



# **A Swiss Army Knife? How Science Challenges Our Understanding of Mindfulness in the Workplace**

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## Abstract

In this paper, we consider key issues and evidence related to mindfulness in the workplace, an area in which there is increasing growth in research demonstrating the potential for positive outcomes. We first review the cognitive process and outcomes of mindfulness at work, then highlight greater complexities of mindfulness at work as we move forward. Mindfulness in the workplace is multifaceted and complex. A lack of clarity can be evident in how mindfulness is operationalised (as a trait, state, intervention or practice). Further, workplaces themselves are naturalistic settings that differ in how they can nurture mindfulness in employees. The use of mindfulness-based interventions in workplaces, largely grounded in clinical approaches and research, has increased; in doing so, this trend raises many questions in terms of replication for the workforce. As evidence mounts regarding the positive benefits of mindfulness at work, this paper asks: What can organisations and researchers do to avoid these pitfalls while benefitting from the evidence that highlights mindfulness as beneficial? These and other issues are highlighted in the following sections.

## Introduction

Drawing from evidence that it has been adopted successfully in therapeutic contexts like clinical psychology, mindfulness has attracted the attention of organisations, including management and corporate trainers, as they seek to gain the positive outcomes of mindfulness for individuals in the workplace. Fuelling this rapidly emerging \$1B industry is a swift growth in research demonstrating the value of mindfulness in organisational life. Our search on peer-reviewed publications of “mindfulness and workplace” found a 181% increase from 2013 to 2017. However, despite its potential value, mindfulness can be challenging to integrate into organisational life. In this paper, we provide an insight into the best of science and practice to help people in organisations better understand and navigate some of the complexities of mindfulness at work, and to derive benefits from mindfulness.

After describing what mindfulness is, we situate mindfulness alongside more traditional models of organisational thought and review the benefits of mindfulness at work. We then discuss some of the complications surrounding mindfulness at work, as well as some of the potential levers available for managers to pull in order to influence mindfulness in their organisations. We close with a discussion of emerging applications and challenges in applying mindfulness at work.

### Background: What Is Mindfulness?

What exactly is mindfulness? Broadly, mindfulness involves nonreactive and nonevaluative awareness and attention to the present moment. First, mindfulness involves present moment awareness and attention. This aspect is important in understanding mindfulness because our minds wander frequently—about half our waking hours. Rather than being in the moment, people tend to think about the future, such as potential problems or issues, or to ruminate about past events, such as undesirable incidents. When mindfully anchored in the present, individuals tend to avoid the habitual tendency to evaluate, react, and ruminate about events. They continually return their attention to the present experience rather than losing themselves in past or future events and thoughts. This quality of the mind enables a person to observe internal states (including thoughts and feelings), as well as external events, without attaching meanings or stories to them.

Under the above definition of mindfulness, as comprising present-focused, nonjudgmental attention and awareness, it is important to distinguish between different ways that mindfulness can be understood and examined in the workplace. For example, is mindfulness a permanent aspect of a person’s psychological abilities? Does it change from day to day? Can mindfulness be learned? If so, what is the best way to learn mindfulness? In fact, and, rather confusingly, mindfulness can be thought of and measured in many different ways: (a) as a momentary state (differing from day to day, and even from moment to moment); (b) a dispositional trait (fixed or permanent quality); (c) a period of practice in daily life (meditation); and (d) as a formalised training intervention.

The differences between these ways of thinking about mindfulness are shown in Box 1 and Figure 1. The extent to which an individual brings nonjudgmental, present-focused attention and awareness to something occurring at a particular moment in time is state mindfulness. Just as some individuals are more outgoing than others, some individuals are also more mindful than others. Therefore, the degree that a person regularly remains in this state of mindfulness is considered trait mindfulness.

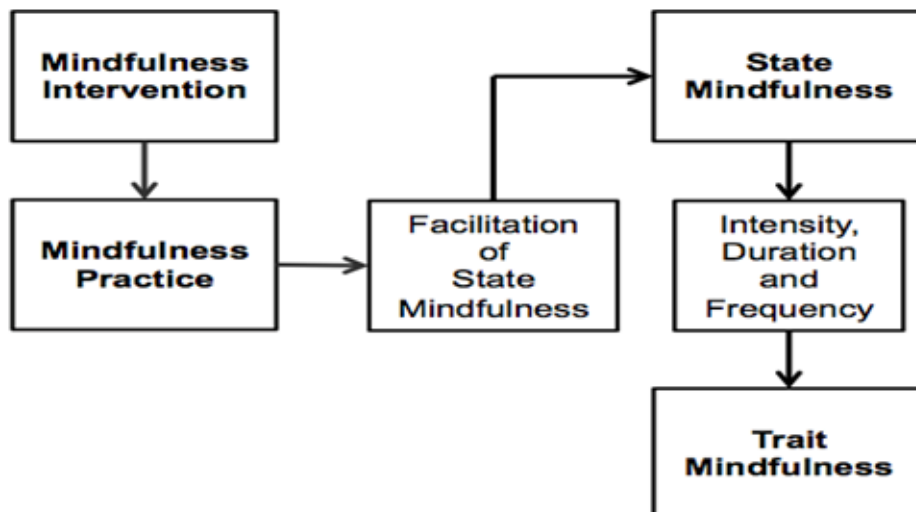
Developing mindfulness can occur through mindfulness practices, when attention and awareness are intentionally focused in the present. Consistently cultivating the state of mindfulness can increase an individual’s ability to generally stay mindful, leaving them with high trait mindfulness. This process is typically facilitated through mindfulness interventions. These are training programs in mindfulness practices and include related topics like stress, which often take weeks or months. Overall, interventions involve individual practices, which induce state mindfulness, and over time lead to trait mindfulness (see Figure 1).

**Box 1.**

Psychological operationalisations of mindfulness (See Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017)

- Psychologists operationalise mindfulness in four basic ways: dispositional trait, momentary state, brief practice, or a longer term intervention.
- **Trait:** People have a natural, baseline quality of mindfulness that goes with them throughout their day. This involves an ability to be consistently present, regardless of their context.
  - **State:** One can be more or less mindful in a given moment, feeling either very full of present experience or engaging in a more abstract and conceptual way about the past or future.
  - **Practice:** Individuals can intensify their degree of mindfulness readily through formal meditation—for example, sitting on a cushion and intently observing their breathing, loving kindness meditation, contemplative practice, yoga, and mindful reflection—or other types of informal meditation—for example, tuning in momentarily into the sensation of your body.
  - **Formal intervention:** Individuals can enhance their tendency toward mindfulness through on-going mindfulness practice and participation in interventions largely developed in clinical settings but adapted for workplaces. These interventions are mindfulness-based stress reduction (see MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 2009), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (see MBCT; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013), dialectical behavior therapy (see DBT; Linehan, 1993), and acceptance and commitment therapy (see ACT; Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda and Lillis, 2006). There are also a few validated apps like Headspace or 10% Happier and/or the Happiness Trap.

Figure 1.  
Different conceptualisations of mindfulness, and their interconnections  
(see the bibliography for a review of Jamieson & Tuckey’s 2017 research)



## Being Mindful at Work

Understanding mindfulness, however, may be more complex than this simple conception above when situated in the workplace. Being present is simply not how most people typically operate at work. So, can they be mindful? How does that impact on how they function? Why might it be both valuable and challenging to be mindful in the workplace?

Insight starts with understanding how we typically think at work. There is consensus across management and psychology experts that the mind typically works to realise goals. Its processes and properties are optimised to realise future goals in order to permit survival in a tough world. This involves maintaining a sense of self that can be extrapolated into the future, which helps to predict whether potential situations and actions are good or bad. For example, knowing whether you would work well with another person requires having a sense of yourself over time, as well as an ability to predict potential work demands, and an objective to attain. This need is so constant that we humans default to the mental mode of “doing,” particularly in the workplace. This doing mode is, of course, extremely helpful for making such decisions—how else would you figure out whether you should do something?

So how does mindfulness fit into a workplace consumed by doing? Most jobs today are hectic, frenetic, crazy—anything but contemplative. It is hard to imagine how people in such environments can even be mindful at work. However, preliminary evidence suggests that this is exactly what occurs; professionals report that they can maintain their usual goal-directed activity while also simultaneously experiencing a strong sense of being fully mindful in the present.

Mindfulness, or what can be thought of as our “being” mode, involves a number of properties that differ markedly from the default doing mode of mind. This mode involves experiencing the present moment fully, accepting it rather than judging it as good or bad. Instead of recalling and anticipating, it involves being intensely present. Instead of a stream of constant and automatic thought, it involves mental quiet.

This mode may not sound particularly profound. Yet evidence shows that the being mode can be extremely helpful, because it provides an alternative way of engaging at work rather than drawing on the unhelpful aspects of the doing mode. It expands the toolkit that individuals have in dealing with their workplace tasks and challenges. Often, the doing mode is simply not the right tool for the job; it is like having a hammer when you need to put in a screw. At these times, digging into the toolbox and picking out a tool from the being mode is just the right response to a situation. For example, when starting to develop a fresh, creative response to a problem, it can be helpful to be fully present and to forget past approaches. Mindfulness can help individuals “clean their mental plate” and enjoy a fresh start.

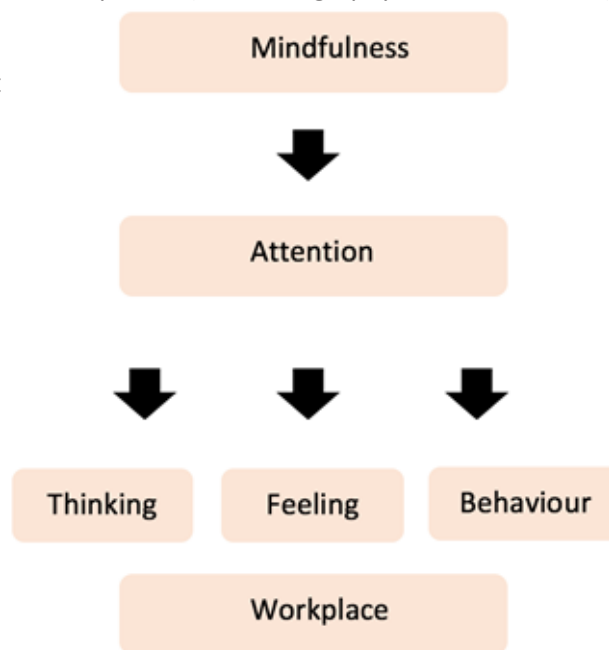
Being and doing modes, therefore, need to be balanced simultaneously if mindfulness is to influence work. For this reason, mindfulness at work has been termed “being while doing.” We now turn to why this combination may be valuable.

### Benefits of Mindfulness at Work

As individuals engage in being while doing, they have more cognitive tools at their disposal to feel and function better in an array of workplace situations.

Mindfulness starts with focused attention. The modern world bombards us constantly with stimuli, draining and distracting our attention. Mindfulness helps to direct and conserve attention, keeping it anchored in the present, on our work and those around us. Through higher quality attention, mindfulness helps us think, feel and act better (see Figure 2). Mindfulness helps individuals be more creative, hold more information in their minds, and make better decisions. Mindful employees tend to have better moods and are less reactive emotionally. Mindfulness enables a better ability to realise goals, even when these conflict with automatic habits. Mindfulness practice physically reshapes the brain’s structure and how brain

Figure 2.  
Mindfulness, attention and outcomes relevant to workplaces. (See Bibliography Good et al., 2016)



regions work together. It also slows biochemical processes linked to aging, including inflammation, stress hormones, and telomeres, and even age-related neurological decay. This suggests that mindful individuals may have longer careers.

Not surprisingly, individuals who attend, think, feel, and act in a mindful way should also feel and function better at work. There is strong evidence that by improving thinking, feeling, and behaviour, mindfulness benefits workplace outcomes, including well-being, performance, and relationships. The impacts of mindfulness generally influence core psychological processes in individuals, such as attention and self-regulation, which explains why mindfulness has broad and significant benefits.

The strongest evidence shows that mindfulness helps individuals with many aspects of well-being. Trait mindfulness, in particular, has been shown to support elevated job satisfaction and engagement while protecting people in many occupations, like leaders and entrepreneurs, from burnout. Although it's still very early days, emerging evidence suggests that being mindful can support important aspects of job performance, ranging from better task execution, to being compassionate toward others, to engaging in less undesirable or unethical conduct. As one striking example, trait mindfulness among nuclear power plant operators was linked to safety behaviors.

Finally, mindfulness has been shown to support higher quality workplace relationships. An exhaustive study showed that more mindful clinicians were more patient focused, and that they received better ratings from their patients. Being more mindful helped leaders curb their hostile impulses, reducing their degree of subordinate abuse. More mindful leaders have been linked to more transformative leadership and better subordinate performance and job attitudes, whereas task conflict in more mindful teams was less prone to produce toxic relationship conflict. In summary, mindfulness supports better moment-by-moment functioning, which then leads to numerous benefits in terms of mainstream workplace outcomes.

### **Managing Mindfulness at Work**

What can managers do to encourage their employees ability to foster being while doing? This can be split into two main opportunities: offering mindfulness training interventions and managing the workplace environment in ways that support mindfulness. We expand on both of these below, and outline opportunities and cautions.

#### ***Implications: Mindfulness Training and Interventions at Work***

As early as the 1970s, clinicians, usually psychologists, began using mindfulness training as a therapy intervention in clinical settings to help people manage symptoms of psychological distress and ill health. Now, numerous formal mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions exist, typically involving intense mindfulness training with a clinical psychologist. Some of these interventions have been rigorously studied from a clinical perspective, including mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). There is growing evidence for the benefits of all three—MBSR, MBCT, and ACT—for improving physical and psychological health conditions in clinical samples. These established interventions are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Key Features of Major Clinically Oriented Mindfulness Interventions*

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Target population</b>	<b>Aim</b>
Mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR)	Individuals with chronic pain	To improve physical and psychological wellbeing through present moment awareness.
Mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT). A form of cognitive therapy that includes mindfulness.	Individuals with a high risk for depressive relapse	To provide clients with skills to assist in the prevention of depressive relapse.
Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). A form of cognitive behavioral therapy.	Unspecified. Wellbeing	To increase psychological flexibility, conceptualised as present moment awareness and altering of behaviour when necessary to align with one's values.

Note: See the work of Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017

Clinical applications offer many advantages in terms of a psychologically trained interventionist (i.e., psychologist), techniques in terms of the intervention (i.e., MBSR), and scientific evaluation of the impact of the intervention.

Consequently, the first generation of mindfulness programs used in the workplace was adapted from clinically oriented programs. In workplaces, however, mindfulness interventions are rarely offered in the specific ways they are used in clinical practice. Although some of the core ingredients might be the same, mindfulness interventions are modified for workplace use in a number of ways, and this can raise some cautions for managers.

Of the breadth of mindfulness training being used in organisations, very few intervention programs have been evaluated with the same level of quality as the programmes in which the clinical researchers were engaged. At this stage, we know the most about the effectiveness of the modified versions of MBSR, and there is some evidence with MBSR of benefits for employee health and well-being. In particular, diversity in the delivery of mindfulness-based interventions in work settings makes it difficult to determine which ingredients and aspects of a training program truly contribute to its effectiveness. For example, there is variation in the mindfulness activities taught as part of the training (e.g., body scan, loving kindness meditation), duration of the training (from one day to one year), number and timing of the training sessions, session length, training modes (such as face-to-face, online, group discussion, written elements), and “homework” practice requirements. The risk is that interventions that deviate too far from established procedures like MBSR may not actually produce changes in mindfulness or in employee and organisational outcomes. Similarly, the addition of features thought to be relevant for the work setting (e.g., health promotion), but with little bearing on mindfulness, could hamper its effectiveness. As such, caution is needed to avoid diluting the “active ingredients” that have been found to predict the effectiveness of the intervention.

Training of instructors is also an emerging issue. Although clinical interventions are often administered by psychologists, no such documentation is required for workplace mindfulness trainers. Care needs to be taken that training is delivered by experienced and qualified mindfulness instructors, such as those from established programs at credible institutions, such as the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in the USA or the University of Oxford in the UK.

Finally, it is currently unknown whether changes in mindfulness, well-being, and organisational outcomes stemming from mindfulness training persist over time. As with many training programs, intervention impacts may weaken as employees return to their normal lives and working environments. At the end of formal training, employees likely benefit from continued mindfulness practice; yet, it may be difficult to conduct these practices effectively or consistently in typical workplace environments, and we comment on this further below when we outline work environments. Managers should think carefully not only about what kind of mindfulness training their employees receive but also how to best support workers in being mindful once they return to work. What is the starting point for helping managers address this potentially complex issue?

### **Case Study on Mindfulness Training at Work**

How do organisations apply these insights pragmatically to foster mindfulness at work and derive the related benefits? What are some of the challenges that real-world managers face when employing mindfulness? To help answer these questions, we offer a real-world case study (see boxes 2 and 3).

Box 2.

Outlines the case of CVS

#### **Example of Corporate Veterinary Services (CVS)**

The business world is embracing mindfulness with open arms, and there is emerging evidence of the business benefits of mindfulness training: Dow Chemicals, SAP Intel, and General Mills all report business gains (see Institute for Mindful Leadership).

However, as outlined above, there are challenges in implementing and realising the benefits of a mindfulness training programme. For example, in the clinical literature, MBCT has benefits for recurrent depression or MBSR for stress, but “one size” does not fit all in the context and variation of needs in workplaces. Workplace programmes dilute the core and the scientifically evaluated ingredients of successful clinical programmes, potentially losing the benefits of the clinical programme in workplace contexts.



Second, there are few cases worldwide that demonstrate successful implementation of *repeatable mindfulness training delivered as a strategic programme, over multiple years* and throughout an entire organisation. These include Corporate Veterinary Services (CVS), Europe (CVS), SAP, Intel, and General Mills. In this article we will refer to the mindfulness training at CVS in the UK. CVS drew on an MBCT programme, successfully adapted as a 6-week group-training programme for the entire workforce to help them manage well-being, and which ran over 6 years. The CVS mindfulness programme was adapted and delivered by The Mindfulness Exchange, with the adaptation being considered carefully. For a full outline of adaptation and implementation issues, see Box 4, and for an outline of trainer selection, see Box 5.

Box 3.

CVS cautions in adapting a mindfulness programme

**CVS systematic program development of mindfulness training:**

1. Agree on the benefits up front. Get senior support for the return on investment case and communicate the benefits clearly to the Leadership team and employees. At CVS, there was a particular need for mindfulness to address the stress inherent in the veterinary profession which experiences four times the average rates of suicide.
2. BUT Be realistic. Mindfulness training is not a “band aid.” The role of mindfulness training is NOT to fix dysfunctional working practices.
3. Manage and support the program: Connect the training content to organisational goals. At CVS, staff rosters were adapted to enable attendance during the working day, course materials and travel expenses were fully funded, and emails sent out to endorse the training.
4. Voluntary attendance. Gain commitment to attend. Use peer “good news” stories, entries in the HR handbook, and local ambassadors to spread understanding of the training benefits.
5. Contextualise the training. Ensure the approach appropriate for the company’s cultural environment, strategy, and values. Does it fit with “the way we do things around here”? At CVS the use of language, working examples, mindfulness practices, and delivery content were tailored.
6. Trainer knowledge. This is a big area further outlined below. At a minimum, the mindfulness teacher needs to have relevant mindfulness and corporate experience to be able to “join the dots” between mindfulness theory and its practical application, company by company.
7. Keep it adaptable. The training structure and trainer must fit the contextual needs of each company and also of each group and its participants, over time. Over 6 years, the TME training at CVS had to adapt to a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment.
8. Workplace-centric. Is the approach workplace “training” or is it therapeutic or spiritually led? At CVS, a direct teaching style with clear explanations based on scientific findings provided the experience that underpinned engagement.
9. Logistically sensible. Training processes and styles need to be relevant for the workforce. This means, for example, face-to-face for vets but online for IT staff. Scheduling of training and class duration will vary, for example to meet the needs of flexitime or shift workers.
10. Focus on individual ongoing engagement. There are no “quick wins” in mindfulness training. Latest research suggests that a minimum of 10 minutes training per day can enhance capabilities such as collaboration, resilience, and managing uncertainties (Reitz, 2016), yet rarely does an employee have a spare 10 minutes in their day. At CVS the training motivated employees to change daily habits to include a minimum of 10 minutes of practice by setting diary reminders.

Box 4.

CVS Cautions in adapting a mindfulness programme

Selecting a Mindfulness Trainer

Qualified mindfulness professionals need to have experienced and sustained an ongoing mindfulness practice. They also need to be able to communicate the experiential nature of mindfulness as well as deliver a systematic programme for organisations and tailor it for the needs of individuals. This checklist was developed to enable effective decisions for organisations, around trainers, and this was followed carefully at CVS.

1. They must be able to deliver an evidence-based training programme, for example, adapted MBCT or MBSR: Validated approaches grounded in science offer a stronger return on your investment with credibility to engage the widest audience.
2. Does the trainer have relevant mental health training or psychological understanding? Desired outcomes vary by organisation so a business coach may deliver positive performance outcomes, whereas a clinically trained teacher will have wider skills in the MBSR, MBCT, and ACT areas.
3. It's a three-way relationship: The trainer has to manage relationships between the enterprise, its employees, and the integrity of the mindfulness training programme. Trainers relevant to your organisational setting can more skilfully contextualise and embed the training for deeper benefits while being true to mindfulness teaching.
4. Delivering the agreed outcomes: Although they may be able to deliver an evidence-based program, is their mindfulness training ALSO workplace specific, for example, Workplace MT or Google's Search Inside Yourself?
5. Adherence to a code of conduct. Do they have a mentor or supervisor, and can they illustrate ongoing certification in this emerging application of mindfulness?
6. Manages risk: Do they understand how to recognise and manage mental health conditions that may reveal themselves through the informal and formal meditation exercises? Can they advise on referral processes?

**Mindfulness and Work Environments**

If mindfulness is so helpful, allowing employees to avoid the usual limitations and pitfalls of their own minds, then why isn't everyone constantly mindful? The answer is not clear. However, as mindfulness practices become more established, managers should also think beyond training practices and begin considering how the environment at work can either support or impede mindfulness. Understanding the factors that help or hinder the experience of mindfulness within the work context can provide managers with greater clarity on how to support mindfulness among their employees and within their organisations.

Two possible explanations have emerged regarding how the environment at work may impact mindfulness. First, evidence suggests that mindfulness requires "mental energy" to bring attention to the present moment. The degree to which employees are able to act mindfully seems contingent on their energy and the degree to which other work activities and experiences draw on—or replenish—this energy. Emerging research shows how demanding aspects of work can hamper mindfulness. Evidence suggests factors that can decrease mindfulness include high work demands and time pressure, frequent interruptions, insufficient recovery periods, and the goal-directed nature of work. It appears that the importance of mental energy and attentional resources depends on the workplace context, and how this is helping (or not!) individuals to be mindful at work. Accordingly, on days that employees experience high workloads, they typically report more fatigue and have lower levels of mindfulness than usual. Employees who reported high task demands and high workloads were also inclined toward automatic thought, leaving them with little room for awareness and attentiveness. High task demands, high workloads, lack of leadership, time pressure, and no quiet space all appear to deplete attentional resources required for mindfulness at work. The depletion of attentional resources can lead individuals to activate their doing mode, and thereby reduce their levels of mindfulness.

Although aspects of tasks and the workplace that tax energy, attention, or time may limit the ability of employees to perform their work mindfully, other factors can support state mindfulness. For example, quiet space, good leadership, and enough time to finish work tasks may allow individuals to focus on the present moment and thereby facilitate mindfulness at work. A study found that employees with supportive managers reported higher levels of mindfulness than employees without managerial support. In an interview study, employees reported that seeking out places such as a private office where they can shield themselves from demands helped them attend to their work in a mindful way.

Interestingly, the home environment might also exert significant influence over mindfulness at work. After a good night's sleep, which helps to replenish resources, employees were less fatigued and experienced higher than usual levels of

mindfulness. What can managers do to ensure the environment at work is ripe for mindfulness? One potential remedy is that managers support employee's home well-being, including making sure employees get enough sleep. Obvious implications of this are making sure that employees have sufficient time to recover, protecting them from workplace demands by eliminating after-hours communication, and supporting consistent and sufficient sleep. Within the workplace, supervisor support, workplace spaces, workplace demands, and task requirements have implications for enabling or detracting from employees' ability to be mindful.

Thus, organisations should seek to create work environments that help individuals to perform their work mindfully by reducing workloads, increasing job control, providing quiet spaces, and supporting positive leadership behaviours. Indeed, leadership appears central to an environment that facilitates mindfulness. How might organisations benefit from differing mindful leadership behaviours?

### **Mindfulness and Leadership**

What benefits does mindfulness potentially offer for leadership development? What are some of the benefits of mindful leaders, when faced with organisational issues? To answer these questions, we offer some mindfulness and leadership insights.

Box 5.

Leadership and mindfulness

#### **Task-oriented leadership**

Some of the toughest issues in task-oriented leadership or "management" are not in the management of others, but in the area of self-management. Here, mindfulness can help leaders become aware of their difficulties and aid effective decisions. There is a plethora of research that demonstrates the development of self-regulatory capacities associated with mindfulness, and these are central to leadership. Task-oriented leadership involves one's ability to "get things done" including things like complex decision making, problem solving, and organisational skills. As human beings, we have numerous flaws or errors in our decision making. By enhancing the quality of one's attention, mindfulness can help leaders become aware of these limitations.

#### **Ethics-oriented leadership**

Ethics-oriented leadership involves one's ability to cope with ethical dilemmas, understand contextual rules and regulations, and develop character elements that help one navigate through slippery situations. In past literature, this has been referred to with constructs such as servant, authentic, and ethical leadership. In the realm of ethical leadership is the notion of a "conscience"—that little voice in our head that tells us right from wrong. An enhanced quality of attention can help with more contextual awareness—understanding the contextual sensitivities in terms of what is considered to be ethical in a certain situation or context.

For an overview of how mindfulness is incorporated into leadership development curricula, we encourage you to contact the authors. Although the benefits of mindfulness and leadership are outlined here, much greater research is needed to substantiate the range and number of "promises made" in leadership development courses.

#### **Relation-oriented leadership**

Relationship-oriented leadership involves one's ability to "connect with others" including things like emotional intelligence, active listening, appreciating diversity, and compassion. Connecting well with others is hard because of the fundamental challenge of accommodating different perspectives. This requires a heightened quality of attention, not only to pick up on the verbal and nonverbal signals that others are sending us but equally to be aware of our own reactions to them, making sure we take the time to truly listen to others without either interpreting it in our own way or completely losing ourselves in the story of others. As outlined above, mindfulness is key in developing the relationship between leaders and followers.

#### **Change-oriented leadership**

Change-oriented leadership involves one's ability to cope with external complexity and change, both as a passive object to change but also as a more active subject to change, being the initiator of change. This involves things like learning orientation, coping with adversity, creativity, and intrapreneurship, and also political skills, vision-oriented leadership, presence, and charisma. The accepting quality of mindfulness can do wonders in a business world where leaders are continuously subject to a changing work environment. Mindfulness installs a learning orientation that pushes individuals toward acceptance of things that they cannot change but also toward continuous improvement of things that are under their control.

### **Next Steps: Lessons for Moving Forward**

In this section we summarise a few of the cautionary issues raised in the paper for readers as they traverse and engage with mindfulness at work. First, mindfulness should not be used as a quick fix for organisational issues, such as employee engagement. It involves a sustained change in employee mindset, which may take substantial and sustained investment to fully take root. Successfully developing mindfulness at work should hinge on mindfulness programmes that are cautiously developed, adapted, and evaluated; taught by experts; and sustained over time through employee involvement beyond initial training. Although evidence from the clinical domain supports mindfulness, those of us implementing mindfulness at work, as an intervention, are advised to do so with caution. The lack of such caution has resulted in some criticism of mindfulness, where the interventions are seen as being gimmicky and commercialised, not based on solid evidence.

Closely connected to this is an understanding of what motivates an employee to engage in training and to maintain the skills after training. In order to harness the full potential of mindfulness, we need a much greater understanding of how to implement the enduring benefits of mindfulness practices. Just like keeping fit or losing weight, a mindfulness programme can only work if the employee engages in the home practice and attends the training. It is a change programme, and more research is needed to understand how to motivate employees to engage and stay engaged with the behaviours that sustain that change.

We therefore suggest that being mindful at work is challenging. It is more than simply having a high-quality intervention. Instead, it requires thinking holistically about the workplace context. It involves thinking about how individuals show up at work and what they experience when they go home. Work is often very depleting as a result of workload demands, emotional burdens, or difficult leaders. Thinking through all these factors and developing a conducive, ongoing workplace context, not simply a one-off classroom that teaches mindfulness, is the next step in managing mindfulness at work.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, we advise organizational psychologists, managers and practitioners to be aware of the strengths as well as the challenges associated with mindfulness at work. Mindfulness does not compensate for bad leadership, toxic cultures, increased work demands, and the like. Interventions to improve mindfulness at work require careful adaptation and implementation. With the above in mind, however, we are encouraged by the mounting, positive evidence of the benefits of mindfulness at work. Although the above cautions are given as a guide to readers, the evidence suggests that mindfulness at work has tremendous value for individuals and—more recently—organisations. It is with this level of excitement, paced with the awareness of the above cautions, that we envisage a promising future for mindfulness at work.

**It is with this level of excitement, paced with the awareness of the above cautions, that we envisage a promising future for mindfulness at work**



## Selected Bibliography

To read more about mindfulness at work and the cognitive and psychological mechanisms of mindfulness - and benefits of mindfulness at work - we suggest you read the article by Darren Good. Good, D. J., Lyddy, C. J., Glomb, T. M., Bono, J. E., Brown, K. W., Duffy, M. K., Baer, R. A., Brewer, J. A., & Lazar, S. W. (2016). Contemplating mindfulness at work: An integrative review. *Journal of Management*, *42*(1), 114–142. <http://doi.org/10.1177/014920631561700>.

In terms of being mindful at work, or understanding the tension between the being and doing of work—where we move from being in the mindful state to the doing state of work, we also direct you to: Lyddy, C. J., & Good, D. J. (2017). Being while doing: An inductive model of mindfulness at work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*, 1–18.

In terms of interventions within the workplace, and the current state of their effectiveness, rigour and evaluation, we suggest you read: Jamieson, S.D., & Tuckey, M.R. (2017). Mindfulness interventions in the workplace: A critique of the current state of the literature. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *22*, 180–193. This article also overviews the differing conceptualisations of mindfulness—state, trait, intervention, or practice—as well as the psychological mindfulness interventions, such as MBCT and MBSR that have been tested and used previously. It also examines how they fare within the workplace setting.

In understanding the role of mindfulness in leadership we suggest you read Maree’s work: Roche M., Haar J. M., & Luthans F. (2014). The role of mindfulness and psychological capital on the well-being of leaders. *Journal of Occupational and Health Psychology*, *19*, 476–489

Ute’s work has examined the workplace context—or antecedents of mindfulness at work—and the context that enables (or detracts from) employees’ ability to be mindful at work. This article outlines issues at work such as work overload, quiet spaces, and leadership in creating the conditions in which employees can be mindful. See Hülshager, U. R., Walkowiak, A., & Thommes, M. S. (2018). How can mindfulness be promoted? Workload and recovery experiences as antecedents of daily fluctuations in mindfulness. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *91*(2), 261–284.

Finally, we suggest readers examine mindfulness interventions at work through the work done by the Institute for Mindful Leadership (<https://instituteformindfulleadership.org/research/>). This website has further information on mindfulness training, adaptation of programmes, evaluation, and key issues in selecting a trainer to aid in interventions being sustained and effective.