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Be Mindful of Motives for Mindfulness Training

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The focal article (Hyland, Lee, & Mills, 2015) has reviewed the literature and has generally concluded that research on mindfulness training has been supportive and suggestive of the potential of these interventions to benefit organizations and people in the workplace. We generally agree with this

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conclusion but have some suggestions regarding future research and the implementation of mindfulness interventions. Our first suggestion is that organizations exercise caution about simply jumping on the mindfulness bandwagon without thinking through the decision to implement mindfulness interventions. The wide variety of mindfulness techniques can be very different in terms of the techniques used, the potential to be perceived as intrusive, and the outcomes associated with the different mindfulness interventions. We suggest that, when mindfulness interventions are implemented in organizations, the fit of the intervention with the specific goals of the organization be considered as well as alternative interventions. In addition, we suggest that the benefits to employees and employers be clearly articulated, as there may be possible conflicts between these constituencies.

Clarifying Objectives

The objectives of mindfulness training are often only vaguely specified prior to implementation. A review of the definitions, objectives, target audience, and resources available for training is critical to gain acceptance, design training, and evaluate the effectiveness of the training (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Clarifying what is meant by “cultivating mindfulness” is a particularly important first step given the variety of terms and traditions relating to mindfulness. Terms such as workplace mindfulness, organizational mindfulness, collective mindfulness, workplace spirituality, mindful organizing, human resource mindfulness, or meta- and supra-mindfulness appear related but may in fact reflect different objectives. Interventions should take care to avoid construct confusion and use precision in terms, definitions, and desired outcomes.

In addition to the variety of terms, mindfulness training can encompass diverse sets of practices. Some practices are sedentary like surveys and diaries, but others engage with more physicality. Popular mindfulness interventions have included guided instruction, group discussion, individual or group therapy, stretching, flowing movements, breathing exercises, body scans, yoga, relaxation exercises, and home assignments (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Reid, 2011). Resources and constraints must be reviewed to choose the methods and design the training. Will participants need comfortable clothing, private spaces, or special materials? Some programs are inconvenient for employees because of the need to change clothes and to find the appropriate yoga space; some programs require access to online software. Training may need modifications across occupations, work spaces, disabilities, and organizational contexts. How much time will be taken during work hours? Will training occur in groups or individually? Answers to these and other questions can be addressed with a thorough needs assessment before developing training. Therefore, it is important to have objectives

and weigh the costs and benefits associated with different implementations prior to launching programs. A single training program cannot involve every possible practice, so those offering the training need to make choices and decisions about what is the best fit for the situation.

Potential for Effective Outcomes

Training in mindfulness is only one option to address stress, productivity, well-being, or other current targets of mindfulness training. Other appropriate actions might include approaches relating to selection and person–job fit, job design, supervisory skills training, or analyzing motivational barriers. An in-depth exploration of the situation can help determine whether mindfulness training is a suitable approach or whether it may be serving as a placebo or patch that hides more pervasive and difficult problems.

It is entirely possible that some mindfulness interventions do not solve the original concerns and may in fact have negative repercussions. Individuals may misallocate their attention to what they think is important at the expense of what is actually important for performance on a given task (Dane, 2011). Employees who are highly mindful may not act quickly if they are preoccupied with failure from overthinking (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). Focusing on processes of an overlearned behavior could be disruptive, as Langer and Weinman (1981) found where certain aspects of mindfulness reduced individuals' creativity. Directing attention to where a person feels discomfort can create more experiences of pain and distress if the employee doesn't understand the process or is guided through it improperly (Brown et al., 2007). If attentional control is given to a person who doesn't want it or who doesn't know how to use it, it can negate the benefits of mindfulness (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996).

Mindfulness may also have unexpected consequences to the organization. Mindful individuals may become more aware of conflicting goals within certain activities and may choose to contribute to tasks only when they agree with the particular goal (Glomb, Duffy, Bono, & Yang, 2011). For example, employees may gain insight regarding high personal costs of helping coworkers or clients, reevaluate their work commitment to slow their pace at work, or place more emphasis on their family and personal connections than organizationally focused tasks (Glomb et al., 2011). Although these may not be undesirable outcomes, it is useful to highlight that the benefits may vary by stakeholders.

Conclusion

Mindfulness training has been implemented in some organizations with the goal of reducing stress and increasing health, well-being, cognitive functioning, learning, and productivity. Although evidence exists of potential benefits, mindfulness training, like other organizational interventions, should

be informed by the best practices of industrial–organizational psychology. Prior to any intervention, diagnosis and needs analyses are needed to gauge what are appropriate solutions to the organizational and individual concerns. These assessments should explore alternate ways of reaching the objective and inform any training design and implementation. Given the variety of objectives, techniques, and outcomes, it is imperative that mindfulness training receives mindful scrutiny.

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Being Mindful of Work–Family Issues: Intervention to a Modern Stressor

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Recently, mindfulness research has grown quickly, particularly as an avenue to increase productivity and alleviate modern workers' growing stress

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