

Spotlight Topic

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Mindfulness at Work: The PQ Approach

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Ask yourself: in this exact moment, am I giving all of my awareness, all of my attention to reading this article, or am I being pulled away by my own thoughts and what is happening around me? Essentially, am I being mindful?

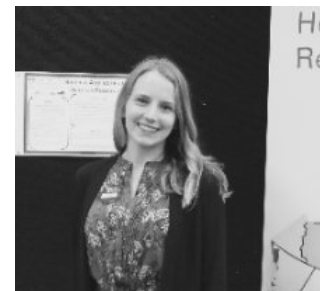
Mindfulness promotes awareness in light of a continuous stream of internal (e.g., emotions) and external (e.g., sounds) experiences all colliding in the present moment. When you are mindful, you notice what is happening around you without evaluating, analyzing, reflecting, or judging based on past experiences or in anticipation of the future.¹

While it is perhaps easier to imagine the mental state of mindfulness in an argument with your partner or attempting to unfreeze your computer screen, Google, General Mills, and Intel have successfully implemented mindfulness in their workplaces. In fact, Google's mindfulness course "Search Inside Yourself" is considered one of the primary reasons Google is the highest rated employer in the world. For General Mills, their 7-week mindfulness course saw a 60% boost in employees' ability to optimize their productivity, and 80% of senior executives said their decision-making and listening skills improved after the course. And for Intel, a high-stress workforce of hardcore scientists experienced improved well-being and focus, decreased stress, and more enthusiasm for their work.²

So, what gives? Well, in line with the PQ Approach, leading experts in the field of occupational health psychology suggest that effective healthy workplace practices should take a holistic attitude by catering to the psychological, physical, and social aspects of the individual.

Current research supports mindfulness as a valuable healthy workplace practice, tagging along tons of workplace benefits that correspond to all five elements of PQ³.

1. Practicing mindfulness at work may have the potential to assist in professional **mentalizing**, as mindfulness has been linked to decreased emotional reactivity in social situations. When employees do not enter a reactive state to other's emotions, they have the potential to exercise thoughtful understanding to their own and other's mental states.
2. Mindfulness also has the potential to lead to superior self-regulation of behaviour⁴, a key component of our ability to succeed in **executive functioning**.



3. In terms of assessing **mental activity**, practicing even just a brief period of mindfulness throughout the workday has been demonstrated to prevent work related emotional exhaustion, improve well-being, and reduce stress levels across all jobs (even high-stress ones!), which are important factors of our ability to steadily concentrate.
4. Mindfulness at work also has the potential to impact **neuroplasticity**, as adopting mindfulness in the workplace has been associated with a greater ability to successfully adapt to new perspectives⁵, as well as fostering creativity⁶.
5. When it comes to the **professional self**, employees who are in organizations that practice mindfulness report feeling more committed to their employer, its goals, and the people in it, which may help employees find more meaning in their work.

From an **Individual** perspective of PQ, mindfulness is a no-brainer (pun intended)! It's an individual activity with immense benefits for the mental state of the individual.

Strategy: Set a daily phone alarm during your work day and take a brief (say, five minute) meditation break using a free mobile app such as Headspace or Calm.

From an **Interactional** perspective of PQ, the benefits discussed by element suggest mindfulness has the ability to facilitate fulfilling interactions with others in our workplaces and within our work groups.

Strategy: Research shows that even just five minutes of mindfulness can draw substantial impacts on helping reset during a challenging task⁷. Next time your work group has hit a wall, clear away your work, set a phone alarm for five minutes, have everyone find a comfortable seated position with their eyes closed, and soak in the silence focusing on breathing.



From a **Corporate** perspective of PQ, a healthy workplace means a more positive organizational climate. And when it comes to mindfulness, it also means a more relaxed climate for employees.

Strategy: At the next managerial meeting, consider sharing this article with managers, highlight the benefits mindfulness for managers and their employees, and encourage them to try one of the above strategies on their own.

Mindfulness as practiced in Western cultures closely resembles the ancient Buddhist tradition of mind training methods. This practice has stuck around for good reason: the well-being benefits of those who are mindful cater to the whole person as a psychological, social, and physical being. Congruent with our PQ Approach, these are the necessary components for holistic, effective healthy workplace practices and procedures; those that work in favour for both the employee and the organization.

References

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³ Hyland, P.K., Lee, A.R., & Mills, M.J. (2015). *Mindfulness at work: A new approach to improving individual and organizational performance. Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 8*, 576-602.

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⁶Walsb, J. P. (1995). Managerial and organizational cognition: Notes from a trip down memory lane. *Organization Science, 6*, 280-321.

⁷Colzato, L. S., Ozturk, A., & Hommel, B. (2012). Meditate to create: The impact of focused-attention and open-monitoring training on convergent and divergent thinking. *Frontiers in Psychology, 3*, 116. ⁷Kuo, C.-Y., & Yeh, Y.-Y. (2015). Reset a task set after five minutes of mindfulness practice. *Consciousness and Cognition, 35*, 98-109.