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**ORGANIZATIONAL MINDFULNESS: IMPERATIVE FOR EFFECTIVENESS IN  
AN ERA OF CHANGE IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper discusses the role of organizational mindfulness as a basis for effectiveness during change events or situations which may have possible negative impacts on the wellbeing and operations of the Tourism Industry. The concerns of the paper captured the conceptualization of mindfulness as an organizational level concept, and its application within the context of the social learning theory. Thus the objectives of the paper bothered on the implications of organizational mindfulness based on the social learning theory, the conceptualization of both concepts – organizational mindfulness and effectiveness, and the role of organizational mindfulness in the actualization of effectiveness within the context of the change – such as that necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A position was established based on literature review, on the imperatives of considerations in the viability of change actions. It was thereupon concluded that mindfulness at the organizational level is vital for addressing the change behaviour and goals of the organization and as such necessary for sustaining the functions of Tourism organizations during change related situations or events; thereby enhancing the effectiveness of organization.*

**KEYWORDS:** Organizational change, mindfulness, effectiveness, social cognitive theory, COVID-19, Tourism

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The world awoke to an unprecedented and rude intrusion of the Covid-19 virus. This pandemic rendered and incapacitated the operations and modus operandi of all sectors of the global economy. It has been documented severally that the Tourism Industry is one of the worst hit pandemics (Babatunde, 2020; Hall, Scott and Gosling, 2020, Obiora and Kpakol, 2015). Crespi-Cladera, Martin-Oliver and Paschual-Fuster (2021) further acknowledge that despite the importance of the Tourism Industry to the global economy, the pandemic drastically caused an unprecedented impact. This therefore raises the awareness for new modes of work organisation and orientation especially for this so important industry, in such a way that a total and comprehensive pattern of organisational processes that involves a combined and communal effort of all members of the organisation is a sine qua non for the Tourism Industry. These Collective actions are such that emphasize on cohesion and sustained collaboration. Related activities such as shared responsibilities, cooperation, and support are often identified as a function of regulatory policies and organizational control mechanisms, which are enacted to channel the resources and collectives (groups, units or departments) of the organization, as well as the organization itself as a group, towards the attainment of specific goals and objectives (Wilensky, 2016; Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007; Okpu and Obiora, 2015). However, the

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COVID-19 pandemic being a recent change events, have necessitated restructuring actions that have impacted on the cohesiveness of most organizations (Cookson & Milne, 2020), including the Tourism Industry. Gregory (2000) observed that organizations are changing and a lot of these changes bother on work systems and the way organizations are re-organizing and formatting their infrastructure and functions to accommodate the new normal or era of change. While such decisions are often based on the need for maintaining their market positions, most organizations are noted to have failed as a result of incompatible designs, lack of supportive infrastructure and as such outcomes of ineffectiveness (Obiora and Okpu, 2015; Obiora and Jaja, 2015).

Bhave, Teo and Dalal (2020) described the COVID-19 pandemic as a change factor which has not only exposed the weak structures of most organizations but has also placed substantial strain on the functions and operations of others. In their study Franck (2020) observed that apart from the growing emphasis on technological systems and the digitization of work processes, a lot of organizations appear to trying out various forms of online collaborative work activities, teleworking and digital connective platforms. These appear to impinge on the cohesive features of work, rearranging communication designs and work exchanges in ways that hold serious implications for their wellbeing. Chaskalson (2011) in their study demonstrated the need for shared consciousness or what Aviles and Dent (2015) conceptualized as organizational mindfulness. Aviles and Dent (2015) argued that organizational mindfulness reflects a position on collective choice and values which emphasize on organizational actions and features such as resilience, deference to expertise, attention to operations, the preoccupation with failure, and the reluctance to simplify.

Studies (Kiken & Shook, 2011; Chia, 2014; Gartner, 2013; Goldman, Taylor & Wolberger, 2018) suggest that organizational mindfulness provides a decision model which aids in the choices and actions of the organization – bridging functional expectations with the changes and emerges gaps in the environment of the organization. Higgs and Rowland (2010) stated that mindfulness is reflexive in nature as it assesses the conditions of the organization in line with its goals, advancing suitable options and considerations that are designed to drive the organizations effectiveness within its context. One finds that mindfulness serves as a lens through which organizations are able to address the gaps within their systems and infrastructure and the limitations these could pose in line with planned lines of action or change behaviour (Hyland, Andrew & Mills, 2015).

While most studies on mindfulness within the Tourism Industry basically assessed the role it plays in improving visitors awareness, understanding, and support for attraction sites (Frauman and Norman, 2004; Moscardo and Pearce; 1986), others have related mindfulness as positive individual antecedents to personal health improvements (Kabat-Zinn, 2015), but the exact nature to organizational processes in the Tourism industry is still unclear. It appears therefore that no insightful study to ascertain business operations and enhancement especially in this new era of COVID-19, of mindfulness within the Tourism Industry has been conducted. This paper is thus, justified on the basis that scarce attention has been channelled towards addressing the role of organizational mindfulness in the actualization of organizational effectiveness in the Tourism Industry; especially in view of the implications of change decisions by same organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it contributes through its availing of content that addresses change behaviour based on the specified context.

The objectives of the paper are thus to:

- i. Discuss the implications of organizational mindfulness for organizations based on the social cognitive theory.
- ii. Discuss the concepts of organizational mindfulness and organizational effectiveness drawing on the change era of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. Discuss the role of organizational mindfulness in the actualization of organizational effectiveness within the context of change such as that necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

In assessing the role of organizational mindfulness in the effectiveness of organizations, the social cognitive theory is adopted. The social cognitive theory as propounded by Bandura (2000) identifies learning actions within social contexts, especially learning that is hinged on the behaviour of significant others within the same context, as imperative to the developing the capabilities and required levels of competencies for the survival and effectiveness of organizations. Sutcliff (2000) argued that while organizations learn at different pace and have various ways of interpreting their experiences, even within the same context; thus influencing their behaviour and line of actions. However, Kaplan (2008) opined that where knowledge acquired is integrated adequately, organizations will be able to develop the required skills set and also engage in suitable actions that match the gaps and expectations of their environment. Corroborating this view, Higgs and Rowland (2010) argued that the observations of others must involve comparisons of their own capacities with those of the organization. According to White and Dacin (2003), learning should draw not only on the experiences of others but also on their responses and existing capacities.

In relation to organizational mindfulness, the social cognitive theory proffers considerations of context as a basis for the application of learning or knowledge forms. While at the individual level, the theory specifies the adoption or change of behaviour as emerging from the observations of others within specific social settings, at the organizational level. Altizer (2017) argued that issues such as infrastructure, technology, skills and even features such as the level of diversity within the context of interest could pose a major concern in the modification of behaviour. Altizer (2017) opined that mindfulness depicts a rather cautious and considerate approach towards organizational plans and actions – drawing on the possibilities of failure (preoccupation with failure), emphasis on resilience, the focus on competency in actions (deference to expertise), the reluctance to simplify and the attention to operations.

Bandura et al (2000) noted that, much like the social cognitive theory, the early conceptualizations of mindfulness were such that anchored on the individual level – highlighting on features such as alertness and sensitivity to differing contexts; recent applications of the concept at the organizational level however have advanced these features from a more specific stance – detailing the concerns of organizational level decisions and actions. In view of the foregoing tenets and position of the social cognitive theory with regards to the implications of organizational mindfulness for organizations, one finds that the theory offers a reinforcing position on the need for organizations to not only learn but to be sensitive

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about their contexts and to be conscious of not only the short-term outcomes of their change related actions but also the long-term implications of such as well (Bandura, 2000). The theory as such suggests mindfulness as a condition for positive turnouts of learning and the application of knowledge generated in addressing the specific concerns and interests of the organization.

### **Nature and Role of Organizational Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a continuous process – bothering on the viability of decisions and plans of the organization (Chia, 2014). Valentine, Godkin and Varca (2010) opined that to be mindful suggests an openness to various possibilities, both positive and negative. According to Charoensukmongkoi (2017), it is the expression of consciousness of the implications of actions and the acknowledgement of what lies at stake in the choices and decisions of the organization. Organizational mindfulness therefore describes the deliberate application of caution, thought and considerations of the actions, decisions and behaviour of the organization in view of specific interests or issues. The need for mindfulness is one which admits to the possibility of mistakes and failure, and hence, acts in line with addressing possible deficiencies in plans of action (Gartner, 2013). Charoensukmongkoi (2017) opined that mindfulness is therefore such that conditions the behaviour of the organization in line with its dominant features and focuses on driving its goals by either enhancing its existing capacities (technological, administrative, functional) or adopting work and operational systems that align with its existing structure and functional architecture.

In their investigation, Brown, Ryan and Creswell (2007) described the key characteristic of mindful organizations as one that is cohesive and collaborative. According to the author, leadership within these kinds of organizations are inclusive and supportive. This way, ideas are pooled from all levels and functions within the organization – boosting creativity and innovativeness. Brown et al (2007) observed that while actions such as the preoccupation with failure may appear pessimistic, the concern however is on identifying and addressing the organizations weaknesses through the focus on the possibility of unfavourable outcomes due to overlooked deficiencies or gaps in the capabilities or capacities of the organization. Chia (2014) argued that in stressing on failure or its possibilities, drives the organization towards ensuring alternative actions or plans are in place to either circumvent failure outcomes or ensure their effects are cushioned through supportive backup mechanisms or plans.

In discussing mindfulness, Aviles and Dent (2015) argued that the application of feedback mechanisms which enable reflexivity in organizational actions and practices is imperative for advancing consonance between the organization and its environment. Harari (2018) agrees with this position in stating that the expressions of mindfulness at the organizational level of analysis, details precise actions manifested through structures, policies and work designs that tend to emphasize on flexibility and reflexive thought. Baer (2003) noted that the consciousness at the collective stage requires reinforcement and a reminder of group values through established frameworks that serve to impose on individual thought lines, expectations and actions. Thus mindfulness as Wilensky (2016) argues is not a voluntary action of agreement and focus expressed by members of the organization – but rather one reinforced through the strategic structuring of relationships, systems, policies and processes that place strong regards and emphasis on various actions, tendencies and behaviour.

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## **Organizational Effectiveness**

Effectiveness according to Rukhmani, Ramesh and Jayakrishnan (2010), is the capacity for the accomplishment and actualization of goals or objectives. The concept of effectiveness differs substantially from that of performance or competitiveness. While performance according to Kwan and Walker (2003), identifies with a general wellbeing and the demonstration of functionality, and competitiveness that reflects the strength in market positioning in comparison to rival organizations, effectiveness is the organizations ability to materialize its projected goals – thus, the defining feature of effectiveness is its purposefulness or its emphasis on goals (Mouzias, 2006). By organizational effectiveness, one therefore describes the organizations ability to meet with its goals – such as quality standards, timely delivery of products or services, financial targets etc. Zheng, Yang and McLean (2010) argued that to be effective involves results. The author argues that while some studies often draw in the issue of capabilities or competencies, effectiveness is rather relative in its features or approach – stressing more on the achievement of targets rather than any particular set of tools or methods. Thus, that which produces results or enables the achievement of goals is that which is effective.

Effectiveness within the dispensation of change implies the capacity to maintain or to be consistent in outcome or value. That is to say, the organization is able to sail through the tides and turbulence of change within its context and yet continue to satisfy its customers; hence to survive, organizations need to be effective during change events. According to Rula (2017) such is actualized through their market consistency and ability to continually meet with the needs and concerns of their clients or customers. Franck (2020) argued that while the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged and in many ways disrupted business and production activities, some organizations were able to sustain their activities through shifts in structures, supply and delivery alternatives, partnerships with stakeholders such as the government, and other key industry players. These created flexibility and ensured the robustness of operations which in turn served in enhancing the effectiveness of these organizations (European Commission, 2020; Manzoor, 2011; Heilman & Kennedy-Phillips, 2011). These organizations survived and remained relevant as a result of their understanding of the context and the bridging of functional as well as operational gaps through increased networking and in most cases, the development of technological systems that advanced operations in ways unperturbed by the changes in the environment.

## **Organizational mindfulness and Organizational Effectiveness**

The conceptualizations of both concepts – organizational mindfulness and effectiveness; clarifies on their manifestations and related features and serves in the identification of the link between both. Muthiah and Huang (2006) argued that within most industries, organizations differ on several levels and features. What may be considered as applicable to one organization may not be suitable to another – even within the same context. This as Shiva and Suar (2010) argued owes to the distinct features that shape and drive the functionality of most organizations. The out turn of the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed noted discrepancies in the outcome of organizational choices – where some organizations were able to advance work through their focus on technological systems - using online video platforms such as Zoom; whereas others using the same platform struggled with its operations, losing time, money and resources and eventually failing to meet with planned goals and targets (Franck, 2020). Such actions

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demonstrate a lack of mindfulness; despite learning and knowledge acquisition, Chia (2014) argued that organizational mindfulness facilitates cross-checks of actions – facilitating yardsticks that determine the viability of a particular course of action. Mindfulness as such builds on issues related to context, capabilities, structures and even the suitability or specificity of methods or strategies.

In their research (Higgs & Rowland, 2010; Worren et al, 2002) showed that organizational mindfulness, through its deference to expertise, stresses more on facts and capabilities. This is as decisions are premised on supportive data and the aggregates developed in line with business goals. Aviles and Dent (2015) argued that when organizations are conscious and alert, options are often not advanced or avoided based on the success or failure of other organization; but rather based on the comparison of the organizations features and a thorough analysis of the features of the other organizations. Gartner (2013) suggested a similar perspective to mindfulness – dwelling on the development of technological systems and advancing the required features to support and drive its applications. Mindfulness as such is focused on addressing the various loopholes in the adoption of processes, knowledge, skills and even structure; its use is such that not only identifies the ways organizations could approach an issue but also the relevance or value of certain features to the organization. Organizational mindfulness is also proactive. Wilensky (2016) observed that in choices and decisions where organizations are mindful, long-term projections of benefits and repercussions of actions are also taken into consideration – thus, mindfulness is integrative in its approach towards change events and related actions.

## **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This theoretical paper has been found to be in support of the Social Cognitive Theory. The discussion established the fact that in this dispensation of the COVID-19 era, the essentials of mindfulness is paramount to the effectiveness of the Tourism Organisations. Theoretically, this research contributes to studies on mindfulness, which has been observed is critical for adaptability of the organisation to changes within and outside the milieu of the establishment. This study also highlights the key definitions and concepts associated with mindfulness and effectiveness.

This research provides an insight on how the Tourism Industry can survive changes brought about by the COVID-19 and it also offers a deep understanding on how Tourism practitioners, managers and executives can be successful in their businesses. From a practical point of view, it is relevant that owners and operators of Tourism organisations adapt to this paradigm shift in business processes to enable them become resilient to abrupt changes in their environment

## **CONCLUSION**

The adoption and development of structures, technological systems and processes in addressing change events and impacts, have in some scenarios worsened the situation in the Tourism Industry. While intentions could be described as good, the implications of incompatibility of organizational features with intended change related actions are such that could pose a major threat and lead to dissonance in the systems functions and operations. Organizational mindfulness as discussed is projected to provide the basis for organizational effectiveness through a more conscious and deliberate process of assessing the suitability of change actions

in view of existing organizational structures, capabilities and architecture. In this paper, a clear distinction is made between individual level mindfulness and collective consciousness (organizational mindfulness) with literature advanced in line with their manifestations. It is thus affirmed, drawing on the discussion of content, that mindfulness at the organizational level is vital for addressing the change behaviour and goals of the organization and as such necessary for sustaining the functions of the organization during change related situations or events; thereby enhancing the effectiveness of organization.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study was purely theoretical. From the preceding paragraphs, it is therefore recommended that in the change era that is necessitated by the COVID-19 virus, managers and chief executives of Tourism Organisations, should embed mindfulness in their operational procedures to enhance the effectiveness of their organisations, towards the achievement of their respective organisational objectives. Furthermore, since this study is basically theoretical, it is suggested that further empirical validation be made to ascertain the impact of mindfulness on organisational performance in the Tourism Industry and possibly other sectors of the economy

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