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# HAPPY, MINDFUL, AND PRODUCTIVE WORKERS

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## Introduction

Mindfulness is one of the key components of happiness, and it can be trained and developed like any other skill through sustained and diligent practice, according to both scientific and contemplative perspectives (Davidson & Schuyler, 2015; Nhat Hanh, 2006). The early roots of mindfulness stem from ancient Buddhist tradition, and it is present in some form in many of the world's greatest spiritual traditions (Levey & Levey, 2018). But before diving into the concept of mindfulness and its role in fostering positive mental states, let's focus first on what happiness stands for in this modern world, where this popular and often misunderstood word has begun to lose its meaning.



Since Martin Seligman's presidential address at the American Psychological Association Congress in 1998, the study of happiness has gained considerable momentum, occupying the spotlight in a new trend in scientific inquiry focused on the study of positive emotions, character, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikzenthmihalyi, 2000). However, happiness is a broad umbrella term with a myriad of different meanings that depend on cultural and philosophical interpretations (Diener et al., 2016).

Both social researchers and philosophers have usually addressed it from one of two main currents: the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives (Waterman, 1993). On the one hand, hedonia refers to satisfaction with life and the presence of more positive emotions than negative ones. It can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristippus, who taught that the ultimate goal of existence was to live as many pleasurable moments as possible (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic perspective is represented by the research on subjective wellbeing, which is built upon two correlated components: judgements of life satisfaction (assessed from specific life domains such as work, relationships, and others), and the predominant and sustained presence of positive feelings (Diener et al., 2016). On the other hand, eudaimonia refers to the actualization of our human potential, focusing on optimal functioning, personal growth, and the presence of a strong purpose in our life project. This line of thought stems from Aristotle's teachings about making an effort to live in accordance with our true selves or "daemon" (Waterman, 1993). It is exemplified by the research on personal and professional growth (Straume & Vittersø, 2014), identification and development of character strengths and values in action (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), psychological wellbeing (Ryff & Singer, 2008), and self-actualization (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Additionally, more integrative conceptualizations of happiness have also included interpersonal and societal dimensions proposing that the individual human being is always embedded in specific

social scenarios that have a powerful influence on individual perceptions, as well as the different temporal points of reference (past, present, and future) we can adopt when thinking about our own sense of wellbeing (Hervás & Vázquez, 2013).

Thus, we propose that happiness is a multifaceted construct that incorporates both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives of wellbeing at the individual, collective, and societal levels of analysis.

## Happy and Productive Workers

The study of happiness at work has been a source of great interest and debate throughout the history of psychology and management sciences. From the first studies by Hersey (1932), reporting on the positive relationship between daily experiences of positive emotions and performance, and by Kornhauser & Sharp (1932), reporting that individual assessments of happiness are not linked to performance and efficiency, a great deal of discussion and reflection on the relevance of wellbeing at work has yielded a large amount of evidence supporting the initial case for happy and productive workers.

The happy-and-productive workers thesis is considered the "Holy Grail" of management sciences. It proposes that, with equal working conditions, workers who are "happy" with their jobs should perform better, achieve more, and feel good while doing so, compared to their co-workers who are less happy (Wright & Cropanzano, 2007). Although there is a significant amount of evidence supporting this hypothesis (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001; Zelenski, Murphy, & Jenkins, 2008), it has received considerable skepticism and doubt, mainly because the majority of the studies supporting it have focused on a one-sided understanding of happiness, emphasizing the hedonic perspective by using measures such as job satisfaction and positive affect (e.g., Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2012).



In light of this criticism, researchers have refined the happy-and-productive workers hypothesis by integrating the two complementary perspectives of wellbeing, hedonic and eudaimonic. They differentiate pleasure and positive affect from interest and engagement as two different domains that function as two sides of the same coin. In a recent effort to incorporate an integrative approach to happiness and wellbeing at work, Peiró, Kozusznik, Molina, and Tordera (2019) explored the patterns of associations between different measures of happiness (incorporating both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives) and performance. They reported that the majority of the workers participating in the study were grouped in either the happy-unproductive or unhappy-productive quadrants. Moreover, their results suggested that workers can experience high hedonic happiness and low eudaimonic happiness simultaneously (and vice versa), and that eudemonic happiness is associated with better performance more often than hedonic happiness, thus showing the relevance of differentiating between the two perspectives. Along the same lines, Straume and Vittersø (2012) examined how different kinds of work episodes were related to different emotional experiences that represent different perspectives of happiness. They found that work episodes perceived as complex and difficult were associated with low levels of hedonic happiness and high levels of inspiration and engagement, that is, eudaimonic happiness. Completing the whole picture, they suggested that episodes of ease and relaxation were associated with higher levels of hedonic happiness and represented a distinct domain that is not necessarily related to personal growth and skill development. Therefore, we understand that both elements are relevant and necessary in obtaining a true happy-and-productive formula. That is, workers need challenges and difficult situations that allow them to test their skills and experience and personal and professional growth, as well as moments of relaxation and recovery through pleasant activities that can replenish both their physical and psychological energy (Bennett, Bakker, & Field, 2018). In a similar effort aimed at extending the happy-and-productive hypothesis, Peñalver, Salanova, Martínez, & Schaufeli (2017) tested the relationship between positive emotions and performance at the collective level of analysis, that is, in

work units and groups belonging to different organizations. They found that positive emotions fostered key group social resources such as cohesion, coordination, teamwork, and a supportive climate, which in turn boosted the groups' performance. Their results support the happy-and-productive hypothesis beyond the individual level, and they integrate new elements into the framework that enrich and explain the process embedded in the theory's pathways.

These findings shed light on the relevance of utilizing different conceptualizations and measures of happiness in a complementary way, as well as expanding the scope of analysis beyond the individual to better understand one of the basic pillars of Positive Psychology.

## Mindfulness and its Effects on Happiness

Mindfulness, understood as the inherent ability of the human mind to pay attention to both internal and external stimuli in the present moment with an open, curious, and accepting attitude (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2017), has burst onto the center stage as a main actor in scientific research and evidence-based practical applications. Only in 2018, there were more than 800 peer-reviewed publications on the topic, with the number continuing to rise each year (AMRA, 2020) Growing numbers of global companies are establishing the trend of making mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) available to their workforce as a strategy to prevent stress and enhance happiness and wellbeing (Good et al., 2016). MBIs are probably the most popular way of teaching mindfulness, engaging participants in meditation exercises and other practices that help them to cultivate mindfulness like any other skill. There are various forms of well-established evidence-based standardized programs, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR, Kabat-Zinn, 2013) mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal et al., 2001), or acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT, Hayes et al., 2006)).



However, the majority of the research and evidence-based applications of mindfulness have focused on an "extinguishing" model, emphasizing the elimination of maladaptive habits and outcomes such as stress, addictions, and behavioral problems, rather than cultivating and promoting wellbeing and healthy outcomes (Coo & Salanova, 2018; Garland et al., 2015). This approach is problematic because it leaves out some of the key elements of mindfulness from its origins in the Buddhist tradition, in other words, the intentional and deliberate cultivation of positive states of mind in order to promote personal growth and transformation (Lama & Cutler, 1998; Ricard, 2003).

Despite the explicit bias toward remediating negative outcomes, there is a growing body of evidence supporting the positive psychological effects of mindfulness interventions on the individuals who participate in different kinds of MBIs. For example, Brown & Ryan (2003) found that mindfulness is positively and significantly correlated with measures of both hedonic and eudaimonic happiness, and that on a daily basis having stronger and more frequent episodes of "being mindful" predicted more intense and frequent episodes of positive affect (hedonic happiness). In the same direction, participants in an MBI that focused on cognitive psychology and dealing with depressive symptomatology experienced increased levels of positive emotions after participating in the program (Geschwind, Peeters, Drukker, van Os, & Wichers, 2011).

Regarding the integration of both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of happiness, Hanley, Warner, and Garland (2014) found that individual mindfulness conceptualized as a trait was positively related to both dimensions of happiness, and that long-term practitioners of contemplative disciplines that encourage the development of mindfulness tend to experience higher levels of both hedonic and eudaimonic happiness. In addition, Garland, Farb, Goldin, and Fredrickson (2015) proposed that mindfulness as a process enhances both dimensions of happiness by facilitating the re-appraisal of adverse situations and enhancing the savoring of positive experiences, thus building a greater capacity to find meaning in difficult events and engage with our own lives in a more positive way. Later on, they supported these claims with evidence suggesting that mindfulness training

promotes upward spirals of both positive affect and cognition (Garland, Geschwind, Peeters, & Wichers, 2015), as well as more frequent use of positive reappraisal, which promotes mindfulness practice, completing the upward spiral (Garland, Kiken, Faurot, Palsson, & Gaylord, 2016). They called this proposal the "Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory" (Garland et al., 2015), which posits that by changing the way one pays attention to mental, emotional, and physical aspects of experience, mindfulness stimulates and enhances the natural human ability to re-interpret adverse events and discover and savor the positive elements still present in those moments. By cultivating positive re-interpretations and positive emotions, mindfulness establishes fertile soil for the construction of eudaimonic experiences that foster meaning, post-traumatic growth, resilience, and engagement with personal values and a well-lived life.

In light of this evidence, we can say that the relationship between mindfulness and happiness is somewhat well established in both theoretical and empirical terms. But what about MBIs at work?

## Mindfulness-based Interventions at Work- Effects on Happiness and Performance

MBIs at work are on the rise, and there is promising initial evidence of their efficacy as a practical, evidence-based strategy to promote psychosocial health, happiness, and performance at work (Bartlett et al., 2019). The benefits of cultivating mindfulness at work range from reducing stress and depressive symptoms to enhancing different aspects of happiness, social relations, and even job performance (Good et al., 2016). Considering that approximately 40% of the adult workforce in the western world experience some form of stress at work, and roughly 10% of the same population will experience stress-derived health complications (Eurofund, 2018; Saad, 2017), the surge of interest in MBIs at work opens up a hopeful and optimistic opportunity to remedy this great affliction, described by the World Health Organization as one of the main challenges at the beginning of the 21st century World Health Organization, 2007). Moreover, the development and evaluation of soundly-conducted MBIs at work may be an interesting approach to not only ameliorate work-related stress and its associated negative outcomes, but also to cultivate happiness and thriving in a meaningful and lasting way that positively impacts society at its core through the organizations that symbolize one of its most relevant building blocks (Huppert & So, 2013).



MBIs at work have been positively associated with at least 31 different measures of wellbeing and/or performance in a recent systematic review of quasi-experimental field studies and randomized-controlled studies (Lomas et al., 2017). In the following paragraphs, we will summarize the most relevant findings from intervention evaluation studies supporting the efficacy of MBIs at work as meaningful, evidence-based strategies to promote happiness and performance at work, focusing on positive outcomes. The reviewed studies are gathered and presented in Table 1. To begin with, Shonin, Van Gordon, Dunn, Singh, and Griffiths (2014) conducted an eight-week long MBI for office-based middle managers (N = 152), and they found that, after completing the intervention program, participants reported higher levels of job satisfaction and performance rated by their employers. In a similar fashion, Kersemaekers, Rupprecht, Wittmann, and Tamdjidi (2018) designed a specific workplace mindfulness training and deployed it in four different companies (N = 425 workers). Participants reported increased levels of positive emotions, a better team climate, and increased productivity up to a month after participating in the program.

In smaller scale studies, Chin, Slutsky, Raye, and Creswell (2019) reported that 60 workers from a digital marketing firm who participated in a six-week MBI delivered through a combination of group and individual meetings, as well as video classes, experienced positive affect more frequently and coped better with stress throughout their workday. Along the same lines, Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, and Lang (2013) showed that participants from a wide range of occupations (N = 64 workers) who undertook a two-week mindfulness self-training via smartphone app reported higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of emotional exhaustion than the participants in the waiting

list control group during the training period. In another study conducted by Aikens et al. (2014) at a multinational company, participants (N = 44 workers) in an eight-week online MBI reported higher levels of resiliency and vigor than the participants allocated to a waiting list control group up to six months after finishing the training program. Last but not least, the authors of this chapter (Coo & Salanova, 2018) found that healthcare professionals (N = 19 workers) who participated in a three-week MBI reported increased levels of happiness, work engagement, and job performance upon finishing the intervention program.

Beyond the scope of interventions and experimental studies, there are some findings worthy of notice. In a recent study, Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, and Sels (2013) examined an eight-week MBI program deployed in different organizations and teams to explore the relationship between mindfulness and work engagement. They found that authenticity and authentic behavior mediated the dynamic relationship between mindfulness and work engagement, which means that the progressive growth of mindfulness practice over time positively impacts work engagement through the clarification of personal values and sense of self, and by consistently acting in accordance with them. From a different approach, Malinowski & Lim (2015) examined the relationship between mindfulness, work engagement, and happiness from a theoretical perspective. They found that mindfulness is positively related to both work engagement and happiness through the mediation of positive job-related affect, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy, which means that mindfulness training shows promising potential to improve happiness at work via more frequent experiences of positive emotions at work and the development of psychological capital. Other findings worth noting in the area of theoretical associations present scientific evidence supporting positive associations between mindfulness and workers' and supervisors' job performance (Dane & Brummel, 2013; Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014; Reb, Samantha, Chintakananda, & Bhave, 2015), academic performance and GPA (Shao & Skarlicki, 2009), and safety behaviors in risky work environments (Zhang & Wu, 2014).



All of these results provide a solid working base supporting the positive healthy effects of MBIs at work. The reported outcomes address both hedonic (i.e., job satisfaction, positive affect, positive emotions) and eudaimonic (i.e., engagement, vigor, self-efficacy) aspects of happiness.

In addition to the studies mentioned, a large body of evidence supporting the case for MBIs as an effective strategy to reduce negative outcomes, such as stress and burnout, has been well-documented and reviewed in various meta-analytical studies (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012; Heckenberg, Eddy, Kent, & Wright, 2018; Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015; Mesmer-Magnus, Manapragada, Viswesvaran, & Allen, 2017). Considering both perspectives, healthy (promoting positive outcomes) and extinguishing (reducing negative outcomes), we can say that MBIs are a sound evidence-based strategy for the promotion of wellbeing from an integral approach that effectively deals with both aspects.

In the next section, we address practical applications and suggestions for the implementation of MBIs at work.

## Happy, Mindful and Productive Workers: Practical Applications and Suggestions

Up to this point, scientific evidence supports the use of MBIs as increasingly useful and effective strategies to promote psychosocial health and wellbeing at work. In order to coherently integrate MBIs in the many different processes that make up the complex activity of managing an organization, it is necessary to begin with an established set of principles and ideas. This is where the Healthy and Resilient Organizations Model (HERO; Salanova, Llorens, Cifre, & Martinez, 2012) comes into play. The HERO model is a heuristic management model that proposes that, in order to achieve excellent performance and financial results in a sustainable manner, organizations need to

engage in systematic, planned, and sustained actions to promote their workers' psychosocial health and wellbeing. One of the most relevant ways to achieve this is through healthy organizational practices and interventions, such as mindfulness training for employees and leaders (Salanova, Llorens, Acosta, & Torrente, 2013; Hernández-Vargas et al., 2014). In this regard, the HERO model could be a useful framework to facilitate the integration of mindfulness training into the flow of HR training needs detection and planning.

From a complementary perspective, it is also relevant to point out that MBIs are a cost-effective strategy to address chronic stress-related ailments such as depressive symptoms and relapse (Kuyken et al., 2015) and back pain (Herman et al., 2017) in clinical populations. Taking into account that the estimated costs derived from work-related stress issues range from 70 billion USD per year, according to the most conservative estimations in the UK, to 300 billion US dollars per year, according to the most inclusive estimations in the USA (EU-OSHA, 2014), it is likely that MBIs at work are a good investment, not only in terms of workers' psychosocial health and wellbeing, but also in terms of firms' financial performance.

However, it is necessary to address certain points in order to ensure proper implementation and maximize the probability of success when delivering MBIs at work. It is clear that MBIs can be implemented in a variety of platforms and formats (Hülsheger et al., 2013; Kersemaekers et al., 2018; Wolever et al., 2012) in order to fit the particular characteristics and needs of each organization. Thus, it is important to establish a clear and strong alignment with the organization's specific challenges, goals, and core values, and be familiar with the aspects of organizational culture that make each organization unique (Rupprecht, Koole, Chaskalson, Tamdjidi, & West, 2019). Following this idea, perhaps the most relevant aspect of MBI implementation is promoting mindfulness at work for the right reasons, that is, understanding that it is not a panacea that will miraculously turn every person into a happy, productive, and compliant employee. It is extremely important to address the underlying structural causes of stress, and allowing for space and time to develop a solid practical foundation that will have a sustained positive impact on overall employee wellbeing. Accordingly, shorter versions of different standardized MBIs serve as a good starting point to introduce mindfulness practice as a relevant resource (Hülsheger, 2015), but sustained practice and integration into daily routines is the only way to ensure lasting positive effects (Kabat-Zinn, 2017).



From the perspective of practitioners and mindfulness teachers, it is important to adhere to good practice guidelines, ensuring that ethical and quality standards are met (UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teachers, 2011). Upholding quality standards is a necessary baseline condition to advance in the field of high quality and rigorous scientific evidence and professional practice. Moreover, the use of existing tools to evaluate program fidelity, adherence, and teaching competence is highly recommended (Crane & Kuyken, 2019).

Another important aspect to pay attention to is the fact that mindfulness can be understood and developed as a multilevel intervention. This means that both researchers and practitioners should not only aim to implement processes focused on developing mindfulness as an individual practice and resource, but they should also include the collective (team, unit, area) and organizational perspectives as well, working alongside team and area managers to develop policies and healthy organizational practicesthat actively support the inclusion of mindfulness as a widely available resource included in daily activities and social interaction situations. The integration of different intervention levels can be a sound strategy to promote effective training transfer to work-related daily activities, because it encourages the inclusion and practice of individual skills and resources in tasks and processes carried out at the level of teams and groups. It also supports these interactions with explicit policies and resources such as dedicated space and time to engage in both individual and collective practice.

In terms of specific practical applications, we acknowledge that mindfulness training at work can be beneficial to HR Managers and policy makers in the following ways:

- Mindfulness training can be an effective strategy to promote happiness, increase performance, and ameliorate stress at work.
- MBIs should be aligned with each organization's core values and vision and mission statement to facilitate the integration of mindfulness into organizational culture.
- MBIs should consistently be deployed across all levels of the organization, emphasizing the critical role of leaders and managers in the adoption, development, and integration of mindfulness-based practices into team and area processes and customs.
- MBIs should not be seen as a panacea or an easy way to deal with relevant organizational challenges that often require seeking the underlying causes of complex problems rather than sticking to superficial and symptomatic interpretations.
- It is highly recommended to look for certified teachers and trainers who adhere to their selected MBI expertise training standards, and evaluate the implementation process as well the desired outcomes of the intervention project.

## Challenges and Future Research Questions

Having addressed the theoretical and empirical evidence supporting MBIs at work to promote employee wellbeing from a health perspective, it is time to consider the challenges and questions the future holds.

Perhaps one of the most important open fields when it comes to the development of MBIs at work has to do with going beyond the individual scope of training and skill development and starting to integrate and analyze social and organizational dimensions into the research and implementation process. There is mixed evidence about the social effects of mindfulness. Some evidence points in the direction of great benefits in terms of prosocial behaviors and improved social relationships (Berry et al., 2018; Montes-Maroto, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Antino, & Gil, 2018), whereas other sources point out that the social impact of mindfulness practices is rather weak and/or affected by publication bias (Kreplin, Farias, & Brazil, 2018).



Nevertheless, one of the main teaching points in popular MBIs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR; (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) is to shift the excessive focus on oneself towards others and balance the search for personal wellbeing with the search for the wellbeing of others through the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion (Gilbert, 2019). The potential is definitely there, and questions are beginning to arise from the existing body of evidence, such as what the role of mindfulness is in work teams and organizations (Yu & Zellmer-bruhn, 2018); what kinds of organizational environments and cultures foster the appearance of pro-social behaviors and social climates stemming from mindfulness practice (Lawrie, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2018); and what roles are played by mindfulness and compassionate leadership, as well as their potential impact on different organizational factors (Reb et al., 2014). Thus, one of the main challenges is to extend mindfulness research beyond individual benefits and outcomes toward social and systemic perspectives.

The second avenue of challenges and questions has to do with the development of sound theoretical models that integrate mindfulness with different work-related frameworks and factors, focusing on their interactions. From this perspective, it is extremely relevant to develop well-designed multilevel studies incorporating collective and organizational levels of analysis. This will allow for a better understanding of mindfulness in the organizational context and the necessary conditions for its development, in addition to identifying possible undesired effects and pitfalls derived from counterintuitive findings (Rupprecht et al., 2019).

A third avenue has to do with understanding the context and specificity when developing and implementing MBIs at work or answering the question of what works for whom in which circumstances (Nielsen & Miraglia, 2016). The same solution does not work for everyone, and this is

particularly true when it comes to organizations that come in all kinds of colors and sizes. Distinct cultural aspects, working conditions, and specific industries require a tailored approach that is able to clearly identify the overarching common principles of successful intervention processes and distinguish them from the factors that need special attention to be properly contextualized. An MBI for healthcare professionals working in a hospital will be quite different from an MBI for factory workers in a car manufacturing firm, despite the evident common ground in terms of the content and rationale of the selected intervention program.

A fourth avenue has to do with developing high-standard random controlled trials to evaluate the effects of MBIs at work. This includes comparing different program lengths, employing active control groups, and evaluating interventions' effects by means of ecological momentary assessment tools and objective measures to identify underlying mechanisms accounting for positive effects.

A fifth avenue has to do with developing and validating adaptations of standardized MBIs to working populations. Most, if not all, of the widely popular standardized MBI programs were originally developed according to the needs and reality of clinical populations. This is problematic because the needs and characteristics of healthy populations are quite different. Thus, it is necessary to make an effort in terms of the translation and adaptation of original MBI programs to the characteristics of the working environment and the specific needs of different collectives of workers.

The sixth and final avenue is aimed at exploring the sustainability of MBIs' effects over time. The majority of the available studies fail to explore long-term effects of participating in MBIs and incorporating mindfulness practices at work as a routine task (Lomas et al., 2017). Thus, we still do not have empirical evidence about this topic, and the question of long-term effects remains open. Using a more fine-grained approach, more specific questions arise, such as: what is the right length and frequency of an MBI? Can the same programs be repeated with innovative variations and mixtures? Finding answers to these questions is extremely relevant for successful implementation on a larger scale (Gilbert et al., 2018).



## Final Thoughts

Throughout this chapter we have briefly explored a scientific approach to happiness and wellbeing at work from the perspective of mindfulness, understanding it to be one of many valid strategies to foster these elements in all kinds of organizations and help them address the many challenges they face.

Perhaps one of the most relevant and transversal aspects of mindfulness and MBIs is the fact that they can become a facilitator component of any kind of organizational training and learning strategy, because they develop and enhance essential psychological processes such as attention and self-regulation, which can have a profound impact on many different practical applications (Saks & Gruman, 2015).

In addition, it is extremely relevant to explore the effects mindful organizations may have on their extended environment and society as a whole. The potential to embody a psychological and behavioral transformation capable of addressing the biggest challenges humanity has to face is there, and we just need the right mindset and attitude to make it come true. Mindfulness can truly be the gateway that connects us with our best possible self, individually and collectively.

Last but not least, the exploration of paths through which mindfulness may promote health, resiliency, and wellbeing at work is a field of science still in its infancy. Its great promise might be realized if we diligently continue to cultivate discovery by means of rigorous scientific research, meaningful dialogue with ancient contemplative traditions of wisdom, and sound and ethically deployed practical implementations in the world of organizations.

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