BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON ADDRESSING SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN THE WORKPLACE[*]

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Abstract

Social challenges in the workplace refer to common problems concerning about the social behaviours which is important for employees to cooperate and interact with each other in the workplace. Buddhism takes a positive approach to social challenges, creating good and fair opportunities for all beings and promotes a specific function in mental cultivation practices for every employee in the workplace. This study is a sort of applied Buddhism takes a new footstep from a Buddhist perspective. This paper is only modified and customised with Buddhist philosophy on social behaviours for the present-day workplaces of the 21st century.

Keywords: social challenges, workplace, Buddhism, business, behaviour

Aim and Objective

The purpose of this study is to explore social challenges which are facing by employees in various ways in businesses and other industries around the world operating to follow economic globalisation from a Buddhist perspective. By continuously exploring human nature and behaviour, Buddhism can empower employees to overcome social barriers in the workplace and tend to create productive and innovative workplaces.

Research Question or Hypothesis

Some classical scholars have consistently focused towards only into Buddhist goal of spiritual liberation, making it a single imperative and they do not seem to want Buddhism to be integrated into the dynamics of the remodeling. In the 21st century, when everything is moving in balance with globalization, it is very necessary to sustain the positive social behaviors offered by Buddhism before reaching a liberation. This paper interrogates to which extent the assumptions expressed by Buddhism can resolve the social challenges of today's workplaces and examines how applied Buddhism can take a ride along with the dynamics of modernization.

Materials and Methods

The central theme of this paper, workplace social challenges, takes a sampling frame of career related websites and the top job and employment websites in 2022, and the topics with the most overlap are randomly selected. Then, nine selected topics are arranged in pairs with remedies to the interpretation from the Buddhist sacred texts such as *Pāli*, *Aṭṭhakathā* and *Ṭīkā*.

Introduction

The workplace typically has different personalities of individual worker and it creates an interactive environment with different communication styles and perspectives. These inconsistencies are a potential source of social challenges and can ultimately lead to social dissatisfaction through inattention to those involved in the workplace. Although it is important for all employees to be treated fairly and feel secure in the workplace, some common problems of harassment or discrimination still experienced employees are common social challenges of a growing concern in 21st century workplaces.

Buddhist perspectives focus on transforming the behavior and personality of the individual to have a positive mind and healthy behavior. As one of the most important factors, Buddhism is especially worrying about causing harm to someone. Making harm towards others includes physical abuse as well as emotional abuse to others. The genuine Buddhists who fully embrace the idea of karma's manipulation accordingly forbid the commission of any evil by observing and avoiding toxic behavior that someone dislikes.

It is assumed that workplace social challenges which mostly arise in the arguing of conflicting behaviors and perceptions among employees, it needs to understand how Buddhism can fix them. Buddhism teaches that every individual to practice self-control over his or her own emotions and begins to positively behave toward others in interpersonal relationships, thus paving a way to effectively solve common issues of today's workplaces.

What are the social challenges?

Nowadays social challenges are growing concerns in our society. Social challenges refer to problems interacting with people in society or engaging in regular social behaviour. Social challenges are common problems in today's society and challenges that many people in society are trying to solve them. Social challenges are antagonistic situations or behaviours at the personal and work level[1].

We always tend to focus mainly on the physical health of employees, but when it comes to mental health, we often forget an important factor that deserves more attention. It is a behavioural health. A typical workplace focuses on inter-organisational or inter-business connectivity and communication. One thing is for sure, an employee's behavioural health can have a significant impact on his success. A social problem is an issue that directly affects many people in society. It is a series of common problems in modern society and problems that many people are trying to solve. It is often the result of factors beyond the individual's control. Social challenges are the source of conflicting opinions about the moral rightness or wrongness of decisions about the private life or social life of individuals.

What is a workplace?

A workplace is a place of work for both the employer and the employees where business operations, tasks and functional responsibilities are performed. Different types of workplaces vary from their nature of industry and can be in a building or non-permanently constructed workplace. Workplaces can be easily adjusted or movable and some people work on different time and days in various places. Advances in technology have allowed people to work virtually as a new type of workplace.

The workplace can naturally take on various settings, such as in an office or outside of the dorm where the business is located, or remotely while traveling. Whatever the terms, the best workplaces are characterised by creating an efficient and inventive environment where employees are equipped with the tools they need. As an employer, knowing what the workplace is and how to design a successful and creative environment are important factors when running a business [2].

Purpose of Workplace

Workplaces assist businesses in effectively delivering their goods and services to customers. Employee working in the industry need to have new ideas to offer their customers. They use their workspace to co-create and coordinate to deliver the products and services to their

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[1] https://www.vantagefit.io/blog/social-challenges-in-the-workplace/amp

[2] http://surl.li/cuacy.com

clients. It mainly depends on the effectiveness and usefulness of workplaces for a business to run well, grow up and stand for a long time. Therefore, the main purpose of the workplace is to assist the businesses in order to reach the market with the goods and services produced by the businesses on time and to distribute them with the least problems.

Buddhist Approach to Social Challenges

Buddhism emphasises the characteristics and functional aspects of social ethics and trainings, and focuses primarily on dealing with social challenges. Concerning about social aspects in everyone's daily life, Buddhism examines good and hygienic ways to approach and encourage them to achieve social objectives by means of healthy behaviours. Buddhist ideals highlight the individual's mental thoughts as a means of behavioural aspects and promote the individual's peace of mind and long-term personal development. The view of Buddhism, where one's mind always delights in evil[1], by consciously resisting any evil mental obstacles, changes someone's behaviour and mental assumptions, thus provides a good approach to the development of the individual's social life.

Social Challenges in the Workplace

As mentioned above, social challenges are undeniably relevant to individuals' behavioural health. There is a connection between the human behaviour, mind and spirit concerning about the behavioural health. It includes the individual's living, eating habits etc., and consistently shows how these behaviours affect an individual's physical or mental health.

Today's workforce is constantly demanding changed, and it needs to be agile and receptive. Those who ignore changes will be the ones holding back the progress of the business. The right attitude towards a workplace is an important factor in a harmonious workplace that we want to address, and inappropriate behaviour needs to be immediately eliminated. Social challenges affect employees' behavioural health and their success. Sometimes it affects an employee's social cohesion, and collective effectiveness in the workplace.

The modern workplace faces many different challenges. According to WHO, the determinants of social challenges affecting behavioural health in the workplace include the worker's social and economic environment, topics related domestic violence, physical environment, air quality, human characteristics to their social environment, race and ethnicity, gender and sex roles, poverty and deprivation, communication gap between social networks.[2]

Individual Antagonism

Animosity or hostility between workers in the workplace leads to long-term antagonistic relationships and negative outcomes. It usually occurs between employees, by focusing on a common benefit of an employee in the workplace, the competitive performance of that desire leads to mutual dissatisfaction and friction with each other. A workplace where employees are disharmonious with each other always shows instability in the workplace and causes a negative incomplete completion of relevant tasks, which is especially damaging to the interests of the business.

Remedy

Buddhism always discourages and suppresses the aggressive behaviours such as anger, hatred, hostility that usually arise in the minds of human beings. Buddhism involves controlling

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[1] Khp, 34-35
[2] http://surl.li/cuacy.com

the angry mind in various ways, such as replacing it with wholesome emotions. Mental defilements such as anger are prevented from arising in their minds or are carefully monitored to detect their entry. There are various methods such as breaking down the mental impurity that is anger in the moment of entry. In addition to this, not only is it often expressed to be aware of the negative effects of anger [1], but it also focuses on the causes of anger. Buddhism always limits what a person really deserves or what is appropriate and strongly forbids excessive greed which is a powerful deterrent to the unlawful acquisition of property. Buddhism advocates for the worldly people to keep and cultivate a positive attitude [2], always works to eliminate anger and hostility among employees.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict can occur in any situation between two or more people or between colleagues at work. This can turn into mutual hostility over time if left unresolved. Interpersonal conflicts in the workplace are also problematic in some situations. In the workplace, different employees come from different backgrounds, so it is difficult for them to easily adapt to each other. Conflict initiated in the workplace not only hinders the completion of work, but also leads to emotional harm to the worker. A social problem that causes a disturbance in the mind is truly awful enough to overwhelm a person's cognition and emotions and become toxic.

Remedy

A Buddhist approach to conflict resolution is to attempt to overcome the root causes of conflict and resolve it by requiring an intervening focus on a multifaceted social process. The *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya* describes two underlying causes for conflicts. First of all, conflicts arise as worldly people cling to unwholesome thoughts and fall under their dominant manipulation. This means that these so-called argumentative conflicts are caused by unwholesome mental impurities because it has not rationally proper consideration with consciousness. Secondly, such thoughts lead to jealousy and avarice when a person desperately takes possession of a quality or thing that another has, and sees himself as worthy of that possession [3]. This shows that the misperception of evil leads to the perception of evil, and the formation of evil consequences with regard to that evil. Being jealous on the quality or his benefits of a colleague who is working together in the workplace can cause conflict, thus by understanding and accepting everyone's karmic interest [4], one should try to prevent his jealousy and overcome interpersonal conflict.

Communication Gap

Communication serves as a critical element of a productive workplace. It is a sort of employee involvement which promotes effective communication and improves common goals that are relevant to all colleagues in the workplace. Communication means mutual understanding, negotiations and discussion among colleagues in a workplace. Effective communication creates a meaningful circumstance for all interacting parties. However, some people are extremely reluctant to express their ideas among colleagues. It always starts with not being able to speak up for fear of getting it wrong, and it leads to a more distant and icy relationship. This hinders mutual understanding among colleagues and makes it difficult to build up a mutual trust.

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[1] Netti, 182

[2] M -a I, 167

[3] M I 145-150

[4] A III, 67

Remedy

Buddhism revolves around interpersonal communications and is guided as a way of eternally practicing the beneficial coexistence of human beings. The Eight-Fold Path [1], a set of authentic Buddhist practices, provide effective results for the communication sector to be applied in the workplace. When dealing with the colleagues who work together in the workplace as a means of a righteous perspective (*sammā diṭṭhi*) from the beginning, they will have righteous understanding (*sammā saṅkappa*). When communicating by means of righteous speech with them, righteous effort (*sammā vāyama*) will also be performed when interacting with them, so every action will be a righteous action (*sammā kammanta*). Therefore, the Buddhist aspects of communication are the steps that must be followed by other righteous aspects through righteousness mindfulness. (*sammā samādhi*)

Rumors and Gossip

Gossip is a bad habit that occurs in most workplaces. The colleagues in a workplace usually target someone who can draw their attention and criticise him from a negative perspective. By saying that, they often conclude the conversation by turning a partial apparent truth into authentic reality. The habit of making negative conversation and judgments over colleagues within a workplace not only affects the tasks of the workplace, but also wipe out the unity and friendship among workforce. By misrepresenting, the person who was being told also feels hurt and feels inferior which disturbs the positive correlation, making it more difficult to create a relationship and can weaken it.

Remedy

Buddhist precepts principally include the four unwholesome actions of speech as fundamental components. The four unwholesome actions of speech that are to be avoided [2] are lying (*musā* vācā), slander (*pisuna vācā*), harsh speech (*pharusa vācā*), and malicious gossip (*samphapplāpa*). This is what Buddhism forbids because they are toxic hindrances without having any benefits in a verbal commutative environment. Therefore, everyone must avoid any kind of talk that destroys anyone's interests, such as rumors and gossip, which are the growth of hatred and enmity. Instead, it should strive to bring positive warmth and relationships to the workplace by speaking truthfully sweet words.

Bullying or Harassment

Workplace bullying or harassment is a common and dangerous behaviour that occurs among the staffs and colleagues. Bullying and harassment include various forms of teasing or threatening others, hating someone and blasphemy. It is often done by means of a person or group of people who target and focus on those who do not conform to their way of thinking or the standards set by them. Sometimes it is into the forms of mobbing and bullying within a workplace, hostile aggression against an individual, or torturing a person to the measure of mentally withered. Moreover, bullying occasionally occurs when a person is targeted and harassed in a number of ways, such as cheating on work assignments or giving unclear instructions in the workplace.

Remedy

Buddhism's assumptions and ideals are commonly based on *kamma* theory. No one can deny that Buddhism clearly accepts evil practices such as bullying and harassment as actions that cause harm to others. *Abhiṇhā Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya* describes about *Kamma* that

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[1] S III, 10
[2] Vi V, 227

"*Kammassakomhi   Kammadāyādo   Kammayoni   Kammabandhu   Kammappaṭissaraṇo"*.
[1](*Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā Vol:1*). In English, "Kamma is our own property. *Kamma* is our inheritance. *Kamma* is a cause. *Kamma* is our relative. Whether it is good or bad, everyone will inherit the *kamma* and its consequences." Buddhism states that a person who commits an evil deed must suffer the consequences of his deed. Therefore, the basic principles of Buddhism not only discourage bullying and harassment, but also always prevent bullying as the consequences of doing so will come back bitterly to the perpetrator.

Employment Discrimination

The employee or job applicant is commonly being discriminated by means of citizenship, genetic information, age, gender, disability, sexuality, religion, ethnicity or nationality, complexions. In relation to above mentioned items, excluding potential employees during the recruitment period, denial of certain employee's compensation or benefits, paying different salaries to qualified employees in the same position are often associated with job discrimination.

Remedy

Buddhism believes that there is no fundamental discrepancy between any human beings. It accepts that every individual should be appreciated and reasonably treated with justice. Concerning about the theoretical concepts of Buddhism, there are two types of truth namely: apparent truth (*sammuti saccā)* and authentic truth (*paramattha saccā*). The *sammuti saccā* is commonly accepted from the perspective of the ordinary layman, while the *paramattha saccā* is approached from the perspective of the *ariyā*, who strives to reach the ultimate goal of Buddhism, liberation (*Nibbāna*). Buddhism mainly promotes the *paramatthā saccā*, thus making it especially acceptable. According to the *Paramattha saccā*, the physical body that is "I" does not really exist. In fact, there is only a name for the law to be called. Even these laws are being used as truth to facilitate human relationships and activities. Once it can understand this basic concept, the greedy mind, hatred, pride and jealousy that refers to and acts with the mindset of "I" will disappear and meaningless. If there is no physical substance "I", other forms of personal creatures are just the names of laws and nature without any essence.

Performance Issues

Workplace performance indicates a critical condition for a productive workplace and it greatly depends on physical health and intellectual ability of each worker in the workplace. In addition, an energetic worker with a healthy mind will be active at his work and able to perform his assigned tasks effectively. On the other hand, it can be caused by such a way as a worker who is underperforming or in capability at work, who has a lack of management relating his social stress or workload stress, who is not caring about his physical health and who has seriously a drug and alcohol addiction. Such a worker who has trapped in one of these consequences can experience a failure of his work performance as well as a lack of work pleasure.

Remedy

Buddhism has many applicable solutions regarding the factors that affect the performance of workers in the workplace. Buddhism urges us to constantly watch out for all kinds of metal formations that dominates and manipulates all sentient beings, and serves as to be free from the unhealthy and toxic emotions. This can be said that Buddhism offers to manage emotional responses that can have a reliable impact on the employee's performance. In addition, Buddhism emphasises the health awareness of all human beings and instructs them to prevent and give up of

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[1] A -a I, 38

unhealthy habits. [1] Buddhism not only prohibits the use of alcohol and other intoxicants as a basic ethical value [2], but has always identified its harmful effects. Following these tips will help the employees to be an energetic and efficient in the workplace.

Lack of Discipline

Every workplace supports the central objectives of businesses to accomplish their specific tasks. It is an important responsibility of all businesses to regulate and enforce a specific rule because it is based on the collective power of the workers. As the employees come from different regions and are born and lived in different customs and environments, anyone should not be favored in the workplace. Under the control of an appropriate and fair regulatory framework, all of them have equal opportunities to perform the tasks required by every business. A workplace where a rigid discipline is not firmly established leads to failure with weak influence on employees and collapse to achieve the common goals of the business.

Remedy

It can clearly be seen that Buddhism always prioritises and maintains the good discipline of individual employee in the workplace. In the *Maṅgala Sutta of Khuddaka Nikāya* describes that "*vinayo ca susikkhito*". [3] It means to practice and a good discipline. It assists the employees to maintain good discipline, which is important among staffs in the workplace by looking for the long-term development of a productive workplace. The *Siṅgāla Sutta* distinctly describes employers' and employees' responsibilities.[4] Buddhist practices first aid to cultivate good disciplines and ethics for an employee before customising the actual regulations in the workplace. Therefore, such an employee who embraces and strongly believes in Buddhism and practices it will have a good reputation about keeping with discipline in the workplace, and will definitely be an outstanding staff who is faithful in his duties assigned by the job and is full of capacity.

Demotivation

Achieving active spirit and motivation in the workplace of individual workers is an important factor for the improvement of a productive workplace. Lack of employee motivation can reduce business productivity which is directly related to missing the intended targets. An employee may sometimes experience negative self-esteem such as losing any hope about his job satisfaction. When an employee does not have enough time and energy to invest in his workplace, it simultaneously leads to depression. Such negativity is usually due to the instability and insecurity of the workplace, lack of improvement, being unable to determine indiscriminately towards a valid career, involving in conflict with colleagues etc.

Remedy

Buddhism constantly encourages and seeks effective ways to improve everyone's ability. *Dhammapada* of *Khuddaka Nikāya* describes that "*Attāhi attano nātho, kohi nātho parosiyā*".[5] The meaning is "one is indeed one's own lord". In addition, we must rely on ourselves in everything, we must strive our best and believe in our ability. In other words, the Buddha said that if we want the best outcome, every individual must first work diligently towards the goal our

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[1] A III, 70
[2] A -a I, 97
[3] Khp, 34-35
[4] D III, 155
[5] Khp, 94

desire, and use our own intelligence to do the best we can. Buddhism strongly encourages the motivation to believe in one's own ability and make effort to do one's best using all kinds of diligence in everything.[1]

Discussion

Social challenges are closely related to an individual's behavioural health and affect the success of an employee [2]. The term "behavioral health" includes all contributors which encompass to mental health, including habits and other external forces. Social challenges can be regards as harmful behaviors that are not only personally poisonous but also occupationally dangerous. The behavioral health of employees is seriously an important factor that deserves special attention. As a workplace is based on cooperative and collaborative communication, an employee's behavioral health can have a significant impact on his or her success in life.

The topics of workplace social challenges collected in this paper are different in nature with each other. On analysis of social challenges in the workplace, it can be found three types as; self-caused related workplace dissatisfaction, other-caused related social problems and both self-caused and other-caused related social problems. Lack of Discipline, Performance Issues and Demotivation are self-caused related topics that lead to workplace dissatisfaction and social problems. Rumours and Gossip and Employment Discrimination are other-caused related social problems. Individual Antagonism, Personal Conflict and Communication Gap are both self-caused and other-caused related social problems.

In this paper, as the topics related social challenges are different in general nature, the Buddhist ways of remedy addressing them are not identical with each other, taking divergent schemes of Buddhist theoretical concepts. When the remedies are also classified into three different groups; by getting rid of mental impurities, by means of *kamma* theory and by assigning Buddhist ethics and theories. In detail, Individual Antagonism is resolved by getting rid of mental impurities.   Bullying and Harassment is addressed by applying the *Kamma* theory. Communication Gap, Rumours and Gossip, Employment Discrimination, Performance Issues, Lack of Discipline, Demotivation is resolved by assigning Buddhist ethics and theories.

In summary, if an employer encounters any social challenge at his or her work, even if it is happened by other-caused, he or she should assign Buddhist ethics and theories such as forgiveness and tolerance without criticising the perpetrator and by removing the negative impurities that arise from social challenges. By understanding and accepting the *Kamma* theory, an employee can prevent from the occurrence of negative social challenges, and not only improve the business industry, but also improve his or her position at work level.

Conclusion

`The various social challenges that have arisen alongside economic globalisation have greatly affected the interpersonal development of employees in the workplace. Nowadays, employers are becoming more critical and understanding of the social challenges faced by workers in the workplace around the world. These problems create a demotivated and disconsolate workforce and drain the country's GDP through significant losses in productivity and work hours.

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[1] A -a, 129

[2] https://www.vantagefit.io/blog/social-challenges-in-the-workplace/amp

Buddhism has always explored human nature such as a person's way of thinking, feeling and acting and encouraged a true humanity. One of Buddhist attitudes is that all social problems and conflicts can be resolved by means of positive reconciliation because Buddhism believes that the root cause of all social problems is human depravity. Negative mental defilements such as greed, hatred, delusion, anxiety, jealousy are the root causes of all negative problems such as social challenges. Their worst characteristics are to remove as much as possible from evil thoughts that arise in our minds, which tend to harm others. This is the basis of the Buddhist ethics in relation to social reconciliation.

Buddhist ideals urge us to always be vigilant and refrain from causing emotional or physical abuse to others. This is fully related to the karmic theory proposed by Buddhism, which holds that hurting others brings back a reciprocal effect to the doer. Therefore, a good social communication is supported by not causing harm to others in the field of social services such as workplace.

Acknowledgement

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