



Mindfulness Interventions and Their Application to the Work Environment

Mario A Diaz and Eros R DeSouza*

Department of Psychology, Illinois State University, USA

***Corresponding author:** Eros R DeSouza, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University, USA.

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Abstract

By focusing research efforts towards extending mindfulness knowledge, existing research can shed light onto the potential of mindfulness and the beneficial techniques it may offer. Techniques of mindfulness include meditation, interventions, training, and mindfulness-based strategies. Mindfulness interventions can provide insight into the benefits of mindfulness in work settings. Recently, work-related mindfulness programs have increased in popularity due to their claims of positive effects on employees' well-being and work-related benefits. Previous mindfulness research has demonstrated positive effects on organizational issues like lowering turnover and increasing employees' job performance. Yet, well-designed scientific research has been lacking to test the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions within the work environment. This entry provides examples of recent scientific studies that demonstrate various mindfulness intervention applications to the work environment. These preliminary results suggest that mindfulness can improve the work environment.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Interventions, Meditation, Work environment, Intrinsic benefits, Extrinsic benefits

Introduction

Mindfulness can be developed to foster physical and psychological wellbeing when applied to daily experiences, personal conflicts, and work environment dynamics. Promising results of previous mindfulness research has inspired organizations to integrate the practice within their work environment [1-5]. However, the quick widespread adoption of work-related mindfulness interventions has been implemented before fully testing the effectiveness of such interventions [1]. As result, we see the practice of mindfulness being utilized with only a few methodologically strong randomized controlled trials, producing obstacles in separating pseudoscience claims from true scientific findings [6]. Only with high-quality scientific studies can researchers extend mindfulness knowledge and create effective work environment mindfulness techniques.

Mindfulness expert Jon Kabat Zinn defines mindfulness as nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment [7]. Mindfulness has been found to produce intrinsic and extrinsic benefits for

employees, which are also beneficial for organizations. According to the University of California Los Angeles Mindfulness Awareness Research Center, meditation is a technique that can offer the practitioner intrinsic emotional, mental, and physical benefits [8]. Moreover, mindfulness meditation can be performed virtually anywhere and does not require an extended amount of time to learn. Previous mindfulness research has shown that a practitioner's regular use of meditation increases one's prosocial behaviors and empathy towards others [2]. Mindfulness also increases attentional control, which allows employees the ability to efficiently prioritize tasks and ignore distractions within the work environment [3]. Previous research has also demonstrated that mindfulness can increase a practitioner's emotional regulation and decrease implicit (unconscious) biases [3,9,10], as well as increase a practitioner's work productivity, work satisfaction, work resiliency and teamwork which are further described below [1,5].

Significant Mindfulness Research

A recent study found that high-dose mindfulness training raised levels of attentional control among employees [1]. Higher levels of attentional control allowed employees to have more power over their work and life dynamics. With this knowledge, it is in an organization's best interest to offer tools to employees to raise their attentional control. One simple tool that could be offered to employees is mindfulness meditation guidelines. Scholars suggest that mindfulness can help regulate one's work and personal life dynamics by improving attentional control to cope with work-related cognitions and emotions more effectively [3,11]. Additionally, one study found that job productivity improved over time for both short and long-term practitioners of mindfulness [1]. Mindfulness interventions have also significantly reduced stress and increased sleep [12]. Through reducing turnover and increasing employees' job satisfaction levels, mindfulness benefits the organization by limiting the amount of recruitment and selection procedures utilized to fill open organizational positions. Although such findings are encouraging, more experimental research with large and diverse numbers of participants is needed.

Other benefits of mindfulness have been highlighted in recent studies that can be used to improve the work environment. Researchers reported that mindfulness training decreased implicit racial bias, age bias and bias towards people with disabilities [9,10]. It is required that organization incorporate non-discrimination practices and promote a diverse workforce. Specifically, with the increasing demographic diversity of the workforce, mindfulness can help organizations address unconscious biases about a particular group of people in order to create more inclusive work environment [13] that is free from microaggressions, which are often automatic (unconscious) subtle insults. Previous research also demonstrates that organizations with a more diverse workforce perform better financially [5]. Concerning stress, researchers found that mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) increased work engagement and resiliency in intensive care units, which are high-stress work environments where burnout is high [14].

Conclusion

The potential for mindfulness to be integrated within the work environment is promising, as the discussed research demonstrates its application to a variety of situations in work environments. Limitations of the studies reviewed include small sample sizes, lack of diversity in their samples, and often relying on self-report measures which are prone to yield socially acceptable answers. Future research on MBIs in the work environment should be experimental in nature to infer causality between mindfulness techniques and their benefits to organizations. Such studies should

also identify key elements and/or mechanisms that make MBIs effective. Lastly, it is important to identify the optimal mode of delivery among a diverse workforce, as certain modes may be best suited for some groups but not others.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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