focusing on different populations rather than the one being undertaken in the present study.

CONCLUSION

The present study has contributed to the engagement literature by ascertaining the role of mindfulness in enhancing employees' engagement. The results of this study are consistent with the results of **Malinowski and Lim (2015),** regarding mindfulness and engagement association. Further, it has contributed to the employee engagement literature by fulfilling the gap in the literature regarding scarce research on mindfulness and engagement association **(Gunasekara & Zheng, 2019)**. However, the research has several limitations, but it has been accompanied by suggestions for future research, which will help in enhancing the researchers" knowledge regarding this crucial aspect. Thus, it can be ascertained that the managers and HRD professionals can rely on mindful individuals for the organization's success.

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