

EXPLORING HEARTFULNESS MEDITATION AS A TOOL FOR ETHICAL HR

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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving organizational landscape, the role of Human Resources (HR) has transcended beyond traditional administrative functions to encompass the cultivation of ethical workplace cultures and the promotion of sustainable development. The recognition of employee well-being, ethical conduct, and social responsibility has become paramount in shaping organizational success and societal impact (Friedman, 1970)ⁱ. Consequently, there is a growing interest in exploring innovative approaches that can effectively integrate transformative practices into HR frameworks to nurture ethical workplace environments and sustainable development.

The subsequent sections delve deeper into the understanding of sustainability in management, ethical HR, Workplace Spirituality (WPS) and Heartfulness practices, establishing a framework for their integration within organizational contexts. Through empirical evidence, we will elucidate the transformative potential of Heartfulness Meditation in fostering ethical workplace environments and contributing to sustainable development.

Sustainability in management: Sustainabilityⁱⁱ in management practices refers to organizations in reducing their negative impact on the environment. Sustainability practices are analyzed against ESG: environmental, social & governance metrics. So, the organizations continue to align to the UN general assembly sustainable development goals (SDGs), to be achieved by 2030. There is a growing need to have a sustainability strategy within the organizations to help implement an ethical culture.

Ethical HR: Ethics in corporations refers to the principles, values, and standards of conduct that guide the behavior of individuals and organizations within the business context. It involves making decisions and taking actions that are morally right, just, and responsible, both internally within the organization and in its interactions with external stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, shareholders, and the community at large. Organizations that have a caring climate towards their employees, they see a strong link between success and ethical behavior (Deshpande SP, 1996)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Key aspects of ethics in corporations include:

1. **Integrity:** Upholding honesty, transparency, and consistency in actions and communications.
2. **Respect:** Treating all individuals with dignity, fairness, and consideration, regardless of differences such as race, gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.
3. **Responsibility:** Acknowledging and fulfilling obligations to stakeholders, including employees, customers, shareholders, and the broader society.
4. **Accountability:** Taking ownership of decisions and actions and being willing to accept consequences for unethical behavior.
5. **Compliance:** Adhering to laws, regulations, and industry standards, as well as internal policies and codes of conduct.
6. **Ethical Leadership:** Demonstrating ethical behavior and fostering a culture of integrity throughout the organization, starting from top management.
7. **Social and Environmental Responsibility:** Considering the impact of business activities on society and the environment and striving to minimize negative effects while maximizing positive contributions.

Ethics in corporations is essential for building trust, maintaining reputation, and sustaining long-term success. It guides organizational culture, decision-making processes, and relationships with stakeholders, ultimately shaping the role of businesses in creating a more ethical and sustainable society. Ethics is becoming a major part of HR and a study found that not complying with ethical principles and values results in negative outcomes in the workplace, including poor performance, employee conflict, and lack of moral conviction (Bogale & Birbirs, 2023)^{iv}. Spirituality can be integrated with work and learning through ethical means (Fenwick & Lange, 1998)^v. Also, another study on spiritually-informed management theory has been presented as Awareness, change and manifestation theories (Steingard, 2005)^{vi}.

Practical application of ethics in organizations has also been researched by many (Clegg et al, 2006)^{vii}. To integrate spirituality and ethics at the workplace many organizations provide prayer and meditation rooms for the employees (McLaughlin C, 2005)^{viii}.

They have also discovered that holistic or spiritual approaches to issues of social & environmental responsibility work better than traditional political campaigns. The business institutions are transforming from within to make a positive ethical change.

Workplace Spirituality (WPS): Spirituality plays a very vital role in bringing about a positive change in the mindsets of employees as the spiritual values of interconnectedness & compassion help in bringing a sustainable work culture. This is where workplace spirituality (WPS) comes into the picture and integrates these spiritual values at work. WPS also needs a practical tool for making the transformation in every individual connected with the organization and that practical tool is available with Heartfulness (HFN)^{ix} practices. Another study reveals that WPS is a requirement for ethical climate which leads to sustainability performance (Jermsittiparsertt et al, 2019)^x, spirituality brings about sustainability (Sulphey MM, 2022)^{xi} and HR managers can bring about sustainability (Papalexandris N, 2022)^{xii}.

Central to this exploration is the concept of Workplace Spirituality (WPS), which emphasizes the holistic well-being of employees and the integration of spiritual values in the workplace. Heartfulness Meditation, with its focus on self-awareness, introspection, and ethical alignment, aligns seamlessly with the dimensions of WPS. Through this integration, HR specialists can play a pivotal role in fostering moral decision-making, providing employees with a sense of purpose, and cultivating a commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

Spirituality has been of great interest in organizational studies for a long time, the term was first used for the “self” and then after seeing its effects at the workplace it was incorporated as workplace spirituality. There have been many studies conducted to examine the role of spirituality in relation to performance, leadership, resilience, organizational effectiveness, and ethics at work too.

The acknowledgement and incorporation of spiritual ideals, beliefs, and practices within the framework of an organization is referred to as workplace spirituality. It places a strong emphasis on workers' overall wellbeing and acknowledges their spiritual requirements in addition to their work responsibilities. A sense of purpose, connectivity, and alignment with higher ideals or beliefs are all fostered by workplace spirituality. It includes providing a caring and encouraging work atmosphere, encouraging moral behavior, assisting in personal development, and giving staff members chances to find purpose and fulfillment in their jobs. Workplace spirituality can take many different forms. Some examples include mindfulness programs, values-based leadership, meditation techniques, inclusive and diverse business cultures, and work-life balance and employee well-being initiatives. All things considered, the goal of workplace spirituality is to establish a work atmosphere that uplifts the human spirit, increases worker engagement, and advances both organizational performance and societal well-being.

Definition of WPS: There is positive association between spirituality at work and employee job outcomes (Milliman et al.)^{xiii}, workplace spirituality focuses on meaningful work and engagement, providing purpose and involvement (Duchon & Ashmos, 2000)^{xiv}, according to (Mitroff & Denton 1999)^{xv}, the managers they researched on defined spirituality as “the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others and the entire universe”, in a single word the definition would be “interconnectedness”. For them the more spiritual organization was more profitable, and they were able to bring their complete selves to work and be more creative. (Mitroff & Denton 1999), workplace spirituality has also been characterized as “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process” (Jurkiewicz CL & Giacalone RA 2004)^{xvi}.

WPS is also defined as a workplace that recognizes that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community (Duchon & Plowman 2005)^{xvii}.

According to the above definitions, WPS has three dimensions namely:

- Meaning and purpose of work and life
- Feeling of community
- Feeling of interconnectedness (within oneself, others, and the universe)

The search for WPS has an intrinsic ethical flavor as it tries to redefine balancing values for oneself, society, humanity, and the world (Rozuel & Kakabadse, 2010)^{xviii}.

HFN practices: HFN practices are very simple & easy to implement as they are at no cost to the company as the services are free and implementation can be done with readily available volunteers. The only requirement from the organization is to make a place and time available for the employees to get together on a regular basis. Heartfulness Meditation is a transformative practice within HR strategies, aiming to foster ethical workplace environments and contribute to sustainable development.

Heartfulness Meditation, rooted in ancient contemplative traditions, offers profound benefits for individual well-being, resilience to stress, and ethical alignment. By aligning Heartfulness practices with HR strategies, organizations can create harmonious workplaces where employees are not only more resilient but also more attuned to ethical considerations.

Moreover, the paper underscores the importance of HR managers' training in Heartfulness practices to effectively instill the ethical dimension within the workplace. By nurturing self-awareness and conscientiousness among employees, Heartfulness Meditation empowers individuals to make ethical decisions and contribute positively to organizational culture. By aligning HR practices with broader societal goals, organizations can pave the way for sustainable development and societal well-being.

Three Practices of Heartfulness: Meditation, Rejuvenation/Cleaning, and Prayer:

1. Meditation: Central to Heartfulness is meditation, a practice designed to facilitate the transcendence of individual consciousness. It forms the cornerstone of the transformative journey, guiding practitioners toward oneness with the 'Universal Consciousness.' The practice is characterized by the unique application of Yogic Transmission (Pranahuti) during meditation, described as “divine energy from the Source, that may be used for the transformation of the human being” (Patel and Pollock, 2018)^{xix}.

This subtle and subjective transmission, rediscovered by Babuji's teacher, Shri Ram Chandra, known as Lalaji (1873-1931), brings awareness and expands consciousness. The trainers of Heartfulness are enabled by the Guide (Daaji)^{xx} to transmit Pranahuti to practitioners, fostering a deeper meditative experience. Transmission helps in eliminating individual lower tendencies with expansion of consciousness.

2. Rejuvenation/Cleaning: The second pivotal technique is Rejuvenation/Cleaning, an active exercise aimed at addressing the root causes of mental and emotional disturbances. This process employs suggestions, visualization, and positive affirmations to remove complexities and impurities, paving the way for behavioral change, which cause the formation of impressions in our subconscious mind (Patel & Westeinde 2022)^{xxi}. This active engagement in self-purification enhances mental clarity and emotional well-being.

3. Prayer: The Heartfulness prayer complements the meditation and cleaning practices (Patel & Pollock, 2018), enhancing the overall experience. Integrating prayer into the contemplative process supports the effectiveness of meditation and the cleansing process. The synergy of these three practices creates a harmonious and sustained meditative state in day-to-day activities. With regular practice, the state can be achieved without actively needing to apply any control mechanism (Patel & Westeinde 2023).

- The Heartfulness method revolves around three primary techniques, each experiential technique serving a unique purpose in the pursuit of expanded consciousness which helps make a transformation towards holistic well-being.
- The purpose of these practices is to purify the expanding field of consciousness, guiding individuals towards oneness with the 'Universal Consciousness.' The evolution of human consciousness is at the forefront of Heartfulness teachings. The uniqueness of this method lies not only in its ancient roots but also in its experiential nature, emphasizing personal growth and evolution.

Discussion

The aim of the paper is to first understand the concepts of sustainable development, WPS, ethical HR and Heartfulness Practices and then understand how Heartfulness meditation can help transform employees and HR managers to be more ethically minded.

Then as seen above, WPS can be easily implemented in organizations towards not only the well-being of employees but also to inculcate ethics. To make the process practical and easy to practice at work and at home, Heartfulness workshops can be organized with the help of trainers available to serve. There are no charges for the services; moreover, trainers are ready to hand-hold practitioners for regularizing the practice.

Inner Change Leads to Outer Change: The regular practice of Heartfulness prayer helps in changing the thinking from 'I' to 'we' and from 'me' to 'us'. Some other qualities that develop in the hearts of practitioners are contentment, calmness, compassion, courage, and clarity. Also, a feeling of unconditional love for all is developed. A natural state of altruism is felt inside (Patel & Pollock, 2018) (Fig.1 & fig 2)

Heartfulness meditation a catalyst for inner change: Heartfulness, meditation, with its roots, in ancient wisdom, offers a unique avenue for personal and professional development, emphasizing self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and compassion. Heartfulness meditation, a simple and profound practice, involves tuning into one's heart and experiencing inner stillness.

Incorporating Heartfulness into management can enhance self-awareness, integrity, respect, fairness, accountability, and transparency among employees, fostering a positive workplace culture to enhance ethical behavior. The ways in which HFN practices can help develop the key aspects of ethics are:

- a) Integrity: Heartfulness meditation is essentially a discipline that goes beyond the difficulties of contemporary management. Through guiding people to focus inward and establish a connection with their own heart, this technique is an effective means of enabling self-awareness. In the dynamic and rigorous realm of ethics, developing integrity with self-awareness turns into a tactical asset in addition to a personal quest. Managers that are aware of their own feelings, motives, and values are better able to make decisions with integrity.
- b) Respect: Incorporating Heartfulness practices at work will help in nurturing the quality of treating everyone with dignity, fairness, and empathy regardless of their position and background. HFN cleaning or rejuvenation removes prejudices and prayer creates the experience of oneness within which makes a person respectful towards others.
- c) Fairness: The regular practice of HFN brings forth correct thinking which helps in making impartial decisions, treating all individuals equitably and avoiding favoritism and discrimination.
- d) Accountability: Regular practitioners of HFN get the courage to take responsibility for their actions, acknowledging mistakes, learning from them, and maintaining a high standard of behavior. Right understanding of one's own responsibility comes forth as a positive change.
- e) Transparency: By regular cleaning practice, the consciousness of a person gets purified leading to being open and honest in communication, sharing relevant information, and avoiding hidden agendas.

All the above qualities are inculcated in our behavior with regular practices of meditation, cleaning, and prayer. The correct attitude of acceptance, being honest with one-self and with others, helps in imbibing the positive changes. When we accept ourselves as we are then we can see our flaws and chart out a plan to change for the better. Heartfulness meditation provides this opportunity to transform ourselves with the help of the practices. The practices are designed after years of research; meditation helps to connect with our inner higher Self, and the method of cleaning removes the unwanted baggage from our consciousness. The power of thought is used which becomes very effectively potent with the help of Transmission (Patel & Pollock, 2018)^{xxiii}.

- Scientifically tested Benefits: Study conducted by (Vijay Ananth K et al. 2023)^{xxiv} showcase the multifaceted benefits of Heartfulness meditation, particularly in promoting positive energy and alleviating stress and depression. Interventions based on adults or older adults dealing with psychosocial issues highlight the potential of Heartfulness practices to contribute not only to individual well-being but also to the overall emotional resilience of the workforce. Positive psychology has shown that gratitude is necessary for life satisfaction; there is a study to indicate that Heartfulness practitioners have higher gratitude than individuals who do not meditate (Amarnath et al. 2019)^{xxv}.
- Another study has shown that Heartfulness meditation practice can improve our mental health (Thakur et al., 2023)^{xxvi}. As organizations prioritize the well-being of their workforce, integrating Heartfulness practices into the fabric of the organizational culture emerges as a proactive approach to enhancing mental health and fortifying the collective resilience of the workforce.
- Some more scientific evidence: There is much scientific evidence to show the effectiveness of Heartfulness practices, studies done on Heartfulness practitioners find positive effects in emotional wellness (Thimmapuram et al., 2017)^{xxvii}, reduction of burnout (Thimmapuram et al., 2019)^{xxviii}, improvement in sleep in patients with chronic insomnia (Thimmapuram et al., 2020)^{xxix}, reduced stress and improved coping and well-being in middle school students (Iyer and Iyer, 2019)^{xxx}, reduced stress and improved mood in teenagers (Yadav et al., 2021)^{xxxi}.

- Virtual Heartfulness meditation sessions with a trainer were also shown to be associated with a reduction in loneliness and improvement in sleep in healthcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Thimmapuram et al., 2021)^{xxxiii}, as well as positive effects within an integrative healthcare program on coping and health-related quality of life of patients with cyclic vomiting syndrome (Venkatesan et al., 2021)^{xxxiii}. And in a pilot study, it was found that greater well-being is present in advanced Heartfulness practitioners compared to novice practitioners (Sankar Sylapan et al., 2020)^{xxxiv}.
- Heartfulness, a holistic contemplative tradition for transformative consciousness: Heartfulness is a contemplative tradition with a global presence that enables practitioners to experience the transcendence of individual human consciousness with the use of a few simple practices (Patel and Pollock, 2018). Scientific studies of Heartfulness have started exploring the effects of these different practices, notably Heartfulness meditation and cleaning have a positive effect on physiological aspects such as Heart Rate Variability (HRV), heart rate and blood pressure (Arya et al., 2018)^{xxxv}.
- Historical Background: To have a better understanding of the impact of Heartfulness at a deeper level, a description of the Heartfulness method is required (Patel and Westeinde, 2022). Heartfulness is also known as Sahaj Marg, meaning “The Natural Path”, the roots of which lie in Raja Yoga. The references of Raja Yoga are found in Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras; the founder of Sahaj Marg, Ram Chandra, also known as Babuji, in the early 1940s (Chandra 1989)^{xxxvi}, simplified it as a set of daily practices. Patanjali describes eight limbs in his Yoga Sutras, which together form Ashtanga Yoga- the eight-limbed Yoga system (Bryant E, 2009)^{xxxvii}.
- Heartfulness is non-religious and universal in its approach. Heartfulness is neither Hindu nor Buddhist; it integrates both, even though it evolved out of yogic tradition. For example, mindfulness is the first step in Pratyahara in Ashtanga Yoga and is very much present in the Heartfulness approach. Transcendence is equally there in the form of Samadhi. All eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga are also integrated in the practices.
- As we navigate towards the spiritual qualities of the heart of oneness, compassion, courage & clarity, the ethical mindset gets inculcated in the employees and the HR managers. The result of spiritual qualities creates a sense of discrimination or Viveka in us to use our discretion in proper conduct.

Holistic benefits: Heartfulness interventions can indeed have significant benefits for HR managers and organizational wellbeing. By incorporating principles of heartfulness, HR managers can adopt a more holistic and empathetic approach to problem-solving and decision-making, which can lead to enhanced qualitative output and a healthier work environment. Here are some ways in which heartfulness interventions can benefit HR managers and the organization as a whole:

1. Empathetic problem-solving: Heartfulness encourages individuals to approach problems with empathy and compassion. HR managers can better understand the needs and concerns of employees, leading to more effective conflict-resolution.
2. Focus on collective well-being: instead of solely focusing on individual performance metrics, heartfulness intervention promotes a collective responsibility for the common good of the organization. HR managers can foster a sense of community and collaboration among employees, leading to a more supportive and cohesive work environment.
3. Stress reduction and mental well-being: Heartfulness meditation can help employees and HR managers manage stress more effectively. By promoting mental well-being, HR managers can contribute to higher job satisfaction and overall productivity within the organization.
4. Enhanced communication and trust: Open communication and trust are essential components of a healthy workplace culture. Heartfulness intervention encourages honest and open communication, which can strengthen relationships between HR managers and employees, as well as among team members.
5. Promotion of work-life balance: Heartfulness practices emphasize the importance of balance and harmony in life. HR managers can support employees in achieving a healthy work-life balance, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention rates.

Methodology:

Heartfulness meditation practices help in creating a spiritually creative workplace using practical tools. The practical part of implementation of Heartfulness practices for women employees at the workplace or near their home is made possible with the help of Heartfulness meditation trainers. These trainers are available free of cost, and many are available in various towns and cities across the globe.

The Heartfulness@work ^{xxxviii} workshops can be organized at the workplace for three days and then once a week a trainer can come to the premises and conduct meditation for the employees. Anyone can be a part of it with a willingness to transform from within.

Heartfulness@work is an initiative of the Heartfulness Institute, where comprehensive programs are offered to professionals and businesses. The programs are designed to promote emotional resilience, champion mental health, and encourage collaboration that transcends team boundaries, paving the way for holistic organizational growth. As individuals become better versions of themselves, they become more empathetic leaders, creative contributors, and positive corporate citizens. The result is a more supportive and productive work environment that increases overall well-being, job satisfaction, and organizational success.

- Heartfulness Institute is a global nonprofit organization that operates through a network of more than 15,000 certified trainers serving more than 2,000,000 meditators in 160+ countries.
- Recognizing that a calm and focused mind brings forth productivity, collaboration and innovation, the participants develop calmness, which leads to better concentration, balance, and true wellness of being.
- Heartfulness meditation helps reduce stress and brings peace, it helps sleep better, gives emotional strength, and keeps a person active throughout the day. Thus, Heartfulness meditation can help employees find a balance first within and then it expands in their work culture as well.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Challenges: While incorporating Heartfulness meditation in management offers numerous benefits, there may be challenges faced in terms of cultural resistance, time constraint and skepticism.
- Opportunities: Trainers available at no cost to the organization, enhanced well-being and productivity, positive workplace culture, helping employees and HR managers with ethical behavior.

Conclusion

HR managers when trained in Heartfulness meditation practices will be able to inculcate the ethical dimension in the workplace as Heartfulness Meditation fosters a deep sense of introspection and self-awareness, leading to a more conscientious and ethically aligned workforce. Incorporating Heartfulness intervention into HR practices can lead to a more positive and inclusive organizational culture, ultimately enhancing both qualitative output and overall well-being. The paper concludes by emphasizing the potential of Heartfulness practices to not only benefit individuals within an organization but also contribute to a more sustainable and ethically grounded corporate landscape, aligning HR practices with the broader goals of societal well-being and sustainable development.

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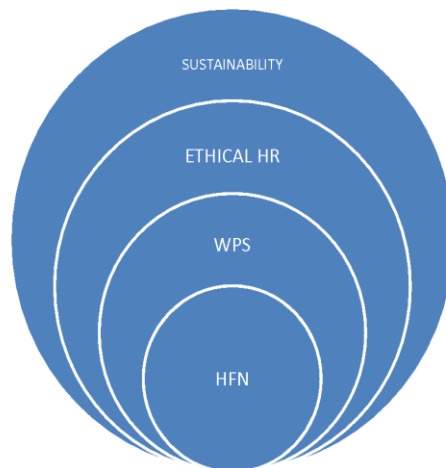


Fig1- The process of effectiveness goes from inside out.

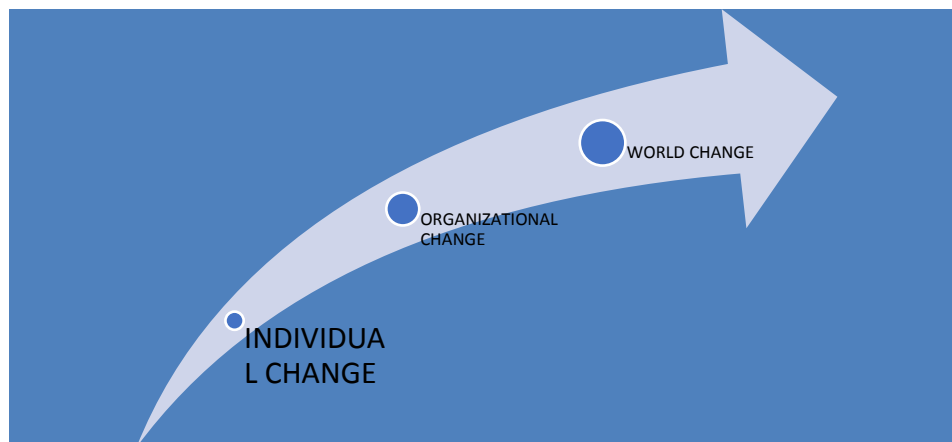


Fig 2 – Transformation starts at an individual level.

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