



Mindfulness Interventions for Enhancing Mental Health Support in the Workplace

Oluwatosin Esther Ajewumi

Olin Business School, Washington University in Saint Louis, USA

ABSTRACT

The increase in workplace mental health challenges stems from heightened work pressure and digital interruptions in recent years. The standard methods of mental healthcare, which include therapy and counselling, hold significant value, yet they lack the necessary capability to handle current workplace complexities. The research demonstrates that mindfulness techniques are effective as a workplace method for improving employee mental well-being. Mindfulness within Buddhist traditions enables people to maintain their presence alongside self-awareness and emotional self-control that fights stress. Research findings demonstrate that mindfulness-based programs lead to significant work benefits because they minimize stress, enhance employee robustness, and optimize satisfaction levels. The study examines how social media affects stress levels while investigating mindfulness capabilities that diminish unfavorable elements, including social judgment and excessive screen usage. This article explores practical mindfulness methods like breathing exercises and digital detoxification with mindful walking as specific tools which support healthier workplace environments. Through daily mindfulness implementation, organizations can develop employees into more focused people with strong emotions and better productivity.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Workplace mental health; Stress reduction; Employee well-being; Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR); Social Media and mental health; Workplace productivity; Mindful interventions.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the work pressure advances in today's society, employees experience a wide range of mental health challenges. The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Results Tool (2019) estimates that 15% of working-age persons suffer from a mental illness at any moment. Anxiety affected 301 million individuals worldwide in 2019, depression affected 280 million, schizophrenia or bipolar disease affected 64 million, and suicide claimed 703,000 lives annually (World Health Organization, 2021). who were mostly of working age. An estimated \$1 trillion is spent annually on the world economy due to the most common mental health illnesses, such as anxiety and depression, with lost productivity accounting for the majority of the cost (Chisholm et al., 2016). As the practices in the contemporary workplace change, it is also important to adapt the ways for approach in regard with the wellbeing of employees. Traditional methods including counseling or therapy are important but insufficient as we struggle to cope with increased cases of mental health in different workforce populations.

A concept borrowed from the earliest Buddhist practices, mindfulness, has become influential in enriching mental health interventions available in places of work. When described as setting attention to the existing condition deliberately and maintaining a particular stance of non-evaluative awareness, mindfulness interventions allow employees to learn how to pay more attention to the experience occurring in the present moment. It helps their self-control, decreases stress, and increases their general welfare.

This essay describes how organizations can improve mental health in the workplace through mindfulness interventions. It is organized to describe the transformative use of mindfulness as an intervention for employees' mental health. The article follows the main principles of mindfulness, reviewing the main findings of the studies and presenting the practical methods for its implementation.

2. THE CONCEPT OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is defined as being aware of one's internal presumptions, emerging feelings, intentions, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors (Ting-Toomey, 2015). It has been adapted from ancient Buddhist teachings into secular practices that address modern challenges, including the workplace. In essence, mindfulness encourages individuals to shift from reactive patterns of thought and behavior to a more deliberate, reflective state of being.

Mindfulness in workplace mental health is used to help one remove stress and learn how to control their emotions. For instance, pressure comes in the form of deadlines, conflict with fellow workers, and an environment where there is always something on the employee's mobile devices (Barber,

Kuykendall, and Santuzzi, 2023). All these causes lead to cognitive load and emotional fatigue, affecting the ability to pay attention and work effectively. Conversely, mindfulness reverses most consequences by promoting tranquility, perspective, and hardiness.

Kabat-Zinn applied mindfulness to mental health through MBSR programs (Kabat-Zinn, 2019). These programs have translated into the workplace, focusing on awareness as a competency that enhances interpersonal relations in organizations. When leaders and teams use mindfulness, it enables them to manage conflict in a positive way and encourages inclusiveness and empathy.

For the same reason, mindfulness is not a self-service practice alone but is also advantageous to an organization's well-being. Managers seeking new ways to boost cooperation, leadership, and retention should note that mindfulness could be a powerful tool for overcoming many business difficulties.

3. RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Empirical evidence indicating the efficacy of mindfulness in enhancing employees' well-being has been extensively documented. This section briefly discussed earlier works that examined the effect of mindfulness on mental health, especially in the workplace.

Khoury et al. (2015) researched the moderators, mechanisms of action, and effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for nonclinical groups. According to his evaluation of 29 studies, MBSR improves the quality of life for healthy people and has a relatively positive impact on stress, depression, anxiety, and distress. The research shows that mindfulness is especially beneficial in organized programs like Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) or MBSR.

Workplace-specific research has also shown strong evidence. A mindfulness program at The Dow Chemical Company was assessed by Aikens et al. (2014). To reduce stress and improve resilience and well-being, they want to know whether a mindfulness program designed for the workplace is realistic and practical. According to the findings, the mindfulness intervention group considerably improved vigor, resilience, and mindfulness while reducing perceived stress. Based on these studies, mindfulness improves mental health on an individual basis, corporate productivity, and employee satisfaction.

Furthermore, mindfulness has been connected to better work interactions. A study by Hülshager et al. (2013) investigated the idea that mindfulness reduces emotional exhaustion and improves job satisfaction, finding that participants in the mindfulness intervention group had significantly lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher levels of job satisfaction than those in the control group. In high-stress situations, when cooperation and support from one another are critical, these interpersonal advantages are vital.

Research evidence also indicates that excessive social media usage generates workplace stress, which creates more anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Ajewumi et al., 2024). Workplace mental health management requires mindfulness interventions due to this finding. People working in modern professional environments encounter meticulously staged online success and happiness depictions, which results in workplace dissatisfaction because they do not measure up. People remain stuck to their devices because of the fear of missing out; thus, they struggle to stay present and focused at work.

The evidence supports mindfulness as a science-backed intervention that can positively change a person's experience of mental health at work. Therefore, organizations that want to create a healthier working environment for their employees must use mindfulness as one potential avenue to promote good mental health amongst workforce members.

4. MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Kabat-Zinn created the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, a group-based health promotion strategy to enhance people's health and ability to manage stress and life's obstacles. It is among the most popular mindfulness interventions (de Vibe et al., 2017). The main component is practicing mindfulness training via mental and physical activities every day for eight weeks. For example, Aetna provided mindfulness training to more than 13,000 workers, resulting in an average 28% drop in stress, a 20% increase in sleep quality, and a 19% decrease in pain (Overland, 2015). Additionally, their productivity at work has increased by an average of 62 minutes each week (Overland, 2015). Additionally, Ajewumi et al. (2024) explain that social media enhances social comparison activities, generating user dissatisfaction and stress. Through their mindfulness practice, employees learn to stay focused in the present moment and minimize the effects that social comparisons create.

During the recent pandemic and the shift towards the home office, lifelong digital mindfulness solutions gained attention. Headspace and Calm are mobile applications that are easy to use and provide guided mindfulness exercises that can be incorporated into the workplace. These apps offer specific short sessions, such as three-minute breath meditation, which helps cope with job stress during the workday week (Mani et al., 2015). Studies show that these digital mindfulness tools have developed the following changes in the employee population: emotional resilience rose by 25%, burnout symptoms declined by 15%, and these changes were confirmed over three months (Plaza et al., 2013; Economides et al., 2018).

5. PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY

The technique of proper and purposeful breathing is one of the simplest forms of mindfulness exercises that allow for the direction of attention and control of the body's physiological state upon stress. Studies have indicated that digital mindfulness is an online relaxation strategy that helps workers disconnect from social media stressors to enhance their work concentration (Ajewumi et al., 2024). By practicing breathing exercises in which they focus on inhaling

and exhaling, employees can stimulate the parasympathetic system when the body is stressed. According to Örüin, Karaca, and Arıkan (2021), using natural and connected breathing exercises decreases stress hormones, and therefore, it is possible to use breathing exercises as a relaxation technique.

How to Practice: Employees can clear their heads by purging fresh air with a four-count, holding at four, and expelling at six counts. This technique is helpful in situations that require strong emotions, such as before a meeting or presentation.

Additionally, mindful walking is one of the dynamic practices of the technique, which involves movement and being fully aware of it. This technique is most helpful when a person has difficulty not moving, especially when the work requires sitting or staying still for long periods. According to Teut et al. (2013), patients who undertook the mindful walking program could record lower psychological stress symptoms and had improved quality of life than a study without any intervention.

How to Practice: Workers can spend some time during breaks walking around, with the goal of feeling the floor and the environment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to make the best use of mindfulness for boosting the help for mental health in the workplace, organizations ought to follow the following practical steps:

1. **Integrate Mindfulness into Daily Routines:** Promote the integration of mindfulness-based practices into the organization's actual workings. Scheduling a few minutes of breathing prior to each meeting or scheduling a short mindfulness walking exercise as part of the working day can go a long way in familiarizing the organizational culture with mindfulness.
2. **Promote Leadership Involvement:** Creating mindfulness and ensuring it becomes part of leaders and managers guiding organizations. Those managers who pay attention to the concept of mindfulness will likely see employees embrace their ideas and initiatives about work.

7. CONCLUSION

Mindfulness interventions are a revolutionary approach to addressing difficulties concerning employees' mental well-being at work. Many of these practices help employees become more aware of themselves and their feelings, reduce stress, build positive relationships with peers, and, at the same time, positively affect organizational performance.

Specifically, mindfulness gives the modern world a pathway for turning vulnerability into resilience to encourage novelties in enhanced working conditions. As more organizations adopt these practices, they bolster hope that they will foster employee success in their careers and lives. Therefore, the development of mindfulness at work is an investment on employees' health today and the future of work tomorrow.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

References

- 1) Aikens, K.A., Astin, J., Pelletier, K.R., Levanovich, K., Baase, C.M., Park, Y.Y. and Bodnar, C.M. (2014). Mindfulness Goes to Work: Impact of an Online Workplace Intervention. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, [online] 56(7), pp.721–731. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000000209>.
- 2) Ajewumi, E., None Victoria Magbagbeola, Kalu, C., Ada, R., None Okunjolu Folajimi. and None Christianah Omolola Diyaolu. (2024). The impact of social media on mental health and well-being. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 24(1), 107–121. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.1.3027>
- 3) Barber, L.K., Kuykendall, L.E. and Santuzzi, A.M. (2023). How managers can reduce 'always on' work stress in teams: An optimal work availability framework. *Organizational Dynamics*, [online] 52(3), p.100992. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2023.100992>.
- 4) Chisholm, D., Sweeny, K., Sheehan, P., Rasmussen, B., Smit, F., Cuijpers, P. and Saxena, S. (2016). Scaling-up of treatment of depression and anxiety – Authors' reply. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 3(7), pp.603–604. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366\(16\)30131-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366(16)30131-6).
- 5) de Vibe, M., Bjørndal, A., Fattah, S., Dyrdal, G.M., Halland, E. and Tanner-Smith, E.E. (2017). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) for improving health, quality of life and social functioning in adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 13(1), pp.1–264. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2017.11>.
- 6) Economides, M., Martman, J., Bell, M.J. and Sanderson, B. (2018). Improvements in stress, affect, and irritability following brief use of a mindfulness-based smartphone app: A randomized controlled trial. *Mindfulness*, [online] 9(5), pp.1584–1593. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-0905-4>.

- 7) Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Results Tool (2019). *Global Health Data Exchange / GHDx*. [online] Healthdata.org. Available at: <http://ghdx.healthdata.org>. [Accessed 25 Nov. 2024].
- 8) Kabat-Zinn, J. (2019). *Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)*. [online] Semantic Scholar. Available at: [https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-\(MBSR\)-Kabat-Zinn/4defbe0fa07bfffceca97ae134f2b73843b61450](https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mindfulness-based-stress-reduction-(MBSR)-Kabat-Zinn/4defbe0fa07bfffceca97ae134f2b73843b61450) [Accessed 25 Nov. 2024].
- 9) Khoury, B., Sharma, M., Rush, S.E. and Fournier, C. (2015). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for healthy individuals: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 78(6), pp.519–528. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2015.03.009>.
- 10) Mani, M., Kavanagh, D.J., Hides, L. and Stoyanov, S.R. (2015). Review and Evaluation of Mindfulness-Based iPhone Apps. *JMIR mHealth and uHealth*, 3(3), p.e82. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2196/mhealth.4328>.
- 11) Örün, D., Karaca, S. and Arıkan, Ş. (2021). The Effect of Breathing Exercise on Stress Hormones. *Cyprus Journal of Medical Sciences*, 6(1), pp.22–27. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4274/cjms.2021.2020.2390>.
- 12) Overland, D. (2015). *How Aetna's Bertolini embraces mindfulness to improve company culture*. [online] Fierce Healthcare. Available at: <https://www.fiercehealthcare.com/payer/how-aetna-s-bertolini-embraces-mindfulness-to-improve-company-culture>.
- 13) Plaza, I., Demarzo, M.M.P., Herrera-Mercadal, P. and García-Campayo, J. (2013). Mindfulness-Based Mobile Applications: Literature Review and Analysis of Current Features. *JMIR mhealth and uhealth*, 1(2), p.e24. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2196/mhealth.2733>.
- 14) Teut, M., Roesner, E.J., Ortiz, M., Reese, F., Binting, S., Roll, S., Fischer, H.F., Michalsen, A., Willich, S.N. and Brinkhaus, B. (2013). Mindful Walking in Psychologically Distressed Individuals: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, [online] 2013, pp.1–7. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/489856>.
- 15) Ting-Toomey, S. (2015). *MINDFULNESS*. [online] Researchgate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303786100_MINDFULNESS.
- 16) World Health Organization (2021). Suicide worldwide in 2019: global health estimates. *Who.int*. [online] doi: [https://doi.org/9789240026643%20\(%E2%80%8Eelectronic%20version\)%E2%80%8E](https://doi.org/9789240026643%20(%E2%80%8Eelectronic%20version)%E2%80%8E).