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A Scoping Review on Kindness in the Work Environment

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Abstract
The paper aims to provide new, theoretical insights on kindness at work to counter bullying on the job. Studies have shown that a range of kindness acts and activities will boost happiness and job satisfaction at work and spillover to the home. Based on the research objectives, the findings identified elements of kindness and unkindness and the built environment's effects on work happiness. The scoping review method and PRISMA analysis revealed that kindness in the work environment depends on the organizational culture, leadership, and organization size. Organizational leaders' exemplary behavior sets the kindness culture towards kindness and happiness at work. The study limitation was the timeframe. Thus, a survey is recommended for empirical evidence to support the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Keywords: Kindness; Civility; Bullying; Built Environment

1.0 Introduction
The Digital Age and the pandemic lockdowns in the past two years have reduced face-to-face human interactions. Electronic devices and gadgets have aggravated the situation by limiting workplace interpersonal relationships, particularly among the younger generations. Now that we are in the endemic phase, face-to-face interactions have almost normalized, especially in the workplace. However, certain practices post-pandemic, for instance, social distancing, is still practiced among individuals where employee relationships and human sociology have become awkward. Adjusting to the freedom of pre-pandemic and endemic phases will take time as the coronavirus cases are continually being updated by the Ministry of Health, Malaysia.

Nonetheless, in the work environment, communication continues to rely on popular texting applications, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and so on, thus creating a gap in collegiality, civility, and kindness among employees. The act of kindness has become an elusive behavior or trait, particularly at work. Studies have shown that a range of kind acts and activities will boost happiness in the workplace (Layous, 2019). Individual differences among adult employees indicate negative organizational culture and weak leadership (Reizer, 2019). The paper aims to identify elements of kindness or non-kindness in the workplace and elucidate the effects of cheerful built environment design on the employees' wellbeing through a scoping review technique.

1.1 Research objectives and questions
Kindness at work has eroded with time. Hence, the study's objectives were twofold; to identify elements of kindness or unkindness at work and to determine the office-built environment as a conducive space to promote kindness and happiness on the job. The research questions were, firstly, what were the kindness (or unkind) acts experienced by the employees at work? Secondly, what built environment (or office infrastructure) has made them happy at work? The following section is a literature review that formed the basis for the data for analyses and responses to the research questions.

2.0 Literature Review
The flow of the literature reviewed will be based on the keyword searches on kindness at work, incivility at work, and the conducive workspace that builds an environment for happiness at work.

2.1 Kindness and Incivility at Work
The new employees' first impression when he or they begin their first day of work requires kindness in the form of being cordial and courteous. Being considerate by the supervisor and their new colleagues will make the newbies feel they belong to the organization. For mid-career and senior employees, maintaining being kind at work would depend on the organizational culture and leadership. Happiness at work will flow into the employees' personal lives, as posited by Rowland and Curry (2019), where a range of kind activities will boost happiness.

This study used the attachment theory with the notion that the ability to build close personal relations may profoundly impact one's functioning in various interpersonal and social domains (Reizer, 2019; Rowland & Curry, 2019). Similarly, a study by Li et al. (2021) too evoked almost similar parameters but from the standpoint of how and why the supervisors behave in a certain way. The harmonious family environment positively influences the supervisors' attitudes and behavior on kindness and how they treat their subordinates at work. In layman's terms, being kind and courteous are internalized behaviors and values at home.

Organizational cynicism was another variable or term serendipitously found during the scoping review. According to Durrah et al. (2019), organizational cynicism is the feeling of dissatisfaction with the organization. Employees believe the organization's management lacks honesty, justice, and transparency in decision-making. Simply put, the organization's management has not been kind nor civil in human resource management. In addition to the paper's literature reviewed and further studies, organizational cynicism has been reported as widespread among global entities (ibid). Thus there is a reasonable justification for exploring this issue. To reiterate, Durrah et al. (2019) ideally put a statement that supports the research problem "As academicians, we are always in search of studies which can be helpful for people to understand, analyze and perform better. There is always a need to study different management aspects in different cultural environments".

2.2 The Conducive Work Space and Built Environment for Happiness at Work
The conducive space to work depends on the occupation. For this paper, the workspace is the office that forms part of the overall built environment. In understanding the term, 'built environment,' Kaklauskas and Gudauskas (2016) defined built environment as referring to "the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to neighborhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure." That said, an organization's-built environment is developed to satisfy the company's business activities where employees' needs can be physiologically or socially fulfilled (ibid). In other words, employees want their built environment to be attractive and accessible with well-developed infrastructure to work and perform at work. The influence of environmental design on people's wellbeing and productivity has been well studied in occupational settings such as offices, hospitals, university campuses, etcetera (Peters & D'Penna, 2020). However, the built environment at the university impacts the emotional stress, happiness, stimulation, cognitive function, social support, belonging, places to wordy or work, lighting, and ventilation (ibid). The benefits for the workers' well-being from installing and retro-fitting green infrastructure (Cinderby & Bagwell, 2018) should be in the organization's strategic plan. Cinderby and Bagwell (2018) reported that providing accessible green space in office settings improved morale, team interactions, workplace satisfaction, and happiness. The relationship between the built environment and green spaces in the workplace positively impacts the employees' mental wellbeing, quality of life, and job satisfaction (McFarland, 2017). Hence, there is no doubt that the office, the workstation, and the overall workplace space affect the employees' moods. In other words, a positive office vibe affects the rest of the human resources at the workplace.

Aside from the standard physical workspace design, happiness on the job in Malaysia mainly is the freedom of religious practices (Mohd Kasmuri et al., 2021) by providing a good area for prayers. Nwachukwu et al. (2021) study showed that employee engagement at work could be promoted if employees were more focused, energetic, enthusiastic, and cheerful to work if the physical areas were conducive to religiosity.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Design
The study uses the scoping review technique to synthesize and map the literature on kindness in the workplace. The scoping review is exploratory (JBI, 2015) but fits the paper's objectives. Moreover, scoping the literature will provide the parameters to identify key concepts and research gaps. The justification for the scoping review is "when a body of literature has not yet comprehensively reviewed or exhibits

a large, complex or heterogeneous nature not amenable to a more precise systematic review." The study's methodology in using a scoping review, alternatively known as a scoping study, is apt at this preliminary stage where rigorous literature review will be narrowed to the relevant few that support the research gap and objectives. Nevertheless, what exactly is a scoping review or study? To reiterate Daudt et al. (2013) in Pham et al. (2014), "A scoping review is defined as a type of research synthesis that aims to 'map the literature on a particular topic or research area and provide an opportunity to identify key concepts; gaps in the research; and types and sources of evidence to inform practice, policymaking, and research."

That said, prior readings on the kindness topic began in late 2019 to formulate a working paper for a students' event management course. At the preliminary stage, a scoping review allows for a focused and narrow literature search to fit the research objectives and derive the research questions. In Colquhoun et al. (2014), "The scoping review has become increasingly popular as a knowledge synthesis." Similarly, the same study design will be used such that an intensive and rigorous search of these keywords; kindness and civility, including synonyms, for example, compassionate, courtesy, favor, cordial, and friendly. The antonyms for kindness were also ferreted with words such as cruel, inconsiderate, mean, nasty, harsh, etcetera. These keywords' searches were then correlated to the work and built environments. These steps were the protocol undertaken by two reviewers following a similar guide advocated by Peters et al. (2015). The systematic conduct included concise titles and background content. The literature searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases. The illustration of the keyword searches is shown in Figure 1. With no publication period constraint, 100 relevant studies of controversial benefits, including grey literature, were systematically reviewed, of which only 20 fulfill the eligibility criteria for the gaps and research objectives. The eligibility criteria were similar to Tricco et al. (2016).
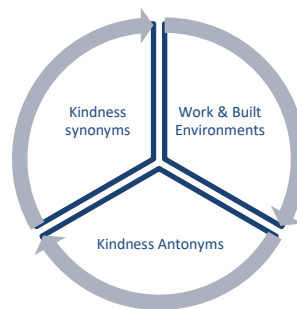

Fig. 1: Illustration of the keyword search process

Google Scholar is used as the database search will elicit relevant scholarly materials that may not be included in Scopus or Web of Science (WoS). However, for this paper, the analyses will only use data from Scopus and WoS as there are indexing duplications.

3.2 Data Analyses
The "scoped" literature was analyzed based on the inclusion criteria of types of organization and employees, the concept of kindness or civility and unkindness or incivility, and the effects of work happiness relative to the built environment design. Other search inclusions were the keywords' interchangeable terms and antonyms. The approach to searching in scoping reviews is the three-step method recommended in the standard JBI (Joanna Briggs Institute) systematic reviews by Peters et al. (2021). The updated JBI guidance for scoping reviews is aligned with the PRISMA-SCR to ensure consistent reporting (ibid) (Fig. 2).
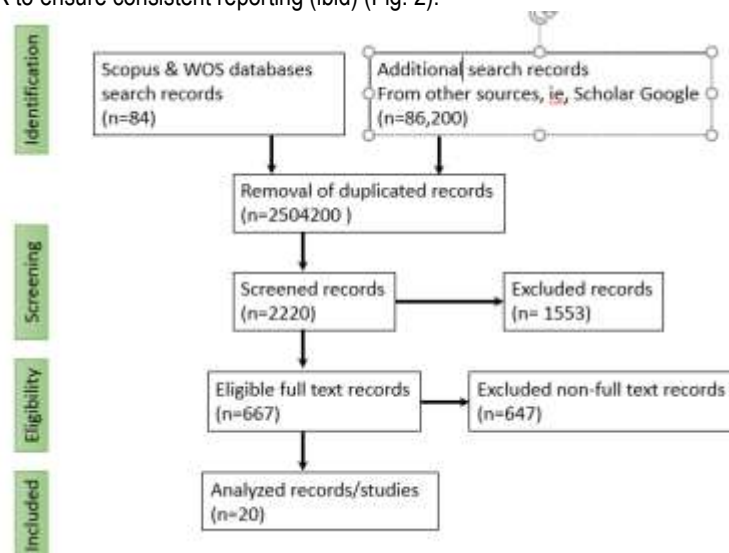

Fig. 2 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram for the scoping review process (Source: JBI Evidence Implementation, 2021 in Peters et al., 2021)

Looking at the JBI framework above, the first step involved the identification of the keywords for searching in the two popular databases. The additional search records were conducted using Scholar Google. However, Scholar Google provided massive hits which indicated a broad spectrum of kindness at work. Thus, the hits were eliminated for noncompliance to the full-text criterion in the screened records step.

4.0 Findings

The findings through mapping the investigation results will inform policy-makers and practitioners on the importance of kindness, civility, and collegiality in the workplace. The rest of the findings will follow the sequence of the research objectives. Firstly, the keywords' searches revealed the number of hits, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Keyword search hits in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar

Keyword search	Scopus	Web of Science (WOS)	Google Scholar
Kindness, workplace	43	41	86,200
Kindness and office	21	243	384,000
Civility and office	16	38	115,000
Civility and work	409	564	168,000
Happiness and a work-built environment	19	133	651,000
Happiness and office	159	534	1,100,000

Only 20 full-text records were deemed relevant and analyzed according to the research objectives and questions from the screened hits. The findings for the research questions are as follows:

4.1 Research Question 1

The first research question was, "What was the kindness (or unkind) acts experienced by the employees at work?" Greeting, a smile, friendliness, respect, helpfulness (for new employees), and an invitation to a group lunch break were some of the characteristics outlined in a positive work environment. The actions were according to best practices of a kind organizational culture as reported in the literature.

4.2 Research Question 2

The second research question was, "What was the built environment (or office infrastructure) that has made them happy at work?" Nice office space, open floorplan, windows, good lighting, wellness rooms, no smoking policy, green environment, complete pantry, and dedicated eating space. These were repeated advice and suggestions elicited from the literature reviewed.

From the findings elicited for both research questions, the next section will discuss the implications of building a gap for further research on the importance of kindness at work.

5.0 Discussions, Implications, and Limitations

The findings or outcomes from scoping review of relevant literature evidenced the importance of kindness in the work environment and the built environment as part of the kind initiative by the organization to ensure employees' comfort and productivity. The organizational culture and the behavior of the supervisors or superiors must be appropriate to their status and the entity that they lead. Any form of unkindness will immediately affect the employee's emotions and psychology at work. Communicating kindness by the supervisors is the key to ensuring a happy workplace where information and communication technology (ICT) must be part and parcel of the employees' work life and the organization's strategy, as Thurlow (2022). The human resource department, especially, must be more proactive in making weekly randomized controlled interventions to elicit a happier workplace as is practiced in Japan (Chancellor et al., 2015). Within the Malaysian context, religious practices at a public sector organization should be fulfilled accordingly. Kindness should be a habit instead of a behavior taught at home.

Nonetheless, the implications from the findings of the scoping review research project provided critical elements that public sector organizations, mainly, are more aware of on job satisfaction. Certain job situations may require the supervisor "to be cruel to be kind." Most importantly, the organization's compassionate leadership on kindness at work would continue to foster belongingness among the employees. To reiterate, "In workplaces where acts of kindness become the norm, the spillover effects can multiply fast. When people receive an act of kindness, they pay it back" (Sezer et al., 2021).

More importantly, kindness at work reflects civil society. Kindness is contagious and creates empathetic leaders (Levy, 2020). To achieve the organization's goals and create onboarding for the junior employees, bosses should lead by example. The office surroundings too offset the positivity from a kind leader. All said and done, organizations that do not heed kindness at work will have ongoing human resource issues, which will affect the company's reputation and performance.

For the individual worker, being kind to oneself is the first step to positivity in life. Kindness at work will counter bullying on the job. From the keyword searches, incivility is related to bullying, where literature evidenced a very high number of hits on bullying or mobbing at work (Stopbullying.gov, 2021). Practicing kindness will eradicate bullying in any environment.

The project's limitations were the short timeframe and the lack of literature on kindness at work within an academic setting. Moreover,

the literature reviewed does not provide enough empirical evidence to support the critical concepts of kindness. Also, the short timeframe to review more literature on the Malaysian workplace is scarce. Thus, this issue limited the number of useful, relevant analysis sources. Mapping the outcomes from the analysis was impossible because of the limited time and qualitative software available for the researchers.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations
The findings showed that kindness at the workplace significantly affects the employees' happiness at work. Providing the comforts at the workplace should be an ongoing process by the management. Although the times have changed and adjusting to the endemic phase, literature has also shown that kindness has eroded with individualistic behavior among employees at the workplace. Awareness of human resource wellbeing should be discussed by the management annually. The office design and built environment should be updated, and an ergonomic workplace and green environment must be prioritized. Also, the leaders' behavior at work should be exemplary, as any form of unkindness would be a piece of viral news in the organization. Simple courtesy among employees and magic words such as "please, thank you" should be the norm. This is where organizational leadership must be exemplary in showing that kindness always matters. Lastly, the study is significant as happiness in the work environment is vital in maintaining solid bonds and collegiality in line with Sustainable Development Goal #3 on good health and wellbeing.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study
The contributions of this paper are in the fields of management, organizational behavior, and culture in the work-built environment.

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