

Acceptance of Mental Health Off Day in Malaysian Job Culture

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Abstract

The work life balance in Malaysian working culture had been showing concerning signs where the lack of the health working culture had triggered the impact on the mental state of the Malaysian employees. In the same direction, the initiative of the mental health off day had been introduced to promote better wellbeing practice within the employees. However, the employers in Malaysia are still having lack of the action into the initiative of the mental health off days due to multiple concerns. Based on the key findings, there is major highlights on the concerns for the employers towards the understanding on the mental health off day initiative which include the productivity impact, financial impact as well as the shift in the expectations for the employees. However, the employees had viewed the mental health off day as strong positive initiatives that could become a game changer for the working culture in Malaysia. It is believed that the mental health off day will become the big step for the Malaysian working culture to move into the positive direction to promote better mental health among the employees. Therefore, the recommendation had been clear where the mental health off day should be supported by employers and employees to provide the positive impact towards the development of the motivation and retention of the employees.

Keywords: Mental health off day; Malaysian employees; working culture; wellbeing

Introduction

The working environment had been very competitive in the job market not excluding the job market in Malaysia. Malaysia had been voted as one of the highest stress levels at workplace in the working culture which slowly gaining more attention on addressing this issues and concerns (Greenwood & Anas, 2021). This had been contributed by the fact of the lack of work life balance in Malaysia which had becoming the norm in the expectations from the employers. Some of the examples to be addressed include the long working hours, working during off time and lack of guidance in the working environment (Bronkhorst et al., 2015). With this, there is significant input from the employees highlighting the lack of rest obtained by the group of employees raising major concerns for the employees to have good mental health.

The lack of emphasize on the mental health importance had slowly gather more attention among the employers where some of the employers are starting to take initiative to provide additional time off and even off day for the employees to enjoy as part of the recognition on the mental health off day (Elraz, 2017). The mental health off day provide the definition on the additional time provided for the employees to have rest mentally and physically to refresh the mind and body to improve the wellbeing of the employees. This had been crucial for the to maintain the motivation and productivity for the employees to ensure the positive contribution to the workplace.

Despite the increasing initiatives to provide the mental health off day event in Malaysia, the address for the need to provide mental health off day still not being widely organized within the employers in Malaysia as it is still being considered as uncommon practice in the Malaysian

working culture (Yu, Park & Hyun, 2021). This had been contributed by the fact where the employers having concerns to lose out in terms of productivity when comes to providing additional day off for the employees as well as the reluctant to provide additional leverage and flexibility for the employees due to the traditional mindset of the Malaysian working culture (Bufquin et al., 2021). With this, the practice of mental health off day is still far being seen to be implemented in the level of employers. This had lead to the problem statement for the study to further understand the challenges for the employers and feedback for the employees when comes to the initiative of the mental health off day within the organization. This will help the outcome of the study to understand the story from both side of the perspective which include the view from the employers and employees. The research objective had been designed to provide the target study to explore and investigate the recommendation on the mental health off day initiatives for the working culture in Malaysia.

Key Findings

The first highlight will look into the exploration of the development of strategic within the group of employers in Malaysia. To put into the major fact, one of the contributing reasons that lead to the employers to prefer the job market in Malaysia especially from the foreign MNCs had been the high productivity of the employees. This includes the extra miles contributed from the employees becoming the norm and culture in the working environment in Malaysia. Therefore, in the first look the suggestion to provide the flexibility on the off day does not fit he philosophy of the employers which will affect the performance and productivity negatively in an organization.

Despite the concerns on the productivity, the employers also emphasize the highlight on the financial impact. This is because the off day or leave will be directly translated to expenses in terms of salaries and wages when comes to the expenses impact in the income statement. In other words, the initiative of mental health off day which create additional off days for the employees will become a financial burden for the business. In other words, the financial statement recognized this as the cost and expense which create to the concerns to the stakeholders and shareholders on the business performance. In addition, the mental health off day may not be applicable for those that are working on significant roles which does not

conveniently allowing off day to happen which will then force the organization to incurred additional overtime payout for the employees. This had significantly drawn the picture to address the coConcerns for the employers to take the initiative that will put thei rfinacnail health into further risk.

Moreover, the employers are believed to be having the concerns on the expectations of the employees where the initiative of providing the mental health off day had been targeted to provide the additional time off to create the rest and peace of mind to heal the mental sate of the employees which should be viewed as an additional bonus initiative provided from the employers. However, the leverage provided may ended up becoming an expectations for the employees forcing the employers to shift in the approach in the designation of the benefits for the employees where the question of the mental health off day to become mandatory practice will become very doubtful. The impact may not be affecting the individual organization but also at the job market and culture within Malaysia which will become concerning for majority of the employers to allow this new trend to take over the mindset of the employees.

Shifting the focus to the point of view of the employees, there is different say and opinion from the employees' perspective. The mental health off day had been positively viewed by the employees stating that the additional time off can be used to improve the work life balance for the employees as many countries had been increasing the initiative to provide higher flexibility and work life balance for the employees. For instance, country like Germany had been limiting the employees to work 35 hours per week where the additional hours should be compensate accordingly but not highly encouraged. On the other hand, the working culture in France had make it illegal for the employees to send business emails outside working hours to promote work life balance. With this absence of those similar initiatives in the Malaysian working culture, the mental health off day had been view as the upper hand advantage to provide the alternative to motivate the employees to go further motivating their job with the employers.

Besides, the working culture in Malaysia had been frequently deemed as unhealthy due to the high stress level as well as the long working hours committed by the employees. It is also understood that these expectations had been relay down from the management of the employers to push for higher performance a productivity for the employees. Therefore, his had slowly become the norm within the Malaysia job culture inducing the negative

impact towards the mindset of the employees in the working environment. This will eventually lead to the burnout, decrease in motivation and drop in focus when delivering the quality of the roles and responsibilities in the long term. With the high commitment from the employees, the employees viewed the mental health off day not only as the day off to heal their mental but also an additional day off to perform personal duties and family matters due to the miss out in working long hours.

In addition, the mental health off day had been frequently viewed as part of the appreciation from the employers to the employees as the additional time off day provide the meaningful rest time for the employees to have their improvement in terms of the work life balance. This is because that many employers are actually having a hard time to show the appreciation and gratitude to the employees through the communication, but actions speak louder than the words which lead to the mental health off day initiative as part of the action to show evidence towards the employees in expressing the “thank you” for their hard work and contribution to the business. With the special treatment, the employees had also felt being special to become part of the team within an organization leading to not only higher motivation but also increase the retention of the employees.

Conclusion

From here, it had become obvious that the initiative of the mental health off day provides both challenges and benefits for employers and employees. The employers had been supporting such initiative at the first place, but the concerning impacts had put a lot of pressure for the employers to walk the talk to do the implementation of the mental health off day event for the employees. On the other hand, the positive impact towards the employees had no long in doubt where the employees will be improving their mental state with such initiatives but the lack of emphasize, and initiatives provided from the employer’s side had led to the high concerns in the working culture in Malaysia. In country like US, the mental health off day had become common among the major MNCs but the similar practice still hardly being felt in the Malaysian working culture. With this, the clear recommendation had been drawn from the outcome of this study where the employers are still being advised to promote the practice on the mental health off day initiative in the job market. This had been triggered by the reasons where there is need of the direct shift into the job culture in Malaysia due to the lack of initiative to

induce healthy working culture in Malaysia. The mental health off day could be the very first big step to ensure the Malaysian job culture to move into the positive direction for the future of the employment market.

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