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Mindfulness, Digitization, and Employee Well-being: The Critical Role of Supportive Supervisor Communication

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KEYWORDS

Mindfulness, Digitization, Industry 4.0, Well-being, Supportive supervisor communication

ABSTRACT

With the increasing use of technology in the workplace, digitization has become a fundamental aspect of modern organizations. While digitization has increased efficiency and productivity, it has also led to increased stress levels among employees. As a result, organizations are seeking ways to promote employee well-being. One way to achieve this is through mindfulness training, which has been shown to reduce stress and improve well-being. However, it is unclear whether the effect of mindfulness on employee well-being is mediated by supportive supervisor communication or moderated by workplace digitization. Therefore, this research explores the direct effect of mindfulness on employee well-being moderated by workplace digitization, as well as the indirect effect of mindfulness on well-being through the mediation of a supportive supervisor. The attention restoration theory posits that attention wavers and requires effort to focus. In this study we examine the regulation of attention using mindfulness to sustain attentiveness and positive effect. 278 responses collected from a survey were analysed to arrive at the relationships. The findings reveal that while mindfulness does not directly impact employee well-being significantly, supportive supervisor communication serves as a key mediator, demonstrating a moderate to strong positive effect on employee well-being. In addition, workplace digitization emerges as a significant moderator, weakening the relationship between mindfulness and well-being as digital technologies become more pervasive. Organizations should focus on developing supportive supervisory communication skills while carefully considering the potential drawbacks of excessive digitization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, organizations are experiencing significant transformations in the workplace due to advancements in technology and the increasing digitization of work processes. While digitization offers numerous advantages, it also introduces new challenges and stressors that can impact employee well-being. As a result, organizations are exploring strategies to enhance employee well-being, considering it a critical factor for productivity, job satisfaction, and overall organizational success. One such strategy gaining attention is mindfulness, which has shown promise in mitigating the adverse effects of workplace stress and promoting employee well-being.

Mindfulness, defined as the intentional awareness and acceptance of present-moment experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), has been extensively studied for its positive impact on employee well-being. It involves cultivating a non-judgmental attitude towards thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, leading to stress reduction, enhanced focus, and overall well-being (Jnaneswar and Sulphey, 2021). Mindfulness practices have been linked to reduced levels of burnout, increased job satisfaction, improved mental health, and better work-life balance

However, the advent of digitization in workplaces adds complexity to the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being. Digitization involves the integration of digital tools and platforms into work processes, enabling increased efficiency and flexibility. However, it also presents challenges such as information overload, constant connectivity, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. These challenges have the potential to undermine the efficacy of mindfulness interventions and impact employee well-being in the digital workplace. Understanding the mediating role of digitization in the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being is crucial. Investigating how digitization influences the impact of mindfulness on well-being can shed light on the mechanisms through which mindfulness practices operate in the context of a digitally transformed workplace. This knowledge is essential for organizations to design targeted interventions and strategies that maximize the benefits of mindfulness while mitigating the negative effects of digitization on employee well-being. The role of supportive supervisor communication needs to be examined as a moderator in the relationship between mindfulness, digitization, and employee well-being deserves attention.

By conducting an investigative study on the impact of mindfulness on employee well-being, mediated by SSC and moderated by supportive supervisor communication, this research aims to add value to the existing literature. The findings will provide a deeper understanding of how digitization and supportive supervisor organizational culture shape the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being in the context of the digital era. These insights will offer practical guidance for organizations seeking to enhance employee well-being while navigating the challenges and opportunities of digitization.

Mindfulness

In today's fast-paced business environment, employee well-being is critical for organizational success. However, workplace stress, burnout, and distractions are common factors that can impede employee productivity and performance. Mindfulness refers to a person's dispositional tendency or innate ability to be aware of and attentive to their present moment experiences without judgment. It is a stable characteristic that reflects how much an individual generally tends to be mindful in daily life. Mindfulness has been the subject of increasing research attention in recent years, with a growing body of evidence suggesting that it may have a range of benefits for mental and physical health. A study on mindfulness and mental health, published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, found that mindfulness-based interventions were effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress across a range of populations, including clinical and non-clinical samples (Panditharathne and Chen, 2021).

The neural mechanisms underlying mindfulness have been examined in the literature, with studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) suggesting that mindfulness may impact brain regions involved in attention, emotion regulation, and self-awareness (Tang et al., 2015). A key area of ongoing research in mindfulness is the study of the impact on workplace outcomes, such as employee well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. Literature found that mindfulness-based interventions had a small but significant effect on reducing job strain and improving well-being, with larger effects observed in studies that included longer follow-up periods and higher levels of participant engagement. Mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). This definition was proposed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who is considered one of the pioneers in bringing mindfulness practices into Western medicine and psychology. He developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which is an 8-week course that teaches mindfulness practices to help people manage stress, anxiety, and chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Bishop et al. (2004), who proposed that mindfulness involves four key components: (1) observing the present moment, (2) describing experiences without judgment, (3) acting with awareness, and (4) accepting the present moment. This definition is often used in research on mindfulness and has been shown to be a reliable and valid measure of mindfulness.

Workplace Digitization

The increasing use of technology has led to the digitization of the workplace, which has transformed the way we work. Digitization has the potential to increase efficiency, productivity, and communication. However, it has also led to concerns about the impact of digitization on employee well-being and job satisfaction. Workplace digitization has been shown to have several benefits, including increased productivity, improved communication, and greater flexibility in the workplace. Studies have shown that digitization can lead to significant time savings and increased productivity (Cijan et al., 2019). Digitization also enables employees to communicate more effectively and collaborate with colleagues from different locations and time zones (Cijan et al., 2019). Moreover, digitization allows for greater flexibility in the workplace, enabling employees to work from home or other remote locations (Baruch et al., 2014). While workplace digitization has several benefits, it also presents challenges for employees. One of the main challenges is the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. Digitization has enabled employees to be connected to work 24/7, leading to increased stress levels and reduced job satisfaction (Baruch et al., 2014). Moreover, the constant need to be connected and respond to emails and messages quickly can lead to burnout and decreased productivity (George and George, 2023). Additionally, digitization has led to concerns about job security and the impact of automation on the workforce.

Several phenomena outline the possible "dark side" of digitization for the individual, which are increasingly discussed, such as information system security behaviors, problematic and addictive use of technologies, loss of control over technology-

mediated decisions, technostress, loss of privacy and the blurring of work-life boundaries, particularly regarding technologies ranging from work applications to social media, artificial intelligence, and fitness trackers.

Employee Well Being

Employee well-being has become an increasingly important topic in recent years, as organizations recognize the impact of employee well-being on performance, productivity, and retention. The impact of workplace digitization on employee well-being is a growing concern for organizations. Studies have shown that increased use of technology in the workplace can lead to increased stress levels and reduced job satisfaction (Baruch et al., 2014). Moreover, the constant need to be connected can lead to decreased sleep quality and increased fatigue (Kim et al., 2023). Additionally, digitization can lead to social isolation and a decreased sense of community in the workplace (Joo et al., 2024). Employee well-being is positively associated with job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment. These factors are important predictors of organizational performance.

Supportive Supervisor Communication

Supportive communication refers to dialogue that strengthens interpersonal connections and shows consideration for others' feelings and perspectives. This type of supervisor-subordinate communication encompasses various behaviors, including acknowledging employees' accomplishments, motivating their work efforts, showing interest in their job satisfaction, backing their career growth, caring about their emotional well-being, genuinely listening to their viewpoints, and responding with understanding and compassion.

This form of communication likely represents a crucial component of overall supervisor support (Verburg et al. 2018). Beyond direct supportive actions, it may shape how employees perceive their supervisor's general supportiveness. Daily supportive communication may serve as the primary means through which supervisors deliver support to their team members. Additionally, this communication style should more directly encourage positive employee responses, including both contextual contributions and task-related performance improvements. Prior research has demonstrated connections between perceived supervisor support and favorable employee attitudes and behaviors. Supportive communication appears to play a vital role in workplace dynamics and employee outcomes.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The theoretical lens used in this study is the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplan, 1995). As per ART, attention is a finite resource that becomes depleted over time as a result of sustained directed attention to tasks that require effort and concentration. A study by Brown and Ryan (2003) found that mindfulness is positively associated with well-being, including reduced stress and increased positive affect. Mindfulness can be viewed as a cognitive skill that helps individuals regulate their attention and maintain focus in the present moment. Mindful individuals are less likely to experience attentional depletion and more likely to experience attentional restoration. Mindfulness has been associated with improved emotional well-being, decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as increased positive affect (Garland et al., 2015).

H1: Mindfulness has a positive impact on employee well-being.

Kim et al. (2021) found that workplace digitization moderated the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being. Specifically, they found that mindfulness was negatively associated with digital overload (i.e., feeling overwhelmed by the amount of digital technology in the workplace), which in turn was negatively associated with employee well-being.

H2: Workplace digitization moderates the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being.

Verburg et al. (2018) found that employee mindfulness was positively related to supportive supervisor communication (SSC), and that both mindfulness and SSC were positively related to employee well-being. The adoption of new technologies can have both positive and negative effects on employee well-being. For example, the adoption of flexible work arrangements enabled by technology can improve work-life balance, but it can also blur the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to increased stress and burnout. Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2018) examine the moderating role of SSC in the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being. The findings suggest that supportive supervisor communication strengthens the positive relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being.

H3: Supportive supervisor communication mediates the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a survey-based collection method. Based on literature review the appropriate survey scale was selected. Mindfulness is typically operationalized using measures that assess an individual's level of mindfulness as a dispositional trait. The most commonly used measure of mindfulness is the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) developed by Brown and Ryan (2003). The MAAS is a 15-item scale that asks individuals to rate how frequently they experience mindfulness-related experiences in their daily life. The MAAS scale was adapted from MacKillop, J., & Anderson, E. J. (2007).

The 5-item World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) is among the most widely used questionnaires assessing subjective psychological well-being. Since its first publication in 1998, the WHO-5 has been translated into more than 30 languages and has been used in research studies all over the world (Topp et al., 2015), and it has been adapted for this study.

While investigating workplace digitization, the researchers came across many theories about technology adoption. The most used theories are the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis 1989), theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991), unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al. 2016), DOI (Rogers 1995), and the TOE framework (Tornatzky and Fleischer 1990). The scale for workplace digitization has been adapted from De Vass et al. (2018). The scale for supportive supervisor communication was adapted from Fukui et al. (2014)

Data was collected online and sample data from approximately 293 respondents was received. Random sampling was done to collect this data from employees working in corporate organizations across north India. Nine samples were rejected due to response bias as all question were answered with same number (5). Six samples were rejected to missing values in responses. A total of 278 responses were considered valid for analysis. The respondents were corporate employee working in Manufacturing, IT/ITES, Retail, Telecom, Education, Banking & other financial Services, Consulting / Professional, Service industry.

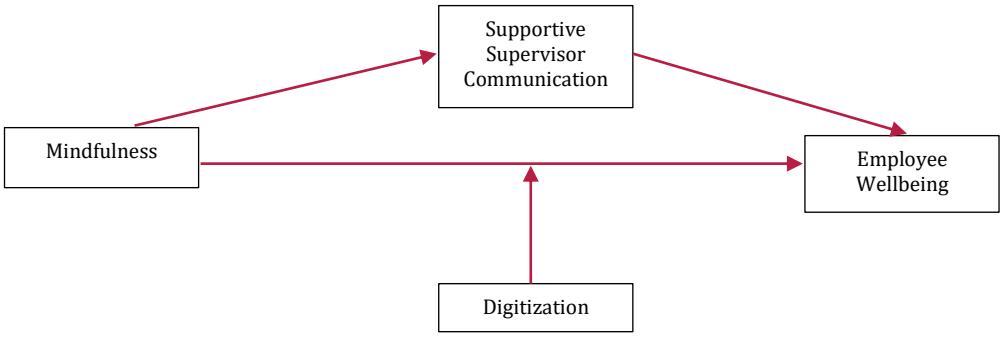

Figure 1: Conceptual Diagram

ANALYSIS

The KMO and Bartlett's test was conducted using SPSS. Values above 0.5 are considered acceptable therefore our sample was considered adequate.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.519
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	640.277
	df	28
	Sig.	.000

Figure 2: KMO-Bartlett's test

As the items were adapted from literature an exploratory factor analysis was not considered necessary. Thus, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. The factor analysis was conducted to understand to total variance explained. Four factors explained 79.719% of the variance in the model.

Component	Extraction Sum of Squares Loading	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.074	25.929	25.929
2	1.78	22.249	48.178
3	1.425	17.817	65.995
4	1.098	13.724	79.719

Figure 3: Total Variance Explained

To focus on the key items which comprised the constructs, a Principal Component Analysis method was used to extract four factors. The rotation method used was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. The rotation was obtained in 5 rotations. The MFN component comprising of MFN-1 and MFN-3 produced values of 0.957 and 0.956, $p < 0.05$. The SSC component comprising of SSC-1, SSC-2, and SSC-3 produced values of 0.754, 0.835, and 0.721, $p < 0.05$. The EWB component comprising of WB-3 and WB43 produced values of 0.829 and 0.845, $p < 0.05$.

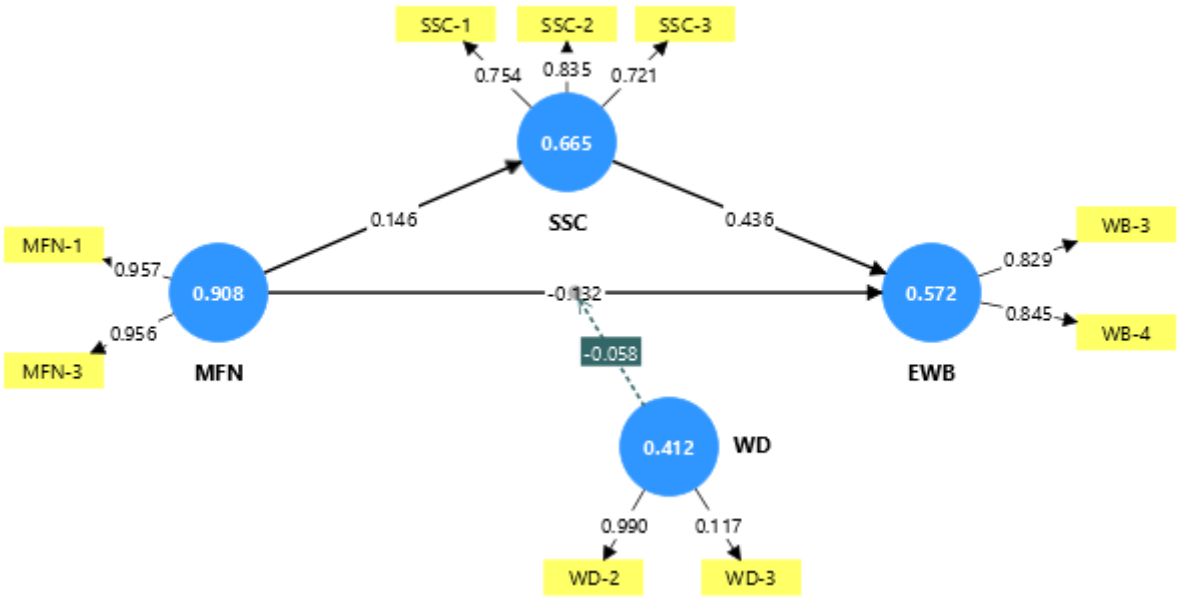

Figure 4: Graphical output of the model

Rho_c, also referred to as composite reliability, is a metric used to evaluate the internal consistency of items within a test or scale. Based on structural equation modeling, this reliability coefficient indicates how effectively the items measure a common underlying construct. In Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), composite reliability values ranging from 0.70 to 0.90 are typically viewed as satisfactory to high, whereas values between 0.60 and 0.70 may be acceptable in the context of exploratory research. In our study, the composite reliability (rho_c) produced the values MFN=0.955, SSC=0.801, WB=0.812, and WD=0.881.

Construct reliability assessment evaluates the extent to which a variable or a set of variables is consistent with what is intended to measure (Straub et al., 2004). This implies that the same measuring instrument produces the same results with the same individuals on different occasions. Construct reliability accessed via Cronbach alpha produced acceptable values for MFN, SSC, and EWB as given in figure 5 (Hair, 2005).

To test discriminant validity, we conducted used the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Fornel and Larcker, 1981). The results established discriminant validity in the constructs, as given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Discriminant Validity

	MFN	SSC	WB	WD
MFN	0.956			
SSC	0.146	0.818		
WB	-0.05	0.202	0.832	
WD	0.109	-0.103	-0.12	0.888

When independent variables in a regression model exhibit strong correlations with one another, it creates a condition known as multicollinearity. This phenomenon can cause regression coefficients to become unstable and produce unreliable statistical inferences. We conducted a test to assess presence of multicollinearity. The VIF values obtained, as given in Table 2, demonstrated the absence of multicollinearity.

Table 2: Multicollinearity

	VIF
MFN -> SSC	1
MFN -> WB	1.044
SSC -> WB	1.039
WD -> WB	1.036
WD x MFN -> WB	1.018

Simple slope analysis in SmartPLS is a technique used to interpret **moderation effects**—that is, how the relationship between an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (Y) changes depending on the level of a moderator variable (M).

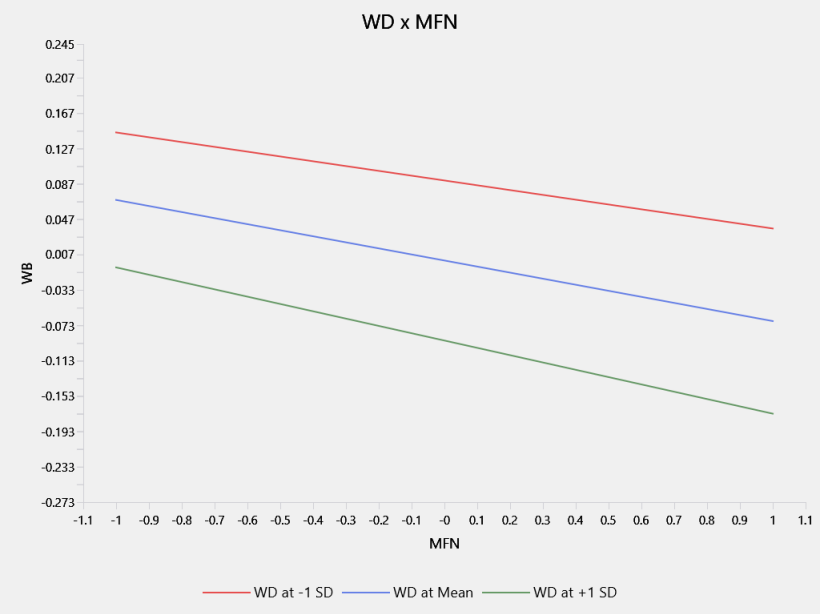

Figure 5: Simple Slope Analysis

A simple slope analysis of the impact of workplace digitization on the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being shows a moderately negative relation between MFN and WB, as digitization increases.

3. DISCUSSION

The sample was considered adequate. The four factors of MFN, SSC, WB, and EWB together explained 74.719 percent of the variance in the model.

The standardized path coefficient value of -0.024 between the relationship of MFN and EWB indicates a weak and negative direct relationship. This implies that for every one standard deviation in MFN, EWB decreases by 0.024 standard deviations. As an instance, assume MFN has a standard deviation of 1.5 and EWB has a standard deviation of 1.2. If an employee's MFN score increases by 1.5 points or one standard deviation, their EWB score would decrease by an estimated 0.029 points (0.024 x 1.2 = 0.029). This implies that if an employee went from "rarely using digital devices at work" (score 3) to "frequently using digital devices at work" (score 4.5), their well-being may reduce from 5.0 to 4.97. This coefficient suggests that the effect of MFN on EWB is so minor that it is statistically or practically not significant. Thus, any relation between MFN and EWB probably occurs through indirect pathways, such as through SSC, rather than this direct path. Thus, H1 is not supported.

SSC exercises a moderate to strong positive effect size. This implies that for every one standard deviation in SSC, the EWB is expected to increase by 0.436 standard deviations. For every one standard deviation increase in SSC, EWB is expected to increase by 0.436 standard deviations. This implies that supportive supervisor communication has a moderate to strong positive effect on employee well-being. Using the same example as given above, suppose SSC increases by one standard deviation, and if an employee went from "rarely receives supportive communication from supervisor" (score 3) to "frequently

receives supportive communication from supervisor" (score 4.5), their well-being may increase from 4.5 to 5. Thus, H3 is supported.

The structured equation model illustrates that WD has a mildly negative effect size (0.058) on the relationship between MFN and EWB. The slope analysis reveals that WD has a mildly significant and negative impact on the relationship between MFN and EWB. This mildly negative impact increases to become a moderate impact as workplace digitization increases and spreads across all functions and processes in the organization. This implies that as digitization increases, the impact of mindfulness on employee well-being reduces. Thus, digitization may be perceived as a distraction that negatively affects employee well-being. It can also be seen in Figure 5, that in case digitization is reduced, the slope becomes even more mildly negative, as compared to the slope at the mean. Thus, in case the digitization at the workplace is reduced, it may not eliminate the negative effect on employee well-being, but it certainly will be reduced. Thus, H2 is supported.

4. IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical implication

Studying the effect of mindfulness on well-being mediated by supportive supervisor communication and moderated by workplace digitization includes expanding our understanding of how mindfulness and supportive supervisor communication interact with digital technologies to influence well-being. Research has shown that mindfulness can have a positive impact on employee well-being (Swanzy, 2020; Carruthers and Hood, 2011). However, our research demonstrates that the direct effect of mindfulness on employee well-being is insignificant enough to not have a noticeable impact. This also implies, indirectly, that studying the indirect effect of mindfulness on employee well-being may guide us to understand this relationship better. Another theoretical contribution is the use of the attention restoration theory to study mindfulness and employee well-being. This study explores the indirect effect of supportive supervisor communication on employee well-being and demonstrates that supportive supervisor communication does have a positive and moderately to strongly significant mediating effect on the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being. A key theoretical contribution of this study is that it empirically proves that as workplace digitization increases, it exerts a moderately negative influence on the relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being.

Business implication

Understanding the impact of mindfulness on well-being can have significant implications for employee performance, productivity, and overall organizational success. Research has shown that mindfulness can improve job satisfaction, reduce stress and burnout, and enhance emotional intelligence (Lee et al., 2019). Furthermore, digitization has become a key aspect of modern work, and mindfulness practices may help individuals navigate the challenges and distractions of digital technologies (Wrede et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding the role of digitization in the relationship between mindfulness and well-being is crucial for promoting employee well-being and productivity in the digital age. As shown in our study, supportive supervisor communication can be leveraged to create a strong and effective impact on employee well-being.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was conducted in the northern geographical area of an emerging economy. We recommend that future scholars extend the study to other geographies and countries to examine the generalizability of these findings. The second limitation of this study is that only quantitative data was obtained and analysed. Future scholars may triangulate the findings by conducting a qualitative analysis as well. The third limitation of this study is that it explores the moderating effect of WD on the relationship between MFN and EWB. Future scholars may examine the moderating effect of other factors, such as gender, age, or any other factor, on this relationship. A fourth limitation of this study is that it studies the mediating effect of SSC on EWB. Future scholars may study the mediating effect of any other variable on EWB.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the complex relationship between mindfulness and employee well-being in the context of workplaces being rapidly digitized. The findings reveal that while mindfulness does not directly impact employee well-being significantly, supportive supervisor communication serves as a key mediator, demonstrating a moderate to strong positive effect on employee well-being. In addition, workplace digitization emerges as a significant moderator, weakening the relationship between mindfulness and well-being as digital technologies become more pervasive.

These results challenge traditional assumptions about mindfulness as a direct solution to workplace stress, suggesting instead that its benefits may be leveraged through interpersonal mechanisms, especially supervisor support. The negative moderating effect of digitization highlights the importance of managing technological implementation thoughtfully to preserve the benefits of employee well-being. Organizations should focus on developing supportive supervisory communication skills while carefully considering the potential drawbacks of excessive digitization. Future research should explore additional mediating variables and examine these relationships across diverse cultural and organizational contexts to further enhance our understanding of well-being in the era of the digital workplace.

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