Mindful Leadership:
Cultivating Sagacity and Wisdom in the Workplace

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Introduction

Mindfulness is a concept that has received enormous attention from scholars, practitioners and, more recently, business leaders. The concept, rooted in Buddhist philosophy, is literally translated from the Buddhist word *sati*, which has been described as the clear comprehension of the mind (Dunne, 2004). While it may seem curious that an ancient contemplative practice would be found in boardrooms, military organizations, and professional sports teams, the growing body of research supporting the benefits of mindfulness has compelled leaders of even the most conservative organizations to consider practicing mindfulness. The purpose of this paper is to review some of these benefits and discuss why mindfulness is a timely concept befitting organizations today. Furthermore, we offer practical advise on how the concept of mindfulness can be applied to leadership in the workplace.

There are a number of contextual forces that have supported the rise of mindfulness. Simply put, today's workplace can be overwhelming. The seemingly endless list of demands reinforces a highly reactive mode of being

This paper reviews theoretical and empirical management literature on mindfulness in organizations and puts forth a conceptualization of mindful leadership based on Vago and Silbersweig's (2012) S-ART model (self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence). Mindful leadership is then linked to outcomes such as performance, well-being, and interpersonal relationships. Case summaries of several organizations that are applying mindfulness are presented and lastly, we provide examples of simple mindfulness exercises and techniques that can be practiced by individuals in the workplace to develop present-moment awareness.

where reflection and proactive planning are often luxuries denied to the average employee. Stress, overload, anxiety, pressure, and constant connectivity define the nature of the current work environment. The integration of screen intensive technology into every day lifestyles is negatively impacting attention spans (Carr, 2010) and creating a culture obsessed with multi-tasking. Time may appear increasingly limited as work obligations and other priorities compete for attention. For all the emails, voicemails, phone calls and meeting requests, there appears to be fewer meaningful face-to-face interactions and instead, an abundance of stress as we spend as much time interpreting the words as we do reading the content. Overall levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and employee burnout are rising, creating a modern day

pandemic in organizations that come at a great cost to employers. Indeed, recently 83% of Americans reported that they felt stressed by their work (Swartz, 2013). In Canada alone, costs due to stress are estimated to be upwards of $50 billion (Lim et al., 2008).

In addition, the psychological contract between employees and employers is shifting. While receiving a steady paycheck is still an integral component of employment, there is a growing desire for work to be fulfilling on a relational level that extends beyond financial compensation impacting socio-emotional expectations (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994). In today's workplace, loyalty is just as likely to mean being true to oneself, as it is to mean being loyal to one's firm. This may partly explain the increasing desire to align one's identity with the organizational identity of

a firm they respect and admire (Lievens, Van Hoye, &Anseel, 2007). To further complicate matters, the expectations of the employee-employer relationship may fluctuate depending on the generation of the employee. There are marked differences between the generations housed within the walls of any organization, which thus requires tailored methods to engage and motivate each generational group.

The complexity of challenges within the current work environment put both productivity and well being at risk. While performance and productivity have been central to the operation of successful firms since their inception, employee well being has only more recently become a point of focus for organizational development. In the last decade, a greater number of organizations have recognized the benefits of taking a concerted interest in the health and wellness of their employees. The mental health of employees is a topic that is all too often left out of the wellness discussion; despite the obvious relationship mental health has with performance outcomes. Leaders face the difficult task of motivating optimal performance levels from a depleted and overwhelmed workforce. One tool that may help

leaders navigate through the challenges they face is the application of mindfulness to their work, relationships, and leadership philosophy.

Mindfulness may represent a stream of research that brings together conversations on mental health, wellness, and performance metrics in the organizational arena. Research on mindfulness training – attention training techniques based on mindfulness mediation – may offer a strategy that not only strengthens the mental health and well-being of individuals, but enhances their performance at work by cultivating their ability to sustain their focus and manage their emotions. Indeed, cultivating mindfulness may provide leaders with the skills they need to manage their employees more effectively in today's workplace.

This paper unfolds in four sections. First, we review the conceptualization of mindfulness in the literature and present three mechanisms of mindfulness training based on the work of Vago and Silbersweig (2012): self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence. Furthermore, we present recent empirical findings that illustrate how mindfulness may benefit leaders in business contexts. Next we discuss what

constitutes a "mindful leader". Here we aim to illustrate how mindful leadership is embodied in individuals and then link these characteristics to workplace variables and outcomes. Following this section, we present case summaries of several organizations that are currently actively cultivating mindfulness within their firms. Lastly, we provide examples of simple mindfulness exercises and techniques that can be practiced by individuals in the workplace to develop awareness of the present moment. We hope that this paper serves as a resource that sheds additional light on a concept that has received much attention in the popular media and lends some credibility to the invocation of mindfulness by leaders.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness refers to a quality of present moment awareness that is imbued with non-reactivity and acceptance. Jon Kabat-Zinn is generally credited for exporting the concept of mindfulness from its eastern Buddhist roots to the west in the form of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR: Kabat-Zinn, 1970), a non-secular stress reduction program for

clinical and non-clinical populations. He defines mindfulness as "…the awareness that arises from paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). The word mindfulness itself has been used in a wide variety of applications which further convolutes an already complex concept. For example, mindfulness may refer to a type of meditation, a form of intervention program, an individual state, an enduring personal trait, a quality of cognition, and an organizational process or corporate strategy (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). In the organizational behaviour literature, there are two additional streams of literature that refer to mindfulness either in terms of an information categorizing process (Langer, 1989) or a set of organizing practices and strategies that a firm uses to respond to high-risk events (Weick et al., 1999). Both of these conceptualizations differ from the Eastern definition of the word, characterized by non-judgmental awareness.

In order to simplify matters, mindfulness can perhaps be best understood as an umbrella term (Kabat-Zinn, 2011) that encompasses aspects of

cognition and attention, emotion, attitude, and behaviour. In this paper we use a 3-pronged framework of mindfulness to operationalize the concept (e.g. Vago and Silbersweig, 2012): 1) self-awareness, the ability to know oneself; 2) self-regulation, the ability to control oneself; and 3) self-transcendence, the ability to see beyond one's immediate experience and connect with others. In other words, we would expect a mindful individual to have a heightened sense of their thoughts and emotions, and a greater ability to decouple their automatic responses from automatic habits so that they may choose to act in a manner that considers others in the wider context in addition to themselves (Dane, 2011).

Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence relate to several outcomes of mindfulness, performance and the human experience in organizations. Echoing this sentiment, the last five years have seen a steep increase in theoretical and empirical research on mindfulness in the workplace. Mindfulness has been associated with processes of physiological, cognitive and emotional regulation (Glomb et al., 2011; Hülsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). Empirically, mindfulness

programs have been shown to be highly efficacious at building resilience to stress, addressing chronic illness (e.g., depression, anxiety), and improving self-regulatory processes related to performance (e.g., will power, attentional control, emotion regulation). Research suggests that employees undergoing mindfulness training may find themselves performing better, enjoying greater work-life balance, making better decisions, being more engaged at work, and decreasing their perceptions of task routineness (Reb & Choi, 2014). One study found that leaders that reported themselves higher in mindfulness had higher quality relationships with their subordinates, and that these employees reported higher job satisfaction, and less turnover intention (Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014). Another study examined mindfulness and morality by looking at the level of mindfulness and one's likelihood of cheating on a short task (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). Furthermore, a mindfulness laboratory at Harvard Business School has produced several studies showing that increasing mindfulness is related to increasing charisma and productivity, creativity, memory, and positive affect

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(Langer, 2005; Langer et al., 2012). The proliferation of findings suggesting the positive impact of workplace mindfulness, while appealing, comes not without its criticism.

Mindfulness may, prima facie, be at odds with the corporate world. Financial reports are built on, and to a large extent focus on, analyzing the past to project the future. Employees are handsomely compensated for their ability to draw up financial projections by modeling the future with complex algorithms, statistics and probabilities. Practicing acceptance for whatever exists as it exists in the present moment, however, seems to suggest complacency, a dichotomous concept next to the highly regarded notions of systematic improvement and innovation.

Some critics have called mindfulness nothing more than the latest organizational trend in leadership (e.g., Carroll, 2006). A more specified critical analysis of mindfulness may result in three common criticisms: 1) mindfulness may be nothing more than placebo effects; 2) sitting still (an element of the practice of mindfulness) is unproductive and has no place in today's fast paced work environment; and 3) acceptance and non-judgmental attitudes breed complacency. We address each of these criticisms in turn. First, positive outcomes of mindfulness interventions are unlikely to be simply due to a placebo effect. Research seeking to determine the mechanisms of mindfulness has begun to demonstrate that there are concrete anatomical, physiological and neurological changes accompanied with mindfulness training (e.g. Lutz, Dunn, & Davidson, 2007). The human brain has been established as plastic, or in other words, is capable of changing itself according to the repeated thoughts and tasks it performs (Doidge, 2007). In this vein, the efficacy of mindfulness training to reshape our brain and corresponding habits is compelling.

Critics may also contend that taking pause in the workday simply to sit and pay attention to one's breath is unproductive. We argue that taking a momentary pause provides an opportunity to re-center oneself. An analogy that has been offered in response to this line of reasoning is the rebooting of a computer where the system's processor can run more efficiently after being shut down from the 'control-alt-delete' function (Shaw, 2011). In this way, a short period of idleness may ultimately enable greater efficiencies.

Lastly, some may find the concept of acceptance and non-judgment out of place in the competitive environment where individuals and firms compete with each other as much as they compete with themselves. Personal improvement initiatives have generated the explosion of a multi-billion dollar self-help industry (Lamb-Shapiro, 2014) where individuals are collecting and harvesting personal data to develop their health, skills, and appearance. Here we suggest that the concept of mindfulness may offer a different perspective through which individuals can relate to themselves. Acceptance of the present state inherently presumes that whatever exists is enough, just as it is. Such acceptance generates the capacity to disengage from the hedonistic treadmill and find moments of reprieve from the pressure of wanting and needing more, a state that may presume insufficiency and undermine prosocial behaviour in organizations. This offers individuals the ability to lower defensiveness, be more authentic, replenish their psychological capital, and enjoy deeper interpersonal experiences. Just as muscles can be trained and new skills can be learned, mindfulness

can be inculcated through intentional and repetitive practices of present moment awareness. Drawing on these practices leaders can apply mindful mindsets and attitudes in their own life and when leading their organizations.

As a final note to these criticisms, for those still wondering how leaders might possibly plan for the future if they are solely living for the moment, we offer an overarching point. Mindfulness should be distinguished as living *in* the moment as opposed to *for* it (Dane, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 1995). The practice of mindfulness can be both productive and improvement oriented but in a way that one can still enjoy where they are on the way to the next destination.

The Mindful Leader

For years scholars and practitioners have been enamored with descriptions of great leadership. Some of these touted characteristics include: a pursuit of excellence, integrity, emotional intelligence, respect for others, self-confidence, open-mindedness, flexibility, and authenticity. What then, is a "mindful leader" and what makes this concept any different than the many inquiries into leadership that

have come before it? In the first section, mindfulness was described as enabling alertness and open awareness to experiences as they occur in a non-reactive and non-judgmental manner. Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence were introduced to ground the concept of mindfulness in a behavioural dimension. Mindful leadership can be understood within these same three aspects of self. By developing these abilities, leaders stand to cultivate the skills they need to manage their own conduct and additionally, to engage, lead, and develop others. Below we discuss the three fundamental elements of mindful leadership (self-awareness, self-regulation, self-transcendence) along with a rationale as to why cultivating mindful leadership in organizations is uniquely poignant and relevant to leaders.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness is an essential component of effective leadership (Goleman, 1998). It enables a clear understanding of one's intentions, emotions, biases, and habits so that an individual can manage his or her thoughts, feelings and actions more effectively. There are three areas of self-

awareness that stand to benefit leaders and in turn, employees and organizations: first, the awareness of one's mental, physical, and emotional state; second, the awareness of automatic functioning; and third, the awareness of one's experiential or narrative self. When a leader is self-aware, these three areas can be linked to tangible work outcomes that affect employees and the organization as a whole.

When the body and mind experience stress, an area in the brain – the medial prefrontal cortex or mPFC – coordinates the limbic system (sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system) to balance the body's systems so a person may continue to function (Siegel, 2007). If the mPFC becomes overloaded or overstressed, the sympathetic system may activate leading the individual to choose a sub-optimal response, for example, attempting to fight when flight is more appropriate. Consider, for example, a manager, experiencing high levels of stress due to an approaching deadline, who snaps at a colleague for asking if they wanted cream and sugar in their coffee. The managers response is likely offensive and unproductive. Overloaded, burnt out, and emotionally exhausted states

that prompt such responses are commonly found in organizations amongst employees of all levels.

While leaders hold the responsibility of managing the welfare of others, they must also take care to invest in their own wellbeing. Indeed, self-care is important for leaders as their moods and decisions are likely to impact a wider population of employees. Thich Nhat Hahn, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, offers the analogy of an airplane oxygen mask to illustrate that people must put the mask on themselves before putting it on another (Howlett, 2003). Before leaders can manage their people, they might first consider making a conscious effort to take care of their own wellbeing first. Nourishing oneself may generate further resources for themselves and others.

Mindfulness training has a strong track record of addressing burnout, stress, anxiety, and overall wellbeing in both clinical and non-clinical populations (see Brown & Ryan, 2003 for a review). In one study, participants that received mindfulness training had higher melatonin levels, an indicator of immune functioning, than the no-treatment condition (Baer, 2003). In the work context, mindfulness has been positively related to employee engagement, job satisfaction, and negatively related to turnover intention and absenteeism (Hülsheger et al., 2012; Dane & Brummel, 2014). Such studies have important implications for leaders interested in protecting their own well-being at work. Moreover, research suggests that leaders with mindful traits have positive impacts on their employees (Reb, Narayanan & Chaturvedi, 2014). In their work, Reb and colleagues surveyed ninety-six managers and their subordinates from different industries. The results found that employees with more mindful managers had lower levels of emotional exhaustion, better work-life balance, and higher ratings of job satisfaction and job performance.

Automaticity is an integral component of the human experience. It would be exhausting to think consciously about the endless processes that take place at any given time. When we pick up a mug of hot coffee, the hand knows where to hold the cup, how hard to squeeze, and how carefully to sip. Yet, these are likely not conscious processes of the mind and rightly so. Buried within the efficiencies of automaticity, however, are habits, biases, and narrowed perceptions that are deeply engrained over time. Habitual responses can occur without volition or awareness resulting in undesirable outcomes like restricted innovation, repeated negative experiences, and an inability to change. Mindfulness helps to break through the rhythm of automaticity by fully experiencing the present with awareness and intention (Glomb et al., 2011). For example, we might respond nonsensically to a question when we do not fully listen to what another person is actually saying. When we are mindful, we can hear the words of another without presumption. Habitual responses are disrupted by activated systematic modes of information processing rather than relying on heuristics (Chaiken, 1980). Along these lines, mindfulness has been related to making better decisions (Weber & Johnson, 2009), enhanced creativity (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000), and increased abilities to overcome cognitive biases (Hafenbrack, 2013).

The third area of a mindfully self-aware leader refers to an individual's capacity to know when they are engaging in the present moment as it is and when they are experiencing the present moment as a story they are telling themselves.

The brain has two distinct modes of processing present-moment experience (Farb et al., 2007): experiential focus and narrative focus. When the narrative mode of processing is activated, thoughts and emotions are driven by a past or future oriented storyline created by the individual. The experiential mode of processing is grounded primarily in the experience of the self in the present moment. Psychologists also depict the self in two dimensions: the *I self* and the *Me self* (Brown et al., 2007; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Loevinger, 1976). Here the *I self*, also referred to as the *self-as-process,* is akin to the state of experiential focus represented by the awareness of ongoing activities. The *Me self* can be understood as a narrative focused, socially constructed view of self. A socially constructed view of self inherently activates the ego by choosing to identify with self-preserving and self-enhancing attributes, characteristics, roles, and beliefs (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Mindfulness develops experiential focus in individuals and combines it with an attitude of unconditional openness (Welwood, 2006).

A self-aware leader may have a heighted ability to recognize when they are caught up in a socially constructed view of self so that they may break, and empathize with others without feeling threatened. This mindful quieting of the ego creates space for self-acceptance, self-compassion, and humility, which leads to decreased defensiveness, increased authentic connection with others, and an openness to multiple perspectives. Suspending the ego may help bridge the generational gap within organizations as leaders can hear the voices of those with whom they may otherwise struggle to empathize with. Developing self-awareness in a mindful way offers benefits to both the leaders, and the organizations they lead. Awareness of one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour in relation to a particular goal allows for improved regulation of behaviour. In the next section, we discuss the second pillar of mindful leadership: self-regulation. While self-awareness offers leaders the opportunity to know where they are; self-regulation is the vehicle that gets them to where they are going.

Self-regulation

In the words of Leonardo Da Vinci, "One can have no smaller or greater mastery than mastery of oneself." Self-control and willpower help us achieve our goals and refrain from regrettable courses of action. Our ability to control ourselves allows us to act strategically on our thoughts, emotions and behaviours rather than reacting to the immediate stimuli of our environment and responding impulsively. In a well-known study on delayed gratification and success, the impact of willpower was elegantly demonstrated. Children were given a marshmallow along with the instructions that they were free to eat it if they desired to do so; however, if they could refrain from eating the marshmallow for a short period of time, they would be given two marshmallows. Years later, researchers found that the children that had the self-control to benefit from the fruits of delayed gratification achieved better grades, coped better with stress, and were more cognitively and socially competent (Mischel, Shoda & Peake, 1988; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989). Recently, a series of studies examining willpower suggest it is a more accurate predictor of success than intelligence (Baumeister & Tierny, 2011). This was a particularly interesting finding given willpower can

be enhanced with practice but increasing an individual's intelligence quotient can be a difficult task with minimal effects (Jensen, 1969). Mindfulness training appears to be an effective way to improve one's ability to manage one's self (Langer, 1989). Additionally, for those that are already highly disciplined, additional mindfulness training may further bolster mental health (Bowlin & Baer, 2012).

Mindfulness improves self-regulation in two ways: attention regulation and emotion regulation. Attention-regulation refers to the ability to hold one's focus on or away from a particular direction, for a particular amount of time (Lutz et al., 2008). Such ability has profound implications for leaders. Addressing all of the potential benefits of mindfulness is beyond the scope of this paper, however, here we discuss three such workplace benefits of improved attention-regulation in leaders: productivity and performance, decision-making, and work-life balance.

Sustained attention towards the task-at-hand is, needless to say, more productive than fragmented attention, or mind-wandering. Indeed, the reader that is able to read this very paragraph in one attempt is a more efficient reader than one that has reached the end of the page and cannot recall what they read because their attention has wandered. Alan Wallace, one of the pioneers bringing Buddhist mindfulness to the West, has said that the "…greatest musicians, mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers throughout history—all of them, it seems, have had an extraordinary capacity to focus their attention with a high degree of clarity for long periods of time" (Wallace, 2006, p.4). In one of Langer's studies, she and her colleagues (Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft, 2008) taped an orchestra playing mindfully or mindlessly. The mindful performances, rated by an audience blind to the nature of the experiment, were judged as superior. One possible mechanism of mindfulness and performance may be through working memory (Mrazek et al., 2014). Working memory refers to the amount of information we can store and manipulate in our minds at one time, for example tallying the total cost of a bill before the waiter delivers it. In Mrazek's (2014) randomized-controlled study, students that completed two-weeks of mindfulness training improved their working memory capacity and performed better on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) than the control group.

Mindfulness helps to develop focus, which in turn allows leaders to see the situation more clearly and as a result, to make better decisions. In one study, leaders with higher levels of trait mindfulness were found to make better decisions under pressure (Hadley et al., 2011). Sustained focus, coupled with an accepting and non-judgmental attitude, allows for leaders to consider multiple perspectives that exist beyond a quick surface glance. Steve Jobs, the late CEO of Apple Inc., had a meditation practice of his own. In his biography, he is quoted as follows: *If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is. But over time it does calm, and when it does... that's when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more".* (Isaacson, 2012, p.71)

For those leaders who find it difficult to stop thinking, or specifically, to stop thinking about work, mindfulness may help to cultivate attention-regulation so that they can leave work at the office and be more present when they get home. In a study conducted on

employees in a Norwegian insurance company, employees that underwent mindfulness training reported significantly higher perceptions of work-life balance at the end of the training (Reb & Choi, 2014). Theo Koffler, the founder of Israel's first drug store chain and the founder of Mindfulness Without Borders, describes her practice of transitioning from one place to another as "crossing the threshold" (Koffler, 2014). Before she enters the next room or begins her next task, she takes a moment to pause and let go of her last experience and prepare for the next scenario. Relatedly, one study found that work-life balance was determined less by the amount of time an individual was spending at work or away from work, but on how present they were during these different contexts (Thompson & Bunderson, 2011). Mindfulness practices are based on volitionally directing one's attention to the present moment. Regardless of how much time leaders have in non-work contexts, mindfulness stands to benefit them by allowing leaders to be fully present wherever they are, and with whoever is before them.

From a neurological perspective, mindfulness appears to strengthen the pathways in the brain responsible for emotion regulation (Davidson, 2000). Emotion regulation is the ability of individuals to soothe themselves when agitated, and to bolster their spirits when they are feeling down. A fundamental component of mindfulness training involves observing, identifying, and labeling experiences without attaching meaning to what is occurring. This process is referred to as "de-centering" (Safran & Segal, 1990) and allows for thoughts to be accepted as interpretations of reality but not necessarily reality itself. When we are mindful, we recognize our emotions in the present moment and de-center ourselves from them to create space for pause before reacting to what we feel. Siegel (2007) calls this ability to pause, response flexibility. Response flexibility enables a moment of reflection to survey the situation from a non-automatic perspective and then choose the action that is best suited to an individual's goal (Brown et al., 2007; Siegel, 2007). De-centering and response flexibility may facilitate emotion regulation for mindful leaders. As a leader, effective emotion regulation offers several benefits. Below we discuss three such benefits,

resilience to stress, increasing positive affect, and enhanced interpersonal communication.

One of the most robust bodies of research on mindfulness has been based on determining the efficacy of mindfulness to reduce stress, depression, and anxiety (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Compelling findings from the medical literature show that a practice in mindfulness bolsters psychological wellness, particularly in situations where stress is abundant (Astin, 1997; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, Kipworth, & Burney, 1985; Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995). A recent study on employees of The Dow Jones Chemical Company found similar results where as mindfulness increased, resilience, engagement and overall wellbeing also increased while stress levels decreased (Aikens et al., 2014). Mindfulness may also interrupt habitual negative thought patterns by reducing ruminative and reflexive self-focused attention (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007) and amplification of negative thoughts (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006) so that individuals can better manage emotionally charged and painful experiences (Baer, 2003; Broderick, 2005; Shapiro et al., 2006; Shepherd &

Cardon, 2009). By de-centering the self from negative emotions, individuals ruminate less, develop a higher tolerance for negative thoughts and feelings, and as a result, learn to cope better with stress (Broderick, 2005). Simply put, with mindfulness the bad doesn't seem so bad and the good becomes easier to recall.

Mindfulness has been linked to increased positive affective experiences in numerous studies (Giluk, 2009; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2007). Barbara Fredrickson (1998; 2001), a researcher from the field of positive psychology, proposed a theory called the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. This theory purports that the more positive daily experiences people have, the more they build other more enduring physical, cognitive, and psychological resources. In 2008, Fredrickson and her colleagues ran a field experiment randomly assigning employed adults to either a meditation treatment group, or a control group. Individuals in the treatment group began to notice and experience more positive emotions, less depressive symptoms, increased life satisfaction, and more purpose in life (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Other research corroborates the link

between noticing and engaging with positive experiences (Erisman & Roemer, 2010). Leaders may not always have the time to stop and smell the proverbial roses, however, mindfulness training may help leaders to notice the roses when they appear. Furthermore, beginning to notice their presence may help leaders become more resilient and protect them from depleting their self-regulatory resources (Giluk, 2010).

Emotion regulation stands to benefit leaders with greater emotional intelligence thereby decreasing impulsivity and improving communication, interpersonal relationships, and social experience (Gross & Thompson, 2007). With mindfulness training, the ego can be better managed allowing leaders to listen skillfully to others as well as to articulate their intended message. Since mindfulness allows individuals to endure more negative emotion as well as effectively mend these states when they occur (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007), more mindful individuals may be less defensive and more open (Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008). In addition to communication advantages, there are positive ripple effects in the functioning of subordinates with leaders

that are less negative (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005), and more mindful (Reb, Narayanan, & Chaturvedi, 2014). Taking their research into the field, Reb and his colleagues (2012) recruited leaders and their subordinates to participate in a web-based survey. They found that leaders higher in trait mindfulness had better relationships with their employees, were more attuned to and supportive of their needs, and in turn, these employees reported higher job satisfaction and were rated as higher performers.

Mindfulness training can be applied to reconfigure how the brain directs and processes thought and emotion (e.g., Lutz et al., 2007; Friese, Messner & Schaffner, 2012). This offers organizations interesting opportunities to address the mental health and well-being of their people. Self-regulation of thought and emotion is an essential skill for leaders so that they not only perform optimally, but also learn to exist optimally in an environment heavily burdened by high pressure, high stakes, and constant stress. We have attempted to present two of the three pillars of mindful leadership, self-awareness and self-regulation, to convey what mindful leadership is and the benefits associated with these two modes of

functioning. With greater self-awareness and self-regulation, leaders may find themselves better equipped to take care of themselves and to lead others more effectively. The last category of mindful leadership, self-transcendence, discusses how mindfulness may allow leaders to go beyond themselves and why such a concept may hold value in the modern workplace.

Self-transcendence

Self-transcendence is rooted in the ability to suspend self-focused needs so that an individual can fully focus on the needs of another. In Buddhist philosophy, there are said to be four immeasurable qualities of the heart: loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity (Wallace, 2010). Mindfulness practice aims to embody and cultivate these qualities; however, the ability to put others before the needs of oneself requires individuals to first develop sufficient personal resources to support themselves. Mindfulness trains the mind to sustain non-judgmental awareness in the present moment. De-centering and reflexive pauses enable people to distance their self-concepts from difficult thoughts and emotions such that negative experiences do not threaten their self-worth. Once resources previously devoted to defending and providing for oneself are freed, mindful leaders have more to give others and may benefit from doing so. When a parent foregoes a pleasure so that their child might enjoy the fruits of their restraint, does the parent not still experience joy? Self-transcendence in mindful leaders can be conceptualized as genuine empathetic and compassionate actions for another. The inclination toward pro-social behaviour has attractive implications for the well-being of individuals and the greater interests of the firms that employed them.

Empathy involves seeing life from the perspective of another. It enables connection with others by attuning ourselves to their experience and allows us to have compassion (Cozolino, 2006). Leaders who can empathize with others have the ability to consider the needs of others and select a course of action that reflects the interests of a larger group of people (Siegel, 2007). In one study on leadership behaviour, individuals completed four empathy measures to determine their dispositional empathy profile: empathetic concern, perspective taking, personal distress, and empathic matching (Skinner & Spurgeon, 2005). Those with the highest empathy profiles were most inclined to exhibit transformational leadership behaviours, a leadership style described as "inspiring followers to achieve more than expected" (p.1). Transformational leadership itself is the topic of a growing body of research that has determined this style to be highly influential in improving team effectiveness, and productivity (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; George, 2000). Empathetic leaders show greater promise to resolve conflict, engage their employees, and effectively motivate their employees (Goleman, 1998).

Compassion is the ability to connect and be affected by the suffering of others so that an urge to extend kindness and assistance to others arises (Wispe, 1991). Furthermore, a non-judgmental attitude is a necessarily precursor of compassion so that the suffering of another can be sympathized with "in the context of shared human fallibility" (Neff, 2003, p. 87). When leaders are able to lend genuine compassion to their co-workers, they can develop positive relationships built on trust. Social psychology has long established the importance of positive human connection

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A growing body of organizational scholarship suggests healthy social connections at work are no less critical (e.g., Thau, Aquino, & Poortvliet, 2007; Porath & Erez, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Some have gone so far as to say that for a leader to add value to a team, they must develop strong emotional relationships with and within the team and then manage these relationships (Goleman, 1995; George, 2000). Compassion may even be a necessary leadership trait to engage followers. Tom Rath and Barry Conchie, the authors of the popular *Find Your Strengths* series, recently published a book called *Strengths Based Leadership* (2009). They list four needs that compel people to follow a leader: trust, hope, stability, and compassion (characterized by caring, friendship, happiness, and love). In fact, the absence of compassion in relationships can make it difficult to form trust (Boverie & Kroth, 2001). Given an absence of trust has been called the first dysfunction of teams (Lencioni, 2006); learning to extend compassion is no small issue.

In essence, we see two main benefits to self-transcendence. First, it helps form positive and fulfilling relationships in a chaotic and fragmented workplace. Second, it builds enduring happiness and life purpose for the leader as an individual. In today's work environment, employees have less job security but more responsibility and longer work hours that have encroached on their non-work life. In many respects, the pressure to achieve and produce has been internalized by individuals of their own volition (Rose, 1990). Recently, the fastest growing segment of the workforce, Generation Y, has added a new dimension to the workplace. Generation Y holds higher expectations from their employers to engage and fulfill their expectations but in their own lives, they hold competing priorities that outrank their careers making them difficult to manage (Sheahan, 2005). Leaders that can mindfully engage their employees through authentic relationships built on compassion and empathy may be able to more effectively manage their organizations through the current state of the workplace.

The second benefit to leaders is a personal one. Enduring happiness and fulfillment involves a commitment to something larger than oneself. Martin Seligman, often referred to as the father of positive psychology by the popular media, writes of the distinction between fleeting and enduring pleasure in his book, *Authentic Happiness* (Seligman, 2002). Here he describes three possible tactics individuals may choose in their pursuit of happiness. The first pursues positive emotional experiences in their own right: good food, nice things, and happy experiences. The second involves discovering one's strengths and applying them to obtain positive experiences. The last, a path he labels *The Meaningful Life*, uses "your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are" (Seligman 2002, p. 249). Importantly, compassion meditation has recently been shown to induce significant increases in altruistic behaviour (Weng et al., 2013). Buddhist meditations on compassion have shown the highest activation of the left prefrontal cortex, or the happiness region (Klimecki et al., 2013) suggesting that perhaps cultivating happiness with generates opportunities to be kinder to others. Mindful leadership has great potential to generate an upward, self-fulfilling, positive spiral.

Mindfulness in Organizations

More and more corporations and leaders have brought mindfulness into their organizations. In this section, we present several mindfulness programs and their outcomes. First, we discuss the individual programs such as Google's Search Inside Yourself, SAP, Genentech IT and General Mills. We also discuss consulting firms that provide mindfulness training services to corporations. Lastly, we review academic institutions and curriculums that are teaching or applying mindfulness in their own schools.

The digital industry appears to be leading the insurgence of mindfulness into corporations. Perhaps the most renowned corporate mindfulness initiative is Google's Search Inside Yourself program. Chade-Meng Tan, a software engineer with a personal meditation practice, championed Google's mindfulness program in 2007. The program was piloted and revised over four years leading to the establishment of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute in 2012. There appears to be no shortage of glowing reviews and results from this mindfulness training program. Google's employees have reported reduced stress, improved focus, productivity, creativity, and an overall boost in their physical and mental health from their mindfulness training (www.siyli.org). Google's mindfulness program has been implemented in a series of other organizations across multiple industries including Ford, Genentech IT, SAP, LinkedIn, and the Rotman School of Business at the University of Toronto, Canada. At Genentech, 88% of the participants enrolled in the mindfulness program reported an increase in employee engagement, and a greater sense of job satisfaction and meaning at work (Dearborn, 2014). SAP's Mindfulnes Program Director, Peter Bostelmann, in an interview with Fast Company declared that Google's mindfulness program "significantly changed my own happiness and personal and professional productivity" (Dearborn, 2014).

Janice Marturano, previously General Mills' deputy general counsel, was responsible for creating the mindfulness program at General Mills in 2006. The formal curriculum runs over 7-weeks as well as in shorter, concentrated full-day retreats. Informal practice opportunities at General Mills are abundant. Conference rooms double as venues for sitting meditation areas and yoga rooms. In fact, at General Mills' main campus in Minnesota, every building is equipped with a meditation room. In 2011, Marturano founded the Institute for Mindful Leadership, a not-for-profit organization established to train leaders in mindfulness applications. She recently published *Finding the Space to Lead: A Practical Guide to Mindful Leadership,* to teach leaders how they can merge mindfulness practices with their management agendas. Her Institute has provided training for such organizations as the American Red Cross, Honeywell, Target, Procter and Gamble, and the United States Army. Marturano's follow-up studies found that her training enhanced innovation, strategic thinking, listening skills, and productivity while also reducing errors (instituteformindfulleadership.org/research).

In terms of professional consulting services, there are presently few companies in the field of corporate mindfulness. Perhaps the foremost-established international consulting firm is The Potential Project. The Potential Project is a global not-for-profit organization with trainers in over 25 countries. Their programs

typically run over 10-weeks and are led by a facilitator that visits the company once a week to lead a session. A champion within the organization is selected to coordinate daily meetings where participating employees can come together to practice their mindfulness training. Their curriculum aims to train focus and attention through formal practices such as breath meditation, and informal practices such as mindful emailing and mindful meetings. Additionally, they teach mindfulness through a set of themes and attitudes like patience, kindness, acceptance, non-judging, and letting go. Some examples of The Potential Project's clients include Carlsberg Group, Sony Electronics, British Petroleum, and Suncor. Recently, to the credit of the Potential Project, Google's Singapore office decided to employ The Potential Project instead of using their company's own mindfulness program.

Another mindfulness consulting body based in the United Kingdom is The Mindfulness Exchange. The Mindfulness Exchange was created to bring the research from Oxford University's Mindfulness Centre out into the workplace. Their curriculum is based on a program originally designed to treat clinical populations, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT: Segal et al., 2002). They offer their services in several modalities to suit the needs of their clients. These range from short presentations and workshops, to longer programs lasting four, six, or eight weeks with weekly one-hour classes. Firms may also choose to hire their consultancy services designed to teach the benefits of mindfulness along with mindfulness exercises in a manner that best compliments the nature of the organization. The Mindfulness Exchange has worked with such notable names as Oxfam and CVS Vets (the largest corporate veterinary surgeon network in the UK).

Within academic institutions, mindfulness has caught the interest of research institutions, and educators of all levels. At the primary level, mindfulness is being taught to children and showing great promise with outcomes such as attention, performance, managing behaviour, and lowering stress (Burke, 2010). Secondary schools report similar benefits. Mindfulness without Borders is a youth program designed to run over 12-weeks with a trained facilitator and a member of a school's staff.

A study conducted by Mindfulness Without Borders found that participants in grades 11 and 12 who completed their program reported improved relationships, greater abilities to cope with challenges, more inclination to work with others, and in general, a more calm and relaxed disposition (mindfulnesswithoutborders.org/our-scientific-research). In the UK, Oxford University's Mindfulness Institute runs a program for mindfulness in schools called Dot B. They have developed curriculums for primary and secondary levels and report that students who take the course feel happier and more fulfilled, can concentrate better, and are better equipped to deal with stress (Kuyken et al., 2013).

Mindfulness can also be found at the university and postgraduate level. Melbourne Business School has its own Mindful Leadership program that covers cognitive science and neuroscience to teach leadership and organizational change concepts to its students (Sinclair, 2014). Georgetown University in Washington offers a meditation and leadership course to its MBA and undergraduate students led by Father Freeman, a Benedictine monk. Other US schools teaching

mindfulness in their business schools include Harvard (led by Dr. Bill George) and Claremont Graduate University (led by Dr. Jeremy Hunter). Two examples of Canadian university's bringing mindfulness to student populations are the University of Toronto and Queen's University. U of T offers an applied mindfulness meditation certificate program out of their School of Social Work. The program has four levels of training that address the history and science of mindfulness, and applies mindfulness to work, therapeutic, educational, and leadership contexts. Queen's hosted a one-day conference on living from the inside out for its 2014 MBA class showcasing topics such as mindfulness, humility, self-awareness, and service to humanity (Kellough, 2014).

The list of research institutions focused on clinical, non-clinical and practitioner applications of mindfulness is growing. For example, research laboratories dedicated to mindfulness, contemplative neurosciences, compassion, and stress reduction can be found at Harvard Business School, Oxford University, Cambridge, Stanford, MIT, and the University of California, to name a few. Additionally, research hubs

and conferences dedicated to the intersection of mindfulness and workplace issues are proliferating (e.g. MindfulLeadershipForum.com, InvestigatingHealthyMinds.org, InstituteForMindfulLeadership.com, Mindfulnet.org, MindfulnessExchange.org, MindfulExperience.org, emindful.net, EoCinstitute.org). There appears to be no shortage of interest in furthering research on mindfulness and applying these research findings in organizations. In the next section of this paper we offer several simple ways that leaders can informally practice mindfulness in their everyday work lives in hopes to extend the application of mindfulness in the workplace.

Exercises to practice Mindfulness at work

Informal practices offer an accessible means of incorporating mindfulness training in daily work life without adding an additional task to an already long list of things to do. Common and routine tasks can become opportunities to practice mindfulness when we apply some extra consciousness to them. Below we provide four mindful ways to direct one's attention during the

workday. The first is to make an effort to be conscious of multitasking behaviour when it occurs and to limit multitasking when possible. The second is to practice mindful listening. The third is to mindfully transition between tasks and events. The last is to practice mindful eating.

Multitasking has become a necessary and valuable skill in the modern workplace. Yet, Sharon Salzberg, author of *Real Happiness at Work*, writes that multitasking may lead to mindless tendencies. Further, she argues that multitasking makes employees appear productive when really their focus is fragmented resulting in performance decrements (Salzberg, 2013). Applied to work behaviour, mindful multitasking can be as simple as developing the meta-awareness of the act. Recognizing when we are doing multiple things at once and then choosing to consciously continue along this path brings awareness to the present moment. If the situation does not require multitasking, consider giving yourself fully to one task at a time. When on the phone, direct all of your attention to the person on the other end and resist the urge to simultaneously respond to emails or surf the web. When working on a report,

keep your attention on the task at hand and choose not to split your attention with any miscellaneous internet searches that come to mind while you work.

Mindful listening involves suspending the mental chatter in one's mind long enough to truly hear what another is saying as they are saying it. Describing what mindful listening is may best be illustrated by outlining what it is not. Thomas Gordon, author of *Teacher Effectiveness Training,* lists 12 roadblocks to effective communication that can be used as a guide for mindless listening. These are: 1) comparing; 2) mind reading; 3) rehearsing; 4) filtering; 5) judging; 6) dreaming; 7) identifying; 8) advising; 9) sparring; 10) being right; 11) derailing; and 12) placating. If you've ever found yourself offering unsolicited advice, you may be a ripe candidate to practice mindful listening. If you have feigned interest in another's story while your mind is elsewhere, or you hear one word and you find yourself re-living a fond memory, you may an offender of mindless listening. Engaging present moment awareness during such conversations is an easy and effective way to practice mindfulness.

Another opportunity to incorporate mindfulness training into your workday is with mindful transitions. Consciously ending one task before beginning another will help address the "where did my day go" feelings that can accompany a hectic schedule. Taking one full, mindful breath before you open the next document or window tab is a simple way to create a moment's pause. Another way to transition mindfully is to bring your attention to your somatic senses as you walk to the next meeting, to the printer, or to the washroom. Instead of reliving the last experience you had or pre-empting the next experience to come, direct your focus to the sounds around you, the feeling of your heels as they walk across the floor, and weight of your hands swinging by your side. Paying attention to such simple present moment phenomenon will keep your mind and body acute to what is unfolding before you.

Meals offer a rich means of cultivating mindfulness. A quick search of "mindful eating" on Google returns almost 2 million results and Amazon.com holds almost a thousand different books on the topic. Mindful eating has been written about so extensively that it may even be considered a subculture of mindfulness in its own right. While we cannot unpack all of mindful eating in these few words, we encourage readers to investigate the topic, as food, diet, and nutrition are fundamental aspects of our daily lives. This is particularly the case in North Americans where food and weight loss comprise multi-billion dollar industries (McGuire, Wing, & Hill, 1999). When eating meals during work hours, try doing nothing else but eating. For the short time it takes to finish a sandwich, salad, or food court platter, savor the experience. Look at the colours in the food before you eat it; notice the weight of the food on your fork; feel the food as it is placed in your mouth and then observe the moment when you feel saliva being produced. Try and notice the desire to swallow before you do so. Think about where the food came from and how it made its way to your plate. Too often we eat while trying to accomplish many other tasks at the same time. We may snack while working and before we know it, the food is gone. Consider how different eating meals might become if they were consumed with non-judgmental, complete present moment awareness. Sustaining your attention on the food that you consume may not only break unhealthy habits, it may enrich your entire well-being (Hahn & Cheung, 2010).

Conclusion

One can imagine that running on a treadmill may have once been perceived as peculiar but today, exercise is a common and respected practice. Mindfulness training is not unlike exercise. Meditation stimulates blood flow to and reconfiguration of particular regions in the brain (Lutz, 2007; Cahn & Polich, 2006) just as exercise stimulates blood flow and reconfigures our physical body. It is conceivable that just as training our bodies is now commonplace, so too will be training the mind. In this paper we presented the concept of mindfulness and the related workplace research that has been generated. We then put forth our conceptualization of mindful leadership and offered our arguments for the associated benefits related to self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence in the workplace. Training curriculums currently being applied in corporate and academic organizations were described to showcase how and why mindfulness is being integrated into corporate cultures. The last section of this paper provided several simple mindfulness exercises that individuals could integrate into their workday. At the onset of this paper we addressed common criticisms of mindfulness in a work setting. We hope that this paper has addressed some of the skepticism by educating the reader on the current state of research and by putting forth a compelling rationale for the practice of mindfulness by individuals and organizations.

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