

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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levels (Hyland, Lee, & Mills, 2015). In a parallel but largely separate literature, work-family<sup>1</sup> conflict has received expansive research attention in the last several decades as an important modern stressor. Work-family researchers have repeatedly called for practical interventions and individual strategies such as coping (e.g., Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011). As a potential remedy for modern stress with demonstrated utility in the workplace, mindfulness is ideally suited to facilitate workers' efforts to balance their work and personal life domains. The purpose of this commentary is to explore numerous ways through which bridging mindfulness and work-family literatures will advance organizational science and practice.

### **Integrating Mindfulness and Work-Family Research**

Hyland et al. identify "managing employee stress" as the first application of mindfulness in the workplace but do not specify work-family as an area of research inquiry. Both mindfulness and work-family research share common footing in the domain of occupational health psychology with overlapping nomological networks. Despite this overlap, we were only able to find a couple of studies that jointly examine mindfulness and work-family (Allen & Kiburz, 2012; Michel, Bosch, & Rexroth, 2014). Thus, it is unfortunate, but not surprising, that discussion of work-family was omitted from Hyland et al.'s focal article.

When Hyland et al. allude to work-family issues in passing, it is framed in the context of the downside of mindfulness for organizations. The authors state that "mindfulness may help employees realize that they should not overburden themselves with extra work duties, should have a more relaxed approach to work, and/or should spend more time with their family as opposed to their work responsibilities. Therefore, it is possible that mindfulness may not facilitate bottom-line organizational performance in the short term" (p. 593). We argue that this viewpoint does not fully capture the complexities of the topic and can be enlightened by current work-family research and theory.

First, the culmination of work-family research studies make a strong case to support the notion that the organizations share a common interest in facilitating workers' attempts to balance work and personal life demands and reduce work-family conflict. In meta-analytic research, discontinuity between work and personal life roles is associated with negative outcomes such as turnover intentions and adverse health symptoms (Allen, Herst,

<sup>1</sup> Consistent with existing literature (e.g., see Kossek, Baltes, & Matthews, 2011), the terms "family" and "life" will be used interchangeably to reflect the multiple personal life roles individuals possess.

Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). In contrast, reporting complementary work and personal life roles is linked with higher job satisfaction, affective commitment, family satisfaction, and mental and physical health (McNall, Nicklin, & Masuda, 2010). Having policies that support work–family is linked with higher firm-level performance (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). Thus, it stands to reason that employers can recruit and retain employees by fostering mindfulness as a way of reducing work–family conflict for both short-term and long-term gains.

Second, work–family scholars have moved well beyond viewing work and personal life domains as competitive counterparts and have recognized that the work–family interface is multifaceted. Applying the various conceptualizations of multiple role involvement is essential to understanding how mindfulness can impact work–family outcomes. The quotation above assumes the *conflict perspective* of viewing work–family issues; this perspective views work and family roles as incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The quotation also emphasizes time-based conflict. However, Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identify two other types of conflict that may be more relevant to mindfulness: (a) *Strain-based conflict* is when a person is distracted from their current role because they are thinking or worrying about the other role. Strain-based conflict could include an employee not paying attention to family because they are worrying about an upcoming deadline at work or being disengaged and distracted at work due to an illness in the family. (b) *Behavior-based conflict* occurs when behaviors in one role are inappropriately enacted in the other role. Behavior-based conflict could include police officers who carry their authoritative role into parenting interactions or, conversely, are overly trusting in their interactions with criminals who are in the same age group as their own children. Mindfulness could reduce strain-based work–family conflict by increasing workers' ability to focus on the present moment and fully designate their cognitive resources to work while at work and to family while at home. Mindfulness is linked to a reduced automaticity of behaviors and enhanced behavioral flexibility, both of which should reduce behavior-based conflict. In turn, mindfulness likely has direct effects on work–family conflict and can serve as a buffer to some of the negative outcomes of work–family conflict.

### ***An Individual Strategy***

Mindfulness could be conceptualized along with other individual strategies to reduce conflict such as coping and recovery strategies. As initial support for this conceptualization, Michel et al. (2014) found that employees who were given mindfulness training were better able to psychologically detach from work, reported less strain-based conflict, and, in turn, reported greater satisfaction with their work–life balance. Other research has demonstrated

a relationship between daily psychological detachment and the effects of positive experiences at work (Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag, & Fullagar, 2012). Mindfulness meditation may be particularly useful for jobs with high integration, where boundaries between work and life are blurred (e.g., workers who are “on call,” own their own business, etc.), and for individuals with a boundary management style that favors segmentation (i.e., separating or focusing on one role at a time).

Hyland et al.’s review of the literature concerning mindfulness as a buffer to stress outcomes provides support for the categorization of mindfulness as a recovery strategy. Allen and Kiburz (2012) provide preliminary support for the efficacy of mindfulness as a recovery strategy. They conceptualized mindfulness as a trait and found it related to work–life balance both directly and through vitality and sleep quality. Because of the impact of mindfulness on burnout (see Hyland et al., 2015, for a review), mindfulness training may be particularly useful as a work–life balance intervention in jobs where employees have high emotional labor and are especially susceptible to cognitive intrusions of work into personal life (e.g., work with trauma victims). Mindfulness training may pay dividends as a work–family balance accommodation in the long term by creating a healthier, more sustainable workforce.

As noted above, work–family research has moved beyond conceptualizing work and family domains from a conflict perspective. The *enrichment perspective* identifies numerous ways in which work and personal life roles can operate synergistically (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). For example, work and personal life may positively impact one another through positive affect, behavior, and the development of skills and values. Mindfulness training develops skills and values that are useful in both domains. Indeed, through mindfulness training, workers may learn to savor their work and personal life domains so that both roles are more enjoyable. Through the lens of the enrichment perspective, offering such training with the genuine goal of facilitating work–life balance may dually serve the employee and organization’s interests.

### **Crossover**

The impact of the work–family interface extends beyond individuals. *Crossover* refers to when one person’s negative or positive experiences transfer to another person (Westman, 2001). Mindfulness increases empathy, which is the primary mechanism through which crossover occurs. Crossover may occur between individuals within an organization or between domains (e.g., between employees and their family members). Regarding crossover within the work domain, Carlson, Ferguson, Kacmar, Grzywacz, and Whitten (2011) found that a supervisor’s work–family enrichment led to a more family-friendly work environment, which in turn led to higher subordinate

work–family enrichment. We discuss leadership further below. Crossover into the family domain may have important impacts on work-related outcomes. For example, Wayne, Casper, Matthews, and Allen (2013) found that family supportive organizational perceptions are linked with employee commitment to the organization in part through partner attitudes. To the extent that mindfulness represents the development of positive skills and values, its individual and organizational benefits may only be fully captured by assessing the viewpoints of others. Future mindfulness research should consider that those others might be role senders outside of the organization (e.g., spouses).

### Leadership

Second to managing employee stress, Hyland et al. identified leadership as an important application for mindfulness research. Likewise, leadership is an important and current line of inquiry in work–family research (Major & Morganson, 2011). Support for work–family from one’s supervisor plays an essential role in reducing conflict (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). Some research in this area has focused on identifying family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSBs), finding that FSSBs are linked with lower work–family conflict, higher job satisfaction, and higher performance ratings (Hammer, Kossek, Bodner, & Crain, 2013; Odle-Dusseau, Britt, & Greene-Shortridge, 2012). Supervisors play a crucial role in the ability of their subordinates to successfully balance professional and personal roles. What is missing from this literature is a strong theoretical underpinning that explains *how* and *why* leadership impacts work–family outcomes. For example, why do supervisors engage in FSSBs? Mindfulness research can serve to fill research gaps in this area.

Mindful leaders may be ideally suited to foster work–family balance in their work groups and organizations. Organizational leaders who are mindful may show increased FSSBs, resulting in greater work–family balance for their subordinates. The specific dimensions of FSSBs are emotional support, instrumental support, creative work–family management, and role modeling behaviors (Hammer et al., 2013). Emotional support involves showing concern for a subordinate as well as the subordinate’s perception that s/he is cared for and able to freely communicate about work–family conflict. Instrumental support involves the work-related actions a supervisor can take in response to a subordinate’s work–family conflict (e.g., scheduling flexible hours for an employee whose child is ill). Creative work–family management is proactive and innovative and involves taking action at an organizational level. Role model behaviors involve supervisors actively displaying behaviors that support their own work–family balance (e.g., leaving work early for a family function) in order to assure subordinates that they may do the same.

Leaders who practice mindfulness are more likely to exhibit FSSBs due to the attitudinal and cognitive changes associated with the practice. Areas of the brain associated with affective processing, emotion regulation, and perspective taking are positively impacted by mindfulness, and increased activity in these areas enables leaders to experience empathy and engage in emotionally supportive behaviors. Improved mood and affect combined with adaptive responses to stress also enable leaders to instrumentally support their subordinates. For example, a leader could demonstrate instrumental support for an employee who is experiencing strain-based conflict by offering to extend a project deadline so s/he can care for her elderly mother. Leaders who experience low levels of stress have more cognitive and emotional resources to devote to helping their subordinates achieve work-family balance. This falls in direct alignment with the FSSB dimension of creative work-family management. Enhanced cognitive flexibility, reduced emotional exhaustion, and improved executive functioning all directly contribute to a leader's ability to find new and improved methods for helping subordinates achieve work-family balance. Finally, role modeling may be the most salient way for supervisors to provide support for their subordinate's ability to balance personal and professional roles. Role modeling involves leading by example or "authentic" leadership. Managers can employ mindfulness as a self-care strategy for their own work-family balance; in doing so, they serve as role models and authentic leaders (Morganson, Litano, & O'Neill, 2014), promoting work-family balance and well-being among in their subordinates.

Recently, mindfulness and psychological capital were shown to have a negative relationship with leaders' experiences of dysfunctional psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and negative affect (Roche, Haar, & Luthans, 2014). The implication of these findings is that mindfulness mitigates those psychological outcomes that can be distracting and detracting for leaders. Leaders who are mindful are not more likely to shirk their work duties in favor of family duties. On the contrary, supervisors who model work-family balancing behaviors must have their own balance in order for their leadership to be authentic. Authentic leaders may use mindfulness practices to facilitate FSSBs.

### **Conclusion**

Work-family research emerged in response to factors including increased globalization, lower job security, and changes in information technology that blur the boundaries between work and family domains (Major & Germano, 2006). One may go as far as to argue that our society is in a state of mindlessness; people are torn between work and personal life domains and chronically function in a state of low awareness, automaticity, and habit.

Particularly in the United States, individuals are frequently left to their own devices to find ways to balance their multiple role demands (Major & Germano, 2006). The application of mindfulness to work–family answers numerous calls for scholarship in the work–family literature. Mindfulness interventions and mindful leadership offer a potential antidote, to the benefit of individuals, people in their personal lives, organizations, and perhaps even society as a whole.

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## Mindfulness and the Transfer of Training

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Hyland, Lee, and Mills (2015) make a strong case for research and practice on mindfulness within the industrial–organizational community. Their main argument is that mindfulness has the potential to provide physical,

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