

MINDFULNESS IN THE WORKPLACE: WHAT HELPS AND WHAT HINDERS

by

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Abstract

Work-related stress is prevalent among many working adults and can lead to a host of detrimental health, psychological, and socio-economic consequences (Van Gordon, Shonin, Zangeneh, & Griffiths, 2014). Researchers have begun to look at the benefits of using mindfulness-based interventions in the workplace (Virgili, 2013), but they have yet to further investigate the mindfulness factors that promote or detract from work performance. To address the absence of empirical accounts in this domain, this qualitative study explored the subjective experience of participants applying mindfulness strategies in the workplace.

Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT; Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009), a well-validated framework for data analysis and interpretation, was used to explore mindfulness factors that help or hinder effective work performance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants from Google's mindfulness-training program, *Search Inside Yourself* (SIY). Data analysis and interpretation identified common themes, patterns, and emerging categories among positive and negative outcomes on work performance, as well as wish list items of resources that participants felt would improve the SIY course and help them to effectively integrate mindfulness into their workplace. Among the helpful factors of integrating mindfulness, 10 categories emerged: (1) communication and interpersonal skills, (2) self-regulation, (3) optimization of performance, (4) ability to cope with stress, (5) empathy, (6) well-being, (7) self-compassion, (8) leadership skills, (9) creative and critical thinking skills, and (10) passion at work. Among the hindering factors of integrating mindfulness, four categories emerged: (1) misperceptions about mindfulness, (2) suitability, (3) time requirements, and (4) dissonance between work goals and mindfulness. To increase the trustworthiness of the research results, nine credibility checks were conducted throughout the study (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Preface

This research study was approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board on March 30, 2015 (H14-03454). This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Melahnie Elena Kennedy Moodie.

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Chapter One: Introduction

According to Gallup's (2013) Global Workplace Study, 63% of employees worldwide are disengaged, leading to lower productivity, innovation, and well-being. Only 8% of people strongly agree that they experience overall well-being because of their work. These findings are concerning considering estimates that working adults, on average, spend roughly a third of their waking life at work (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003). The traditional borders between work and personal life are increasingly blurred with the rise in portable technologies and the ability to communicate instantly. Converging occupational pressures can lead to employees suffering from work stress. A study in Britain revealed that 20% of workers are stressed as a result of their work (Houdmont, Cox, & Griffiths, 2011), and a study in Canada revealed that almost half of employees experienced at least one episode of psychological distress over their longitudinal study of eight years (Marchand & Blanc, 2011). Work-related stress (WRS) can lead to harmful health, psychological, and socio-economic consequences such as somatic illness, work-related injuries, and absenteeism (Van Gordon, Shonin, Zangeneh, & Griffiths, 2014). Furthermore, work performance is negatively affected by unhealthy amounts of stress (Vuori, 2014). In economic terms, WRS costs North America industries over \$150 billion per year (Neuman, 2004).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions

It has been suggested that Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) constitute a psychological intervention that may be particularly useful to reduce psychological distress in employees (Fries, 2009; Jacobs & Blustein 2008), improve job performance (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014), and enhance employee well-being (Cohen-Katz et al., 2005). Researchers,

however, have not thoroughly investigated the mindfulness strategies that promote or detract from work performance. In the absence of empirical, qualitative accounts regarding the helpful and hindering factors of mindfulness, this present study is a qualitative exploration of what helps and what hinders work performance after participation in a mindfulness training program designed for the workplace.

The use of mindfulness techniques dates back 2,500 years to Buddhism. Described by Kabat-Zinn as “openhearted, moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness” (2005, p. 24), mindfulness is commonly achieved through practiced meditation (Hahn, 1976). Over the past 30 years, the introduction of mindfulness from a Western-based, non-religious perspective, has generated scientific interest to applications to reduce symptoms within clinical samples (Bohlmeijer, Prenger, Taal, & Cuijpers, 2010; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004) and to promote well-being in non-clinical samples (Irving, Dobkin, & Park, 2009). The most frequently cited and empirically supported program is Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, an intensive eight-week group intervention that uses mindfulness techniques to alleviate suffering (Baer, 2003). Over 60 published studies have examined MBSR as a treatment for a variety of conditions including chronic pain, fibromyalgia, and disordered eating (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindfulness-based interventions in the workplace. Karanika-Murray and Weyman (2013) have argued that interventions that are efficacious in public health-care contexts could be transferred into occupational and organizational arenas. Hülshager Alberts, Feinholdt, and Lang (2013) noted that only recently researchers have begun to examine the role of mindfulness in organizational domains. Benefits that have been found thus far when investigating mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in the workplace include reduction of psychological distress

(Gregoire & Lachance, 2014), increase in work engagement (Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, & Sels, 2013), strengthening of protective factors in the workplace (Ryan, Niemiec, Legate & Williams, 2014), and decrease in employee stress and improvements in resiliency, vigor, and overall employee well-being (Aikens, Astin, Pelletier, Levanovic, Baase, Park, & Bodnar, 2013). Measures of mindfulness such as the Mindful Awareness Attention Scale (MAAS; Baer, 2003), for example, have been proposed and used to provide an empirically testable and quantifiable definition for research. This scale, however, is still subject to criticism. Grossman (2011) suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on qualitative investigations and that greater insights could be gained about the characteristics related to the practice of mindfulness that may serve to inform categories that measure mindfulness (Grossman, 2011).

Qualitative research in the field of mindfulness in the workplace is scarce. One of the few studies to address this gap is Shonin and Van Gordon's (2014) qualitative investigation to analyze the experiences of employed participants receiving training in an MBI. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999) was used to analyze participant experiences, and six themes emerged: (1) changing attitudes towards work, (2) improved job performance, (3) letting go of self, (4) phenomena feedback effect, (5) well-being at work, and (6) taking responsibility for one's spiritual growth. For example, participants made explicit reference to improvements in job performance. These improvements were discussed in the context of adopting more present-moment-orientated working styles that improved quantity and quality of work.

Aikens et al. (2013) argue that a potential deterrent to using traditional MBSR programs in the workplace is time commitment. Therefore, a variety of MBIs have made adaptations from traditional MBSR programs such as a reducing the required time and offering online components

to better suit the needs of the employees. One such program is Google's *Search Inside Yourself* (SIY), the mindfulness program that will be explored in this study. This program was developed at Google by Chade-Meng Tan in 2007 and has been attended by over 2,000 Google employees since its inception. The course is usually taught by two instructors, one who leads the experiential mindfulness exercises and the other who delivers the psychoeducational component, based on mindfulness theory, neuroscience, and psychology (Tan, 2012). Due to its popularity at Google, this program is now available in other workplaces and the public through the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI).

Rationale for the Study

Although the SIY program is popular, there has been no quantitative or qualitative research to substantiate its success. The body of literature for mindfulness-based interventions is still in its infancy. If MBIs are to be considered an effective occupational intervention, research must clarify the helpful and the hindering factors of using mindfulness in the workplace. Researchers in this domain may benefit from a detailed description of what is helpful. The research thus far has mainly focused on the beneficial aspects, so it will also be useful to researchers, practitioners, and employers to examine what is hindering. Additionally, programs are being revised and new programs are emerging, so it would benefit researchers and program developers to learn what could be improved. As of now, there are no specific measurement scales for mindfulness in the workplace, so researchers, practitioners, and employers could benefit from the categories that emerge in this qualitative research to inform new categories for measurements. Giluk (2010) recommends that future research focus on qualitative efforts to study mindfulness and work given the lack of empirical support, and suggests, "it would help to ensure a rich understanding of mindfulness' impact and the process by which this occurs so that

more viable models can be proposed and empirically tested” (p. 145). Furthermore, Giluk (2010) suggests that the potential negative effects of mindfulness on work outcomes warrant research consideration.

In this study, I will use a qualitative approach to explore employees’ experience of mindfulness and how it relates to work performance. The research method I have selected is Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT; Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009), used to focus on factors that promote or detract from effective performance of an activity or experience. This study focuses on the mindfulness factors that promote or detract from work performance. The ECIT has proven to be a versatile, adaptive, and robust research method (Butterfield et al., 2009), and research findings of this study will be a needed contribution to the field.

Purpose of the Study

Given that there is a dearth of qualitative research in the field in general, this study aimed to explore individuals’ subjective experience of using mindfulness in the workplace. More specifically this study aimed to elicit mindfulness strategies used in the workplace to manage stress and enhance work performance. Additionally, this study aimed to elicit mindfulness strategies that detract from work performance in the workplace and to learn more about what factors would be helpful. With the expansion of MBIs into occupational settings, exploration of workers’ experience using mindfulness to manage occupational stress and thereby enhance work performance will provide a more refined and enriched description of the helping and hindering factors of mindfulness, which will in turn enhance research and practice.

Research Question

The research question for this study was: What helped or hindered work performance after participation in the mindfulness program *Search Inside Yourself*? There are four subsets of questions that were asked to investigate this overarching question: (1) How have mindfulness strategies helped you in enhancing work performance? (2) Are there mindfulness strategies that have detracted from your work performance? (3) What are the challenges you experienced in implementing mindfulness at your workplace? and (4) What additional resources or improvements to the SIY course might make it easier to effectively integrate mindfulness into the workplace?

Researcher Subjectivity

I have practiced various forms of mindfulness such as Hatha yoga, meditation, mindful eating, mindful conversations, mindful walking, and body scans for over 20 years. I was introduced to yoga and meditation by my mother. Mindfulness has been an integral part of my life and helped me significantly coping with stress, anxiety, and pain. I have integrated mindfulness approaches into all arenas of my life, including work, family, and physical activities. Mindfulness has not only helped me with coping strategies but also enhanced my overall health and well-being. Given that mindfulness is such an integral part of my life, my subjective experience is biased towards it being extremely helpful. My experience of mindfulness, however, is a layered process of discovering deeper and subtler levels of awareness over time. Although one weekend or course of mindfulness training could be life-changing, it is a life-long journey of deepening practice and discovery. Finally, the majority of participants in mindfulness research are female, middle-aged, and Caucasian, of which I am a part. Therefore, my perspective is not providing a voice from the experience of the minority.

Assumptions

In this study the assumptions were (a) people experience change, are aware of it, and have the ability to describe their responses; (b) awareness of self and the external environment and their interaction is a positive value in itself; (c) people can gain the awareness to change the way they respond to the external environment; and (d) people want to employ strategies that help them to enhance their experience.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this study I explored how workers use mindfulness to manage work-related stress and enhance work performance. In the last three decades, the concept of mindfulness has received considerable attention in counselling, psychology, and medicine. More and more practitioners are integrating mindfulness-based interventions to treat a range of physical, mental, emotional, and behavioural disorders such as chronic pain, major depression, and eating disorders (Bishop et al., 2004). As a result, there is a growing body of empirical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions to reduce symptoms in clinical samples (Bohlmeijer, Prenger, Taal, & Cuijpers, 2010; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004) and to promote well-being in non-clinical samples (Irving, Dobkin, & Park, 2009). More recently, mindfulness-based programs have expanded into the workplace.

As mindfulness-based programs grow into workplace settings, researchers have begun to examine employees' use of mindfulness to manage stress and increase well-being. However, the field is still in its infancy, and there remain many aspects to be examined. In this chapter I detail the effects of work-related stress, the origins and history of mindfulness research, and the more recent intersection between the two realms. Methodological approaches used to evaluate the effectiveness and explore the experience of mindfulness-based interventions are reviewed. This chapter concludes with ethical considerations that were contemplated in this study.

Occupational Stress or Work-related Stress (WRS)

Occupational pressure is now recognized as the major source of stress for North American adults, representing a serious threat to employee health and productivity (Aikens et al., 2014). According to Health and Safety Executive (HSE) statistics done in Great Britain, the most prevalent and empirically researched complaint is work-related stress (WRS), which accounts for

39% of all work-related illness in Great Britain (2014). In Canada, Marchand and Blanc (2011) conducted an eight-year longitudinal study with 5,500 employees working in various organizations, and they found that 46.4% of these employees experienced at least one episode of psychological distress during that period, 23.5% had more than one episode, and 10.6% had three or more. Psychological distress is a mental health outcome characterized by psychophysiological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and stress, and behavioral symptoms such as irritability and anger that are not specific to a mental pathology (Dohrenwend et al., 1980). WRS can lead to serious detrimental health and socio-economic consequences, including somatic illness, addictive behavior (both chemical and behavioral), work-related injury, mortality, reduced productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism, high staff turnover, employee compensation claims, burnout, and work-family conflict (Cox & Griffiths 2010; Griffiths & Karanika-Murray 2012; Manocha et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2012; Sussman, 2012). In Britain, approximately one in five adults are stressed as a result of their work (Houdmont et al., 2011) and 11.3 million working days each year are lost (HSE, 2014). WRS is not only burdensome for the employees, but also for the organizations they work for and society at large. Recently, one such factor thought to reduce stress and promote wellness among employees is mindfulness practice.

The Mindfulness Construct

Our understanding of mindfulness is inspired by the 2,500-year tradition of Buddhism. According to Buddhist philosophy, individuals have a tendency to ruminate about the past and worry about the future (Van Gordon, Shonin, Zangeneh, & Griffiths, 2014). The Buddhist teachings explain that this behavioural trait of not being fully present can cloud an individual's perception of reality, and walking through life on autopilot is likened to that of a "walking corpse" (Van Gordon et al., 2014). Thus, mindfulness is traditionally viewed as a means of

awakening from unawareness so that an individual can begin to observe, experience, and consciously participate in the present moment (Van Gordon, et al., 2014).

Although the concept of mindfulness is most often associated with Buddhism, its phenomenological nature is rooted in most religious and spiritual traditions, as well as Western philosophical and psychological schools of thought (Brown & Cordon, 2008). Mindfulness is not an ideology, religion, or philosophy, rather it is a “coherent phenomenological description of the nature of mind, emotion, and suffering and its potential release,” based on practices aimed at training the mind and heart through mindful attention (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Although there is still a lack of consensus in the literature in Western psychology as to what defines the mindfulness construct, there is some agreement among researchers that mindfulness: (a) is about becoming more aware of the present moment, (b) is cultivated more easily by using an anchor such as observing the breath, (c) can also be integrated and practiced during daily activities, (d) requires deliberate effort to pay attention, and (e) is concerned with observing both sensory and cognitive-affective processes (Van Gordon et al., 2014).

An operational definition, according to Kabat-Zinn, of mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (2003, p. 145). A considerable body of mindfulness research literature is developing, with attempts to operationalize and to connect mindfulness to psychological theories and treatment (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007). Bishop et al. (2004) propose the operational definition of mindfulness as a “process of regulating attention in order to bring a quality of non-elaborative awareness to current experience and a quality of relating to one’s experience within an orientation of curiosity, experiential openness, and

acceptance” (p. 234). Furthermore, it is a “process of gaining insight into the nature of one’s mind and the adoption of a decentered perspective” (p. 234).

Mindfulness is both a process (mindful practice) and an outcome (mindful awareness) (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Mindful practice requires the systemic practice of intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way. Mindful awareness, on the other hand, is a way of being, a deep awareness and experiencing each moment of life as it arises and passes in an alert and relaxed manner. This awareness involves freedom from grasping and from wanting anything to be different and simply accepting what is here (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). According to mindfulness theories, suffering is caused by constant reactivity and resistance to what is happening in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness practice is one way individuals can intentionally pursue mindful awareness.

A model of mindful practice. Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006) developed a model of mindfulness composed of three core elements: intention, attention, and attitude. According to Shapiro and Schwartz (2000), in order to understand mindful practice accurately and deeply, it is essential to incorporate the aspect of intention. Kabat-Zinn agrees that some kind of personal vision is necessary and that intentions prepare the grounds for what is possible (1990). A study that explored the intentions of meditation practitioners found that those who set the goal to self-regulate achieved self-regulation, those whose goal was self-exploration attained self-exploration, and those whose goal was self-liberation moved toward self-liberation (Shapiro, 1992). The second component of mindfulness practice is attention. This involves the dynamic process of learning how to cultivate attention that is discerning, non-reactive, sustained, and concentrated, so that one can clearly see what is arising in the present moment, including thoughts and emotional states (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). And third, the attitude in which one

attends is essential. Cullen illuminates that mindfulness is not “just bare attention” but “affectionate attention” (2006, p. 5). Often the quality of mindful awareness is not explicitly addressed; however, the attitude one brings to the act of paying attention is crucial (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). For example, attention can have a critical quality that may result in a practice that is judgmental of the experience (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The attitudes are not an attempt to make things a certain way but rather relate to whatever “is” in an open, loving, and non-judgmental way.

Work stress from a mindfulness perspective. All potential stressors, including time pressures, other people, and confining roles, can converge in the work arena (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). According to Van Gordon and colleagues (2014), the existing conceptualizations of the work-related stress (WRS) construct are based on an “exposure environmental” model of work stress (p. 133). Thereby WRS is operationalized as a function of the extent to which employees are exposed to inadequate working conditions such as: (a) inadequate support systems, (b) inflexible working hours, and (c) conflicting demands (Edwards, Webster, Van Laar, & Easton, 2008). This operational model of WRS emphasizes the importance of the external work environment as opposed to their internal psychological environment (Van Gordon et al., 2014). From a traditional Buddhist perspective, resisting and constantly trying to change the external environment leads to suffering. Rather than make changes to the external work environment, the most effective means of reducing stress is to modify the internal psychological working environment (Hahn, 1999). Kabat-Zinn further explains that the level of psychological stress one experiences depends on how they interpret things. The ability to flow with change, for example, rather than make it into an occasion for fighting or worrying facilitates how one can cope with stress. By making a shift in the mode of responding and relating to outside stimuli (stressful

experiences), “the meditator is better positioned to objectify their cognitive processes and to apprehend them as passing phenomena” (Van Gordon et al., p. 133, 2014). Things will be constantly changing in the work environment, which is outside of one’s control, but how one responds to those changes is within their control. Kabat-Zinn (2013) suggests that the work arena be a place to hone inner strength and wisdom from moment by moment, thus leading to better decisions, improved communication, patience, efficiency, and perhaps happiness.

Mindfulness Based-Stress Reduction

Growing interest in mindfulness-based interventions can be attributed to Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR. Originally developed in a medical setting to assist individuals with chronic pain and stress-related disorders (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), MBSR has been used to treat psychological suffering associated with chronic illness (Bishop & Carlson, 2009), emotional and behavioral disorders (Bishop et al., 2004), and stress-reduction for non-clinical populations (Grossman et al., 2004). A number of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for depression (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training for eating disorders (Kristeller & Hallette, 1999), and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) for the treatment of borderline personality disorder (Linehan, 1993) have developed in recent years, though MBSR remains most frequently cited and empirically validated (Baer, 2003). More than 20,000 medical and non-medical patients have participated in the MBSR program at the University of Massachusetts alone (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

MBSR and how it works. Kabat-Zinn (2013) describes that MBSR is typically conducted over an eight-week period in a group setting for 2.5 hours per week with one full day silent retreat. Participants learn formal mindfulness exercises such as the body scan, Hatha yoga postures, sitting meditation, and directing attention to the sensations of breathing. Participants

also practice mindfulness during daily activities like walking, standing, and eating. Additionally, there is a home practice component, and participants are asked to maintain a regular sitting meditation practice of 45 minutes a day, six days a week. Participants are offered psychoeducational instruction about stress, including information on external stress events “stressors” (Seyle, 1974), physiological responses to stress, and the difference between adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Participants are instructed to notice when the mind has wandered into thoughts, briefly observe the nature or content of them without judgment, and then return their attention to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In other words, participants are encouraged to notice their thoughts and feelings but not to become attached to their content. The consistent application of these processes is thought to strengthen self-regulation and increase acceptance of the present experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Further, Kabat-Zinn proposes that the cultivation of mindfulness can lead to a heightened awareness of physiological cues (e.g., increased blood pressure and pulse rate), emotions, cognitions, and the transactional stress process (Lazarus, 1990), which enables individuals to then appraise events with awareness and relaxation leading to theoretically healthier coping strategies (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

MBSR research. Traditionally delivered MBSR programs, which teach core mindfulness concepts, are becoming more well-researched, with beneficial therapeutic effects found in psoriasis (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), fibromyalgia (Schmidt et al. 2011), type 2 diabetes (Roseinweig et al., 2007), rheumatoid arthritis (Pradhan et al. 2007), chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Zylowska et al. 2008), and insomnia (Gross et al., 2011). Research also indicates that mindfulness-based therapies are beneficial in the treatment of depression (Ma & Teasdale, 2004), anxiety (Arch et al., 2013), and bipolar disorders (Perich et al., 2013).

A recent study published by Kristeller, Wolever, and Sheets (2014) explored the efficacy of the Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT). MB-EAT incorporates sitting and guided mindfulness practices to cultivate greater awareness of hunger and satiation cues, and other triggers for eating, such as emotional triggers. The 12-session group treatment of MB-EAT was compared to a psychoeducational/cognitive-behavioral intervention (PECB) and a wait list control. The study consisted of 150 overweight or obese randomly selected individuals (12% men; 14% African-American/Hispanic; average age = 46.6 years), 66% of whom met the full DSM-IV-R criteria for binge eating disorder (BED). Compared to the wait list control, MB-EAT and PECB showed generally comparable improvement after one and four months post-intervention on binge days per month, the Binge Eating Scale, and depression (Kristeller, Wolever, & Sheets, 2014). After four months, 95% of participants with BED in MB-EAT no longer met the BED criteria, compared to 76% receiving PECB. Moreover, the infrequent binges were likely to be significantly smaller than before. Notably, the amount of mindfulness practice predicted improvement on a range of variables, including weight loss. Findings indicate that MB-EAT decreased binge eating and related symptoms at a clinically significant level.

Limitations include that observed attrition rate was higher in this trial than in typical behavioural trials, possibly due to staff turnover at one of the sites. Second, the length of follow-up was limited to four months, and longer-term follow-up is recommended to assess the durability of effects of this intervention.

MBSR for health-care practitioners. The success of MBSR in addressing a range of physical, psychological and mental issues in clinical samples has inspired use of this program outside of clinical settings to address issues such as stress and burnout in the workplace. Initial studies of MBSR in the workplace have been conducted with health-care practitioners. Since

early studies with MBSR and health-care professionals, there continues to be an impetus to develop a curriculum aimed at fostering wellness for clinicians. Irving, Dobkin, and Park (2009) review the empirical studies that have examined the impact of participation in mindfulness-based stress-reduction programs aimed at enhancing well-being and coping with stress. Eight quantitative studies and one qualitative study are included in the review. Empirical evidence indicates that participation in MBSR yields benefits for clinicians in the domains of physical and mental health. Research suggests that mindfulness training can serve as a viable tool for the promotion of self-care and well-being.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) in the Workplace

Considering the growing body of evidence indicating that mindfulness benefits clinical and non-clinical populations across aspects of physical and psychological well-being, it seems timely and relevant to explore its role in the workplace (Schultz, Ryan, Niemiec, Legate, & Williams, 2014). Karanika-Murray and Weyman (2013) have argued that there is scope for transferring interventions that are efficacious in public health-care contexts into occupational and organizational domains. Hulsheger et al. (2013) note that only very recently have scholars started to look at the role of mindfulness in organizational settings other than health-care centers. Dane (2011) provided theoretical accounts of how mindfulness may promote task performance and physical and psychological health in the workplace; however, empirical evidence of mindfulness in the workplace is scarce (Schultz et al., 2014). Accordingly, in the last few years there has been growing scientific interest into the applications of mindfulness in the workplace setting. Of particular interest and relevance to occupational stakeholders is the potential of MBIs to simultaneously improve work-related mental health and job performance. According to Aikens and colleagues (2014) a potential deterrent to using a traditionally delivered MBSR program in a

workplace setting is the participant time commitment. To address the more time-urgent needs of the workplace environment, a variety of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) based on MBSR have been adapted to fit the needs of employees and employers.

In order to assess the effectiveness of MBIs for reducing psychological distress in working adults, Virgili (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of studies in this field. The analysis included 19 controlled and uncontrolled intervention studies with a total of 1,139 participants. Four main findings emerged from the study. The first finding was that MBIs were shown to have a robust medium–large effect on psychological distress in working adults. The second main finding of the present study is that effects obtained at post-treatment were largely maintained at follow-up. Third, the evidence suggests that brief versions of MBIs developed for use in organizational settings are equally as effective as standard eight-week versions originally developed for clinical settings. Overall, these findings are encouraging and support the use of MBIs for the reduction of psychological distress in organizational settings. Limitations include the fact that participants in the included studies were largely self-selected, middle-aged, female, more highly educated with mild to moderate elevations in stress/distress at baseline, thereby limiting the generalizability of these findings. Additionally, several of the moderators examined in the present study had small numbers of studies in the subgroups, and therefore, interpretations based on these findings should be considered preliminary at this time. Finally, the inclusion of poorer quality studies in the meta-analysis may have resulted in an over-estimation of the magnitude of effect sizes (Virgili, 2013).

Over the last couple of years, researchers have begun to investigate the connections between mindfulness training and work-related stress, job satisfaction, work, and employee well being. For example Gregoire and Lachance (2014) conducted an evaluation of a brief

mindfulness-based intervention to reduce psychological distress in the workplace. They found that as the employees became more mindful, their psychological distress tended to diminish; they became less stressed, anxious, depressed, and tired, and tended to experience less negative affect. These correlations suggest that mindfulness played a role in promoting mental health through this intervention. Leroy, Anseel, Dimitrova, and Sels (2013) showed that mindfulness is positively related to work engagement and that this relation is in part mediated by authentic functioning (i.e., being aware of oneself and regulating oneself accordingly). Schultz et al. (2014) found that mindfulness appears to be a protective factor at the workplace (from frustration and unsupportive managerial environments) and could serve for a potential pathway to employee well-being. Moreover, mindfulness training has been found to have a beneficial effect on various well-being related outcomes, such as enhancing positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Dane and Brummel (2014) suggest that in dynamic work environments, mindfulness facilitates job performance and that there is value in not only being engaged in work, but also in focusing attention mindfully. Furthermore, workplace mindfulness is also predictive of the degree to which workers are attached to their employer (Dane & Brummel, 2014). Findings from Aikens et al. indicate that a shortened online mindfulness intervention seemed to be both practical and effective in decreasing employee stress, while improving resiliency, vigor, and work engagement, thereby enhancing overall employee well-being.

A comprehensive study by Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, and Lang (2013) builds upon and extend findings on the role of mindfulness in the workplace and investigates the impact of mindfulness on emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in interactive service work. Their research seeks to contribute to the emerging literature on mindfulness in the workplace and investigates the role of trait mindfulness, state mindfulness, and a brief mindfulness intervention

for these key outcomes. Study 1 is an observational diary study investigating the link of trait and state mindfulness with daily reports of emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, and the mediating role of surface acting. Study 2 complements Study 1 by combining a diary design with a field experiment implementing a brief mindfulness intervention in the experimental group. Study 2 thereby provides insights into the causal nature of relationships between mindfulness, surface acting, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction in a field setting. Participants were recruited from various organizations in the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. For Study 2 the final sample comprised 64 participants, 22 in the mindfulness intervention group (MIG) and 42 in the wait list control group (CG). Participants (18 men, 46 women) had a mean age of 38.6 years ($SD = 11.1$), and an average organizational tenure of nine years ($SD = 8.6$). The sample consisted of teachers (17.2%), social workers/social pedagogues (15.6%), kindergarten teachers (7.8%), physicians (7.8%), waiters/hotel service employees (6.3%), industrial clerks, bankers, medical assistants (4.7%, respectively), nurses, psychologists, retail salesmen, pharmacists (3.1%, respectively), and other interactive service jobs (18.8%). Both groups (CG and MIG) received a diary booklet containing a general survey assessing demographic information and baseline measures. They were asked to fill in this general survey before starting, with the diary covering 10 work days. Each day, participants were asked to fill in their diary after work. Participants in the MIG received the intervention described below, while the wait list CG received no intervention and just filled in the diary. After completion of the study, they received a booklet containing the same self-training intervention as the MIG. The mindfulness self-training intervention was based on two closely linked mindfulness programs—mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Segal et al., 2002) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1982). One measure used to assess for mindfulness was the

Mindful Awareness Attention Scale (MAAS; Baer, 2003). Findings of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that for employees working in emotionally demanding jobs, mindfulness promotes job satisfaction and helps preventing burnout in terms of emotional exhaustion. Results showed that state and trait mindfulness are inversely related to employees' emotional exhaustion and positively related to their job satisfaction. The same relationships were found when mindfulness was induced by a self-training intervention, suggesting that the direction of effects is such that mindfulness precedes and affects emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The present findings suggest that mindfulness is a productive way to deal with emotional job demands. Future research may continue exploring to what extent mindfulness-based interventions prove useful in helping those who work in emotion-intensive fields cope with daily job demands. The authors suggest that it may thus be worthwhile to examine the link of mindfulness with job performance in future research.

Limitations of this study include that participants all held interactive service jobs, and therefore findings may not be generalizable to other employment sectors. Another limitation is that a wait list control design was used rather than an active control group, which might have introduced expectation biases.

Trends in mindfulness-based research. The ability to establish a comprehensive account of mindfulness has been made difficult by a general lack of agreement about what mindfulness entails. Research is moving towards operationalizing the concept (Bishop et al., 2004). Bishop and colleagues proposed two components of mindfulness: (a) self-regulation of attention reflective of metacognitive skills, and (b) an orientation of curiosity and acceptance of one's experience (2004). Bishop and Carson distinguish that the two components of mindfulness include mindful awareness and mindful practice. And the three aspects of mindful practice

include intention, attention, and attitude, leading to increased mindful awareness. Measures of mindfulness such as the Mindful Awareness Attention Scale (MAAS; Baer, 2003) have been proposed and used to provide an empirically testable and quantifiable definition for research. This scale, however, is still questionable. Grossman (2011) critiques that the recent enthusiasm for mindfulness in psychology has led to the problematic increase of self-report inventories that purport to measure mindful awareness such as the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Grossman (2011) explains that the Buddhist construct of mindfulness is derived from a 2,500-year-old systematic phenomenological approach to investigate subjective experience, while the current self-reports such as MAAS are less than 10-year-old attempts to objectify and quantify mindfulness. He cautions that this approach may misrepresent the meaning of mindful awareness in psychological research. Mindfulness is a complex and subtle practice that is more “akin to an art form that one develops over time” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p 148). Grossman (2011) suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on the qualitative investigations and research employing interview methods. Research in this area is relatively scarce, but qualitative studies are likely to contribute greater insights into the psychological mechanisms and characteristics related to the practice of mindfulness that may serve to inform “categories of psychological effects” (Grossman, 2011).

Summary. MBSR research originally began within the medical context. Over the last 10 years it has expanded into the workplace, beginning with health-care practitioners and recently expanding to other workplace settings. Recent research into the use of MBIs in the workplace, although limited, has suggested that these programs may positively affect employees. Gaps in the research include comparing MBIs with other work-related stress programs in order to determine their effectiveness, examining the link of mindfulness with specific functions in the workplace

such as job performance (Hülshager et. al, 2013), how workplace mindfulness can be developed through training and how this training would benefit employees (Dane & Brummel, 2014), and employing more methods to inform the categories related to mindfulness in measurement scales.

The Use of Qualitative Methodology in MBSR Research

According to Irving et al. (2009), there is a relative dearth of published qualitative examinations of MBSR or mindfulness interventions. The use of qualitative methodology has been sparse. To evaluate how health-care workers experience mindfulness training, Morgan, Simpson, and Smith (2014) conducted a review, synthesizing published qualitative papers on the experiences of practicing health-care workers or those in training. Fourteen papers were identified for inclusion in the synthesis, reporting the experiences of 254 participants. Participants included both trainees and qualified professionals in social work, counselling, nursing, and clinical psychology, as well as trainee occupational and family therapists and qualified physicians. Concepts from the papers were grouped into 61 categories which were then refined and the constructs identified were organized into themes to make sense of participants' experiences: (1) experiencing and overcoming challenges to mindfulness practice and (2) changing relationship to experience in (a) personal and (b) interpersonal domains. This review demonstrates the range of potential benefits of mindfulness training for health-care workers and those in training, to reduce stress and increase well-being, as well as to further develop and enhance the way they relate to patients or clients. Some evidence also suggested that health-care workers were more confident in decision making, as well as recognizing the limits of their competency and asking for help. Morgan et al. (2014) conclude mindfulness training is a promising option for supporting healthcare workers and enhancing the care for those with whom

they work. One limitation of this meta-analysis is that strict criteria were not applied when selecting studies to include.

A relatively small number of studies have employed qualitative methods to rigorously examine the experiences of health-care professionals enrolled in MBSR (Irving, Park-Saltzman, Fitzpatrick, Dobkin, Chen, & Hutchinson, 2014). To attempt to address this gap, Irving and colleagues (2014) developed a working model of how participants may experience change during an adapted MBSR program for health-care professionals. The study explored health-care professionals' experiences in a modified version of MBSR, Mindfulness-based Medical Practice (MBMP). Individuals in this study were recruited from participants who took part in the MBMP program offered to health-care professionals in a large, multiculturally and linguistically diverse metropolitan area over two consecutive years. A series of six focus group interviews were conducted for 1.5 hours, each with three to six participants per group. Of the participants who provided demographic information (N = 26), the mean age reported was 51 (range = 23–82; SD = 12.2 years); 81% were female and 19% male. All participants spoke English; however, 36 % identified French as their first language, 40% English, 4% Polish, and 4% Japanese. Twelve percent identified as being fully bilingual from early childhood. Twenty-seven percent were physicians, 15% were psychologists, 15% were nurses, 8% were social workers, 8% were counsellors, and 27% identified as being complementary health-care providers (e.g., naturopathic doctor or massage therapist). After the data analysis, 88 concepts arose from the interview data in the open coding phase of the analysis. Through axial coding procedures, open codes were grouped into 35 subcategories that fell into six overarching categories: the core category enhancement of awareness, mindfulness practices (informal and formal), internal and external context, group experience, mindful strategies, and consequences for self and others. For example

in the category *Consequences—Self and Others*, outcomes included increased self-compassion, changes in attitudes towards self-care, and an increase in self-care practices. For some participants, self-care improved their workplace functioning. Findings indicated participants were willing to make changes to aspects of self-care: making time for breaks during the workday, setting limits in the workplace, and prioritizing self-care more generally. Also “findings illustrated the nuanced change processes undertaken by participants and the implications such change held across professional and personal domains” (Irving et al., 2014, p. 60).

This study carries a number of limitations relative to sampling procedures, participant selection, and researcher bias. Notably, the mean age of the participants ($M = 51$) in this course was higher than the average age in other investigations of MBSR with health-care professionals (Shapiro et al. 2005), which could potentially limit the applicability of this model to clinicians at different stages of their career. Another limitation is the use of translated text.

Mindfulness research in occupational settings. There have been very few qualitative research studies outside the domain of health care on mindfulness in the workplace. One of the few studies to address this gap is Shonin and Van Gordon’s (2014) qualitative investigation to analyze the experiences of employed participants receiving training in a MBI. Ten participants were randomly selected from the intervention arm of a randomized controlled trial assessing the effects of meditation awareness training (MAT) on work-related well-being and job performance. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Jarman, and Osborn, 1999) was used to analyze participant experiences of MAT, and six themes emerged: (1) changing attitudes towards work, (2) improved job performance, (3) letting go of self, (4) phenomena feed-back effect, (5) well-being at work, and (6) taking responsibility for one’s spiritual growth.

For example, participants made explicit reference to improvements in job performance. These improvements were discussed in the context of adopting a more present-moment-orientated working style. Regarding, *Theme 5: Well-Being at Work*, participants reported that undergoing MAT led to improvements in work-related stress, coping skills, and psychological well-being.

The mindfulness training helped participants to be more present while working and to employ perceptual skills that enhanced their job performance. Examples included improvements in: (1) leadership and decision-making confidence, (2) ability to cut through confusion, office ploys, and “strategic game playing,” (3) remaining centered and calm under pressure, (4) strategic outlook, (5) productive thinking and working styles, (6) sense of work autonomy, (7) sense of pride whilst engaging in work tasks, and (8) ability to keep attention focused on the task at hand.

Limitations include that findings cannot be generalized beyond the original sample frame and efficacy of the program cannot be assessed. Given that participants were healthy and career-motivated adults and working in well-paid jobs, it is uncertain whether other workers would respond as well.

Summary. Qualitative methods have been sparsely used in MBI research. The majority of qualitative research has been within the context of health care. However, given the positive findings of research in this field, there is growing interest in the applications of mindfulness in workplace settings. Initial qualitative studies are providing rich and detailed accounts in positive support of the mindfulness training experience; however, there is clearly still much to learn in terms of how they provide coping mechanisms to manage stress, and enable and enhance the health, wellness (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014), and work performance (Dane & Brummel,

2014) of participants. Furthermore, very few qualitative researchers have explored the potentially negative effects associated with mindfulness.

Search Inside Yourself Program

The specific mindfulness-based program that this study will examine is called *Search Inside Yourself*. This program was developed at Google by Chade Meng-Tan, a Singapore-born engineer who was hired as a Google employee in 1999. The class has been taught at Google since 2007 and can be taken as either a two-and-a-half-day intensive course or in 20 hours over seven weekly sessions. The course is usually taught by two instructors, one who leads the experiential exercises and the other who delivers the psychoeducational component. The experiential activities include mindful breathing exercises, body scan, mindful listening with empathy, mindful walking, and mindful journaling. The homework consists of a daily meditation practice and integrating a mindful activity of participants' choice into their workday. Participants are matched up with a buddy from the course to check in about their practice and progress. The psychoeducational component is based on neuroscience and research in the field of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2012) and leadership.

SIY positions itself uniquely in using the practices of mindfulness to develop emotional intelligence (EI). Further, mindfulness trains the quality of attention and the ability to perceive the emotional experience with clarity, which in turn builds the capacity to self-regulate emotions, the foundation for emotional intelligence. According to Tan (2012), emotional intelligence enables “stellar work performance” (p. 12). Studies have shown that emotional competencies are twice as important in contributing to excellence as pure intellect and expertise (Goleman, 1998). Moreover, emotional intelligence improves leadership skills: Goleman (1998) also found that emotional competencies make up to 80 to 100 percent of the distinguishing competencies of

outstanding leaders. Through practicing mindfulness, one may improve emotional intelligence, build resilience, develop a positive mindset, and become a more centered leader (Tan, 2012). Tan has an even broader vision for this mindfulness-based emotional intelligence course: he hopes it will eventually contribute to world peace in a meaningful way. According to Tan, mindfulness is the doorway to loving-kindness and integrating this into the business world could be very transformative (Tan, 2012). The program has been extremely popular at Google and is now being made available to the public and other workplaces through the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI). As of yet, there has been no research conducted on this specific mindfulness-based training program for the workplace.

Conclusion

Findings have suggested that MBIs may be an effective way to manage WRS and enhance work performance. The growing attractiveness of mindfulness to employers and employees is not surprising given that working adults spend up to a third of their waking life at work (Harter et al., 2003) and WRS is prevalent in so many working adults. Increasingly, organizations are promoting and training their employees in mindfulness with the hope that it will contribute to employee health and motivation (Schultz et al., 2014).

Additionally, stakeholders in the occupational field have expressed an interest in operationalizing mindfulness as a WRS intervention and as a means of enhancing job performance (Van Gordan et al., 2014). In order to do this, more qualitative research needs to be conducted to examine the subjective experience of participating in a mindfulness-based program for the workplace. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to achieve a more adequate account of the use of mindfulness in managing occupational stress (Treleavan, 2006) and enhancing work performance.

The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) is a qualitative method that is appropriate to use when the research is interested in learning more about little-understood events, factors, or psychological constructs that help promote or detract from effective performance of an activity (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). Given that there has been no ECIT conducted in this field of mindfulness in the workplace, this study will be looking at how the construct of mindfulness (learned through SIY) helps promote or detract from effective work performance. Participants in the SIY program were interviewed to explore the following research questions: What helped or hindered work performance after participation in the mindfulness course, *Search Inside Yourself*? The following four questions were investigated: (1) How have mindfulness strategies helped you in enhancing work performance? (2) Are there mindfulness strategies that have detracted from your work performance? (3) What are the challenges you experienced in implementing mindfulness at your workplace? and (4) What additional resources or improvements to the SIY course might make it easier to effectively integrate mindfulness into the workplace? This investigation yielded a rich description that may contribute to a more comprehensive empirical account of the experience of mindfulness in the workplace.

Chapter Three: Method

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of employees' use of mindfulness through an interpretive qualitative research design based on in-depth interviews. In this chapter I describe the methodological concepts and procedures that guided this research and the sample. The following sections outline my choice of qualitative study, the use of Enhanced Critical Incidence Technique (ECIT), the data collection and analysis procedures, and a discussion of ethical issues concludes this chapter.

Qualitative Research and ECIT

This study used a qualitative approach to explore employees' experience of mindfulness and how it relates to work performance. The research method selected was ECIT (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). This qualitative research method focused on factors that promote or detract from effective performance of an activity or experience. This approach was chosen to clarify the subjective experience of using mindfulness in a work-related environment and to discern what promotes or detracts from work performance.

ECIT is an enhanced version of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT), which arose from the World War II Aviation Psychology Program of the US Army Air Forces for selecting and classifying aircrews (Flanagan, 1954). Since its original use it has now expanded to a qualitative research method used in many disciplines, including counselling, psychology, business, and organizational learning (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). The CIT meets the qualitative research descriptions offered by Creswell (1998) as "the researcher is the key instrument of data collection; data are collected as words through interviewing, participant observation, and/or qualitative open-ended questions; data analysis is done inductively; and the

focus is on participants' perspectives" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 482). More specifically, data analysis is conducted by determining the frame of reference, forming categories that emerge from the data, and determining the specificity or generality of the categories. The narrative form is in categories with operational definitions and self-descriptive titles, which is a feature that distinguishes CIT from other qualitative methods (Butterfield et al., 2005).

Flanagan (1954) described the CIT as having five major steps: (a) ascertaining the general aims of the activity to be studied, (b) making plans and setting specifications, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis, and (e) data interpretation and report on the findings. Data interpretation involves three primary stages: (a) determining the frame of reference, (b) forming the categories, and (c) determining the level of generality or specificity to be used in reporting the data (Butterfield et al., 2005), which will be described in more detail. The enhancements to the original CIT include nine credibility checks, additional contextual questions at the start of the research interview, and wish list (WL) item questions. WL items are those people, supports, and information, for example, that were not present at the time of the participants' experience but would have been helpful.

The preliminary step to the ECIT is deciding on the research question. The ECIT is designed to explore what helps or hinders in a particular experience or activity (Butterfield et al., 2005). It is exploratory by nature and is appropriate to use when the researcher is interested in learning more about psychological constructs "that help promote or detract from effective performance of some activity or the experience of a specific situation or event" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 483). The research question that drove this study is: "What helped or hindered work performance through participating in the mindfulness *Search Inside Yourself* course?" The assumption was that after participating in the mindfulness-training course there would be unique

experiences of how mindfulness was applied in the work setting that could be elicited through interview techniques. To answer this overarching research question, I investigated four sub-questions: (1) How have mindfulness strategies helped you in enhancing work performance? (2) Are there mindfulness strategies that have detracted from your work performance? And (3) What additional resources or improvements to the SIY course might make it easier to effectively integrate mindfulness into the workplace? I have modified the ECIT method by adding an extra question: What were the challenges you experienced in implementing mindfulness at your workplace? However it was analyzed the same way as the other questions. The difference between challenges and hindering factors are as follows: hindering factors examined what may have impeded work performance whereas the challenges examined what made it difficult to implement mindfulness at work.

After forming the research question, the first step was ascertaining the general aims of the activity being studied. As stated by Butterfield et al. (2005, p. 478), “understanding the general aim of the activity is intended to answer two questions: (a) what is the objective of the activity; and (b) what is the person expected to accomplish who engages in the activity?” Participants were selected based on being prepared to talk about what had helped or hindered their work performance after participating in a mindfulness training course, and being available for one interview and a follow-up email. The purpose of the research interview was to elicit the distinct strategies of these workers in order to build a comprehensive picture of the mindfulness approaches used that they perceived as helping or hindering them in enhancing work performance, and those they thought would have been helpful.

The second step involved making plans and setting specifications. This step has been described as “(a) defining the types of situations to be observed, (b) determining the situation’s

relevance to the general aim, (c) understanding the extent of the effect the incident has on the general aim, and (d) deciding who will make the observations” (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 478). This step was about deciding what to ask and creating an interview guide. The format of the interview guide is key to ensure ease of identifying *critical incidents* (CIs) and *wish list* (WL) items, and that the supporting details and examples for each item are recorded during the research interview (Butterfield et al., 2009). The guide also helped to ensure all interview guide questions have been responded to (see Appendix A).

Participants

Within the ECIT method, the number of participants in a sample is determined by the number of critical incidents reported in an interview and whether those incidents provide sufficient coverage of the process being researched (Butterfield et al., 2005). Participant interviews continue until exhaustiveness is met in the data. Once exhaustiveness has been established, Amundson, Borgen, and Butterfield (2014) suggest conducting half again more interviews to confirm that exhaustiveness has been achieved. Eleven participants from the SIY course were interviewed for this study. Exhaustiveness was met after the completion of the eighth interview, and three additional interviews were conducted to confirm that exhaustiveness had been achieved.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Inclusion criteria. Participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) had participated in the SIY program, (b) had a regular mindfulness practice (at least three times a week), (c) were employed full time or part time, and (d) were able to describe the experiences with mindfulness and work performance coherently in English.

Exclusion criteria. The exclusion criteria, on the other hand, included: (a) individuals who had not taken the SIY program, (b) did not have a regular mindfulness practice, (c) were not employed full time or part time, and (d) were not able to describe their experiences with mindfulness and work performance coherently in English.

Recruitment. Upon receiving approval from the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board, contact was made with people who had participated in the SIY course and Marc Lesser, the CEO of the SIYLI. The principal investigator of this study also participated in the SIY course (see Appendix B), and four of the participants were initially met in person at the course and then contacted via e-mail. Two participants were recruited through snowball sampling and the remaining four participants were recruited through a company who had an in-house SIY course for all employees via e-mail. All follow-up contact was made through e-mail, and individuals were given information about the study including the methods, study significance, time commitments of involvement, participation criteria, and risks and benefits.

Potential participants were sent an invitation to the study (see Appendix C), which outlined participant criteria. If individuals met the criteria and agreed to participate in the study, they were sent an informed consent (see Appendix D). A Skype interview was arranged at a mutually agreed-upon time, and verbal consent was conducted before the interview.

Participant Demographics

Eleven professionals who were currently integrating mindfulness strategies into their workplace were interviewed for this study. Four participants worked in the tech industry, two in marketing, and five in finance. Average time in the industry was 16 years, with a range from 2.5 years to 25 years. Positions included a CEO, a principal of firm, a manager, an investment

advisor, a headhunter, three directors, and three research consultants. Eight of the participants held bachelor's degrees and three held master's degrees. There were eight females and three males interviewed. The average age was 42 years old, with a range from 27 to 56 years of age. Participants from a variety of ethnicities were invited to participate in this study. Nine participants were Caucasian, one was Hispanic, and one was Portuguese/Irish.

The average time spent being mindful was 13 hours per week with a range of 30 minutes to 42 hours per week. The amount of time spent on meditation specifically was 1.27 hours per week on average with a range between 0 and 2.5 hours. The average years of experience with mindfulness was four years, ranging between three months and 15 years. None of the participants had taken any other courses specifically related to mindfulness in the workplace. One participant had taken a workplace productivity workshop, one had taken meditation through college, two had taken ad hoc meditation courses, four have done additional reading on the subject, and four have no other experience with mindfulness or meditation. Five of the participants had taken the SIY training between three and four months prior to being interviewed and six of the participants had taken the SIY training between six and seven months prior to being interviewed. The participants had been practicing the mindfulness techniques for three to seven months prior to the data collection.

Data Collection

Butterfield and colleagues (2005, 2009) recommend preparing an interview guide to provide interview consistency. For this investigation, an interview guide was developed (see Appendix A) to seek information about the participants' experience of integrating mindfulness into their workplace. The guide was designed to obtain information about critical incidents, wish

list items, and examples that include descriptive details and information about mindfulness that helped or hindered work performance.

Data collection was carried out through one semi-structured qualitative interview. Eleven of the interviews were conducted over Skype, in English, and each interview took approximately one hour to complete. Before interviews commenced, the principal investigator e-mailed the consent form to the participant. The participant was reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their confidentiality would be honoured. After the participant had verbally agreed to the consent form, the interview began. The participants were then briefed about the purpose of the study and the interview protocols.

Butterfield and colleagues (2009) suggest building rapport, allowing space for the participant to share their story, and following up with probes and questions to yield rich data when using the ECIT method within counselling psychology research. In line with these recommendations, all participants shared an overview of their work situation as well as general information about how they have been integrating mindfulness into the workplace. These initial questions facilitated opportunities for the interviewer to follow-up with probes and questions. The participants were asked to discuss specific mindfulness strategies they used and explain how that affected their work performance. They were encouraged to give specific examples of their experience and how it either promoted or detracted from work performance. Through questions and probes, they were encouraged to explain what specific aspects of work performance were affected by the strategies.

As recommended by Butterfield and colleagues (2009), the researcher tried to examine the same content areas in the same depth with all participants. The interview guide steered the direction of the data collection and helped to ensure interview fidelity. All interviews were audio

recorded with call recorder, transcribed, and during the interview the researcher took notes.

As per the recommendations of Amundson, Borgen, and Butterfield (2014), the researcher conducted an interview summary for each section of the interview (helpful incidents, hindering incidents, challenges to implementation and wish list items) with each participant as a part of their interview. This summary process confirmed the interview content and data with participants and served as an internal credibility check.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data included three steps: (1) determining the frame of reference, (2) formulating categories, and (3) determining the level of specificity or generality to be used in reporting the data (Flanagan, 1954; Butterfield et al., 2005; Butterfield et al., 2009).

The researcher organized the data based on Butterfield and colleagues' (2009) suggestion of using an electronic Word document. The helping critical incidents, then the hindering critical incidents, challenges to implementation and finally the wish list items from the first interview were electronically extracted. For an incident to be considered critical (and to be included in the research findings) the participant must have shared examples that depicted the incident and also framed the importance of the incident as it relates to the participant's work performance and the integration of mindfulness strategies in the workplace.

Next the researcher coded the helping incidents, hindering incidents, challenges to implementation and wish list items electronically. In carrying out this stage it was important for the researcher to determine the frame of reference and be clear about the goals and use of the research findings (Butterfield et al., 2005). For the purposes of this study, the results were intended to help counselling interventions for people struggling with work stress and career performance, to inform employers and employees about mindfulness strategies, and to enrich

research in the field of mindfulness as well as to inform developers of mindfulness programs. Therefore, it was important to include specific details surrounding what led to or detracted from work performance as a result of practicing mindfulness.

To begin categorization, the helping critical incidents were copied and pasted into a new Word document under a sub-heading called “helping critical incidents.” The participant was coded with a colour and all of their critical incidents were highlighted with their corresponding colour. The categories patterns, similarities, and differences between the helping critical incidents were then assessed, and categories were created. As the incidents were sorted, categories were named, renamed, and separated apart or merged together to reflect the emerging categories. This same process was then carried out for the hindering critical incidents, and finally for the wish list items. Next the researcher examined the CIs and WLs from the second transcript. The helpful CIs were examined and placed into existing categories for the ones that fit, and new categories were created for those that did not fit. This process was repeated for the hindering CIs, challenges and WL items. This working table was updated continually throughout the analysis process. The same process was followed for the following remaining transcripts. In addition, the category names were constantly revisited and broken down into more specific categories or merged. For a category to be deemed viable, at least 25% of participants must have identified an incident that fit within it (Borgen & Amundson, 1984). An operational definition was then created for each category.

Nine credibility checks were carried out during data interpretation to increase trustworthiness of the research results (Butterfield et al., 2009). These nine checks included: (a) audiotaping interviews, (b) interview fidelity, (c) independent extraction of critical incidents, (d) exhaustiveness, (e) participation rates, (f) placing incidents into categories by an independent

judge, (g) crosschecking by participants, (h) theoretical agreement, and (i) reporting the results. Each of these checks will be explained in the proceeding paragraphs.

Audiotaping Interviews. All the interviews were recorded using call recorder technology. Butterfield et al. (2005) suggest that recording the data collection enables the researcher use the exact words of the participant, which helps to ensure the data is accurate. It also accounts for descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992) and increases the robustness of the findings (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Interview Fidelity. Interview fidelity includes making sure that the ECIT research method was followed, that leading questions or prompts were not used, and that the interview guide was being followed. Dr. Marla Buchanan, an expert in qualitative research, and a doctoral student conducted expert checks every fourth interview through the data collection process.

Exhaustiveness. The emergence of new categories was tracked in a working table to determine when exhaustiveness was reached. Exhaustiveness was reached at eight interviews. Amundson, Borgen, and Butterfield (2014) recommend conducting half again more interviews to confirm that exhaustiveness has been achieved. Another three interviews were then conducted, which confirmed that exhaustiveness had been realized.

Participant Crosschecking. Participant crosschecking was carried out in order to verify that the responses elicited accurately represented the participant's experience. After transcription, selection of CIs and WLs, and creation of categories, an e-mail was sent to each participant with the participant's information and they were asked to confirm that their responses were genuine and their experience was accurately represented. All 11 participants agreed to carry out content verification. Nine were in 100% agreement with the interview summaries, and one made a few

edits to their responses that did not change the meaning of the summary. One participant did not respond to the email, but during the interview she confirmed that the summary was accurate.

Independent Item Extraction. Independent item extraction of CIs and WLs requires that an independent researcher (other than the person who initially identified the CIs and WLs) review and identify what they think are the CIs and WL items. The principal investigator randomly selected 25% of the interview transcripts and gave them to the independent researcher from the University of British Columbia. The principal investigator then compared the independent researcher's identified critical incidents and wish list items. Both the principal investigator and the independent researcher were in 100% agreement on what was identified as a critical incident. The reason for such a high level of agreement was that the principal investigator listened to the interview at length and only transcribed the critical incidents rather than the entire interview.

Participation Rates. Participation rates were generated by counting the total number of participants who provided items under each category and dividing it by the total number of participants in the study. This calculation yielded the participation rate in each category. The rates are reported in Tables 1–5 in Chapter Four: Findings. According to Butterfield and colleagues, there needs to be at least 25% of the participants in one category in order for it to be considered a viable category (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Placing Incidents into Categories by an Independent Judge. An independent researcher from the University of British Columbia was asked to place 25% of the critical incidents and wish list items into the pre-existing categories. The researcher then compared the independent researcher's placement with hers. The agreement rate between the independent judge and the researcher was 85% for the helping incidents, 95% for the hindering incidents,

100% for the challenges to implementation and 100% for the wish list items. According to Butterfield and colleagues, at least 80% of the categorizations must match (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Expert Checks. The eighth credibility check consisted of submitting the categories that have been created to two experts in the field of mindfulness. Due to time constraints, only one expert was able to participate. The expert had conducted research in the field of mindfulness and has a mindfulness practice of her own. She provided responses to three broad questions after reviewing the categories (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, and Amundson, 2009): (a) Do you find the categories to be useful? (b) Are you surprised by any of the categories? and (c) Do you think there is anything missing based on your experience? She confirmed all the categories were congruent with her knowledge of the research and professional field, and believed the categories were useful. Below are her comments after reviewing the categories:

Do you find the categories to be useful? Categories for helping are congruent with what quantitative and qualitative research shows to be common positive outcomes of mindfulness practice. I found the categories for hindering to be of more interest. It is useful to know what participants perceive as the downside of mindfulness in the workplace—this will help better adapt mindfulness interventions for the workplace. Category two (misperceptions about mindfulness) underlines the importance of participants’ understanding that mindfulness is, for example, not necessarily a quiet or clear mind; often this is difficult for participants to really understand. Category three (time requirements) underlines the importance of discussing with participants the paradox of being too busy for mindfulness. Category four (suitability) raises valid points that may help in decisions about whether or not to implement a mindfulness program

in the workplace. Similarly, the wish list categories could enhance better programming in the future.

Are you surprised by any of the categories? Under the hindering category one, dissonance between work goals and mindfulness, I was pleasantly surprised by the sub-category, “realization that work is not in line with your values.” I agree this is a possibility, and speaks to the powerful impact mindfulness can have from the Buddhist psychological point of view—towards insight (clear-seeing) and liberation from what might be limiting personal development. Also within this category, “can raise issues that are uncomfortable and makes it harder to ignore them,” again this speaks to the powerful and deep personal change-process that mindfulness elicits; it is not simply a stress-reduction technique. It is impressive that some participants experienced this in such a short time. It does raise legitimate questions about the role of mindfulness in corporate settings or other large systems.

Do you think there is anything missing based on your experience? One thing that comes to my mind in terms of hindering is the potential for psychological issues to be exacerbated through mindfulness practice. Untreated trauma, anxiety (panic disorder), and depression may be masked by folks staying on autopilot, and these issues can bubble up in mindfulness practice. This was alluded to in the hindering categories of “dissonance between work goals and mindfulness” and “not suitable for everyone.” The potentially harmful effects of mindfulness have recently become of interest in mindfulness research. This speaks to a tension between mindfulness being used and promoted as a stress-reduction and attentional training tool, whereas in its Buddhist origins it is the basis for personal (spiritual/psychological) transformation. Should such a powerful therapeutic and spiritual intervention be used in the

workplace? If so, should it only be delivered by facilitators trained in dealing with mental health issues (clinical counsellors, psychologists) and familiar with spiritual developmental issues?

Theoretical Agreement

According to Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, and Amundson (2009), the theoretical agreement has two parts. The first is articulating and reporting the underlying assumptions of the study. The second is comparing the emergent categories with relevant published literature. Exploration of the theoretical agreement is carried out in Chapter Five: The Discussion.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of findings centered on whether workers could describe their experience of using mindfulness in the workplace accurately. And to ensure that the interviewer did not ask leading questions or prompt the participant, the supervisor listened to every fourth interview. Reliability and validity of the ECIT were strengthened through conducting the nine credibility checks. For example, participation rates helped to establish credibility; having an independent judge place incidents into categories, crosschecking by participants, and obtaining expert opinions to review the category scheme all increase credibility. Although more labour-intensive and time-consuming, these research processes increased the researcher's confidence in the credibility and trustworthiness of the results obtained from the study (Butterfield et al., 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Participating in qualitative research can be revealing and demanding. The following psychological risks were possible (Treleaven, 2006): (a) confrontation with a perceived self-failure leading to the loss of self-esteem, (b) augmented awareness of emotional issues without immediate and available support, and (c) exposure of unsettled issues in the workplace that could

lead to undesirable feelings. To address these risks the following measures were implemented: (a) the purpose of the research was clearly articulated to ensure understanding of how the data will be used, (b) informed consent was obtained, (c) if participants required counselling due to the effects of the interview, they had the option of being referred to my research supervisor, Marla Buchanan, registered psychologist, or my committee member, Marv Westwood, registered psychologist, (d) participants were reminded that they could crosscheck the data from their interview and add or remove what they wanted to, (e) participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any time, and (f) confidentiality was maintained during and after the study was completed.

The interview and follow-up contact was confidential, and steps were taken to protect participants' identities. Only my supervisor, an independent researcher, and I reviewed interview data, transcripts, and audio recordings. No individual identities were used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. To protect identity, pseudonyms were used when reporting findings. All audio recordings, transcripts, and summaries were given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identifying information of participants. Any printed transcripts will be kept in the researcher's locked filing cabinet, along with raw and analyzed data, and stored for five years. All electronic data will be stored in a password-protected personal computer and also stored for five years. After five years, print material will be shredded and electronic files will be erased.

Chapter Four: Findings

In total, 204 incidents were described by 11 research participants, including 123 helping incidents, 31 hindering incidents, 26 challenges to implementation, and 24 wish list items. The incidents were organized into the following helping, hindering, challenges and wish list categories. There were ten categories found for helping incidents, there were four categories for the hindering incidents, two categories for the challenges and three categories for the wish list items, which are listed and described below.

Table 1. Categories for Mindfulness in the Workplace

Categories	Helping Incidents	Hindering Incidents	Challenges	Wish List Items
1	Communication and Interpersonal Skills	Misperceptions	Difficult to Establish New Habits	Improved Follow-Up
2	Self-Regulation	Suitability	Work Environment	Course Content
3	Optimization of Performance	Time Requirements		Delivery of Course
4	Ability to Cope with Stress	Dissonance between Goals		
5	Empathy			
6	Well-Being			
7	Self-Compassion			
8	Leadership			
9	Creative and Critical Thinking			
10	Passion at Work			
Total Number of Incidents	123	31	26	24

Helping Critical Incident Categories

In the helping category, 123 helping incidents were reported by participants. Within these incidents, 10 categories emerged, including communication and interpersonal skills, self-regulation, optimization of performance, ability to cope with stress, empathy, well-being, self-

compassion, leadership, creative and critical thinking, and passion at work. All of the categories identified met the 25% participation rate established by Borgen and Amundson (1984).

Table 2. Helping Categories

Helping Categories	Number of Incidents	% of Helping Incidents	Number of Participants	% of total Participants
1. Communication and Interpersonal Skills	24	19.5%	9	82%
2. Self-Regulation	19	15.5%	9	82%
3. Optimization of Performance	18	14.5%	9	82%
4. Ability to Cope with Stress	15	12%	8	73%
5. Empathy	12	9.75%	8	73%
6. Well-Being	12	9.75%	6	55%
7. Self-Compassion	9	7.5%	6	55%
8. Leadership	6	5%	4	36%
9. Creative and Critical Thinking	4	3%	3	27%
10. Passion at Work	4	3%	3	27%
Total Number of Helping Incidents: 123				

Communication and interpersonal skills. Incidents related to communication and interpersonal skills informed the largest group of incidents, with 82% of participants identifying 24 incidents. Communication and interpersonal skills has been defined as clear, honest, authentic communication with improved listening skills, which enhances working relationships, improves teamwork and collaboration, and deepens connections with coworkers.

Nine of the participants (82%) noted that their listening skills have improved, indicating that this impacted the way that they interact with coworkers and clients. One of these nine explained:

I have noticed a shift in giving myself permission to be okay with not needing to contribute to every conversation and recognizing a way I can contribute is by actually

allowing there to be a space for people to be seen and heard. As someone who is younger, I don't have 20 years of industry experience. There is a lot of really valuable information that I can take in and learn from the people who I have the opportunity to work with.

(Participant 7)

Rather than being preoccupied with what to contribute to the conversation, this participant expressed that mindful listening enabled her to learn from other coworkers. She went on to add that interactions are more meaningful when you actually experience being heard:

And also to recognize when I get the opportunity to be heard as well, there is a different type of respect and gratitude that comes out of having those meaningful interactions, rather than just having the feeling of going through the motions.

Another participant described that relationships with coworkers had improved because they were taking the time to truly listen rather than direct the conversation:

Mindful listening helps me listen and not interrupt, and I think that creates a closer relationship between us. It helps me just sit and listen and not be so invested in getting us to a certain point or find a point when I am going to contribute. (Participant 11)

A third described mindful listening as helping to stop from interrupting others and actually understanding what they were trying to say:

I am de-stressing and what that enables me to do is to look at things with a different perspective, to listen better and communicate more effectively instead of rushing into saying something, I actually listen, I process, and then I respond versus being very reactive. It is a noticeable difference. The outcomes are definitely more positive and interactive. I realize that when I am not mindful and I am reactive, I am often interrupting

people before they are done speaking. So it becomes less about me needing to get what I need to say out and more about me listening and understanding others. (Participant 10)

This participant further explained that listening and having genuine concern for coworkers increased the team's "drive to succeed," and this was much more effective than having an extremely competitive work environment where people felt separate from each other.

The most immediate impact when people have a general care and concern for each other is the level of teamwork and drive to succeed comes out a lot more than if it is every-man-for-himself or every-woman-for-herself type of environment. The power of multiple people working together as opposed to in silos individually I think is apparent.

(Participant 10)

Another participant corroborated that compassionate communication improved collaboration and teamwork, which in turn improved working relationships:

For example I recently started a new role. Along with me started another person that is new to this company. In the past I could perceive it as a threat, this other person joining work and I would be like, I'll use whatever I can, I will leverage whatever I can, my contacts and whatever to get an upward edge on this guy. I just said, okay I am going to include this guy on whatever I do—if I am setting up new meetings, talking to new people, if I have information, I am just going to share it with this guy very openly and be compassionate and try to tackle it that way. What ended up happening was that he was very receptive and appreciative to it and doing the same for me. (Participant 3)

One participant noted that as a result of practicing mindfulness, employees could communicate more honestly with each other, and this provided more opportunities for constructive growth:

On an individual and team and interpersonal relationship level, I am seeing how we're seeing people actually engage with people in an honest and authentic way. And tell them, hey that hurt my feelings, or I don't like the way you are being with me, something they don't want to hear but in a way that they can hear and not feel attacked but be a constructive growth opportunity for them. (Participant 2)

This participant also described that tuning into how they were feeling physically and emotionally helped the way they interacted with others:

Having a regular check in with how am I feeling? What is my breathing like? Just noticing what my state is at any given time helps me to be more skillful about how I am with people. (Participant 2)

Self-regulation. Incidents related to self-regulation informed the second largest group of incidents, with 82% of participants identifying 19 incidents. Self-regulation has been defined as the ability to regulate emotions and reduce emotional reactivity. This ability helps to solve workplace conflict, improve the ability to cope with change, increase resiliency, enhance awareness of physical sensations and emotions, and maintain a sense of calm. Many of the participants referred to a specific exercise they learned in the course that helped with self-regulation called the Stop, Breath, Notice, Reflect, Respond (SBNRR). One participant attested:

If you know the SBNRR and we get into a situation where someone is being rude to you or any kind of challenge at all—we really can stop and breathe and notice and reflect and come up with the best reply and do something that is really effective to really make someone happy and have the best solution. (Participant 1)

Two participants also agreed that it was very helpful to be able to have the ability to create a space where they can choose how to respond skillfully rather than react impulsively:

As someone at times who can come across as impatient because I have a lot of things on my mind, (SBNRR) has been helpful to create that space between impulse and actual response. (Participant 11)

Similarly, another participant shared that:

One of the benefits of this mindfulness training and integration—just noticing non-judgmentally what is occurring whether it be in your body, the symptoms you are having. It is such a powerful way of creating space between yourself and the emotions—within that space is our ability to choose how we are going to respond rather than react to a situation. (Participant 7)

Another participant described how SBNRR has helped regulate their emotions and helped them respond more effectively to situations:

As a result of the meditation and the attention, I am better able to recognize those physical sensations of being stressed or angry and use either the SBNRR exercise or something to stop that emotional hijack before it hurts and take a breath and be mindful of everything that is happening and make the decision of how I want to respond. (Participant 4)

One participant shared how mindfulness practice helped to not only regulate emotions but also build resilience over time to stressful situations:

Being able to restrain myself from being overtaken by emotions. Not only did that help me in that certain incident but it is also building the muscle of resilience where I can learn and remember what I have learned, like, hey you have been overtaken by stress and things in the past and you were actually able to avoid letting that stress truly rule you and you came out whole on the other end. (Participant 2)

Another shared an example of how mindfulness has helped in dealing with conflict at work:

If conflict is involved, that is one of the major areas where it is helpful. And I think the biggest piece of that is the not interrupting. So when I am mindful—I myself am aware that I want to fix everything. So when I'm mindful of that, when someone is telling me an issue or problem they have, I can listen and kind of repeat back what they are saying and make sure I am understanding it correctly and then just have them have that opportunity to voice it without having to respond and react immediately and fix it and say I am going to take care of this...95% of the time I am not there to fix it, I am there to listen. If I am not mindful about it, I will just interrupt and try to fix it and then walk away unsatisfied.

(Participant 10)

Mindfulness helped one participant in dealing with emotions of anger and annoyance.

Although their problems at work didn't go away, their ability to cope with them had improved:

I had a real issue with anger, annoyance. I would get ticked off if things weren't provided to me correctly or someone did something wrong or I just had a developing intolerance for people who weren't supporting me the way I wanted them to. To the point that I would have to leave my desk and stomp around and be angry and try to work out the emotion. I realized after six months that I wasn't feeling angry anymore, and one of the reasons that my days were flowing better was that there weren't these constant interruptions for me to work off steam. The problems didn't go away, but my ability to deal with them improved. The ability to not make people feel guilty and go with the flow more is so much easier for me personally. (Participant 6)

This illustrates how the participants gained the awareness and ability to change the way they respond to external stressors. Rather than trying to change the environment around her, she was able to change the way she interacted and responded to it, and as a result her workdays flowed more easily. Another sub-theme of self-regulation that participants reported was the ability to better adapt to change. As one participant observed:

I have been noted on quite a few reviews that I am not adaptable to change. Quite honestly, I thought this is who I am and I am not going to change and they have to accept me for who I am. On my last review they told me I was very adaptable to change and she was very impressed. Change used to throw me in a spin and I was very defensive and quick to say no, no, no, we are not going to do that. Now I am much more open to change, much more able handle it, able to think about things, and instead of just saying no I say, "Let me think about it, we'll find a way, but I need to figure out what the process is." (Participant 6)

Likewise, another participant observed that:

I am getting better at dealing with change and expecting that change is going to happen. I don't find myself clinging onto things I want. (Participant 2)

A core belief in mindfulness theory is that suffering can be caused by clinging on to what "is." For example, if you are experiencing something pleasurable, you may not want it to end. Rather than enjoying the moment, one starts to worry that it will eventually come to an end. Alternately, suffering can be caused by forcing something to change. For example, if you are experiencing something uncomfortable you want it to end. Both clinging to what "is" and wanting something to be different can lead to unhappiness and suffering. Rather, mindfulness encourages observation of what "is" and acceptance that change happens.

Optimization of performance. Nine of the participants (82%) identified 18 incidents within the category of optimization of performance. This category has been defined as the ability to increase focus, productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency in the workplace. One participant explained that through mindfulness they have improved their focus, which in turn has made them much more effective at work:

I do know that my brain is constantly in thousands of different places, and it is easy for me to get caught up in various thoughts and not be able to focus on the task at hand...Sitting and taking a mindful minute, a quick meditation, a body scan, whatever it may be, gets me more in tune with my body, my breathing, my biological rhythms, and I am able to focus much more on whatever the task may be. Whether that be listening to a research call, listening to someone speak, writing an e-mail, communicating with someone else. My mind is focused on that one task. It makes me 10 times more effective.
(Participant 10)

This participant identified that taking the time to tune into their body and breathing helped them to gain better focus on their work tasks. Another described how starting their day with a daily meditation helped them to feel re-energized and calm, which enabled them to plan their day in a more efficient way:

It [mindfulness] has really benefited me in a number of ways. Specifically, it allows me to center myself in the morning. What I found previously in the morning, I would sit down with my coffee, read the news go through e-mails and my day would just start automatically. Whereas now with the guided meditation, I come in and just kind of quiet things down, get settled in and really take a few minutes to recharge and re-energize myself before starting my day. While it is just a very minor thing, I think just taking the

time to sit and clear your head and calm yourself down has a tremendous impact in terms of focusing you and allowing you to plan your day in such a way that you become more efficient. (Participant 8)

One participant observed that mindfulness has helped them to realize that multitasking is not possible and that they are much more efficient if they can focus and direct their concentration.

I was one of those people who would think that I could multitask before I started on this whole trajectory and I realized that is just not possible. I am much more focused now, and I am much better able to manage my work and direct my concentration...Even though the volume of what I have to do hasn't changed, it feels like I am more efficient. (Participant 4)

One participant explained how the strategy of taking one minute before meetings to be mindful helps to have more productive meetings:

When we do have it [mindful minute before meetings]—it has been really effective at quieting the busy thoughts and the pre-work you are doing before you jump in. That minute of silence makes a huge difference in being able to focus your attention and focus your messaging as well so you can use your time more efficiently and effectively and feel more productive at the end of it. You get the sense you have accomplished what you were setting out to do. (Participant 7)

For this participant, having the time to quiet her mind and focus her thoughts results in more efficient use of time and a greater sense of accomplishment. Another participant identified that self-care and having a more positive start to the day helped her to accomplish more:

The ability to step back and start taking care of myself and starting the day with a more positive start has changed what I can accomplish and has increased the amount I can accomplish. (Participant 6)

Additionally, one person reported that the mindfulness practice has contributed to an overall increase in effectiveness:

The rest of the practices contribute to a more general level of overall effectiveness. It means being able to achieve clarity on what needs to be done, clarity on what I specifically need to do, and then the ability to bring sufficient focus and attention to those tasks and responsibilities. Then I can execute them in accordance to the standards I have set and we collectively set here at the firm. (Participant 11)

For this participant, mindfulness has brought more clarity to what needs to be accomplished at work. Finally, one participant explained how mindful listening helped to reduce stress and feelings of anger, and as a result freed up energy to put towards productivity:

If I was able to solve a problem quicker than I had been able to before just by active listening, hearing her out, and being able to think through solutions I increased productivity for me and for her. For me, reducing stress and feeling of anger and frustration freed me up and allowed me to do other things. I see that as a huge productivity enhancer for both of us. (Participant 3)

Ability to cope with stress. Eight of the participants (73%) identified 15 incidents related to improving the ability to cope with stress. The ability to cope with stress has been defined as being able to manage work stress in an effective manner. This includes reducing the sense of overwhelm, increasing patience, and seeing things from a broader perspective. All of the participants explained that the external stressors had not gone away, but their ability to cope with

them had improved. One woman explained how meetings and presentations used to be very stressful for her. Now through integrating mindful breathing she is able to feel calmer and find perspective, and the meetings and presentations are no longer as stressful.

I went through a very rigorous interview process and did a presentation to five to six people. I was stressed about the presentation and the interview process, and being able to integrate mindful breathing right before the interview, right before the presentation, and during the presentation at moments when I was feeling very stressed out I was able to find perspective and not go through a spiral of stress. It helped me feel calmer... In general, meetings and presentations were a source of great stress to me, and today I can say that has really become a lot less. (Participant 3)

Another participant described how taking a mindful minute helped with stress reduction: I receive immediate benefit whenever I receive the opportunity and make the time to sit down and spend a mindful minute with myself, whether that is immediate stress reduction. I notice my shoulders leave my ears and come back down to where they are supposed to be. I am able to focus more. (Participant 10)

One participant explained how taking a five-minute meditation decreases stress and therefore helped his effectiveness at work:

Taking five-minute meditations throughout the day without a doubt decreases my stress levels, decreases anxiety, and those two things alone help me be more effective at what I am doing. (Participant 1)

Three participants described how being mindful facilitated them to be more objective, less attached to the stress, and look at things from a broader perspective:

If I can sit in a state of being for five minutes and just be with what is, it can help me just be with what is. I can do the same with a large project and just see it objectively and accept it for what it is and to approach it in a more detached way. There is something very comforting with just sitting with nothing to do. And that same sense of comfort can help reduce the anxiety. I get things that are complex, big projects, and they can seem overwhelming, and modeling that experience of sitting in calm acceptance of what is can help reduce the overwhelm of big complex projects. (Participant 11)

This participant explained how she found comfort in sitting and just being. Developing the ability to detach from the overwhelm during meditation then translated to being able to detach from the overwhelm at work and “calmly accept” the complexity of big projects. Another participant echoed how being able to look at things from a broader perspective helped to approach work tasks in a more manageable way:

When it comes to approaching how I think about getting through each day, and being able taking a moment to breathe and check in with yourself and being aware and notice where you are at really is like a Google Maps view. You get this great snapshot of a bigger picture, and I have found that really helpful in how I approach breaking down my work into tasks I can get through. (Participant 7)

And finally, one participant described that her work required her to come up with creative solutions. Stress can block that from happening. So rather than get stuck feeling stressed, she allowed the stress to flow through her without attaching to it:

Work is a bunch of challenges, things that need to get done that may not have obvious solutions, and you need to be creative and free to come up with the right solutions. If I’m holding a lot of stress or doubt or negative talk about my ability to overcome those

solutions, it blocks that creative flow and clarity. So doing the practice of meditating, being aware, like, oh wow I am feeling stressed, but knowing that is not actually me, but a thing that is flowing through me. (Participant 2)

Allowing the stress to flow through her rather than getting enveloped by it enabled her to come up with creative solutions.

Empathy. An increase in empathy was reported by 73% of participants in 12 incidents. This is the ability to sense and understand other people's emotions, coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else may be feeling or experiencing. This includes releasing judgments of others and being more compassionate towards their situation. Eight participants agreed that practicing mindfulness helped them to develop more empathy, which positively impacted their experience at work. One participant explained how empathy helped to improve her relationship with her boss:

I used to have a challenging relationship with my immediate boss. I would get very defensive, and angry and I think one of the biggest changes that I saw with me personally as a result of the practice through the empathy and compassion piece, I was really able to put myself in his shoes and respond from a place of compassion, and as a result our relationship has vastly improved. (Participant 4)

One participant shared her experience of how empathy enhanced her interactions with clients:

I try to put myself in my clients' shoes and empathize with what they are going through on their end to try to have more compassion for the changes and be more open to them.

She further explained that:

Empathizing builds bridges and connections with people, which fosters trust. (Participant 5)

Echoing that, another participant described how improving her ability to empathize really improved her communication with the people she works with:

The ability to take a step back and see possibilities, pause before I e-mail, to try to and really see it from their point of view. I am observing in response some very grateful people, and the tenor of our communications has changed. Even though I have been working with some of these people for a long time, I am feeling like I am just getting to know them in a sense, and it has been a really amazing experience. (Participant 6)

And finally, one participant described how empathy helped to improve collaboration with team members:

There is also a level of empathy that you can access when you do check into yourself and your environment and be mindful of other people and their experience. The way I see my managers and team members, I have a deeper level of gratitude and respect for the work that they do. That fosters a healthier and overall positive work environment. There is a whole other level of compassion and appreciation, which fosters collaboration between team members. (Participant 7)

Well-being. An increase in well-being was identified by 55% of the participants in 12 incidents. This included experiencing a reduction in physical symptoms caused by stress, such as headaches and sinus infections, and an increase in health, such as better sleeps, increased energy, and weight loss. Additionally, the participants expressed an increase in positive emotions and thoughts and a reduction in negative thoughts and emotions. One participant described how mindfulness had helped to reduce work-related headaches caused by stress:

I used to have a lot of work-related headaches, and I used to go through a large bottle of Aleve every six months and seldom use it now. That has impacted my work because when I have to take breaks to lie down or find an ice pack and take time to deal with the headache, I didn't realize how much of that was stress related. Once I was able to handle stress better, the physical response went way down. (Participant 6)

Another person shared how meditation helped to improve her immune system, and she no longer got chronic sinus infections:

I usually get chronic sinus infections and I don't think I have been sick a day since I started meditating, save a stomach bug my kid brought home. I have tones of energy now, I feel great most of the time. (Participant 4)

A few of the participants shared how they felt an increase in positivity. One explained how starting the day with a gratitude journal helped to put her in a positive frame of mind and deal with all the requests she needed to respond to at work:

One of the offshoots of doing this is that I have become much more positive. I start my day with a meditation and a gratitude journal, just a short couple so when I start my day I am often in a much better frame of mind than I used to be, and when I start my day is usually when I get hit with these requests. (Participant 6)

Another participant observed how focusing on his breathing helped him to feel happier and set a much more positive tone in meetings:

I am just overall happier when I take a moment to focus on my breathing. It does make the world of difference to walk into a meeting full of people with a smile on your face than to walk in out of breath disheveled. (Participant 10)

For one participant, taking a five-minute meditation after lunch helped him to recharge and feel more energized for the rest of the day:

After lunch the meditation is almost like a nap. Just taking a five-minute break and knowing that you can disengage and shut down from everything else that is going on and my company says that it is okay for me to do that—it really does allow me to close my eyes and take a rest, and by doing that it's like a refresh or a recharge, and it gives me more energy to finish out the day. (Participant 8)

And finally, one manager noted how implementing the mindfulness program helped to create a positive feeling across the workplace because the employees felt like their well-being was cared for:

One of the things that stood out to me in the employee response was how much feedback that I got and heard generally that it represented a real depth of caring for them [the employees] as individuals, and caring for their well-being and investing in them. That created a really powerful positive feeling across the workplace. (Participant 11)

Self-compassion. Self-compassion was identified as being a helping factor by 55% of participants in nine incidents. Self-compassion has been defined as being more understanding, kind, and caring towards oneself. This includes being more comfortable with vulnerability, releasing self-imposed judgments, and taking time for reflection and enabling the opportunity for self-growth. The participants explained how self-compassion helped them to be more compassionate towards others. One participant shared an example:

Mindfulness practice is the thing that keeps me whole and helps me to process, to see things with fresh eyes, so it has been an interesting journey for me back to really committing to daily meditation, taking breaks, taking the quick five minutes to change

the pace up and also really working on being much kinder to myself and stopping negative self-talk and being more compassionate to myself. Being more compassionate to yourself you certainly have more capability to be compassionate towards others.

(Participant 2)

Another participant shared his experience of how in the moment you may not have responded mindfully, but through taking time for self-reflection you could look at how you could have responded more mindfully next time. Rather than judging yourself you can learn how to make improvements for the next time.

One of the ways to improve is to go back. So if you had a situation where you weren't able to practice some of the mindfulness techniques, you can remember those situations and think about what you would have done differently as a way to improve your ability to practice them in real-time situations. (Participant 8)

One participant echoed how mindfulness helped him to reflect on situations and grow from them:

Mindfulness, after the fact, you have time to reflect, to be aware of how you felt during certain situations and learning and trying to continue growing. (Participant 1)

Another participant explained that practicing having a non-judgmental approach helped to reduce self-criticism, and therefore spends less time beating herself up about what she is doing:

When you are noticing and not judging, you give yourself room to realize that it is not the end of the world. Distractions do happen and sometimes we get caught up in the minutia of the day-to-day work. But that non-judgmental approach to checking in with yourself and checking in with the work that you are doing, I think makes it easier to keep

emotionality out of the picture so that you can give yourself room to be human, and you are continually doing your best at your current level of awareness. (Participant 7)

Leadership. Leadership was reported by 36% of the participants in six helping incidents. One reason that this category is lower is because there were only a few participants in significant leadership roles in the sample. Improved leadership has been defined as the ability to model skills such as patience, mindful listening, constructive feedback, empowering coworkers, improved management, and creating a sense of calm and a safe space. As one participant explained:

I can keep a calm, even tone and establish that reaction for my team as opposed to feeling or having people feel that things are moving too fast or out of control. Mindfulness techniques have helped me model a more patient and measured reaction to the constant changing pressures and information of the day-to-day work. (Participant 5)

Another participant shared how mindful listening has helped him realize that he doesn't have to fix everyone else's problems, and that actually he is more effective as a leader by just listening and allowing his employees to come up with their own solutions:

For one, it is not healthy for me. I have enough on my plate already, and I don't have to fix everyone else's problems. And two, it really empowers them and makes them more independent and confident if they can work through it on their own. (Participant 10)

Additionally, this is a much healthier approach for him because he is now not taking on the stress of trying to fix everyone else's problems. Mindful breathing helped one participant to feel more empowered and therefore a more effective business leader:

I've been working towards a daily practice of mindful breathing for five minutes and I find when I do that (it lowers) it creates a calmer, more empowered sense of myself,

which enables me to be less reactive, more open, be more patient, all of which improve my effectiveness as a business leader and a manager and a producer of work. (Participant 11)

Creative and critical thinking. The participants (27%) reported four incidents regarding creative and critical thinking. Enhanced creative and critical thinking has been defined as the ability to think more creatively, find innovative solutions to problems, and clearly analyze decisions.

One participant explained how mindfulness helped to free up energy for more creative ideas and innovative solutions:

If I can be mindful during the meeting, not only do I physically feel better because I am not holding the stress in my shoulders and my stomach, but I feel like my mind has become... there is less energy spent on holding tension, and I feel like I have more creative ideas and I can find insights to problem solving and finding solutions.

(Participant 3)

Another participant agreed that when your brain is in a more relaxed state, it is more likely to let creative ideas flow:

One of the benefits of mindfulness practice, when you get that focus, your brain is able to be more relaxed, and that is where you have those inspirational “ah ha” ideas. You can’t will yourself to be creative. You have to provide an environment that allows you to be creative. At any technology company that is crucial. (Participant 4)

And finally, a participant described how mindfulness improved the ability to think critically and problem solve:

Kind of like allowing your engine to cool off and to not constantly be in overdrive, and once you actually turn the car back on and get moving, you can approach problem solving and critical thinking I think even better because you're actually integrating and taking in other people's perspectives and expertise and giving it a different weight than it would have if you were caught up in the busyness of trying to constantly react to whatever is coming to you. (Participant 7)

Passion at work. An increase for passion at work was reported by 27% of the participants in four incidents. This category has been defined as tapping into a greater sense of purpose at work and improving work satisfaction. For one participant, integrating mindfulness and helping to teach others about mindfulness has helped her to become more passionate about going to work:

Finding these kindred spirits to work with me on this [mindfulness project] has just brought a whole new depth of personal reward to my career. It is so exciting to be able to be part of something that is bigger than you, and it makes you want to get up in the morning. (Participant 4)

Another participant explained how mindfulness helped to deepen relationships, and this helped people to have more satisfaction and motivation at work.

People share things on a more personal level, which is so much more gratifying sometimes than talking about work. It's nice to have a balance of both because we spend a lot of time together here, so it enables us to get to know each other better on a personal level. Anyone can work for a pay cheque, but what really motivates people is deep relationships and wanting to help other people. And if you develop deep relationships on

your team, then you all are working towards a common goal. The satisfaction and work ethic becomes higher. (Participant 10)

And finally, one participant explained how mindfulness has helped her to realize that she is happy with the choice she made to work at the firm she is working at:

I really enjoy what I do—every job has its challenges and those challenges are typically involved in the work, but it also involves the actual culture of the firm and the people that you work with on a day-to-day. It is never perfect. I do feel like I have made an active decision to be here instead of plodding along, which I did for many years in another firm and realizing this isn't really where I want to be doing what I am doing. It has been bigger-picture reflection for me, which in my case has really validated a lot of where I am. (Participant 9)

Summary. All 11 of the participants in the SIY program reported positive experiences of implementing mindfulness into the workplace. All described with enthusiasm ways in which the mindfulness strategies helped to improve their work performance in a variety of ways. The majority agreed that mindfulness improved their communication and interpersonal skills, ability to self-regulate, ability to optimize performance, ability to cope with stress, and increased empathy. Over half of the participants described how mindfulness improved their sense of well-being and self-compassion. Roughly one-third of the participants identified how mindfulness improved their leadership skills, creative and critical thinking skills, and passion at work. Each of participants provided a detailed explanation of how their work performance improved with regard to reported categories.

Hindering Critical Incident Categories

Within the hindering categories, participants reported 31 incidents. Within these incidents, four categories emerged, including misperceptions, suitability, time requirements, and dissonance between goals. All of the categories identified met the 25% participation rate established by Borgen and Amundson (1984).

Table 3. Hindering Categories

Hindering Categories	Number of Incidents	% of Hindering Incidents	Number of Participants	% of total Participants
1. Misperceptions	8	29.5%	6	55%
2. Suitability	9	18.5%	5	45%
3. Time Requirements	11	40.5%	4	36%
4. Dissonance between Goals	3	11%	3	27%
Total Number of Hindering Incidents: 31				

Misperceptions. One of the most prevalent hindering categories that emerged for participants was misperceptions, which included eight items reported by 55% of participants. This category has been defined as limited understanding of mindfulness, which includes lack of evidence-based research, unrealistic expectations of what mindfulness practice may achieve, and confusion related to religious beliefs. One participant explained that people who don't have experience with mindfulness may be judgmental of it:

People have a tendency to be judgmental of things that they don't have experience with.

We are in a profession of providing financial advice and being respectful and trustworthy, and I guess people could have different perceptions of us taking breaks to practice mindfulness. They may be like, huh and I trust you with my money? (Participant 10)

Another participant observed that some people have an ideal of what mindfulness should be and then are critical of themselves when they don't reach this ideal, which can be counterproductive:

People confuse what mindfulness is and spend a lot of time trying to be in some nirvana mindful state and then judge themselves because they're not. Meditation is not about having a clear mind. It is about catching what is in your mind. (Participant 2)

Another participant echoed this sentiment and shared that when she first started trying to meditate she thought she was a failure because she wasn't achieving what she thought she was supposed to achieve:

In the past I really tried meditation and I failed and failed. What I didn't get was the idea you don't stop thinking. I thought that since my brain was distracted so easily and so often and couldn't focus, I am also not good at visualizing, so it really annoyed me. I felt like a failure. After reading the first chapter of *Search Inside Yourself* talking about developing mental muscle, that you have to fail to catch it and bring your attention back to it and to build that exercise, that part of your brain, to make it a habit, I was then able to view it in a different way and realize I didn't fail. (Participant 6)

Another participant observed that mindfulness has become very popular, and unfortunately people are exaggerating its benefits:

People have exploited [mindfulness] and turned it into everything, which undermines its credibility. It is not the magic potion to life—it is just techniques to calm yourself. It gets exaggerated or sensationalized. (Participant 5)

She further suggested more research needs to be done in order for us to really understand what the benchmarks are for meditation. What level of time or effort needs to be put forth to see

certain kinds of results? Another participant commented that some people misunderstand the science behind mindfulness, or some people think it will conflict with their religious beliefs:

Certainly selling it to some people is a challenge, and there are still people who don't really understand all the science behind it or don't really want to hear or think it is going to get in the way of their religious beliefs. (Participant 4)

Suitability. Eight incidents related to suitability were reported by 45% of participants. These participants reported that although they did not experience it personally, they observed how mindfulness was not suitable to absolutely everyone and could hinder work performance. This category has been defined as people's readiness to look inward and practice being present with their thoughts. Not everyone is at a stage in their life at which they are prepared to practice mindfulness for various reasons. As one participant explained:

Everyone has to go on their mindfulness journey, emotional intelligence journey, all at their own pace. People can't change unless they want to change, and this isn't something that I would try to force. (Participant 1)

Another participant echoed this sentiment:

It is a really challenging thing to ask of people who aren't open to it. You don't know what people's journeys have looked like. For some people it might be too painful or unnatural to turn inward. I know people who are in a constant state of distraction, and in some cases it is necessary for their well-being. (Participant 7)

She further added that some people "need to be in a constant state of distraction in order to function." This may be because they have such high levels of anxiety or have experienced extreme trauma. In these cases it may bring up too much pain to cope with in a work situation.

Time requirements. For the category of time requirements, 36% of the participants identified 11 incidents. Mindfulness does take some time out of the day, and some of the participants experienced feeling stressed trying to find the time to practice mindfulness. One participant explained that he already experiences many demands during the day and it can be difficult to try to fit mindfulness into that busy schedule:

One thing that comes to mind is the general balance and prioritization of things that we try to fit into a day. There are definitely times when it seems like just another thing that I am trying to get done in an already too-busy day. (Participant 10)

He further explained that although the thought of trying to fit mindfulness into the busy schedule can contribute to feeling overwhelmed, after he does it, he feels less overwhelmed: “That is the paradox—I am overwhelmed thinking of doing it but when I do it I am less overwhelmed.”

Another participant described her struggle with trying to fit mindfulness into her schedule:

It always feels like a race against time, and even though you know it is going to be beneficial in the long run, in the moment you have to get over that first step or barrier to turn your mind down and feel the benefits. I struggle with that. (Participant 5)

Another participant explained that she used to be available for work all the time, and she has now made changes to her availability. Rather than getting on e-mail first thing in the morning, she takes time to do her mindfulness practice first.

What may be perceived as a hindrance is that my sense of urgency for some people’s requests has decreased. I used to get up and be online and on e-mail within 15 minutes of waking up. I don’t do that anymore. I get up, I do my meditation first. (Participant 6)

Now that she is taking more time for self-care, she has “reset [her] expectations about [her] availability” and she has “narrowed [her] scope on what [she is] willing to do for others.”

Most participants agreed that time requirements were more of a perceived hindrance. For example, one participant, when asked if he experienced any hindrances to work performance commented:

The one thing that comes to my head is if you spend 30 minutes a day practicing meditation, that might be 30 minutes you are taking away from work, but if that makes you that much more effective then it’s worth it. (Participant 1)

Dissonance between goals. Three participants (27%) identified four incidents related to dissonance between goals, which has been defined as the possible conflict between work expectations and requirements, personal goals, and goals aligned with mindfulness. In addition, mindfulness required introspection, which may raise suppressed issues that are uncomfortable to deal with. One participant explained:

If you are doing a mindfulness practice that is separate and potentially feels in competition to your actual work—that could create a dissonance that is really hard to resolve, and you might have feel like you need to choose one over the other, which would be unfortunate.

She further added:

It might lead you to change your career. It might tell you that what you are doing is not in your best interest, it is not in sync with what you really value and care about. In the short term that might be a loss because you might lose your job, but in the long term hopefully that’s a win because it puts you on a pathway towards your future. (Participant 2)

Another participant described how mindfulness forces you to look honestly at your life and you may not be ready to look at these issues that could cause discomfort:

I am really busy and because of that there are things that are important to me that I am not giving time to, being a parent, being a partner to my husband...so there are all these things that are going on. It is easy to be busy and go through that, but when you take the minute to slow down and move the focus out, when your mind becomes clearer and you take the time to think through things, you're faced with things that are uncomfortable that you have to address. Overall it is a healthy thing, but I could see that being disruptive depending on how impactful it is for the rest of your life. I think that could be something you may not know you are signing up for when you start doing this. (Participant 9)

And finally, one participant described his conceptual dilemma with mindfulness:

Conceptually, a big part of the teaching is that you should always try to understand other people's perspective and where they are coming from and why they are doing what they are doing and then internalizing that information, understanding it and then responding, but sometimes people do stuff that is just wrong. When I feel that someone has done something wrong or incorrect, I don't always think about going through that process before responding. Sometimes it is just obvious—you need to respond appropriately.

(Participant 8)

Summary. In comparison to the helping incidents, there were very few hindering incidents reported. Many of the participants said that mindfulness practice did not detract from their work performance in any way. When asked if there were any hindering factors, most participants took a while to respond and had to really think about it. Just over half the participants reported that one of the hindering factors was a misperception or a misunderstanding

of mindfulness. Just under half the participants reported that not everyone may be ready to practice mindfulness (suitability). Roughly one-third reported that time requirements could be a hindering factor. And roughly one-fourth reported that a hindering factor may be a dissonance between work goals and mindfulness goals.

Challenges to Implementation

Participants reported 26 incidents related to challenges to implementation of mindfulness in the workplace. The “challenges to implementation” question was a modification to the ECIT method. Since there were so few incidents relating to the hindering factors on work performance, the researcher also wanted to enquire about the challenges to implementing mindfulness in the workplace. Rather than investigating what hindered actual work performance, this question explored what made the implementation of mindfulness problematic. Two categories emerged: difficulty in establishing new habits and work environment. All of the categories identified met the 25% participation rate established by Borgen and Amundson (1984).

Table 4. Challenges to Implementation

Challenges	Number of Items	% of Challenges Items	Number of Participants	% of Total Participants
1. Difficult to Establish New Habits	17	65%	10	91%
2. Work Environment	9	35%	4	36%
Total number of Challenges Items: 26				

Difficult to establish new habits. Ten participants (91%) identified 17 incidents related to the difficulty in establishing new habits that hindered their ability to integrate mindfulness into

their workplace. The participants reported that integrating mindfulness into their daily routine required motivation, overcoming challenges, and at times discomfort. As one participant shared:

It is really difficult to establish new habits and there has to be that uncomfortable moment of trying something different. I have found myself forgetting to advocate the mindful minute. I may have to set reminders to establish new habits and new policy. It is one thing to mention that we are going to implement this, but it is another to actually build habits. (Participant 7)

She continued to explain:

I am trying to create a space for meditation in my life and prioritize it in the same way I do sleeping, working—I am trying to give it the same level of priority in terms of the time it deserves—and I have to admit, like anything, establishing a new habit, especially one like this that requires dedicated time when we are already so constrained with our day-to-day lives, that is a personal struggle. (Participant 7)

Similarly, another participant described that having the discipline to integrate mindfulness even for five minutes was difficult:

Just doing it—overcoming whatever it is that makes the resulting resistance to sitting for a scant five minutes. That discipline piece is the major difficulty. (Participant 11)

One participant described how the teachings from the *Search Inside Yourself* were useful, but the challenge was actually implementing them into a regular routine:

There are a lot of teachings in the book that are totally applicable to everyday life. Stuff that makes sense on how to deal with situations. The difficulty is translating it into everyday life. The challenge is practicing and using it in real time. (Participant 8)

Another compared meditating to exercise and described how it can be really difficult in the beginning to get started:

It is almost like when you start running, and the first run you feel like crap and you're breathing hard. It's not fun when you are out of shape. And then as you get shape, you get your runner's high. I am sort of out of shape when it comes to meditating, so it is kind of that hump I have to get over. Whatever that habit is. It is a little more painful because I am not conditioned for it. And so every time I skip it and don't do it—it is easier to not do it than do it. It is time and pain avoidance. (Participant 5)

This participant also explained how the first stages of meditating were really difficult. It can be very uncomfortable sitting and doing nothing, especially when you have a large list of things you need to do. She found the experience excruciating:

Mindfulness is really, the first time I did it, I felt like I was screaming inside. It is just hard. I find it really hard still, so it is a little bit like torture. So I know it gets easier. The first time, I walked in the room and I had so many things on my mind and it was like, "Hi, welcome, we are going to meditate," and my brain was screaming, I wanted to leap out of my skin, I was so uncomfortable for those five minutes, and I quickly went to the bathroom to check e-mails. I had so much to do that day, and I was like, I can't believe we're here and the first thing we do is just sit. And through the weekend it got easier and more enjoyable. (Participant 5)

Work environment. Four participants (36%) reported that work environment impeded their ability to integrate mindfulness. Work environment has been defined as the physical barriers to integrating a mindfulness practice at work, such as open workspace concepts and not having a private, quiet space to practice. Additionally, it has been defined as the barriers

resulting from a work culture that may not embrace mindfulness, including employees feeling fearful of other's reactions and judgments, perception that it is not a critical skill, and not prioritizing funding. One participant described how having open workstations made it more difficult to practice meditation:

The work environment has made it harder—really loud in a big room with a bunch of workstations with no sound barriers. Remaining focused and within yourself in that kind of environment is very challenging. (Participant 2)

Another participant explained that she would feel more comfortable at her workplace if there were a designated area where she could practice:

I would have a lot more success if I had a place I could go at my work where I could do a longer sitting because I could extend into more areas. It would be great if there were a mindfulness class or space that I could go to and feel safe. I don't feel safe sharing my mindfulness with many people. Not widely. (Participant 3)

This participant also shared that she would like to take more initiative to integrate mindfulness into the workplace, but she is fearful of how others may react to it:

I really wanted to start off meetings with the mindful minute, but I don't feel like I am there yet, and I fear what the reactions would be. (Participant 3)

Other participants shared how there is resistance from the corporate culture and senior management to embrace mindfulness:

There is naturally a greater skepticism, certainly in senior management who have a more linear authoritative management mindset. On one hand we have young, talented, brilliant engineers, and we also have a culture that is not inherently embracing of [meditation]. (Participant 4)

One participant explained part of the reason why the corporate culture may be resistant is that:

There is a lot of concern that empathy and meditation will be perceived as either wimpy or not something we train our people on. (Participant 6)

She further clarified that mindfulness was not considered a critical skill to get the job done, and so therefore it may be more challenging to find people willing to lead its implementation:

Finding a corporate champion will be more challenging for the mindfulness educational piece. The fact it is not a critical skill, it is not something they need to learn to do their job. (Participant 6)

Summary. Since there were so few factors that detracted from work performance reported, I decided to also ask what the challenges to implementing mindfulness were. There were two categories that emerged from this question: difficult to establish new habits and work environment. Almost all of the participants agreed that the biggest challenge to implementing mindfulness was actually doing it. They reported that it was difficult to integrate something new into their routine. Roughly one-third of the participants reported that the work environment posed challenges to implementing mindfulness.

Wish List Items

Twenty-four wish list items were reported by the participants. Within these incidents, three categories emerged: follow-up, course content, and delivery of course. All of the categories identified met the 25% participation rate established by Borgen and Amundson (1984).

Table 5. Wish List Categories

Wish list Categories	Number of Items	% of Wish list Items	Number of Participants	% of Total Participants
1. Improved Follow-Up	13	54%	8	73%
2. Course Content	7	29%	5	45%
3. Delivery of Course	4	17%	3	27%
Total number of Wish List Items: 24				

Follow-up. Eight participants (73%) identified 13 wish list items related to improved follow-up. Improved follow-up has been defined as providing a more comprehensive follow-up for helping participants to sustain their mindfulness practice. This includes suggestions such as a workbook, a mindfulness smartphone app, and opportunities to connect with other participants in the program to create a sense of community and support. As one participant suggested:

A guide could be made available for people who have done the course to use the book and reinforce the practices, like a book club guide or manual. (Participant 11)

Another participant suggested that a useful follow-up tool would be a smartphone app:

Given that so many of us are living on our mobile devices, even having a simple app with the guided meditation in it that is priced into or part of the program would be a great way to have an active, easy-to-access takeaway in our pocket. Maybe it has a weekly journaling prompt. (Participant 7)

A third thought that helping to facilitate connection between the participants of the course would be helpful:

Help to facilitate a community of meditators to continue the human connection and relationships of the group. Extend the connection after the three days. (Participant 5)

Another participant echoed this sentiment:

Creating the sustained community of support and experiential sharing and encouragement would be great. (Participant 2)

And finally, another participant also suggested more ways to connect with the group after taking the course:

More group meditations, through live webinars. To help to gel the *Search Inside Yourself* community together. (Participant 1)

Course content. Five participants (45%) identified seven wish list items related to course content. Improvement to course content has been defined as suggestions made to the actual content taught during the course. This includes suggestions such as more science-based evidence for mindfulness at the beginning of the course, more psychological components, more meditation time, and less focus on leadership and one-on-one breakouts.

One participant suggested that it would be beneficial to put more science-based information at the beginning of the course, which would help hook people's attention:

I think one of the most powerful tools that a lot of people can sink their teeth into early on is focusing on the physical brain and how it functions and how did it evolve, how it is impacting his whole idea of emotional intelligence. Putting more focus on that earlier might be a good idea on the flow of information. (Participant 7)

Another explained that the benefits of mindfulness can be overinflated, so the course should "include more science" and:

Lower expectations about its benefits, or really show the evidence of how impressive the results are [from meditation]. (Participant 5)

Another participant thought that the some of the one-on-one breakout times could be replaced with more demonstrations from the instructors:

A lot of one-on-one breakouts—a couple could have been removed. Replace with an example of a difficult conversation led by the instructors. (Participant 8)

Finally, one participant suggested that less focus needed to be put on the leadership component of the course when the workshop was being delivered onsite to a group of employees who weren't all in leadership positions:

The leadership component at the end should be saved for executives, but I don't see that everyone sees themselves as a leader or wants to see themselves as leaders. The time spent on leadership could be used better by saying, given everything that we have done here are ways...you can pick and choose from an array of things that can work for you. And make it more accessible that way. (Participant 7)

Delivery of course. Four wish list items linked to delivery of course were identified by 27% of participants. Delivery of course and materials relates to suggestions about spreading the course over time, providing distance learning opportunities, and providing materials to review prior to the course. In addition, providing materials to help employees teach others in the workplace about mindfulness. As one participant suggested:

It would have been helpful to have some of the exercises done as a pre-requisite. There was such a broad range people in the room—if some people had done the exercises beforehand the day may have flowed better. (Participant 6)

Another participant thought it was a lot of information to fit into two days and believed an improvement could be to offer it over a period of time:

I suggest a distance version over time—it is a lot to take in over two days. (Participant 4)

And finally, one participant thought it would be helpful to have a package or presentation that she could present to human resources or executives at her workplace to help with the integration of mindfulness in the workplace:

I wonder if there could be a business-level package or presentation that I could get coming out that I could present to human resources or the executive-level partners with the science behind mindfulness so I could be a champion of this so I could try to get this integrated into the workplace. (Participant 3)

Summary. Overall the participants spoke highly of their experience taking the SIY course. The majority agreed that improved follow-up would have ameliorated their experience of integrating mindfulness into the workplace. Just under half of the participants made suggestions to the course content, and roughly one-third made suggestions on the manner in which the course was delivered.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Research Question

This investigation sought to answer the following research question: What helped or hindered work performance after participation in the mindfulness program *Search Inside Yourself*? To answer this overarching question I investigated four sub-questions: (1) How have mindfulness strategies helped you in enhancing work performance? (2) Are there mindfulness strategies that have detracted from your work performance? (3) What are the challenges you experienced in implementing mindfulness at your workplace? and (4) What additional resources or improvements to the SIY course might make it easier to effectively integrate mindfulness into the workplace? The purpose of these questions was to gain an understanding of mindfulness factors that promote or detract from work performance. Eleven professionals were interviewed and 200 incidents were reported. Incidents were divided into helping, hindering, challenges, and wish list categories. Through the research process, the incidents reported, and the analysis of those incidents, these questions were answered.

Theoretical Agreement

Many categories emerged from the findings that should be discussed within the context of the existing literature to ensure that there is theoretical agreement. There are no known studies that use the ECIT method to investigate the helping and the hindering factors of integrating mindfulness into the workplace and how it affects work performance. However, Shonin and Van Gordon (2014) used interpretative phenomenological analysis to investigate participant experiences receiving training in a Mindfulness Based Intervention (MBI) in the workplace. Treleaven (2006) used grounded theory methodology to conduct his qualitative investigation on employees' use of mindfulness on managing stress. Morgan, Simpson, and Smith (2014)

synthesized published qualitative papers on the experiences of health-care workers currently practicing or those in clinical training who had attended mindfulness training. Glomb, Duffy, Bono and Yang (2011) conducted a thorough literature review to answer why and how mindfulness might impact employee performance and well-being. The findings from the current studies will be discussed in comparison to these investigations, as well as the other existing literature on mindfulness.

Helping Factors

Within the current study, communication and interpersonal skills were identified as being two of the most prevalent helping factors for improving work performance as a result of using mindfulness strategies. Clear, honest, authentic communication with improved listening skills that enhanced working relationships all contributed to better work performance. A major category that emerged was improvement of teamwork and collaboration, and deepening connections with coworkers. These factors have also emerged in the pre-existing literature as being a result of integrating mindfulness. Morgan, Simpson, and Smith (2014) found that mindfulness impacted listening skills and helped participants to develop more awareness in conversation, listening, and recognizing others' needs. Treleaven (2006) reported that participants experienced a greater connection with others in their workplace. Within the current study, it was apparent that being able to listen and relate mindfully improved work performance.

The ability to self-regulate was shared by participants in Treleaven's (2006) study. As one of his participants stated,

I felt basically quite calm, and not overly reactive or upset, and I didn't make it a big something that had to do with me. And as a result I came up with a really good solution of how to handle it. (p. 36)

Similarly, participants in the current study reported that mindfulness strategies have been helpful to “create that space between impulse and actual response.”

A skill that emerged from the ability to self-regulate is the ability to deal with conflict. Participants in Morgan and colleagues’ study (2011) reported “developing a new understanding of role, valuing being with others without needing to problem solve or fix” as well. In essence, mindfulness promotes healthy ways of relating to others in the workplace (Giluk, 2010), including considering others’ perspectives and avoiding reacting out of habit, which can cause a situation to worsen.

A theme that emerged in Shonin and Van Gordon’s (2014) study was improved job performance. One participant commented,

Everyone’s thinking about the future—deadlines, targets, promotions... But they’re missing the point. They’re missing their life. I work so much better when I’m being mindful—both quality and quantity. (Participant 7) (p. 903)

Similarly, in the current study many participants commented on how they have optimized their work performance through self-care and consequently increasing the quantity and range of what they can accomplish.

In Morgan and colleagues’ study, participants reported, “developing the ability to increase focus and concentration” and “to refocus throughout the day.” Participants in the current study also reported improvements on the ability to refocus from distractions as well as overall improvements in focus in general. The improvements in focus, all participants agreed, contribute to more efficiency and effectiveness at work.

Another aspect of being able to optimize performance is changing one’s attitude to the external stressor. The work expectations have not changed, but the way the participant responds

to them has. For example one participant reported that even though the “volume” of what they had to accomplish hadn’t changed, they felt like they are more “efficient” through increasing their ability to focus and decreasing the amount of time trying to multi-task. Furthermore, by relinquishing expectations related to future events, these employees experienced a greater sense of relaxation and ease in the workplace.

The ability to cope with stress was shared by participants in Treleaven’s (2006) study. The employees said that an awareness of their bodies led to positive outcomes such as increased physical relaxation, increased “self-care,” and improved psychological states (e.g., a “state of calm”) (p. 33). Similarly, participants in the current study reported that tuning into their bodies’ physical sensations helped them to release stress.

In Treleaven’s (2006) study, a theme that emerged in employees’ ability to cope with stress through mindfulness was detachment from expectations and acceptance of what is. Likewise, participants in this current study also reported the ability to cope with stress through detachment and acceptance. Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to handle stressful situations better than those who do not because their practice helps distinguish between the self and the emotions, meaning they spend less time dwelling or ruminating on negative thoughts (Broderick, 2005).

The fifth category that emerged in the current study was empathy. In Morgan, Simpson, and Smith’s study (2014), there were reports of “a sense of shared humanity,” which led to “less judgment of others and increased empathy.” In Chiesa and Serreti’s meta-analysis (2009) of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in healthy people, they found that MBSR was able to increase empathy. In the current study, participants experienced an increase in empathy, which they reported helped work performance. Participants reported a “vast improvement in

relationships,” being able to see things from “other points of view,” experiencing “gratitude and respect” for others, which “fosters a healthier overall positive work environment.” Additional studies found that “higher levels of empathy are clearly desirable for organizational members at all levels” (Kamdar, McAllister, & Turban, 2006; Patient & Skarlicki, 2010).

In the current study, participants reported an increase in well-being, including health, energy, and positive thoughts. Participants reported that they “have become much more positive” and they are “overall happier when [they] take a moment to focus on breathing.” Mindfulness training has been found to have a beneficial effect on various well-being-related outcomes, such as enhancing positive emotions (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Meta-analytic evidence indicates a positive association between mindfulness and positive mood states (Giluk, 2010).

Additionally, participants reported a decline in negative emotions such as frustration and anger. Further evidence of the role of mindfulness in regulating negative affect comes from a study by Hariri, Bookheimer, and Mazziotta (2000) in which observing negative emotions and labeling them without judgment caused a reduction in limbic system activation, decreasing how those emotions were both felt and expressed. In terms of the workplace, a significant body of extant work has documented the benefits of increased positive mood and decreased negative emotional experiences (Bono & Ilies, 2006)

In terms of health, mindfulness treatments have been linked to improved immune function in non-clinical populations (Baer, 2003). In the current study, participants reported increased health including being able to sleep better, having fewer stress-related headaches, losing weight, and spending fewer sick days away from work. As Glomb and colleagues (2011) conclude, individuals who practice mindfulness are less likely to report work-related health

complaints. Further theoretical agreement related to an increase in well-being as a result of mindfulness training was found in Shonin and Vangordon's study (2015). Participants reported feeling "happier," "healthier," and "doing better now," and feeling "more alive" (p. 904).

A seventh category that emerged from the current study was self-compassion. Employees from Treleaven's (2006) study reported increased self-compassion when using mindfulness and becoming gentler and accepting of themselves at work. In Morgan, Simpson, and Smith's review (2014), a theme emerged of participants developing more self-acceptance and self-compassion, and letting go of self-criticism. In the current study, participants reported increased self-compassion and acceptance, as well as reduced negative self-talk.

In regards to leadership, the current study reports that mindfulness techniques have improved participants' leadership and management skills. The participants who held leadership positions reported that being able to model patience and calm helped to establish a more even tone for the rest of the team. Conversely, if they were feeling disheveled and frenetic, this rippled out to the rest of the team, which caused them to also feel stressed and panicked. Likewise, in Shonin and Vangordon's study (2015), managers reported improvements in leadership through, for example, remaining "centered and calm under pressure" (p. 907). Moreover, Reb, Narayanan, and Chaturvedi (2012) found that leader mindfulness was positively related to overall employee performance, and supervisor mindfulness was positively related to employee job satisfaction.

Participants in the current study reported the mindfulness freed up energy for them to clearly analyze decisions and problem solve. This finding is consistent with others in the literature. For example, Glomb and colleagues (2011) concluded through reviewing existing literature that mindfulness is also expected to impact job performance through improved decision-making. In Shonin and Vangordon's study (2015), participants reported an increase in

decision-making aptitude.

Challenges to Implementation

In Morgan, Smith, and Simpson's review (2014) they do include some of the barriers to overcome in implementing mindfulness. A category that is consistent with their review is the difficulty in establishing new habits. Participants of the current study reported feeling discomfort, frustration, and impatience. One participant reported that the first time she tried a sitting meditation she felt like she "was screaming inside" and that it was "a little bit like torture" (Participant 5). Comparably, participants from Morgan, Simpson, and Smith's review (2014) experienced frustration, impatience, boredom, pain, or discomfort while practicing mindfulness.

Finally, participants reported that a challenge to implementation was the work culture or work environment. Some participants reported that a barrier to implementation was the physical environment, and some reported it was resistance from work culture itself. These findings are consistent with Morgan, Simpson, and Smith's review (2014), in which participants reported feeling unsupported at work or contrary to work culture.

Wish List Items

In terms of wish list items, participants in the current study expressed that more follow-up support would be helpful. Some suggested further opportunity to connect with others and continue with group opportunities for mindfulness practice. In Morgan, Simpson, and Smith's review (2014), participants expressed that they felt isolated as professionals using mindfulness after participating in the course, whereas in the group context during the course, they felt more connected and supported.

New Findings: Helping Factors

There are two exciting new findings that emerged from this research. The first new finding reported by participants is the increase in the ability to think creatively in the workplace. One participant reported because she was no longer holding stress in her shoulders and in her stomach, more energy was freed up to think creatively: This is a notable finding, considering that the ability to think creatively is an increasingly valued skill in the workforce. Moreover, certain professions require employees and employers to be able to think creatively, and unfortunately stress can hinder this ability. Mindfulness is one way to facilitate the creative ideas to flow. As one participant reported one of the benefits of mindfulness practice:

Your brain is able to be more relaxed, and that is where you have those inspirational “ah ha” ideas. You can’t will yourself to be creative. You have to provide an environment that allows you to be creative. At any technology company that is crucial. (Participant 4)

One way to create an environment that “allows you to be creative” is through integrating opportunities to practice mindfulness in the workplace.

The second new finding that emerged in the current study was the final helping category: passion at work. Participants described finding a renewed sense of passion at work because they felt that they were part of something that was personally rewarding. One participant described that working with like-minded people on the mindfulness project brought a new depth of personal reward to her career. It also made her eager and motivated to go to work. Participants also reported developing more meaningful relationships. One participant described that through mindfulness in the workplace he was able to develop deeper and more respectful relationships, and this made him more enthused to go to work. He experienced that when his team wanted to help each other and work collaboratively towards a higher goal, job satisfaction and work ethic

increased. And finally, one participant noted that she was really motivated by the broader vision of creating something positive and giving back to people on the planet. It was inspiring to her to be part of SIY founder Chade-Meng Tan's vision to create world peace through mindfulness programs in the workplace.

New Findings: Hindering Factors

Much of the research in mindfulness has focused on reporting the benefits of practicing mindfulness. There have been no studies thus far that have looked specifically at the hindering factors of mindfulness on work performance.

One of the categories that emerged from the current study as a hindering factor, was the time required to practice mindfulness. This underlines the importance of discussing with participants the paradox of being too busy for mindfulness. As one participant explained, "That is the paradox—I am overwhelmed thinking of doing it [practicing mindfulness], but when I do it I am less overwhelmed" (Participant 10). Generally participants agreed that although initially integrating mindfulness takes time away from work, in the long run it enables you to be more effective. Participants agreed that the time required to practice mindfulness could initially be perceived as a hindrance, but in the long run the benefits they received outweighed the initial time investment.

In the category "dissonance between work goals and mindfulness," some of the insights spoke to the powerful impact that mindfulness can have, such as clear seeing and liberation from what may be limiting personal development. This may cause employees to realize that their work is not in line with their values. As Glomb and colleagues (2011) noted, "The behaviors of more mindful employees will be more intentional, but they may not always lead to self-regulation that is consistent with organizational goals" (p. 146). Moreover, mindfulness is not simply a stress-

reduction technique; it is a powerful and deep personal change process that can raise issues that may be uncomfortable for people to deal with.

This transitions into the category of mindfulness not being suitable for everyone. As participants pointed out, mindfulness is not something you can “force,” and people need to go at their own pace. As physician and psychiatrist David Brendel (2015) cautions, people can feel uncomfortable when forced to do mindfulness. Furthermore it could lead to increased levels of anxiety:

Imposing mindfulness on your employees for the sake of jumping on the mindfulness bandwagon isn't going to calm their stress levels; instead, it might lead to anxiety when enforced as a top-down requirement. (Brendel, 2015)

Another important consideration, as one participant from the current study pointed out, is that “for some people it might be too painful or unnatural to turn inward” (Participant 7). Some people are coping with very high levels of trauma or anxiety and do so by being in a state of distraction. Untreated trauma, anxiety, and depression may be masked by staying on autopilot or in a state of distraction, and these issues can rise to the surface in mindfulness practice. These issues may be too much for someone to cope with in a work situation. As Dr. Brenda Dyre (2015) noted while reviewing the categories for this current study, this speaks to a “tension between mindfulness being used and promoted as a stress-reduction and attention training tool, whereas in its Buddhist origins, it is the basis for personal/spiritual/psychological transformation.”

The category “misperceptions about mindfulness” underlines the importance of participants understanding that mindfulness is, for example, not necessarily a quiet or clear mind or a state of nirvana, but rather observing what is happening in the mind. Often this is difficult

for participants to really understand. Again, this cautions that imposing mindfulness could increase anxiety for some participants because they put pressure on themselves to attain something they are not. Additional misperceptions about mindfulness stem from the current popularization of it. Brendel (2015) cautions that this kind of “blind acceptance” can prevent people from using the constructive critical questioning needed when thinking about potential risks of a practice that has become so popular.

Further concerns raised in the category of misperceptions about mindfulness have to do with religious tensions. One participant explained that people may think that mindfulness may “get in the way of their religious beliefs” (Participant 4). Another participant who actually started teaching a mindfulness course at her workplace explained that she really needed to take out any language that alluded to the Buddhist roots and secularize it. As Glomb and colleagues (2011) also observed there may be “uneasiness that might exist in organizations about the Buddhist roots of mindfulness” (p. 147). As a result many organizations are removing the link to Buddhism and other philosophical underpinnings. However, Glomb and colleagues (2011) question whether such altering to suit organizational purposes undermines the core principles of mindfulness or its outcomes. In the words of one of their interviewees:

What I notice is the secularization of mindfulness, I mean, there’s some good things about that as people are getting interested and it’s helping them reduce stress, and it’s making them more effective. That’s all good. But I’m a little bit worried about the longevity, if they see it as a tool, if it’s seen as like another tactic, strategy a lot of times people have a very short span of attention for that because it takes years of practice. When it’s [mindfulness meditation] connected to more of a spiritual religious teachings, like the Dharma, then it’s much more transformative, like it’s more of a personal

transformation, it's much deeper. And then it's more sustainable because you have that it's not just about being effective at work, it's about your life, it's about how to be happy in your life, so then it's much deeper and it's much more transformative. Then I think there's a chance for it to be sustainable in the workplace. But, in the workplace you have different religions, different creeds, and you could never pull that off. You'd have to secularize the practice. And you lose something when you secularize it, you know, you lose something...it just seems light, and fluffy. It's not, it doesn't penetrate it just feels really surface. Mindfulness is really powerful. (Participant 3) (p. 148)

Limitations

It is important to recognize some of the potential limitations of this study. First, there is not a diverse cultural representation; the majority of the participants were female, Caucasian, and middle-aged. Second, participants were able-bodied professionals, which may not transfer to other work contexts. And third, there may be participant bias, since participation in the research was voluntary and the sample selected purposefully rather than randomly.

Another unanticipated limitation was in regards to the credibility checks. Originally, I had recruited 12 participants; however, the twelfth had to drop out do to personal reasons. While I reached exhaustiveness at eight participants, and no new categories emerged in the following three interviews, Amundson, Borgen, and Butterfield (2014) would have suggested adding an additional interview to satisfy their newest credibility check, which included conducting half again more interviews (12 total) to confirm that exhaustiveness has been achieved. Due to a restricted research timeline, the researcher was unable to continue recruiting and interviewing participants. Additionally, due to a restricted research timeline, I was only able to get one expert for the expert credibility check.

A final limitation is the variation in the amount of time that people practiced mindfulness. Some practiced exclusively at work, while others also practiced at home, which led to a large discrepancy in the amount of time people spent practicing mindfulness.

Implications

The present study contributes to the field in a variety of ways. One significant contribution is the new findings. Novel categories that emerged for mindfulness factors that help work performance include creative thinking and passion at work. These are exciting findings that warrant further study considering how beneficial it is to have employees who are passionate and creative in their work. The new findings for the hindering factors also contribute to the field. This study explored some of the hindering factors of mindfulness, which can shed light on what to be aware of when implementing a mindfulness program in the workplace. Very little research has looked at how factors such as time requirements, dissonance between goals, misperceptions and suitability could impact work performance. These categories will help to inform researchers, career counselors, employers and employees of the possible risks of implementing mindfulness.

With qualitative research on mindfulness training in the workplace just beginning to appear, researchers in this domain will benefit from a detailed description of what is helpful in regards to enhancing work performance. It will also be useful to researchers to examine what is hindering and what could be improved. In the wish list items, for example, 73% of participants expressed the need for improved follow-up. This indicates that more research needs to look at how to support and sustain participants in their practice of implementing mindfulness over the long-term. As of now there is no specific measurement scale for mindfulness in the workplace, therefore researchers could benefit from the categories that emerged in this qualitative study to inform new measurements scales.

This study will contribute to the field of counselling psychology in a variety of ways. For example, career and employment counsellors will benefit from the findings of this study. It will benefit them to learn more about the helpful and hindering factors of mindfulness in the workplace. This study will benefit academic psychologists training counsellors on how to counsel clients dealing with work-related issues such as stress. Additionally, this study contributes to the growing field of mindfulness, which may open up new possibilities for counselling psychologists for employment as mindfulness trainers in the workplace.

Overall the participants reported positive experiences in integrating mindfulness strategies into their workplace. They all shared experiencing a variety of outcomes that led to increased work performance. Further evidence-based research in this field may encourage other organizations to provide mindfulness-based programs for the workplace that will help transform participants' work experience in positive ways.

Conclusion

Research shows that mindfulness is powerful and has the potential for many positive outcomes in improving people's lives. Much of the research on mindfulness has been conducted in clinical settings or with health care professionals. There has been little research in other organizational contexts. Although the initial findings in more recent research are promising, there appears to be a gap in applied research that explores the mindfulness factors that promote or detract from work performance.

By using the enhanced critical incident technique (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009), this investigation sought to provide concrete examples of ways that mindfulness enhances or detracts from work performance. The study focused specifically on participants' experience from the program *Search Inside Yourself*, originally founded at Google.

Findings revealed that participants experienced improved communication and interpersonal skills, improved self-regulation skills, optimized performance at work, improved ability to cope with stress, increased empathy, improved well-being, increased self-compassion, improved leadership skills, enhanced creative and critical thinking skills, and renewed passion at work. Although the finding predominately revealed positive experiences to integrating mindfulness it also illuminated some of the hindering factors to be aware of such as competing for time requirements, misperceptions about what mindfulness is (i.e., feeling like a failure if one does not reach a certain expected state), dissonance between mindfulness goals, work goals and personal goals and suitability (i.e., mindfulness practice may reveal feelings or sensations that one is not ready to deal with). Furthermore, there are challenges to integrating mindfulness such as the difficulty in creating new habits as well as barriers in the work environment.

Future Research

At the time of this investigation there were no known studies that examined the potential negative outcomes or hindering factors on work performance. Many participants reported that there were no hindering factors on their work performance. Some participants pointed out possible hindering factors that fell into four emerging categories: misperceptions about mindfulness, suitability (not everyone is ready to tune inwards), time requirements, and dissonance between work goals and mindfulness. These categories raise questions such as: Should participants be informed of the risks and benefits before signing up? Should mindfulness programs only be delivered by facilitators trained in dealing with mental health issues and experienced with spiritual developmental issues? Does the secularization of mindfulness to suit organizational purposes undermine the core principles of and effectiveness of mindfulness?

Overall, however, participants reported positive experiences with integrating mindfulness into their workplace. In order to create more support for these programs, additional research is needed. More specifically, it would be helpful to develop new measurement scales specific to mindfulness in the workplace and to test the effectiveness of mindfulness-based practices in a series of carefully designed field experiments in work settings. It would be helpful to investigate what the specific time requirements are for actual mindfulness practice to occur during the workday in order for employees to start noticing improvements as a result of their mindfulness practice. In regards to the new findings presented in this study, it would be worthwhile to further explore how mindfulness impacts creativity and passion in the workplace. Additionally, it would be helpful to investigate the long-term impacts through longitudinal studies. And finally, a broader range of participants from a diverse sample of ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and work environments needs to be included in future studies. It is also recommended to further study the hindering factors of mindfulness and determine which populations or individuals where it may not be beneficial.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide: “Mindfulness” Strategies Being Used

Participant #: _____ Date: _____ Interview Start Time: _____

Adapted from L. D. Butterfield, W. A. Borgen, A.-S. T. Maglio, and N. E. Amundson (2009)

1. Contextual Component

Preamble: As you know, I am investigating the experience of using mindfulness in the workplace. The purpose is to collect information about your experience of using mindfulness strategies and how it has affected your work performance.

- a. As a way of getting started, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your work situation.
- b. You volunteered to participate in this study because you experienced implementing mindfulness strategies at work. Can you tell me more about the ways you integrate mindfulness into your work?
- c. How has integrating mindfulness affected your work life?
- d. How has mindfulness affected your work performance?

2. Critical Incident Component

a. How have mindfulness strategies helped you in enhancing work performance? (Probes: What was the incident/factor? How did it impact you?)

Helpful Factor & What It Means to Participant (What do you mean by ...?)	Importance (How did it help? Tell me what it was about ... that you find so helpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of incident.)

b. Are there mindfulness strategies that have detracted from your work performance?
 (Alternative question: What kinds of things have happened that made it harder for you to do well?)

Hindering Factor & What It Means to Participant (What do you mean by ...?)	Importance (How did it hinder? Tell me what it was about ... that you find so unhelpful.)	Example (What led up to it? Incident. Outcome of incident.)

c. What are the challenges you have experienced in implementing mindfulness?

d. Summarize what has been discussed up to this point with the participant as a transition to the next question: We've talked about what's helped you to do well (name them), and some things that have made it more difficult for you to do well (name them). Are there other things that would help you to continue doing well? (Alternative question: I wonder what else might be helpful to you that you haven't had access to?)

Wish List Item & What it Means to Participant (What do you mean by ...?)	Importance (How would it help? Tell me what it is about ... that you would find so helpful.)	Example (In what circumstances might this be helpful?)

3. Demographics Component

i. Sex:

ii. Ethnicity:

iii. Age:

iv. Occupation:

v. Length of time in current industry:

vi. Education level:

vii. Time spent doing mindfulness each week:

meditation:

mindfulness:

viii. Years of experience with mindfulness:

ix. Other mindfulness programs:

Interview End Time: Length of interview: Interviewer's Name:

Appendix B: Letter of Completion



November 23, 2015

Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute
1014 Torney Ave., San Francisco, CA 94129

To whom it may concern:

This letter serves to declare that Melahnie Moodie participated in the Search Inside Yourself 2-Day Program on November 7-8, 2015, in San Francisco.

Provided by the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI), this program is based on neuroscience theory and mindfulness, providing techniques for building emotional intelligence and leadership skills of participants.

Please contact info@siyli.org with any questions. Note: Participation in the

Sincerely,

Marc Lesser CEO and Master Teacher, SIYLI

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Lesser". The signature is fluid and cursive.

[Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute | www.SIYLI.org](http://www.SIYLI.org)

Appendix C: Invitation to the Study

Study Title: Mindfulness in the Workplace: What Helps and What Hinders?

Purpose

Work stress is common among working adults and can lead to health, psychological and socio-economic problems. Researchers have started looking at the benefits of mindfulness in the workplace but they have yet to explore the factors that promote or detract from work performance. To address the lack of research in this field, this qualitative study explores individual experiences of using mindfulness at work. The aim is to get a deeper understanding of this experience and to inform its use in the workplace. Researchers, employers and practitioners alike will benefit from studies that reveal more about this integrative practice.

Participant Eligibility

You are eligible to be a research participant for this study if:

- You have participated in the Search Inside Yourself Program.
- You have a regular mindfulness practice.
- You integrate mindfulness practices at work.
- You work part-time or full-time.

Study Procedures

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to describe and reflect on your experiences of integrating mindfulness at your workplace through a one-hour Skype interview that will be audio-recorded with the primary researcher. You will be contacted through email after to confirm your responses and that the themes drawn fully represent your experience.

Contact Information

If you are interested in participating in the study or knowing more, please contact Melahnie Moodie (primary researcher, Co-Investigator). This research is being conducted as a part of the thesis requirement for her Master's degree in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). You may also contact Dr. Marla Buchanan (Principal Investigator), Professor, UBC.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Study Title: Mindfulness in the Workplace: What Helps and What Hinders?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marla Buchanan, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, UBC.

Co-Investigator: Melahnie Moodie, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, UBC. This research is being conducted as part of the thesis requirement for a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology. Upon completion, the thesis will be a public document that can be viewed through the UBC library.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of employees who have taken a mindfulness-training program. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of this experience to inform researchers, practitioners and employers about what is helpful and what is hindering. There is little research on this integrating mindfulness in the workplace. As there are no studies specifically looking at what helps promote work performance and what detracts from work performance. This study will enable researchers, practitioners and employers to understand this experience from the perspective of the participants.

Study Procedures: If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to describe and reflect on your experiences of using mindfulness in the workplace. If you feel comfortable doing so, you will be asked to give some basic demographic information. You will then participate in a 1-hour interview where you will be asked to speak about your experience of helpful and hindering factors of mindfulness training. The interview will be over Skype or phone. Once the results have been analyzed, you may review if the themes elicited genuinely reflect your experience. The time commitment is approximately 1.5 hours in total.

Potential Risks: There is minimal risk involved in this study. However, you may find that sharing your experiences promotes strong emotions or elicits memories. You are free to decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer, or may stop your participation in the interview at any time, without penalty.

In addition to encouraging you to seek out your regular resources, you will be provided with options for counselling services that you might want to use in the event that our interview triggers a need to further process.

Potential Benefits: You may find that participation in the study and sharing your experiences of integrating mindfulness in the workplace is rewarding and beneficial. You may gain new insights through articulating your own experiences and/or reviewing the compiled data at the conclusion of the study. Your participation will be contributing valuable information and understanding about a growing field of mindfulness that is currently not well represented or understood in the scientific literature. Research on mindfulness practices helps to make them understood, ethical, and empirically supported methods for employees, employers and practitioners to use.

Confidentiality: The interview and follow-up contact is confidential, and steps will be taken to protect your identity. Only my supervisor and I will review interview data, transcripts, and audio

recordings. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. To protect your identity, pseudonyms will be used when reporting findings. All audio recordings, transcripts, and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identifying information of participants. Research information will be kept in a lockbox in the researchers home at all times. After the study is completed and all data has been transcribed from the audio recordings, the audio recordings will be held for five years and then destroyed.

There are three exceptional circumstances under which confidentiality cannot be maintained, including if a participant discloses:

1. Legitimate concern of or actual harm being done to a child or vulnerable person, 2. serious and imminent risk of harm to self, and 3. clear and imminent threat of harm to someone else.

If at any point a participant's self-disclosure includes any of these three situations, the researchers are required to take steps to ensure the safety of the participant and those disclosed in harm's way. This might include and is not limited to: contacting emergency services, the Ministry of Child and Family Development, and counselling support services. If confidentiality needs to be broken in these ways, the participant will be informed at every stage and will be given every opportunity to engage in accessing these services him or herself, with the support of the investigator.

Contact: At any time during the study, if you have any questions with respect to the study, you may contact Melahnie Moodie. You may also contact Dr. Marla Buchanan.

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent: Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate in this study or withdraw your participation at any time without negative consequences.

Your verbal consent indicates that you have read, understand, and agree to this information and consent to participate in this study. Your verbal consent also indicates that you agree to audio-recording of our interview.

Verbal Consent Obtained Date: _____

Participant

Researcher