

# EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF MINDFULNESS AND WELLBEING PRACTICES ON LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

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## ABSTRACT

Although mindfulness and wellbeing practices have long been discussed, there has been very little actual implementation in the workplace. Keeping mental health in check is crucial given the amount of stress people experience both individually and at work. The pandemic's onset brought this to light, and numerous businesses launched numerous programmes focusing on health and wellbeing. This study was created in an effort to better understand leaders and the factors that influence their effectiveness at work. It addresses two main research questions about how these factors influence leadership styles and how it impacts leader's self-development over-time, by using a qualitative research method and semi-structured interviews with eight organisational leaders, who were either in senior positions or had extensive work history in any company or location. The research objective centred on acquiring instances demonstrating improved leadership effectiveness, which was found to be unaffected by the participants' country and field of work, enabling the researcher to develop a varied participant pool. Overall, findings suggest that environments are deterministic to the leadership style one adopts in a certain situation or circumstance, and most of the participants have claimed to have evolved from exhibiting a transactional mindset to a more empowering and coaching one. Moreover, these practices have helped leaders become better at conflict management, resulted in improved team dynamics and, helped them reduce stress by reducing reactivity in challenging situations. Although it might not promptly help everyone, it has been observed to provide long-term benefits.

**Keywords:** *mental health, leadership, wellbeing*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Growing evidence connecting mindfulness to a wide range of advantages is the cause of the rising degree of interest in it. For instance, mindfulness has been demonstrated to cause beneficial immune system changes (Davidson et al., 2003) and to have also been seen to enhance mood and cognitive performance (Lutz et al., 2008). Other studies document positive effects on mental concentration, academic performance, and emotional intelligence alongside having a beneficial impact on employee work engagement and various job performance metrics (Dane, 2011; Glomb et al., 2011; Dane & Brummel, 2014).

While a large amount of the present mindfulness training and wellbeing practices is focused on improving leadership effectiveness, a considerable portion is also directed towards employee health issues including alleviating stress (Gelles, 2012; Wolever et al., 2012). Even though there are hundreds of recognised leadership degree programmes available and the establishment of sustainable, efficient leadership is a constant challenge for many organisations (McKee, 2012), some businesses spend up to \$150,000 per person on leadership development programmes and trainings (Gurdjian & Halbeisen, 2014). With regards to organisational leadership, mindfulness has been proven to benefit several of the emotional intelligence skills linked to increased leadership effectiveness, particularly self-awareness, self-regulation, and social consciousness. Additionally, studies discussed by Snowden et al. (2015) have shown a connection between mindfulness and greater levels of all-around emotional intelligence.

(Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998; Davidson, 2012; Lazar et al., 2005; Kerr et al., 2013; Baer et al., 2006; Brown Ryan, 2003; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Sinclair & Feigenbaum, 2012; Snowden et al., 2015). A recent study examining the connection between mindfulness and leadership effectiveness linked increased mindfulness among leaders with higher overall performance on the job and other staff performance measures (Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014).

Leadership researchers such as Boyatzis and McKee (2005) and Carroll (2007) have also suggested a mutually beneficial connection between mindfulness, wellbeing practices, and leadership effectiveness. Despite these findings, the researchers note that there is limited evidence linking mindfulness with enhanced leadership effectiveness (Good et al., 2015; Dane & Brummel, 2014; Reb et al., 2014; Lam & Kirby, 2002); additionally, minimal research has been done on the interpersonal advantages of mindfulness (Condon et al., 2013).

However, there is not much research on how or why participants think mindfulness and other wellbeing practices contribute to outcomes regarding improved

leadership interpersonal effectiveness attributes, as well as does not show how it influences leadership styles over time.

This gap in the literature is particularly noteworthy given the continued expansion of mindfulness-based leadership development programmes despite the dearth of empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of such programmes (Gelles, 2012; Carroll, 2007). Furthermore, my interest in this topic is also based on personal results of practicing meditation and following various personal growth entrepreneurs.

As pandemic brought mental health into attention, studying this topic post pandemic felt like the need of the hour.

This study topic was chosen in order to gather new data from organizational leaders about their opinions and experiences engaging in these practices on their own and in workplace training.

Organizational leaders were asked to describe the effects that these practices had specifically on their leadership effectiveness as well as their justifications for continuing to do so in the long run. This dissertation explores the points summarized above in greater detail. With reference to the experiences and perspectives of organizational leaders, the goal of this study is to investigate how mindfulness and wellbeing practices impact leadership effectiveness, particularly interpersonal skills and leadership styles. In order to achieve these goals, the following two research questions have been explored:

Question 1: How do mindfulness and wellbeing practices influence leadership styles?

Question 2: How do these practices help contribute towards leader self-development?

An in-depth grasp of the significance of mental health and wellbeing as well as how practicing mindfulness at work enhances a leader's performance may be gained from the answers to these questions. As well as the impact it will have on various aspects of life in the long run. Especially after a global pandemic that made adjusting to the new normal in terms of hybrid working and personal experiences during covid challenging.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To study the effect of mindfulness and wellbeing practices on the efficiency of leadership, the major areas around pertinent literature are covered in this chapter. It discusses leadership and leadership styles, as well as the effects of mindfulness and wellness practices on leadership in light of organizational context. The analysis provided here is critical in nature and identifies any gaps that need to be addressed. Studying the connections between mindfulness, wellness practices, and leadership effectiveness is the main research focus along-with its impact on the self-development of leaders and how it influences leadership styles.

### 2.1 Leadership

Many other authors and philosophers are credited with the initial writings on the topic of leadership; however, the study of leadership in modern academic studies has developed primarily over the course of the last 60 years, with attention arising during the last two decades (Yukl, 2002). Although there is not a single, widely acknowledged definition of leadership, there are enough commonly understood aspects of the role to create a useful description. For instance, according to Kotter (2008), there are many similarities between management and leadership responsibilities, including decision- making, developing relationships, innovation, and persuasion.

Irrespective of their formal title or assigned position, people who want to have a significant impact on how others perform in an organization should cultivate strong managerial and leadership skills. These skills center on more than just putting better procedures into practice; they also include the capacity to communicate a vision, build organizational support, and motivate others (Duttweiler & Hord, 1987). According to subject area experts, trait, contingency, transactional, transformational, and behavioral theories of leadership are the most prominent ones. They are covered in more detail in this section.

**Trait Theory:** Trait theories of leadership may also highlight traits like charisma, extraversion, courage, and self-confidence in addition to focusing on traits like intelligence, a feeling of accountability, and creativity. (Northouse, 2012).

Early trait theorists including historian Thomas Carlyle (1841) and academic Frederick Woods (1913) did not investigate the idea that leadership traits could be formed and instead based their work on the notion that these characteristics were naturally present (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). Ralph Stogdill (1948), who developed a list of leadership qualities like adaptability, cooperation, and self-assurance as well as a list of abilities like being clever, diplomatic in nature, tactful, and persuasive is credited with conducting further trait theory research. Although trait theory was contested as early as 1860, Herbert Spencer is credited with being the first to suggest that the great men's actions, which served as the foundation for the time period's trait theory studies, were influenced by outside factors such as upbringing, social circumstances, and situational requirements. The results of trait studies are

sometimes viewed as being inconclusive because throughout time, leadership

researchers have discovered that traits are context- specific and challenging to quantify correctly (Bolden et al., 2003).

## **2.2 Mindfulness and Well-being Practices**

According to Pinck and Sonnentag (2017), being present in the moment and paying attention to current events or present reality is known as mindfulness. Its components as a multidimensional term include receptivity to experience, awareness of internal thoughts, external surroundings, and internal stimulus. It also requires having an open, nonjudgmental perspective towards both good and bad things that allows for a more detached perception of such events without assessing them. The idea that awareness is both a feature that varies from person to person and a state that alters inside an individual has been put forth. Furthermore, it can be enhanced and produced with a few quick training sessions (Pinck & Sonnentag, 2017).

The 2,500-year-old Buddhist Abhidharma psychology framework has been strongly linked to mindfulness that includes meditation. Many researchers and academics claim that it provides the theoretical underpinnings for what is now known as mindfulness practice (Bush & Goleman, 2013).

However, there are several interpretations of mindfulness within Buddhism, which is to be anticipated from an ideology that has developed over many centuries and different places (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, 2015).

In-depth scientific research on mindfulness over the last three decades, along with its rigorous application in a variety of organisational and clinical settings, have revealed that it is not exclusively associated with any one type of spirituality or religion. Leading Buddhist academics and Western researchers have also backed this transition to a secular, and therefore more accessible, approach to the research of mindfulness (Bush & Goleman, 2013; Congleton, Hölzel, & Lazar, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

## **2.3 Well-being at workplace**

A person's experiences at work, whether they be mental, physical, emotional, or social in character, undoubtedly have an impact on them while they are working. Additionally, these experiences "spill over" into areas outside of work. Employees work for nearly third of their waking hours, and they do not always leave their jobs behind when they leave the workplace (Conrad, 1988). For instance, stress from job combined with stress from daily life can have a negative impact on one's physical and emotional well-being due to the excessive mental and physical stresses imposed on the body and mind (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

Workplace features can have a significant impact on employees, ranging from organizational health and safety policies (Patterson, 1997) to work design difficulties

related to fundamental ergonomics (Hoke, 1997). Employees that are unhappy at

work may be less productive, make poorer judgements, be more likely to miss work (Boyd, 1997), and constantly make smaller and smaller contributions to the organization (Price & Hooijberg, 1992).

The concept of "well-being" is usually more inclusive and all-encompassing because it considers the person as a unique individual. Therefore, beyond specific psychological and/or physical symptoms or diagnoses related to health, well-being should be considered appropriate to include measures of life experiences (e.g., fulfilment, happiness), and within the context of organisational research, to include both generalised work-related experiences (e.g., job satisfaction), alongside more facets- specific dimensions (e.g., satisfaction with pay or colleagues).

Issues with behaviour, health, and psychology might result from occupational stress. Changes in behaviour are frequently the first and most obvious indications of stress. It is also acknowledged as a crucial element and a significant issue that poses a threat to societal, organizational, and individual health in daily life (Danna et al., 2005).

According to the interactionist perspective (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994), stress results from a mismatch between a person's desires and needs and those of the environment. The likelihood of coronary heart disease, mental breakdown, poor health behaviours, job dissatisfaction, productivity losses, family issues, and some types of cancer have all been linked to work-related stress. (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

Work-related overload, work shifts, prolonged hours of travel, hazards and risks, new technology, and the standard of physical working atmosphere are only a few examples of the fundamental job elements that can be stressful.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

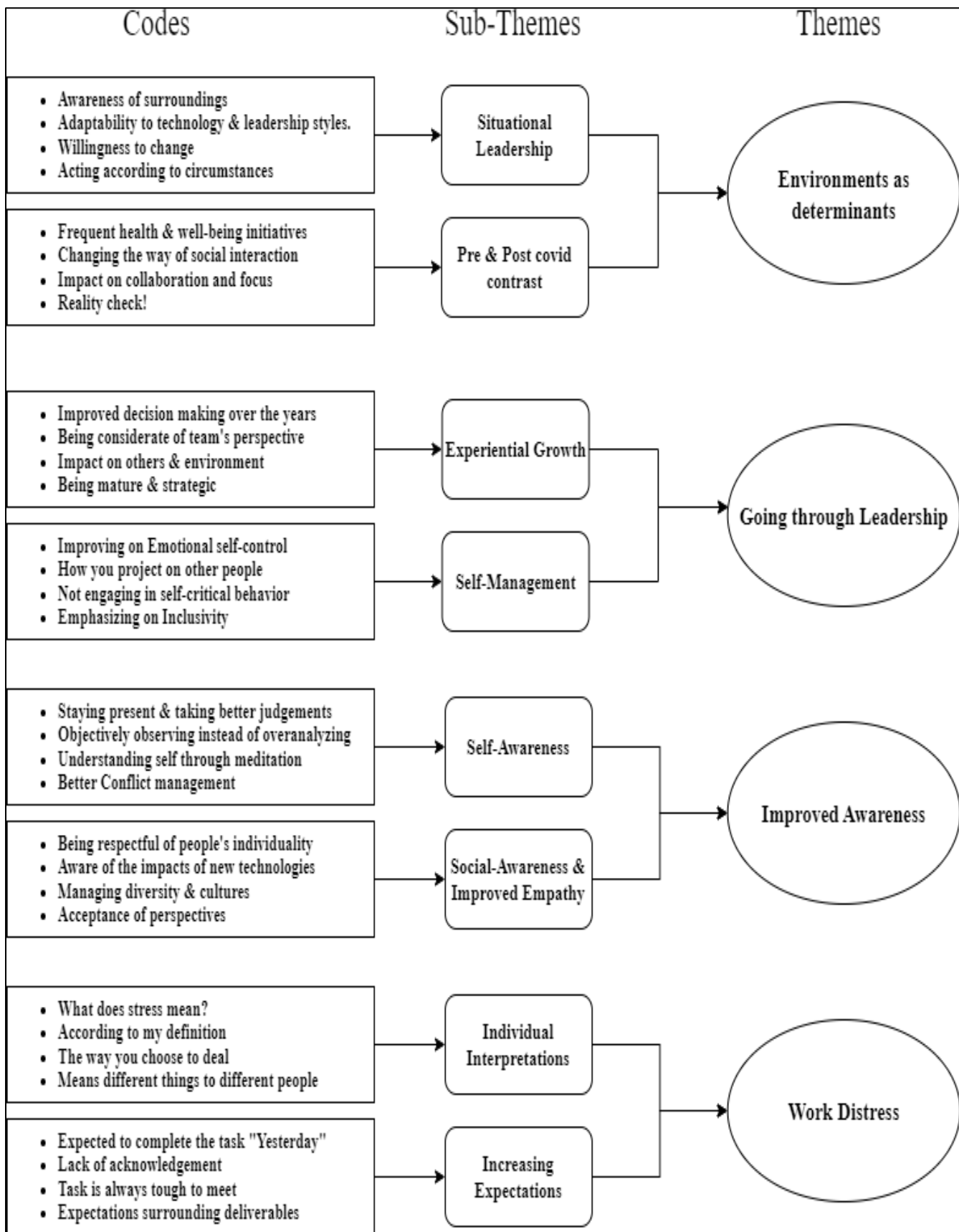
Data was collected through semi-structured, personal interviews that were conducted online. An Interview-based approach is more desirable for this research due to the necessity of exploring subjects such as individual beliefs, impressions, and value assignments (Kvale, 1996), all of which came about thorough participant illustrations describing the beneficial impact that they believe mindfulness and well-being activities had on their leadership effectiveness. Substantial material in the form of verbatim transcripts was gathered and processed.

The interviews were conducted using MS Teams and recorded for transcription and analysis using the same platform. English was the sole language used during all interviews and correspondence with participants. It was specifically stated that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed prior to commencing. Participants were, however, asked to confirm their comprehension and approval for the same. Participants were also given the opportunity to raise questions or express concerns about the interview procedure at this point.

### **4. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

The main themes and sub-themes covered in this section are summarized in Figure below. It should be noted that not all the categories and themes found throughout the thematic data analysis process are covered in this section. Instead, only those themes and sub-themes that are related to the research questions and are present in majority of the transcripts are discussed.

Figure I Themes and Sub themes



#### 4.1 Theme 1: Environments as determinants

Table I. Theme 1, Environment as determinants

4.2.1(a) Sub-Theme: Situational Leadership
4.2.1(b) Sub-Theme: Pre & Post Covid Contrast

According to interpretation of the transcripts Theme 1 is about finding how environments play a key role in determining a leadership style during a certain period. It aligns with a broader aspect of Leadership style. Situational leadership is exhibited by a leader when he/she feels the need to tailor his/her approach towards the team, based on the changing needs, task or due to organizational changes (Cherry, 2023). Further review of the transcripts identified an emerging pattern to the question of leaders associating themselves to a leadership style. The sub-themes, henceforth, were stated by majority of them.

4.2.1(a) Sub-Theme: Situational Leadership: This was discussed by all the participants. For instance, when asked about their leadership style, a participant described it to not have a particular definition or a straight answer. "So, there is, no straight answer about the leadership style. Person should always have a good mix of different leadership styles and it depends on what kind of team you are handling, what is the seniority level of the team" (Participant #2, 2023)

Participants also provided a detailed description of how being mindful is necessary and how it relates to leadership styles which in turn would aid in managing diversity and generational dynamics at work. "People need to understand what mindfulness means and in simplicity to be mindful is to be aware of your surroundings and to be aware of the type of people that are on your team. You have in the workplace four generations. There are people in their tail end of their career, they are ready to retire. There are people at the peak. People just starting brand new, right? So, your leadership style changes based on the people that are within your team" (Participant #1, 2023).

"I would say you talked about transactional and transformational. So probably I have a mix of both because in certain situations you have to be transactional to make sure that you're delivering your goals and sometimes you have to be transformational to make sure that your team is motivated, and they are on top of the game to make sure that they give you the right results. So, I would say situation to situation. You must change your style, and you must keep improving and learning from your experiences. That is what is most important, and that keeps me going." (Participant #3, 2023)

While some participants identified themselves associating to one leadership style but did amend their styles as per the demand of the situation. One participant exclaimed it as follows:

"I cannot give you a name for my leadership style because my leadership style is quite flexible and depending on what is needed in a current situation. But when I lead my employees, I always try to help them understand & identify problems themselves and find their own solutions. I try to empower them to develop their own solution to a problem they identify, that is my general approach. In terms of situations where we have targets, goals in terms of for example we are hiring an employee and we have deadlines for contract and stuff. I also give clear targets and process deadlines and that would be rather transactional in my leadership style, but in general I empower, and I coach people to improve and learn and develop themselves." (Participant #5, 2023)

In contrast, one participant did not relate to exhibiting transactional leadership style even in stringent timelines. Upon asking if the participant associated with it, the response stated clearly the belief of transactional leadership style associating with fostering a culture of authority. The conflicting opinion could be associated with the amount of work experience and industry exposure, which was significantly less than the rest of the participants that were interviewed. The excerpt is as follows:

"I am not a transactional type of leader and have never been one. just because it is not me. I am a very empathetic, vulnerable kind of leader. Like I just feel leader should be extremely transparent and extremely real and that is how people will associate with me, right? Like if you bring that aura of like oh, I am a figure of authority and you are supposed to report to me, or you are supposed to listen to me. No one will relate to you and most of the people will hate you, right? Like you are fostering a culture of hierarchy and authority which does not really work. You can be nice to people and still get work done, so even when it was fast paced and everything, I always tried to empathize with people who were in offshore and if I had to pick up the slack and do something that was beyond my role. I used to do that as well, so that is my style. You know, which is like to be friends and understand people more, rather than like being a figure of authority" (Participant #7, 2023).

Moreover, the most successful leaders, in line with situational leadership theory, are those who can modify their approach to the circumstances at hand and pay attention to cues like the nature of the task, the makeup of the group, and other elements that may help the team complete the task. (Cherry, 2023)

4.2.1(b) Sub-Theme: Pre & Post Covid Contrast: The sub-theme emerged as one of the most intriguing findings of all. The role that Covid has played in making people more aware and conscious of their choices as well as its negative impacts has led people to value time and the present moment more than ever. The theme was discovered when most of the participants talked about a contrast in their leadership styles pre & post pandemic and how they managed the challenges.

Participant #1 initiated the topic while reflecting on his journey as a leader and how the onset of covid-19 pandemic brought to light the seriousness of mental well-being. The following quotation exemplifies the thought mentioned “I think it was serious, however this Pandemic brought it to light. People are willing to talk about mental health, which in the past was a taboo. Nobody wants to tell their parents that they have gone to stress, depression. Nobody wants to tell their relatives, their friends because of perception, people are judgmental like he cannot cope with life, he cannot do this and that. People look at negativity as opposed to looking it as a positive thing because if one person comes out, there are five other people. It is like in the classroom. People are willing to talk about these things now, which is a good thing so that we know. you are not suffering in silence, right” (Participant #1, 2023)

Reinstating for it to be a positive change in terms of mending perceptions and breaking a taboo. Looking further at its negative impacts, participants shared some instances from their experience and credited mindfulness and other well-being sessions for helping them cope up and find ways to manage the new way of working.

“Now we are looking vice versa not in my team, but in general people often are in the office one day per week and that has changed the way we work with each other. It has changed the way of social interaction and I see a huge negative impact on well-being. If you are talking to cameras and screens all the time and the way we discuss, we interact, we talk, we like each other. Everything has changed, for the worse, and that has had a significant impact and negative impact on personal well-being people are much more stressed. The level of collaboration has decreased, and I think mindfulness exercises have helped me personally and others I know, to better cope with that new environment. to find the new way to deal with this new work environment, this new social environment. It gives them tools and ideas on how to better find their personal way to manage the new way of working” (Participant #5, 2023) Discussions surrounding losing focus while working from home, participant #6 explained about learning to focus in terms of being considerate to team members and colleagues in a hybrid set-up. However, facing challenges with respect to productivity especially due to stretched working hours and the lack of trust employers have about timesheet manipulation. The following excerpt illustrates the experience:

“But post covid what has happened is since most of us were remote during COVID it was not extremely easy to just go into the room and say whatever we thought. It had to be very, very planned. You had to let people arrange their time. Sometimes our time was very off for late hours and sometimes the other people were sitting late hours, so we had to be very, very careful and mindful of when somebody is taking that call and we used to also give ample time in the beginning of the meeting which never used to happen in person was we had to give 5 minutes for everybody to

settle down. So yes, I would say it is more focused now because when you sit on the screen, you know that everybody has taken time out to attend this meeting remotely” (Participant #6, 2023)

He added: “But then when you know I am in office for 8 hours, you work in those eight hours and then you try to be productive. What happens at work from home is you know that you are going to extend your 8 hours to anyway, 10/12/14 hours, and then it is not a straight 8-hour work. So, the focus goes away a lot and every time you come back to the system you must restart that focusing thing again” (Participant #6, 2023).

On the other hand, some participants expressed mixed emotions regarding hybrid working, accepting the fact that it caused various challenges however learning from those challenges have made them a better leader, which confirmed that environments were deterministic to leadership growth. Topics pertaining to the influence on leadership effectiveness will be covered in the section that follows.

## 4.2 Theme 2: Going Through Leadership

Table II. Theme 2, Going through Leadership

4.2.2(a) Sub-Theme: Experiential growth
4.2.2(b) Sub-Theme: Self-Management

According to a proverb “grow through what you go through” the next theme to emerge was aligned with experiential learning as a leader over the years, most of our participants mentioned about a significant growth in their leadership, as they become more mature with experience, their leadership competencies and effectiveness increased. They also associated with an improved sense of empathy after practicing mindfulness and well-being practices over the years. Hence the theme “Going through leadership” suited the most.

4.2.2(a) Sub-Theme: Experiential growth: A way of expressing the development that occurs over time as one matures and gains experience. As one reflects on individual experiences, experiential learning is said to promote self-awareness. Furthermore, it is considered a crucial component of leadership development. (Ligon et al., 2011)

When asked to reflect on a “then vs now” comparison, a participant mentioned the importance of experience and how it helped him to reflect on the impact of his decisions on his team as well as on the environment. “Experience! Like when I started as a leader in in my 20s, it was more functional, get the job done. Does not matter how you got it done if you achieved the task. Now we are looking at- how was it achieved? How did it affect the people and I think experience teaches you that. As you mature. You go through leadership, and you become more strategic, like at my level. Now it is more strategic, more big picture. What impacts the environment? Staff retention is a big problem. Staff attraction is a big problem because from our parents’ generation, they did one job with one company for 40 years, the next generation might end up in three or four jobs. Your generation would

shift every 2-3 years. Because for them, three things are important. The cell phone, your immediate friendship and eating out.

Acknowledging that things are not the same, I think is important" (Participant #1, 2023). It can be noted that these experiences allow the person to become more mindful and can attribute towards mindful leader development. In addition, participants also provided detailed descriptions of lessons they learned while in a leadership position and how they realized a distinct difference between being a manager and a leader.

"Later, when I started to manage a team of people, I was using those practices which I learned back there when I was myself under some manager. But then eventually I learned from my mistakes, went through certain trainings as well as through the leadership program from my company and by doing, you know, different HR sessions, I realized that there is a need to shift from a mere manager to a leader. So, there is a difference between a manager and a leader. With manager you can be you know, Authoritative. Yeah, but people may not follow you or may not trust you. but when you are a leader then people start to build trust in you. now I feel that I follow that leadership and try to develop that trust, empower my team, give them liberty to do the way they want. So, I feel I have evolved from just a manager to a leader." (Participant #2, 2023)

Analyzing another significant result as mentioned in the excerpt above, from the practice of mindful experiential learning is the ability to evolve. It is not a one-time process. The experiences are iterative, and one can reflect on the learnings anytime according to the situation one is presented with.

Presenting some further descriptions in alignment with the sub-theme "So I would say there is a significant difference. Over the years you see a significant difference in yourself, how you operate, how you manage situations, how do you deal with people. five years back, if somebody in my team responded in a way, I would have got angry with him. Today I do not get angry with him. I try to understand what his perspective is. That is how you change over the years" (Participant #3, 2023)

Whereas responses relating to experiencing extremes along the professional journey were also recorded, where enjoying a certain sense of authority in the beginning and understanding and executing a sense of inclusivity as they moved up the ladder was observed. To help clarify the analysis presented above, a wonderfully described account of a leadership journey is provided below.

"I would not really say but quote unquote you can be a brute force in the room to say "I am the boss" I say this will happen. So, you, I mean when you are a new boss, you sometimes go into that mode where you say I am the boss and I know the best. So, over a period of next couple of years it changes. OK, I am the boss, so I will have the final authority, but I am OK to listen to everybody in the room to say which is the best idea and then I will decide what is the best idea so that "I" remains. But you tend to be more inclusive of the ideas of the room, right? Four years down the line, three years down the line when you go to the room, you stop saying my decision is final. you say, let us all discuss the problem.

Another 4-5 years down the line, it has become very inclusive and especially like I said during covid, it has been very, very inclusive. I have seen that now we all try to brainstorm, and we have gone to a level where most of our decisions are based on a consensus rather than the leader deciding this is how it will be done, and I am one part of that consensus. I should be able to process the thought, deliberate upon it and think how it will fit into the big picture. then say OK, this approach looks good. That is where I am now as of today” (Participant #6, 2023)

Finally, participants shared reports of “experience” being at the centre of their leadership development journey. These experiences combined with mindfulness training and well-being sessions play a crucial role in their self-development over time. Self-management as a sub-theme will be explored next.

4.2.2(b) Sub-Theme: Self-Management: The sub-theme aligns with the ability to control emotions at the work front. Improved emotional self-control as a leadership competency will be discussed in this section. It further comprehends with one's capacity to restrain irrational impulses and unfavourable feelings in routine and stressful situations. Self-management also includes mental clarity, a goal-oriented mindset, flexibility, and openness (Goleman, 2000).

Participants discussed about their opinion on the idea of leaders practicing mindfulness that would also link to reduced iteration rate in their organization. Most responses converged towards the ability to self-manage as a leader. Participant #7 shared her experiences regarding the same idea and emphasized on encompassing the ability of successfully regulating negative emotions.

Being a leader and being a good leader are two different things. I have worked with leaders who have no control over their emotions, and they project that on you. They project that stress on you. They project that non empathy just because and they are super smart people. I am not saying that they are incompetent. They're just not good leaders. So being a good leader, is a completely different ball game. And what I have observed in my career is that the best leaders are the ones who have their emotions in check, who have practiced some of these things. And they are very mindful of how they show up and how they are projecting on to the people who report to them” (Participant #7, 2023)

The ability to be thoughtful and conscious of one's emotions and demeanour at work was found to come with experience, learning from mistakes made in the past as well as through regular feedbacks from coworkers.

Participants #6 reiterated along the same lines, he delved upon the reasons for resigning and how being mindful and working on self-development as a leader could help in staff retention. “I am sure you might have also seen the most commonly provided reason after resignation, outside of the official reason that you give to HR is “your boss.” It is always said that people never leave organizations, they always leave bad bosses. And that is the truth. That is the truth. Whether you

look at it theoretically, whether you look at it from our own experiences, I can vouch for it. 90% of the leaders will confirm that people leave because of bad bosses. Mindfulness, self-development, team development, trying to bring everybody through, trying to have that ideating process, trying to involve everybody has a lot of positive impact on your peers, your deputies, your juniors, and the iteration rate at least in our industry IT has definitely. I have seen the impact of iteration when people work with good bosses.

Money wise, it might make a little difference, so there can still be 10% people who will always jump for money, but majority I would say 70-80% will continue to remain with the organization, will continue to give their best if their bosses are mindful, are inclusive of their approach, include them in the decision making and appreciate everybody's efforts" (Participant #6, 2023)

Study of the transcripts also revealed themes related to leader self-development with improved self and contextual awareness, which will be explored next.

#### 4.3 Theme 3: Improved Awareness

Table III. Theme 3, Improved Awareness

4.2.3(a) Sub Theme: Self-Awareness
4.2.3(b) Sub Theme: Social Awareness and Improved Empathy

There are various aspects when attributing towards leader self-development. Observations about improved awareness at work after practicing mindfulness are mostly related to self-awareness and social awareness, within which empathy was highlighted by most of the participants.

4.2.3(a) Sub-Theme: Self-Awareness: Self-awareness is crucial for a leader's personal growth and for becoming a better team leader. It enables leaders to increase their reputation and trust. They are able to see their own flaws and limitations and are willing to be upfront about them. With their staff and stakeholders, this sincerity promotes credibility. Participant #3 described it eloquently in a two-point approach: "Yes, yes, I think, one it definitely helps you to remain focused, as you said when you are mindful you remain in the present, you take better decisions. You do not overthink About certain things that could happen in future. You remain in the present and that helps you to take better calls. Second would be it helps in better stress management. It has helped me significantly and the I would say one major thing which I see improvement in me, Is better conflict management in both personal as well as professional life. Because it gives you a distinct perspective" (Participant #3, 2023)

The above statement focuses on leader self-awareness when one does not think too much and objectively observes the surroundings and hence also get better at making ethical decisions. As a result, we infer that mindfulness practices also help improve decision making.

Talking about being mindfully aware about the surroundings, Participant #1 mentioned self-reflection, how important it is and how less it is practiced in today's day and age. Further mentioning about becoming self-aware with respect to what is expected from the participant in that role.

A lot of people do not self-reflect. One of the things that I am mindful about is records management, and what could potentially go to court, litigation and ensuring data security and data integrity" (Participant #1, 2023)

Whereas participants mentioned that irrespective of the calm state of mind, they also felt that the pace of the outcomes of these exercises did not deliver on their expectations sometimes. Hence, they did not attach themselves too much to the outcomes. Nevertheless, they were satisfied with the slow but significant changes that they so far observed.

"But yes, although it brings certain calmness to you. it also brings in certain disappointment at certain times, but I think it is, I would say – a work in progress. You just need to keep working on it. Just keep doing it. without much of expectations, OK, at any rate, it is going to help you in the long run. So rather than having short term goals or the goal for today, I just take it as a long-term action." (Participant #8, 2023)

Finally, the most accurate explanation of being mindfully aware of the self, came from a discussion about meditation and practising Buddhism, when participant #5 stated: "Often we notice things about ourselves that we do not have an idea about. We do not have knowledge about, we do not have the proper terminology for it. We do not have an understanding of what is going on. But, when you know that an increased heart rate does certain things, you get more aware to listen and feel what your heart is doing. When you know that clenching your teeth puts strain on your muscles in your face and neck and on your whole body, then you are aware of it, and you can actively relax your teeth. So, these seminars, trainings, books, and exercises have helped me gain a lot of self-awareness. That helped me be being more relaxed and at peace" (Participant #5, 2023)

Participant 2 mentioned how mindfulness practices help prioritize tasks and structure thoughts, while stating the "Pareto 80-20 principle" the participant elaborated on how prioritization of initiatives intensifies the impact. The reference is as follows: "So, with these mindfulness practices, I have been able to identify by focusing that what are the most important things that I should prioritize. it has at least helped me in focusing my mind to in the right direction. So, mindfulness can be a guiding path, these things are helping me a lot in prioritizing things I would say" (Participant #2, 2023)

Hence, according to my analysis self-awareness is extremely crucial for the growth of a leader. It also improves the team dynamics as the leader identifies, acknowledges, and works on his/her shortcomings and can mindfully manage the performance of a team. Self- awareness is centre to leader self-development and there is ample evidence to support that mindfulness and well-being practices enhance leader self-development.

4.2.3(b) Sub-Theme: Social Awareness and Improved Empathy: Social Awareness emerged as a sub-theme during the discussion about improved awareness, participant #8 talked about social network and how it makes us feels watched all the time. The concept of being mindfully considerate about people's decisions and being respectful about it, goes a long way. Moreover, while discussing about the previously mentioned idea, the participant added "The minute you go on to any form of social network, people know you are using that network, anywhere in the world. There are Cameras everywhere. You are more watched than ever before. There has to be a limit, of privacy and being respectful of people's individuality" (Participant #8, 2023)

In an interesting coincidence, a similar answer emerged where participant #6 mentions about changing visibility "these days it is even more important because your visibility is less physical, more social. So, what I do, always goes on my social media account. So eventually it is good and bad. Good in the sense that now I have at least 200 references. To know what to do in a situation that I am in, it is quite easy for me to go on LinkedIn and see what my professional references would do in such a situation. On the other hand, it stops my mind from thinking afresh and I tend to be swayed by the public opinion. So, it has both positive and negative effects on you" (Participant #6, 2023) This demonstrates that the participants are aware of the positive and negative impacts of certain emerging technologies and are critically thinking towards improving their decision making.

The transcripts of the interviews contained both clear and implied allusions to the emergence of empathy towards colleagues and team members. There were also references to descriptions of how practicing mindfulness has helped people become more attuned to the sentiments of others. Participants gave elaborate accounts of these realizations that resulted in positive changes in how they perceived and interacted with others, as well as specific reports of experiencing these changes in themselves.

Empathy as a sub-theme emerged during the discussion about diversity, participant #1 talked about increasing diversity in Canada and how they had to inculcate more empathy towards diverse cultures while working within a team as the following quotation illustrates: “I mean, it is a fancy word for me. It just means do I understand where you are coming from? Do I understand your point of view? I may not agree with your point of view. but do I understand that you are speaking from your perspective? There are other things like diversity, especially in Canada because we have a multitude of diversity here. Plus, there is a recognition of indigenous culture, indigenous awareness that this country belongs to indigenous people” (Participant #1, 2023)

The conversation therefore centred on how improved team leadership was a result of our increased ability to recognise and comprehend the needs and feelings of others. It helped leaders become more socially aware, more accepting towards cultural and religious differences and be more adaptable with the changes.

To further correlate empathy with improved team dynamics, participants mentioned about going beyond their individual brilliance to help and motivate their team members achieve certain results. The following excerpt from an interview further exemplifies the above idea: “So you will have to go beyond your individual brilliance to understand people and to see how you can help them. Maybe bring to your level or above that level as well and see how you can work as a team. Yes, and empathy is an important part of that. You need to see from where they are coming from? Ok, you try to be in their shoes to understand the reason they have not done a particular task. How can you help them? So, I would say over the years you get that maturity at least I have seen, and I have tried to bring that change within me through these practices which is helping me to become a better person and a better leader.” (Participant #3, 2023) The preceding quotation serves as an example of the kind of scenarios several participants presented, highlighting how enhanced empathy assisted them in building interpersonal connections and comprehending the needs of others within an organizational setting. In these instances, participants demonstrated a better understanding of both important business requirements and the unique needs of their colleagues in relation to those requirements.

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Work Distress

4.2.4(a) Sub Theme: Individual Interpretations
4.2.4(b) Sub-Theme: Increasing Expectations

Table 4. Theme 4, Work Distress

Work distress has been seen to increase and is quite common in these times. After asking about how often participants felt stressed at work and how did they overcome it. Most responses were around defining the terminology as it meant different things to different people as well as around increasing expectations. Review of the transcripts also revealed certain coping mechanisms apart from practicing mindfulness which will be discussed in further detail ahead.

4.2.4(a) Sub-Theme: Individual interpretations: The sub-theme emerged as a result of discussions around stress at work, its frequency, and various coping techniques. Most participants related to “stress” as a term differently. For instance, a very riveting response from a participant noted “I was going to say- how often am I upset, every hour. I am annoyed most of the day. But stressed? Stress for me is - I feel my heart rate going up. I feel anxiety. I cannot sleep. I cannot forget work. I cannot relax. That, to me, is being stressed. And considering my definition of being stressed, it would not even be twice per week. once per week on average” (Participant #5, 2023)

Although, most of the other participants mentioned about experiencing stress most of the time. According to my analysis of the transcripts, apart from participant #5 all others were experiencing stress daily. This finding confirmed that people’s individual personality and perspective is a factor in demonstrating the importance of terminologies and its individual interpretations.

To emphasize the idea, some excerpts from the interview with Participant #1 are as follows: “Because what does stress means? Stress means different things to different people. How do you cope? How do you manage and how do you let go because sometimes you just have to let it be. Do not worry about it, you cannot change it” (Participant #1, 2023)

Finally, according to most participants it depends on the way one chooses to deal with a situation.

4.2.4(b) Sub-Theme: Increasing Expectations: Majority of the participants spoke about increasing expectations in the workplace and how it is creating problems. The expectations surrounding targets and deliverables, to always being expected to complete a task “yesterday” is the biggest issue. Although, rewards and recognition succeeding these events are prevalent in every organization, but having to go through a stressful situation at work often is not considered healthy.

Participants shared their experiences around the same, for instance, participant #4 mentions the undue pressure on completing a task “quickly”. It read: “how often do you feel stressed at work- all the time. No in the past it was not like this. Now the

biggest stress is expectations to get it done yesterday. They expect you to do it in a short period of time and quickly” (Participant #4, 2023)

Additionally, along the same lines, participants shared how lack of people, funds and moving everything to paperless has in-fact increased the workload. “Moving it from paper to paper less has not reduced workload. It has increased workload, it has increased expectations, that is the stress and that is something not everybody acknowledges” (Participant #1, 2023) Which brought to light the lack of acknowledgement regarding certain practices which might make employees feel neglected.

Participants also demonstrated an awareness of the occasionally unpleasant reality of their work environment. As seen by the following quote, which accompanies participant's discussion of how mindfulness has helped him to recognise and accept such challenges. “Then everything became central. That, to me, is a stress. We used to have an IT person in the building who would take care of our IT problems, that has been centralized. Now you must go through a call centre for them to sort your problems out. HR, we used to have designated and dedicated two HR people, one for hiring and recruitment and another one for Labor Relations, that has been centralized. So, you are losing that relationship, that is a stress for me. Centralization. It is a stressor more than anything” (Participant #4, 2023) She further added, “We should learn to be mindful about being more kind and just not think about it because it is out of our control now. I cannot control that. Let it be. Awareness is a big thing and acknowledging and not taking life too seriously. Is it like, the word here is chill? Get a chill pill, right?” (Participant #4, 2023)

However, participants also exhibited awareness regarding stress at workplace considering it a part of their corporate life “So, I think see stress today has become I do not know, we should not say this, but yes, it is a fact that it is kind of part and parcel of your corporate life because there are expectations. There are deliverables and when you try to achieve them you will have challenges. the task is always you can say tough to meet. So yes, stress is a part of the game and maybe not daily. Often you will have stress” (Participant #3, 2023) and how acknowledging it and taking a moment to self- reflect help in taking better decisions as a leader. “You should be self-motivated. Whenever I am under stress, I try to take a pause and see. Sometimes, if you react immediately, you will not take the right call, so you must give it a pause and think, OK, how do we tackle it?” (Participant #3, 2023)

According to most of the references, increasing expectations can be a major stressor, putting the mind to the present moment and acknowledging the situation allows the person to take better decisions. Self-Management is a concept we talked about

previously in this section, where increased emotional awareness helps reducing the intensity of stress. Consequently, assisting in leader self-development.

## 5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Organizations can implement the above-mentioned recommendations by allocating a budget towards health and wellbeing initiatives. They can additionally gain support from senior leadership by demonstrating the potential benefits of these initiatives, highlighting that these practices can contribute to employee engagement, performance and, overall organizational success. Moreover, preparing a cost-benefit analysis that outlines the potential ROI (stating factors such as, decreased stress-related absenteeism or increased staff retention) of implementing these practices will foster better collaboration.

First, carrying out a "Needs assessment" will assist in determining the preferences of leaders and will also help in customizing the programs to their unique needs. Along with using internal resources, working with outside wellness experts and practitioners for specialized advice will be advantageous. Continuous improvement will be aided by testing these efforts using a phased approach, pilot programs, and outcomes measurement. The success of these activities must be shared with others in order to demonstrate their positive effects on leadership development and overall organizational well-being.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This research was designed to accomplish the following research questions:

Question 1: How do mindfulness and wellbeing practices influence leadership styles?

Question 2: How do these practices help contribute towards leader self-development?

where a qualitative research method was undertaken and eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with organizational leaders who had extensive experience of working in multinational organizations, the study participants were selected from across the globe to eliminate any biases that may arise. Most professionals interviewed were in senior leadership positions and had experience with working as well as leading teams.

While exploring the answers to the above-mentioned research questions, some insights are gained from organizational leaders who are leading teams, they reflected on their experiences and converged on the fact of leading while keeping the circumstances in mind. Whereas, they also pointed towards the unlikeliness of a

positive result from meditation techniques under stringent timelines. Most of them expressed how they personally felt while reflecting on their respective leadership journeys which they would not have done otherwise. Some exclaimed awe and excitement to have come this far and gauged upon their growth as leaders.

As a result, the research worked towards achieving the initial objectives, albeit there is still room for further study because investigating mindfulness at work is a burgeoning field that will have a significant impact on human dynamics in the future.

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