Authentic leadership benefits from mindfulness

Mindfulness can help managers to develop authentic leadership. Researchers at Maastricht University and Kühne Logistics University in Hamburg have discovered that managers’ authentic leadership increased after an app-based mindfulness intervention. The intervention also had a positive effect on employees’ justice perceptions. The Maastricht researchers’ findings were recently published in the Journal of Business and Psychology.

Leadership plays an important role in daily life. Many of the recent scandals at large companies can be attributed to irresponsible behaviour on the part of their top executives. Since then, many organisations have gone in search of a more positive and ethical type of leadership. One of these alternatives is known as ‘authentic leadership’. ‘It’s very important not to confuse this term with authenticity,’ says lead researcher Dr. Annika Nübold of Maastricht University. ‘You can be a very authentic but unpleasant person. Authentic leadership is mainly about self-awareness, transparency in relationships, taking account of different perspectives, and an ethical attitude. The scientific literature shows that authentic leadership has a positive impact on employees’ commitment, productivity and wellbeing.’ The Maastricht researchers therefore set out to answer the questions ‘What are personal predictors of authentic leadership and how can you promote it?’

Mindfulness
To find the answers, the research team turned to mindfulness. ‘Mindfulness is a very good match with authentic leadership,’ Annika Nübold says. ‘It’s about adopting an attentive, non-judgemental awareness of the present moment and also about being aware of the world around you. This is why we wanted to see if mindfulness can contribute to promoting authentic leadership.’

In an initial study of 209 leaders, the researchers found a positive relation between mindfulness in leaders as a naturally occurring trait and authentic leadership. In a second study, they wanted to test whether leaders can also improve their authentic leadership through a mindfulness intervention. The researchers recruited 173 pairs of leaders and followers from countries including Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia and the United States. Half of the leaders then used the mindfulness app produced by the US-British company Headspace for a period of 30 days.

At the end of the training period, authentic leadership was more strongly evident in this intervention group, both in their own eyes and according to their employees. For Dr. Niels Van Quaquebeke, Professor of Leadership and
Organizational Behavior at Kühne Logistics University in Hamburg and co-author of the study, this is an indication of the effectiveness of mindfulness training. ‘As a discipline, we know a lot about good leadership, but surprisingly little about how to train it. Our study shows that good leadership is not only linked to mindfulness, but also that you can train it professionally. We found there seems to be a lot of potential in it, because it even worked with a mobile app.’

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Contact for scientific information
Dr. Niels Van Quaquebeke
Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior
Kühne Logistics University
Niels.Quaquebeke@the-klu.org

About KLU
Kühne Logistics University is a private university located in Hamburg's HafenCity. The independent, state-certified university focuses on the areas of logistics and management. With one BSc and three MSc degree programs, a doctoral program, and a part-time Executive MBA, KLU offers its 350 full-time students a high level of specialization and excellent learning conditions. In open, customized management seminar series, industry specialists and managers benefit from the application of academic findings to practical issues. KLU has an international team of 23 professors who teach in English. The programs are oriented toward students from Germany and abroad. Research at KLU is concentrated on the Key Competence Areas of Digital Transformation, Creating Value, and Sustainability for the benefit of transportation, global logistics, and supply chain management. In 2017, KLU was granted the right to confer PhD degrees, making it one of only 15 among the 118 private universities in Germany permitted to confer their own PhDs. In the newest CHE university rankings, KLU obtained the highest ranking in all major criteria. For more information, visit www.the-klu.org

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