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Flourishing in the Workplace Through Meditation and Mindfulness

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We believe that Hyland, Lee, and Mills (2015) introduced important considerations concerning the importance of mindfulness for research and practice

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in industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology, and we applaud their effort. We also feel that some equally important points were neglected or given scant attention. We amplify their introduction in three ways. We discuss (a) how construct confusion is common when new constructs are introduced and how paying attention to the type of meditation practice used to induce mindfulness will enhance construct clarity, (b) how using forms of meditation that employ physical movement and other activities to induce mindfulness expand the choices for intervention and training, and (c) how meditation and mindfulness provide a valuable bridge linking positive psychology and I-O psychology theory and practice.

Because mindfulness is a new construct, confusion concerning its meaning and relevance is to be expected. New constructs often produce questions about meaning, relevance, and importance. Ambiguity may be most common when new constructs come from disciplines other than psychology. The introduction of organizational culture, a construct created in sociology and anthropology, provides an example of this. When organizational culture was introduced, it raised questions and stimulated debates about its similarity to existing constructs such as organizational climate and psychological climate, the best means for operationalizing and measuring it, and its relationship to work outcomes (Denison, 1996). Over time, the similarities and differences between these constructs became clear, each was integrated into more comprehensive models of the organization, and together they provided important advances in I-O psychology research and practice (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Muhammad, 2013). We believe that confusion concerning the construct of mindfulness will abate as psychologists gain more experience with it.

Construct Confusion to Construct Clarity

Hyland et al. discussed mindfulness without explaining the types of meditation that produce this state of awareness. We feel that this omission can confound attempts to clarify the construct and create operational definitions. Hundreds of meditation techniques exist, but they fall broadly into three types: focused attention, open awareness, and guided intention forms of meditation (e.g., Sedlmeier et al., 2012). Hyland et al. conflated two of these, focused attention and open awareness, to represent mindfulness, when in fact these represent two different approaches to meditation that produce different types of awareness and outcomes. Focused attention meditation uses various targets to train attention. These targets often include some part of the body, such as the breath or lower abdomen. Focused attention meditation is frequently used as a preliminary practice to produce sufficient mental stability to enable practice of other, more challenging forms of meditation. Despite differences in national and religious origin and purpose, all three approaches to meditation share similarities (Kohn, 2008), but their outcomes

and causal mechanisms may vary (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012; Sedlmeier et al., 2012).

Rather than narrow the focus of one's attention, open awareness meditation expands attention to focus simultaneously, nonjudgmentally, and non-analytically on physical sensations, thoughts, feelings, and other internal and external stimuli that arise in the present moment. This yields a state of open awareness (mindfulness) in which one pays attention to all that enters one's perceptual field. Variations of this type of meditation have been most studied in research, and they are often conflated with the mindful state of awareness that the meditation produces.

Guided intention forms of meditation yoke attention and awareness to intention without attaching strongly to the desired goal or outcome. Resolving the contradiction between having an intention and simultaneously not attaching to it is a major challenge of this approach and yields some of its most important benefits. Loving-kindness meditation is an example, where the meditator employs focused attention to hold loosely to the goal of evoking and enhancing positive emotions and compassion toward oneself and others.

Researchers should choose the meditation method that matches their goals and should be explicit about the meditation method they are studying and the population in which they are studying it. For example, focused attention and open awareness approaches to meditation may have different impacts on attention regulation and other aspects of cognition, and neither may be as successful in cultivating positive emotions as guided intention forms of meditation such as those that emphasize loving kindness (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008). These differential effects result because meditation approaches may have different causal mechanisms (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006) that influence different areas of the brain (Cahn & Polich, 2006) and other aspects of neurobiology and physiology (Esch, 2014), which in turn influence distal outcomes such as expressions of affect (Davidson & Lutz, 2008). Moreover, meditation effects may be stronger in experienced meditators compared with novices, which has important implications for research that examines meditation and mindfulness using short-term interventions and training with meditation-naïve participants (Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008).

Moving Meditation

The second point we wish to make is that most research studies on mindfulness employ physically static, usually seated, forms of meditation. Moving meditation practices focus on integration of body movements with the three types of meditation described above. For example, one may use focused attention or open awareness while performing different physical

movements. Moving forms of meditation have been used for millennia in Asia to increase longevity and enhance physical and mental well-being, for example, Chinese practices associated with Daoism (Kohn, 1989, 2006). Moving forms of meditation are often more accessible to those who find it difficult to sit still for the long periods of time needed in seated forms of meditation.

Moving meditation practices that have received growing research attention include *taiji quan* (tai chi) and *qigong*, both of which are ancient Chinese systems of psychophysiological self-regulation used to produce physical and mental health outcomes comparable with those produced by seated forms of meditation. Mental health outcomes important in the workplace include reduction of depression and anxiety (Chen et al., 2012) and improved cognitive function (Mortimer et al., 2012). Occupational health outcomes include enhanced immune system response (Morgan, Irwin, Chung, & Wang, 2014), reduction in the stress-related hormones of cortisol and inflammatory cytokines (Campo et al., 2015), and improved stress management (Wang et al., 2014). Other work-related outcomes include improved daily function and quality of life associated with management of chronic diseases such as cancer (Zeng, Luo, Xie, Huang, & Cheng, 2014), Parkinson's disease (Ni, Liu, Lu, Shi, & Guo, 2014), and fibromyalgia (Langhorst, Klose, Dobos, Bernardy, & Häuser, 2013); improvement in head, neck, and shoulder mobility injuries (Fong et al., 2015); and enhanced pulmonary function and exercise capacity (Niu, He, Luo, & Hu, 2014). Moving forms of meditation, because of their impact on multiple physiological systems, may improve a wider range of work-related outcomes than seated forms of meditation, but this is only speculation.

Sitting and moving forms of meditation may be usefully combined as is done with the use of open awareness meditation and yoga in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), one of the most studied and effective mindfulness interventions (Sedlmeier et al., 2012). Immersive interventions create living environments that combine sitting and moving meditation with other activities, such as cooking and walks in nature, to induce deep states of mindfulness (Davis & Kohn, 2009). Sitting and moving meditation techniques may also be combined to augment and deepen traditional approaches to education and training in I-O psychology (Davis, 2013).

Meditation, Mindfulness, and Positive Organizations

Our third aim is to highlight the link between positive psychology and I-O psychology and the role that meditation and mindfulness may play in strengthening this connection. Positive psychology focuses on human strengths and flourishing. Processes and outcomes studied by positive psychologists that are potentially relevant to I-O psychology include resilience

when confronted by adversity and failure; positive cognitions and attitudes such as optimism, hope, and information processing; positive affect, positive emotions, and emotional self-regulation; character strengths and values, meaningfulness, wisdom, and transcendence; and prosocial motivation, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion (Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2015). Concepts from positive psychology are being widely adapted to the study of organizations (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2013).

Meditation and mindfulness play an important role in many of the processes and outcomes studied in positive psychology that may be relevant to the workplace (Davis, 2011). For example, affective dispositions and emotions are important in organizations (Brief & Weiss, 2002) as is the ability to monitor and regulate one's emotions (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Positive psychologists have provided a possible causal mechanism to explain some of these workplace effects. Positive affect and emotions can create an expanding spiral of positive influence that broadens and builds personal resources that may be used to support desired actions, such as interactions with customers and coworkers (Fredrickson, 2001). Meditation and mindfulness are associated with enhanced self-monitoring of emotions, expression of positive emotions, reduced negative emotions, and emotional regulation, and meditation and mindfulness may moderate the relationships between these variables and other organizational outcomes (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012).

A meta-analysis of kindness-based meditations, which are intended to cultivate compassion and prosocial motivation, shows consistent enhancement of positive emotions (Galante, Galante, Bekkers, & Gallacher, 2014). In one example, participants from an information technology organization that practiced loving-kindness meditation increased their daily experience of positive emotions, and these, in turn, produced increases in a wide variety of personal resources including mindfulness and social support, providing evidence for the "build" portion of the broaden and build model of positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). This result highlights the manner in which loving-kindness meditation may be used to cultivate the emotional and personal resources needed to produce compassionate organizations (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006).

Meditation and mindfulness provide an important means to foster human flourishing. Centuries of experience with their use provide anecdotal evidence that they enhance many aspects of life. Researchers are beginning to document these outcomes, and I-O psychologists have much to gain from considering their contribution to work life. Personal experience with each of these meditation techniques and the states of awareness they produce will deepen the efforts of I-O psychologists to study and understand them. Individuals, teams, and organizations will flourish as a result.

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Making Sure That Mindfulness Is Promoted in Organizations in the Right Way and for the Right Goals

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I am happy to see the topic of mindfulness at work find its way into this journal as a focal article (Hyland, Lee, & Mills, 2015), and I read it with great interest. Although I agree with most of the points made, I want to elaborate on some critical issues that were not or were only briefly touched on and that I deem worthy of further exploration and discussion.

With the current surge in popularity of mindfulness trainings in organizations, it is our responsibility as (mindfulness) researchers to ensure that mindfulness interventions are used for the right goals and implemented so that they benefit the participating individuals. Given the current publicity about mindfulness in the media and comparatively little empirical evidence on mindfulness in industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology, there is a risk that mindfulness interventions will be sold as a panacea to fix well-being, motivation, and performance-related problems in organizations without changing potentially underlying structural problems. In order to be able to manage organizational expectations about mindfulness interventions and to safeguard the proper use and promotion of mindfulness in organizations, it is important to address a number of critical issues. These issues refer to commonly held (mis)conceptions and research foci that limit not only our

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