

## ABSTRACT

MACKOWSKI, LORI ANN. Mindful Leadership: A Study of Leader Receptiveness to Mindfulness Practice in the Workplace. (Under the direction of Dr. Jessica Katz Jameson).

Scholars note that today's organizational leaders face increased responsibilities and unique challenges, and in order to successfully navigate today's workplace, leaders need more effective ways to manage (Baron et al., 2018; Ehrlich, 2017; Petriglieri, 2020; Vann et al., 2017). This qualitative study explores the application of mindfulness to leadership practice as a means to foster a way of being that enhances personal and professional relationships and a leaders' ability to effectively navigate the unique challenges for which they are faced. Despite the value of mindfulness, its benefits, and the timeliness of this practice as related to organizational leadership, it is unclear whether organizations and/or leaders will embrace the practice.

In order to explore the relationship between mindfulness and leadership, with attention to leaders' perceptions of its potential for leadership development, this study used the following research question: *What are organizational leaders' perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace?* As such, 27 interviews were conducted between June through July 2022, with participants varying in demographics. The interview questions focused on exploring leaders' perceptions of mindfulness and their opinions related to the practicality and receptiveness toward five mindfulness skills: mindful speech, mindful listening, non-judgment, self-regulation and sustained attention, and reflection. Data gleaned from the interviews were analyzed by applying thematic analysis. The results of the analysis indicated that the majority of informants perceive all five skills as practical, and they are receptive to their use. Furthermore, informants stated that mindful listening would be the most practical to implement in the workplace. Lastly, the analysis identified four significant themes: (a) being mindful takes work, (b) mindfulness poses logistical

challenges at work, (c) mindfulness is unknowingly practiced, and (d) successful integration requires modeling and allocation of resources.

The study has made contributions to leadership and mindfulness scholarship and responds to the gap in the literature by explicitly connecting mindfulness, leadership, and the workplace, which was missing from previous discussions—offering newfound knowledge and insights regarding the adoption of mindfulness and the workplace. Beyond theoretical contributions, this study offers practitioners new insights into how mindfulness can be integrated into leadership development, including considerations for messaging and naming, training, content, and proportion.

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Mindful Leadership: A Study of Leader Receptiveness to  
Mindfulness Practice in the Workplace

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Ron and Mary Ann, thank you for your incredible love, support, and guidance. I am blessed with the most wonderful parents, and I am grateful for the lessons you have taught me, for showing me how to live life, for instilling in me a strong work ethic, and for encouraging me to pursue my dreams and soar higher. Thank you for sharing in this dream with me; it would not have been possible without you.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Lori Mackowski was born in Englewood, NJ, and after 13 moves up and down the East Coast with her family, they settled in Pfafftown, NC, where Lori grew up. Beginning in 1992 and for more than 30 years, Lori has been a non-traditional student, working full-time and going to school part-time. In 2003, Lori earned her bachelor's degree in communication studies from the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG), followed by a master's degree in communication studies from UNCG in 2010. Having a passion for learning, Lori continued her educational journey as a doctoral student at NC State University, graduating in 2023 with a Ph.D. in communication, rhetoric, and digital media. Lori's love of learning led her to teach, and from 2012-2022, she was employed as a professional track faculty member, teaching business communication and innovation in the Bryan School of Business and Economics at UNCG. Prior to UNCG, Lori taught communication at Salem College. Lori's research interests are in organizational communication and leadership and are based on 14 years of business experience in the healthcare, furniture/textiles, and banking industries. Grounded in practical application, Lori's research goals are to provide assessment and solutions for organizational needs.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In a world filled with daily complexities, challenges, and constant distractions, how can leaders center themselves? Is there a practical strategy that promotes both physical and mental well-being for leaders and their followers? Mindfulness, which gained popularity in the 1970s with its integration into the clinical setting for therapeutic treatment of psychological and psychiatric conditions, is a practice that has become mainstream and offers wide-ranging benefits and applications. This project explored the application of mindfulness to leadership practice as a means to foster a way of being that enhances personal and professional relationships and a leader's ability to effectively navigate the unique challenges with which they are faced.

Much has been written on the value of mindfulness, which is noted to (a) improve mental health and overall physical well-being; (b) aid in building healthier relationships, including interacting with empathy and non-judgment; (c) increase calmness and attention as well as promote greater insights; (d) foster openness to new perspectives, enhancing thought and decision-making processes; and (e) decrease the use of automatic thinking and/or responding, also known as mindlessness, which inhibits the ability to be present in the moment (Akyurek & Khan, 2018; Fuller, 2016; Glomb et al., 2011; Good et al., 2016; Hanh, 2008, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Langer, 1989a, 1990b; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Manusev & Harvey-Knowles, 2015; Weick & Putnam, 2006). Given the ample research supporting this practice, leaders might consider implementing mindfulness as a daily practice to take advantage of its wide-ranging benefits and applications for personal, professional, relational, and organizational contexts.

Today's organizational leaders face many unique challenges and demands. Specifically, as noted by Vann et al. (2017), today's leaders are more diverse—in their backgrounds, culture

and ethnicity, and generation. Coupled with that, Vann et al. explained that today's leaders are accountable for a wide variety of organizational responsibilities, such as decision-making, problem-solving, perspective-taking, conflict management, and demonstrating emotional intelligence. Baron et al. (2018) further explained that today's fast-paced work environments, extreme competition, rapidly changing technology, and uncertain economic forecasts adversely affect leaders' ability to make decisions, think clearly, and remain calm. Furthermore, Ehrlich (2017) noted that today's businesses are challenged by lower budgets, the demand for faster communication and products, and the existence of multiple forms of technological distractions—all of which, according to Ehrlich, hinder the ability to think clearly, develop meaningful relationships, and understand how to how to take care of oneself or others.

In addition to more traditional organizational demands, it is necessary for leaders to address a wide variety of social issues. Two relevant examples that highlight the dire need for mindfulness at this time include navigating the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and finding solutions to counter deeply rooted racial injustices in our country.

COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of day-to-day living, including relational, financial, physical, and mental well-being. As such, many organizations and individuals are searching for ways to cope with the pandemic, including working from home, schooling from home, and the use of a wide range of new technologies. Prior to COVID-19, work-life balance, especially as related to the usage of communication technology, was already a relevant topic. For example, Wright et al. (2014) explored how the availability of technology has simultaneously increased employees' flexibility and accessibility to work tasks and resulted in organizational cost savings while also contributing to increased levels of workplace stress and burnout, hindering work-life balance. However, since the pandemic, stay-at-home orders, quarantines, and

overall safety concerns have forced many organizations to shift employees to work-at-home in remote and virtual settings, further blurring the lines for work-life balance. The Mayo Clinic (2020) explained that blurring personal and professional boundaries can result in fatigue, health issues, and decreased time with family and friends. To establish a healthy work-life balance, the Mayo Clinic suggested strategies such as detaching from work, implementing a self-care routine, and finding ways to relax are important. Supporting these notions, Harvard Business Review authors Lupu and Ruiz-Castro (2021) advocated for other strategies, such as taking pauses/stepping back to evaluate situations and paying attention to emotions. While technological advances will continue to impact work-life balance, the effects of COVID-19 bring additional burdens for workers. Now more than ever, leaders need to be attentive to the emotional and physical needs of their employees and develop skills that will enhance their emotional intelligence.

In addition to COVID-19, the United States is dealing with the grave reality of deeply rooted injustices in our country, such as discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, which demonstrate how imperative it is to identify ways for leaders to promote moral and ethical values that foster inclusivity, such as equality, justice, peace, and acceptance. Interestingly, Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) directly linked mindlessness to social issues such as prejudice and stereotyping. Langer (1989b) explained that mindlessness, also referred to as acting on autopilot, occurs when attention is decreased and when one is reliant upon previously established categories, rules, and processes, and/or forms of repetition (including behavior, thinking, and decision-making). Employing a mindful approach can (a) offset the negative effects of mindlessness as related to prejudice and stereotyping and (b) foster more empathic interactions with others, which may help to decrease the occurrences of these types of injustice.

However, in order to successfully navigate today's unique challenges and relevant social issues, leaders need more effective ways to manage. As such, and more important than ever, new management strategies are needed to inspire a more moral and ethical leadership. Petriglieri (2020) highlighted the need for novel approaches to leadership, suggesting that there remains a reliance on outdated theories that are proving less relevant in today's organizational settings. To demonstrate the gravity of the situation, Petriglieri stated, "It is impossible to build the future using the blueprints of the past" (para 29). Petriglieri further stated:

We need a truly human management, one that makes room for our bodies and spirits along with our intellect and skills. That cares for what work does and feels and means to us, not just for what we do at work and how. A management that abjures the relentless pursuit of efficiency and alignment—and celebrates, or even just acknowledges the inconsistencies that make us human. (para 26)

Considering the lack of new management theories and Petriglieri's explanation for the need of a fully human approach to management, the integration of mindfulness in both leadership and management theories is timely. Mindful leadership offers guidelines for behavior, interaction, and communication that is grounded in awareness, being present in the current moment, and refraining from judgment. It also recognizes that we are all human and wish to be treated with kindness and respect.

Based on the state of today's business landscape, scholars are having important conversations about specific strategies needed to adapt to today's organizational challenges. These adaptation strategies, which can be identified in mindfulness leadership literature, seem to signal a turn toward a moral approach to leading, which employs emotional intelligence, embraces ambiguity, promotes leader flexibility, and incorporates somatics, which is a way of

knowing that includes processing information through a mind-body-spirit relationship (Baron et al., 2018; Brendel & Bennett, 2016; Chesley & Wylson, 2016; Ehrlich, 2017; Mir & Abbasi, 2012; Vann et al., 2017; Wells, 2015). These types of mindfulness adaptations, prompted by the context surrounding today's business landscape, provide unique and promising solutions for today's organizational leaders.

However, despite the value of mindfulness, its benefits, and the timeliness of this practice as related to organizational leadership, it is unclear whether organizations and/or leaders will embrace the practice. Its historical roots in Buddhism result in some stigma in Western societies, and resistance to mindfulness may include unsuccessful past experiences with mindfulness and/or meditation, perceptions that mindfulness is a fad, and/or that mindfulness practice contradicts personal religious beliefs and/or customs. Any movement toward encouraging leaders to integrate mindfulness into their practice will need to take full account of how it is perceived by organizational leaders in order to determine their receptiveness to the idea and obstacles to adoption.

While this study is certainly not the first to advocate for mindful leadership, existing literature on mindfulness and leadership fails to explicitly connect mindfulness, leadership, and the workplace. For example, Good et al. (2016) explained that "leadership has not been extensively studied by mindfulness researchers" (p.127). Glomb et al. (2011) further explained that much experimental evidence on mindfulness has emerged from non-workplace samples, raising questions of generalizability. Additionally, as Reitz et al. (2020) noted:

While researchers have theoretically argued that leaders' mindfulness may be beneficial to face modern leadership challenges (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Hyland et al., 2015), theories linking mindfulness and leadership are scarce (King & Badham, 2018), and very



few studies have investigated the impact of mindfulness training for leadership development (Brendel et al., 2016) (p. 224).

This study responded to this gap in the literature with a focus on two main goals (a) to review the existing literature that establishes a relationship between leadership and mindfulness as well as mindfulness and leadership development and (b) to investigate how mindfulness is perceived by leaders, including how leaders react toward the practice and their receptiveness to it. Importantly, my approach to mindfulness in the workplace involves a “Return to the Buddhist Roots” and focuses on skills that are linked to the Eastern perspective of mindfulness, which is grounded in Buddhism. Hyland (2017) explained that in both academia and today’s culture, mindfulness has been commodified, misused, and abused, producing “McMindfulness.” Hyland explains that “McMindfulness” is a commercialized version of mindfulness (i.e., a fad or trend) that ignores its ethical roots of meditation and traditional foundations and, as such, defeats its true benefits. Positioning mindfulness in the workplace with a focus on its more traditional values makes this project unique and enables my research to offer novel contributions to the mindfulness and leadership literature as well as new approaches to the practice of mindfulness and the enactment of leadership.

In order to counter the commercial approach and to develop clear and concrete guidelines for integrating mindfulness into leadership practice, this project aimed to define what mindful leadership looks like— how it is communicated, how it is enacted, and, in essence, how it can be a “way of being” (Wells, 2015) for leaders. As such, the results of this research should provide leaders with a clear and specific approach to communication with their employees that enhances personal and professional relationships as well as their ability to effectively navigate unique challenges facing leaders today. A review of the literature that focuses on both mindfulness and

mindful leadership achieved the first goal and established the necessary foundation for the scope of this project.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

This literature review will cover research that has examined mindfulness and leadership. As such, the review is organized into three main sections: Section I: Defining Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership, Section II: Benefits of Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership, and lastly, Section III: Challenges Associated with Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership.

#### **Section I: Defining Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership**

##### *Defining Mindfulness*

Scholars agree that mindfulness is not easily defined or operationalized (Bishop et al., 2004; Good et al., 2016; Glomb et al., 2011; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). To recognize this challenge and narrow the focus, I draw upon five conceptual definitions that are most applicable to my study and that center on seminal work from Langer (1989a) and Kabat-Zinn (1990) as well as more recent work from Bishop et al. (2004), Hanh (2008), Glomb et al. (2011), and Langer and Moldoveanu (2000).

Beginning with seminal work defining mindfulness, Langer (1989a) described a mindful state as the ability to create new categories, to be open and willing to receive new information, and the ability to recognize multiple points of view. The notion of novelty is fundamental to Langer's work; as Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) further explained, mindfulness "can be best understood as the process of drawing novel distinctions" (p. 1). Additionally, these authors believe it does not necessarily matter what is actually noticed (i.e., significant or insignificant) but rather that it is a fresh or original viewing. Next, Kabat-Zinn (1990) defined mindfulness as being aware, attentive, and immersed in the current moment with a non-judgmental approach.

More recent work includes definitions such as Bishop et al. (2004), who believe mindfulness centers on one's ability to maintain attention in the moment as well as one's capability to demonstrate curiosity, openness, and acceptance. Next, as a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and meditation master, Hanh (2008) explained, mindfulness is the ability to focus or maintain one's consciousness within the reality that is currently unfolding. Lastly, Glomb et al. (2011) explained that while awareness and attention are at its core, mindfulness also requires individuals to acknowledge stimuli in a non-judgmental way and to remove all personal filters such as assumptions or biases. Relative to defining mindfulness, the literature highlights two crucial tensions, which include mindfulness versus mindlessness and the differing perspectives of Eastern and Western mindfulness.

### ***Two Crucial Tensions Found in Mindfulness***

**Mindfulness Versus Mindlessness.** The first tension is the mindfulness versus mindlessness relationship. Ellen Langer (1989b), a key scholar of mindfulness, believes human life can operate by means of two approaches, mindfulness and mindlessness, that function on a continuum. According to Langer, mindfulness involves noticing and being alert and aware—resulting in the creation of new categories for processing information and assigning meaning. For Langer (1989a), when new categories are created, mindfulness is occurring. Conversely, Langer (1989b) explained that mindlessness, also referred to as autopilot, occurs when attention is decreased and when one is reliant upon previously established categories, rules, and processes and/or forms or repetition (including behavior, thinking, and decision-making). This tension is relevant as mindlessness, which does have some notable benefits (i.e., efficiency, consistency, reduced mental load, etc.), does prevent and/or limit one's ability to be fully present in the moment.

**Eastern and Western Perspectives.** The second major tension revolves around the differences between the Eastern and Western perspectives on mindfulness. For example, the Eastern perspective is grounded in Buddhism, utilizes meditation as a core component of achieving mindfulness, and is the premise for the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. One significant feature of this perspective includes a focus on living mindfully. Greenberg and Mitra (2015) suggested that mindful living is more than the achievement of awareness or reducing/eliminating illness but rather follows components of the Noble Eightfold Path as well as observing and recognizing others. Specifically, Greenberg and Mitra explained, “we consider mindfulness to be not only a specific set of meditative practices but also an integral part of the eightfold path in which right speech, right action, right livelihood, etc., are intrinsically linked” (p. 74), which positions mindfulness to include a moral and ethical aspect as well. For Langer (1989a), the Eastern perspective centers on the “moral aspect of mindfulness” (p. 78), wherein one who becomes mindful by means of meditation is led to right action. In their discussion of the Eastern perspective of mindfulness, Weick and Putnam (2006) stated, “The four, and only four, foundations of mindfulness are introspective awareness of: body, feelings, consciousness, and mental objects” (p. 277). As such, living mindfully requires looking within and quieting the mind, and according to Langer, in the Eastern view, one uses meditation to quiet the mind and reduce distracting thoughts in order to achieve a mindful state.

Conversely, the Western perspective is generally considered more cognitive, draws its roots from social psychology dating back at least 40 years, and is closely aligned with the work of Ellen Langer. One core feature of this perspective includes a focus on cognition. Langer characterized mindfulness as a “state of alertness and lively awareness” (p. 138) in which (a) information is actively processed, (b) new categories and/or distinctions are created, and (c) an

awareness of both multiple perspectives and context are fundamental. In the Western perspective, according to Langer, creating mindfulness involves actively processing information in order to create new categories. Having defined mindfulness and examined two crucial tensions, I now turn to outline the central characteristics of the practice.

### *Central Characteristics*

As a key figure of mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn's (1990) Seven Attitudinal Foundations for Mindfulness Practice demonstrate characteristics for both the practitioner and the practice and provide a general framework that can also be used to demonstrate other scholarly connections. These foundations include:

1. Non-judging: When practicing mindfulness, it is essential to recognize your own judging habits yet intentionally suspend these judgments by being impartial and simply observing what is happening, including your emotions/reactions. Glomb et al. (2011) specifically suggested that being non-judgmental requires removing all personal filters, such as assumptions or biases.
2. Patience: According to Kabat-Zinn, "Patience is a form of wisdom" (p. 24) and comes with an understanding that things and situations must unfold in their own time. Additionally, patience requires an openness in each moment and an acceptance of what is.
3. Beginner's Mind: A beginner's mind is like having fresh eyes, which allow you to see everything as if it were being seen for the very first time. This includes people, situations, and ordinary life activities and/or events. My interpretation of beginner's mind also includes the integration of (a) curiosity as explained by Bishop et al. (2004), which accepts the notion that our mind will wander and that our curious spirit enables us to take

notice of our thoughts, feelings, and sensations and (b) the notion of novelty accredited to Langer (1989a, 1989b) and Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) as a means to cultivate novel distinctions.

4. Trust: Kabat-Zinn related trust to intuition and explained it is better to trust yourself (i.e., your intuition/your own authority) and potentially make a mistake versus seeking guidance from others. “In practicing mindfulness, you are practicing taking responsibility for being yourself and learning to listen to and trust your own being” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, pp. 25-26).

5. Non-striving: Kabat-Zinn believes we are wired to continually strive—what we do is prompted by either a purpose, a goal, or some kind of recognition. However, through non-striving, Kabat-Zinn explained, we can release goals and allow ourselves to experience each moment. Furthermore, Kabat-Zinn believes when we step back from striving, see and accept things as they are in the moment, we are then better equipped to attain our goals.

6. Acceptance: Acceptance is “seeing things as they actually are in the present” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 27). According to Kabat-Zinn, one does not have to like something and/or be passive about it, but rather embrace reality—accept what is. For example, during meditation, Kabat-Zinn explained that it is necessary to experience each moment as it is—to be open-minded to thoughts, feelings, and observations with an attitude of acceptance because the experience is situated in the here and now. Interestingly, Bishop et al. (2004) also aligned with this foundation, referring to it as openness.

7. Letting Go: Letting go is also known as non-attachment and means letting things just be—accepting them as they are. As Kabat-Zinn explained, when we realize we are

making judgments and/or thinking about the past or future, we are to recognize those thoughts and emotions but not hold to them. This concept of letting go, Kabat-Zinn compares to going to sleep. According to Kabat-Zinn, when we go to sleep, “we let go of our mind and body” (p. 30). As such, and as explained by Tamara Levitt in the Calm app, it is also important to remember that thoughts and emotions are fleeting and do not define an individual (J. Jameson, personal communication, June 1, 2021). Again, this foundation connects to the concept of acceptance that Bishop et al. (2004) refer to.

In addition to Kabat-Zinn, other scholars describe additional characteristics of mindfulness, such as self-regulation and sustained attention, stillness, compassion, and mindful communication.

Practicing self-regulation and sustained attention requires observing one’s feelings, thoughts, and sensations in the current moment and maintaining one’s attention to the current experience over a lengthy period of time (Bishop et al., 2004). Stillness: Hanh (1995) explained that in order to “be still,” one must be tranquil and focus attention within. Hanh further explained that stillness produces a stopping effect, which fosters the capability to “know”—having insight and gaining understanding. Wood (2004) believes compassion is cultivated as we recognize our connectedness, our interconnectedness to others, and that we affect one another in what we do and say. According to Wood, this realization of others and otherness (a) promotes compassion and (b) compassion is a necessary component of mindfulness.

Lastly, in relation to mindful communication (speaking and listening), Omilion-Hodges and Swords (2016) explained that individuals who communicate mindfully carefully consider their thoughts and actions, avoid making judgments, and serve others with a strong sense of purpose, which combined, foster compassion and compassionate communication. My



interpretation of mindful communication includes both speaking and listening with a mindful approach. Mindful speech is created by using what Hanh (2013) referred to as “loving speech” (p. 36). “Using loving speech, gentle speech means letting go of all anger, fear, and suspicion. It’s an effort to try and understand and to be understood” (Hanh, 2013, p. 38). For Hanh, loving speech requires diligence, and right diligence is a component of Buddhism’s Noble Eightfold Path, which is also linked to right speech. In conjunction with mindful speech is mindful listening. The goal for the mindful listener, according to Shafir (2003), is to mute all noise (internal and external) so both the person and their message can be understood fully. Shafir believes this type of listening allows people to feel valued and understood, which promotes trust and respect. Mindful listening requires being calm, relaxed, focused and demonstrating a desire to learn another person’s perspective (Shafir, 2003). Interestingly, Hanh believes that good listening begins by first listening to yourself through daily meditation.

### ***My Definition of Mindfulness***

Drawing upon the identified conceptual definitions and adapting applicable components and characteristics from scholars such as Bishop et al. (2004), Hanh (2008), Glomb et al. (2011), Kabat-Zinn (1990), Langer (1989a), and Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000), my definition of mindfulness recognizes mindfulness as an experience (as other scholars have previously done) but extends the definition to also include enactment:

To experience mindfulness, one must be fully present in each moment, observing and regulating internal and external stimuli by means of stillness, awareness, and attentiveness, and accept what is, balanced through a spirit of inquiry and a non-judgmental attitude. To enact mindfulness, one applies the experiential aspects of

mindfulness to their interactions with others in a compassionate and empathic way by means of mindful speech and mindful listening.

### ***Defining Mindful Leadership***

Mindful leadership is referred to by scholars as embodied, holistic, or mind, body, spirit practice (Brendel & Bennett, 2016) or, as Ehrlich (2017) suggested, a spirit, emotion, mind, body leadership model. These definitions emphasize somatics, a way of knowing that includes processing information through a mind-body-spirit relationship (Brendel & Bennett, 2016).

Furthermore, in explaining mindful leadership, Ehrlich stated:

When we actively pay attention, we build self-awareness, which is the heart of leadership. We can think of awareness like a spotlight. With information overload, ambiguity, and change all around us it is easy to have our spotlight waving wildly around. Mindfulness enables us to focus our spotlight on where we want. (pp. 234-235)

In essence, the key to becoming a more effective leader is to become more self-aware. Wells (2015) stated that “It is the practice of mindfulness that informs the practice of leadership” (p. 14), which incorporates unique characteristics.

### ***Central Characteristics of Mindful Leadership***

Brendel and Bennett (2016) established that mindfulness and somatics practices are effective for enhancing leadership development and name organizations such as General Electric, Google, Apple, IBM, Starbucks, Goldman Sachs, Pfizer, and the U.S. military as examples of organizations that have incorporated these principles. Mindfulness, as a practice for increasing awareness, and somatics as a means of processing information, promote a holistic and embodied approach to leadership, positively impacting relationships, learning, openness, and the ability to deal with/manage change (Brendel & Bennett, 2016). This embodied approach fosters the belief

in leadership as a “way of being” versus a “way of doing,” as noted by Wells (2015) and Brendel and Bennett.

According to Brendel and Bennett (2016), receiving information somatically situates the body as the central place for “change, learning intelligence, and transformation” (p. 412). By utilizing the body, as well as the five senses, Brendel and Bennett explained, “leaders can learn to access their internal experience including sensations, emotions, and the meaning they assign to those feelings” (p. 412). As such, Brendel and Bennett positioned mindfulness as a way for leaders “to be.” This is in agreement with Wells (2015), who also explained the characteristics of mindfulness, including awareness, acceptance, refraining from judgment, and being present in the moment, as representing “a way of being” (p.1). However, Wells, citing Bolman and Deal (2008), Fry and Kriger (2009), and Northouse (2013), further suggested that this way of “being” is a novel perspective as, historically, leaders have been described by either their behaviors or traits or by what they “do.”

Building on Brendel and Bennett (2016) and Wells (2015), Ehrlich’s (2017) model of mindful leadership is based on six factors: spirit, emotion, mind, body, connecting, and inspiring. Ehrlich makes a strong argument that mindfulness enables one to be fully present with their spirit, emotion, mind, and body, enabling them to connect (with themselves and others) and fostering effective leadership, which positively impacts the leader, the follower, and the organizational culture.

## **Section II: Benefits of Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership**

### ***Benefits of Mindfulness***

Much has been written on the value of mindfulness as related to personal, professional, and organizational benefits. For example, the practice of mindfulness is documented to positively

impact physical and mental health, enhance relationships, create an openness to new perspectives, and improve work outcomes.

**Improves Physical and Mental Health.** In most discussions of mindfulness, scholars such as Akyurek and Khan (2018), Glomb et al. (2011), Good et al. (2016), Hanh (2013, 2008), Kabat-Zinn (1990), and Manusev and Harvey-Knowles (2015) outlined the many positive effects—both physical and mental—associated with mindfulness. For example, Glomb et al. (2011) state, “a burgeoning body of research has reported clear links between mindfulness, meditation, mindfulness treatment, and improved physical health” (p. 121). Additionally, they stated, “Mindfulness and mindfulness-based practices have been clearly linked to reduced symptoms of mental, psychological, and psychiatric conditions” (p. 121).

**Aids in Building Healthier Relationships.** Mindfulness is also credited with enhancing relationships and promoting interaction with others, which includes empathy and a non-judgmental approach (Glomb et al., 2011; Manusev & Harvey-Knowles, 2015). Additionally, Manusev and Harvey-Knowles (2015) draw upon a number of scholars (see Manusev & Harvey-Knowles, 2015) to outline the many relational benefits of mindfulness, which include increased relational satisfaction, enhanced communication and ability to navigate conflict, improved ability to withhold judgment, increased feelings of relational security, heightened degree compassion for both self and others, and improved work-life balance—all of which demonstrate how the practice of mindfulness can result in positive outcomes for interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Manusev and Harvey-Knowles (2015) stated, “Whether it is stress or anxiety reduction, or well-being in families, higher levels of mindfulness tend to make people better able to navigate what comes into their personal and relational lives across their lives” (p. 21).

Additionally, within the workplace, Good et al. (2016) noted that “Although mindfulness is an individual quality, initial evidence suggests that it affects interpersonal behavior and quality of dyadic and workgroup relationships” (p. 126). Furthermore, Good et al. suggested that mindfulness helps foster empathy and compassion, which is central to improving workplace relationships impacting both leadership and teamwork.

**Fosters an Openness to New Perspectives.** Langer (1989a) stated, “we experience the world by creating categories and making distinctions among them” (p.11), and Langer further stated that “creating new categories is a mindful activity” (p.11). Building upon this notion of making distinctions, Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) stated, “Mindfulness is not an easy concept to define but can be best understood as the process of drawing novel distinctions” (p. 1). According to Langer and Moldoveanu, the act of making novel distinctions carries two important aspects: (a) what is noticed is not as important as the fact that it must be new to the person who views it and (b) the act of making these new distinctions allows one to remain positioned within the current moment. According to Langer and Moldoveanu, drawing these novel distinctions can lead to four outcomes: “(a) a greater sensitivity to one’s environment, (b) more openness to new information, (c) the creation of new categories for structuring, and (d) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving” (p. 2). As a result, mindfulness fosters an openness to new perspectives. This type of openness is also linked to improved decision-making processes as noted by scholars such as Glomb et al. (2011) and Bishop et al. (2004).

**Improves Work Outcomes.** While many scholars such as Akyurek and Khan (2018), Brown (2008), Glomb et al. (2011), Good et al. (2016), Jamieson and Tuckey (2017), Malizia and Jameson (2018), and Weick and Putnam (2006), have outlined the benefits of mindfulness at work, I draw upon Langer (1989a) for a broad representation of these benefits. According to

Langer, “For the employer and employee alike, mindfulness may increase flexibility, productivity, innovation, leadership ability, and satisfaction” (p. 133). Langer provides examples such as (a) a mindful manager or worker noticing things (e.g., shifts or changes in normal routines/processes) and viewing them as warnings and/or opportunities; (b) mindfulness offsetting fatigue and exhaustion by creating a “second wind” (p. 135) or renewed energy by introducing a context change; and (c) innovation being positively impacted when mindfulness is applied to problem-solving, allowing for “reframing” (p. 138) the problem and exploring it by means of multiple perspectives, creativity, and imagination. A final example Langer provides is that when mindfulness training was conducted at Lewis Bay Head Injury Facility, the result was a change in outlook and renewed feelings of optimism, promoting caregivers to note “a significant increase in morale and job satisfaction” (p. 151).

### ***Benefits of Mindful Leadership***

A mindful leadership approach offers a variety of benefits, such as improving organizational culture, promoting emotional intelligence, fostering strategies that enhance a leader's flexibility and capabilities in dealing with ambiguity, and, lastly, promoting reflection in leaders.

**Improved Organizational Culture.** Ehrlich (2017) stated mindful leaders tend to exhibit more confidence in their abilities, which helps to put employees at ease and aids in reducing employee stress and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, Ehrlich (2017) believes that mindful leaders appear to display a more hopeful, optimistic, and resilient demeanor, and in turn, their employees “demonstrate higher job performance, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors as well as higher engagement and well-being” (p. 240). When leaders apply a mindful approach to their leadership, the positive behaviors associated with mindfulness can be modeled

by followers (Thompson, 2018), which can positively impact the organizational culture. Additionally, Brendel and Bennett (2016) noted that leadership scholars and practitioners have applied these more holistic approaches to leadership development programs in order to create organizational culture change initiatives. Brendel and Bennett outline two examples: (a) *Presencing*, which was created by Senge and Scharmer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Scharmer, 2009; Senge et al., 2004) to assist with innovation, focuses on being present in the moment and suspending judgment to envision the future as it appears and (b) *Humble Inquiry*, which was created by Schein (2013), focuses on the Buddhist attitude of “beginner’s mind” and teaches leaders to open their minds as a novice/amateur/inexpert in order to expand their creativity.

**Emotional Intelligence.** According to Ehrlich (2017), mindfulness helps us to notice our feelings and emotions and provides a space for our feelings/emotions to play out without judging them. Especially applicable to leadership, emotional attunement is necessary for leading effectively and includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Ehrlich, 2017; Mir & Abbasi, 2012; Wells, 2015). The identified relationship between emotional intelligence and mindfulness demonstrates that mindfulness positively impacts one’s emotional intelligence and results in better leadership capabilities, as noted in Wells’ (2015) study of mindful leadership in schools and Vann et al.’s. (2017) study of self-leadership.

**Ambiguity.** Chesley and Wylson (2016) explained that change within an organization can impact employees adversely, causing uncertainty, stress, discomfort, as well as feelings of negativity and distrust, which promote feelings of ambiguity. In their study, Chesley and Wylson present a unique way to apply mindfulness as a means for leaders to manage the ambiguity associated with change. Results from their study indicate that change leaders who are more

mindful typically possess higher self-awareness and greater self-care that provide strategies for managing ambiguity.

**Leader Flexibility.** Baron et al. (2018) explained that leadership flexibility, also referred to as “reflective, adaptive, agile, versatile and flexible” (p.165), can be effective in managing workplace tensions, demands, and challenges. Drawing upon Bishop et al.’s (2004) definition of mindfulness, Baron et al. explored five aspects of mindfulness, including nonreactivity, non-judging, acting with awareness, observing and describing, and based on their results, indicated that by utilizing mindfulness, leaders are better equipped to navigate the diverse and changing demands required of them.

**Reflection.** Mindful leadership promotes reflection in leaders: Several scholars identified that with the application of mindfulness/a mindful leadership approach, leaders become more self-reflective as they are able to step back and gain perspective on tasks, decisions, problems/solutions, and strategies (Ehrlich, 2017; Omilion-Hodges & Swords, 2016; Reitz et al., 2020; Thompson, 2018). According to Thompson (2018), committing to mindful reflection and learning is beneficial to effective leadership.

### **Section III: Challenges Associated with Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership**

#### ***Challenges Associated With Mindfulness***

Two challenges associated with mindfulness include stigma and McMindfulness. First, for many individuals, mindfulness carries a stigma given its historical roots in Buddhism, and they feel it may contradict their religious beliefs and practices. As an example of this stigma, Dean R. Broyles (2021) stated, “Mindfulness is Buddhist meditative practice that seeks to connect people to their purported inner ‘divinity’ or god.” Mindfulness at its [sic] core, confuses and blurs the distinction between Creator and creation (see Romans 1:25)” (para 5).



The effort to overcome the stigma resulted in a commodification of mindfulness to make it more palatable to the masses, or what Kabat-Zinn (2015) calls “McMindfulness.” Hyland (2017) described “McMindfulness” as a commercialized version of mindfulness that ignores its ethical roots of meditation and traditional foundations and, according to Hyland, defeats its true benefits. Citing Monteiro et al. (2015), Greenberg and Mitra (2015) also believed the traditional Buddhist roots of mindfulness have been removed or “watered down” in order to make mindfulness more acceptable in the Western culture, and due to commodification, mindfulness has become misused/used inappropriately. More specifically, these scholars are concerned that the Western methods of practicing mindfulness and the benefits produced (e.g., stress reduction, increased attention/focus, improved decision-making and workplace gains including employee performance and productivity, and creativity that positively impact a company’s bottom line) are in opposition to the Buddhist’s origins of mindfulness which include “right livelihood, loving-kindness, compassion and nonmaterialism” (Hyland, 2017, p. 336).

### ***Challenges Associated With Mindful Leadership Approach***

While my coverage of the literature does not specifically indicate any obvious disadvantages of mindful leadership, I have noticed limitations that connect back to the overall use/application of mindfulness. These limitations center on the fact that in order to be a mindful leader and develop leaders through the practice of mindfulness or create a mindful organizational culture, mindfulness must remain central to these initiatives. Keeping this in mind, two limitations arise: (a) commitment to practice mindfulness and (b) intended use and related logistics.

**Commitment to Practice Mindfulness.** One of the limitations of the mindful leadership approach is that its success is dependent upon a leader’s commitment to practice mindfulness.

Given that (a) the foundation of mindful leadership is based on the dimensions and characteristics of mindfulness and (b) many scholars believe mindfulness is a skill (Bishop et al., 2004; Good et al., 2016; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Reitz et al., 2020), and it must be practiced (Thompson, 2018; Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016). However, many individuals, and especially leaders, complain about not having enough time to practice mindfulness (Yeganeh & Good, 2016). Interestingly, in their study, Reitz and Chaskalson (2016) noted “leaders who practiced for at least 10 minutes every day progressed significantly more than others who did not” (p. 3). As such, while this limitation centers on the commitment to practice, I believe with proper messaging and training, the lack of time perception can be corrected in order to reduce this limitation.

**Intended Use and Related Logistics.** How mindfulness will be used/applied by either the leader/organization brings unique limitations to this approach.

First, the differences between the Eastern and Western perspectives of mindfulness have resulted in scholarly discussions centering on the appropriate use of mindfulness—specifically and as applied to organizations, the Western perspective of mindfulness is typically used for organizational gain, which is in direct opposition to the original Buddhist traditions, which center on the Noble Eightfold Path (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015; Hyland, 2017; Monteiro et al., 2015; Vu & Gill, 2018). This tension brings forth questions for leaders regarding how to appropriately use mindfulness within their leadership practice, and in turn, within their organizations. This choice will vary based on the individual leader and the type of organization (i.e., mindfulness initiatives should be customized based on each organization [Glomb et al., 2011]). Leaders will also need to consider that some individuals may not be receptive toward this practice due to their perceptions of mindfulness (i.e., stigma), and as such, leaders may face resistance in generating buy-in.

Second, Vu and Gill (2018) explained mindfulness is typically a personal choice centered on personal values and beliefs (Glomb et al., 2011) and how to practice mindfulness also centers on personal choices and preferences. This challenge becomes relevant in how leaders enact a mindful approach as well as how the leader/organization chooses to integrate mindfulness within the workplace. Additionally, bringing this personal practice into the workplace can bring logistical challenges for both the leader and the organization (Vu & Gill, 2018). Bringing mindfulness into the workplace requires the consideration of many factors, including (a) creating favorable conditions that support the practice, such as designating a meditation room and/or redesigning office space/layout to align with a mindful culture, (b) providing guided meditation practices, and (c) encouraging managers, supervisors and all organizational leaders to be supportive of the practice by granting time/space during the workday for practicing mindfulness (Glomb et al., 2011; Good et al., 2016; Vu & Gill, 2018). These logistical challenges may require financial commitments, which may not be possible as such, creating a limitation for this mindful leadership approach.

Based on the preceding literature review, the following research question (RQ) was utilized to explore the relationship between mindfulness and leadership, with attention to leaders' perceptions of its potential for leadership development:

RQ: What are organizational leaders' perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace?

With this question in mind, the next section provides a general outline of the project's methodology.

The literature review, which focused on both mindfulness and mindful leadership, fulfilled the project's first goal and, coupled with the establishment of research questions,

provided the necessary foundation for a discussion of the selected methodology outlined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### Method

In order to investigate how mindfulness is perceived by leaders, I used a qualitative methodology that included a pre-interview demographic questionnaire, interviews, and a Likert scale instrument. The questionnaire and Likert scale data were analyzed using descriptive analyses to determine whether there were any connections between demographic characteristics and perceptions, as well as patterns in the prevalence of certain perceptions. As the primary approach, interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis.

The demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) was included as part of the pre-interview tasks informants were asked to complete. The questionnaire consisted of questions related to (a) general demographic information, such as age, gender, religious affiliation, and race and (b) education and work experience, including the level of education, years of full-time employment, job title, and industry, and how long and in what capacity informants have been in a supervisory role. Beyond providing general demographic information, the purpose of the questionnaire was to establish a baseline understanding of what informants understood, knew, and believed about mindfulness and/or mindfulness as related to leadership. As such, the questionnaire ended by asking informants this baseline, open-ended question: In your management position (current, past, or future), what is your opinion about applying a mindfulness approach to those you supervise?

The study employed in-depth interviews as a means to obtain comprehensive qualitative data. The use of interviews provided data related to leaders' perception of mindfulness based on their (a) emotional responses toward specific mindfulness skills, (b) preferences toward the most

practical skill to implement in the workplace, and (c) opinions about how their practice of mindfulness would be impacted if their boss openly practiced mindfulness.

One of the advantages of interviewing is that this method elicits rich data, which can provide valuable insights into answering the study's research question. Tracy (2020) stated that "Qualitative interviews provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection, and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energizing" (p. 156). Furthermore, Martin and Hanington (2012) stated, "Interviews are a fundamental research method for direct contact with informants to collect firsthand personal accounts of experience, opinions, attitudes, and perceptions" (p. 102). Conversely, while the interview method is effective, certain challenges can also be associated with this form of data collection, including maintaining ethical guidelines for interactions with human subjects and securing the confidentiality of data. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) discussed the importance of protecting human research subjects and believed it is essential to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for all qualitative research. As such, an integral part of this study was to obtain approval from the NC State University IRB Office, which required the creation of the following documents: adult consent form, interview protocol, emotions list, and recruitment materials in the form of e-mails, e-mail blasts, and talking points for classroom visits.

All IRB documents received final approval on March 21, 2022. Using the parameters designated by the IRB approval, I demonstrated an ethical commitment to this research by structuring participant involvement as voluntary and (a) providing each informant with the adult consent form prior to the interview, (b) advising informants they could decline to answer any question and/or could stop the interview at any time, (c) remaining prudent during the interview—being careful not to lead the conversation and/or refraining from offering personal

opinions or experiences related to the subject matter so that data would not be skewed, and (d) securing the confidentiality of data by ensuring names and/or any other identifying information remained confidential through cross-link data files and that all files, recordings, and data of any kind are stored in a secure manner.

In addition to the qualitative methods used in this study, a Likert scale instrument was integrated into the interview protocol. The instrument consisted of two statements wherein informants were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement toward each statement. The purpose of including this instrument was twofold—first, to gauge the level of willingness leaders have toward practicing the specific mindfulness skills introduced in the interview, and second, to create an opportunity for leaders to offer their opinions as to the practicality of these skills in the workplace. The data produced from these Likert statements were used to help quantify the range of perceptions and serve as a check on my interpretations of the interview results.

### **Research Sample**

The study sought participants that included the following criteria: English-speaking individuals 18 years or older with 2 or more years of full-time employment in managerial or leadership positions. Recruitment began by seeking MBA students at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and NC State University, as well as initiating a call for participants through the Greensboro, North Carolina Chamber of Commerce. However, these recruitment efforts did not produce any viable informants. The participants were successfully recruited via social media, with the help of a former internship director who had a large number of contacts who not only met the criteria but were also varied in their professions. This recruitment process helped locate 27 key informants varying in gender, race, age, religious affiliation, education, job

industry, and supervisory experience. General participant demographic information is provided in Table 1. Participants' education and work experience demographics are provided in Table 2.

**Table 1**

*General Demographic Information (N = 27)*

Demographic item	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	18	67%
Male	9	33%
<b>Race</b>		
White or Caucasian	23	85%
Black or African American	3	11%
Hispanic	1	4%
<b>Age</b>		
30-39	6	22%
40-49	9	33%
50+	11	41%
No response	1	4%
<b>Affiliated With a Particular Religion</b>		
Yes (answers included Christian, Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Nature Spiritual)	13	48%
No	13	48%
Prefer not to answer	1	4%



**Table 2***Participant Education and Work Demographics (N = 27)*

Demographic item	N	%
<b>Level of Education</b>		
Bachelor's	8	30%
Master's	15	55%
Doctorate	4	15%
<b>Job Industries</b>		
Advertising Technology	1	4%
Banking/Finance	2	7%
Education/Higher Education/Research	5	18%
Entrepreneurship	1	4%
Health Care	1	4%
Hospitality/Service	1	4%
Instructional Design	1	4%
Marketing/Communications/Public Relations	1	4%
Nonprofit	2	7%
Pharmaceutical	1	4%
Writing/Publishing	3	11%
IT/Software Development/Data Science	8	29%
<b>Years in Supervisory Role</b>		
1-5	11	41%
6-10	6	22%
11-20	3	11%
20+	6	22%
Does not currently supervise	1	4%

**Procedures**

Before beginning data collection, informants were sent an e-mail with instructions and links to complete the pre-interview tasks, which included participating in a demographic questionnaire and signing the adult consent via a Google document. Once the informants completed the necessary pre-interview tasks, I scheduled the interview based on the informants' availability. All interviews were conducted remotely and via the Zoom platform. Zoom was

selected for a variety of reasons, including the varied geographic locations of both the interviewer and interviewees, comfort, and personal safety preferences while still navigating COVID-19, and lastly, by utilizing Zoom, the interviews were able to be recorded, and the transcript feature could be initiated so that each interview also included a transcript file.

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted from June 3 through July 22, 2022, via Zoom, totaling 30.66 hours of video recording and generating 1,533 pages of transcripts. The average interview time was 1 hour and 13 minutes, with the shortest interview lasting 48 minutes and the longest 98 minutes.

### **Interview Process**

During the interview, I initiated the Share Screen feature on Zoom and used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to guide the interview process. The interview protocol was divided into three main sections:

1. *Experiences with Mindfulness*
2. *Introduction of Five Specific Mindfulness Skills*
3. *End of Interview Questions*

The first section, *Experiences with Mindfulness*, provided interviewees an opportunity to share their general experiences of mindfulness, including their success and challenges if they practice, any tools or apps they use or have used in the past, and if they currently work or have worked for an organization that tried to implement mindfulness. The second section of the protocol introduced five specific mindfulness skills, which included mindful speech, mindful listening, non-judgement, self-regulation, and sustained attention and reflection. Within this section, interviewees were presented with a specific mindfulness skill and its corresponding definition. Three types of questions were asked for each of the skills: an emotional response question, Likert

scale statements, and an opinion question. Outlined below are detailed explanations for each question type.

### ***Emotional Response Question***

After interviewees were introduced to a particular mindfulness skill, they were provided with its corresponding definition. After hearing the definition, I asked interviewees to provide their immediate, emotional response to the skill using the emotions list (see Table 3.) The emotions list was adapted from the Watson et al. (1988) Panas Scale, and for the purpose of this study, included seven positive emotions and seven negative emotions, as noted in Table 3.

**Table 3**

#### *Emotions List*

Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions
1. Enthusiastic/Excited	1. Afraid/Scared
2. Interested	2. Upset
3. Inspired	3. Distressed
4. Alert	4. Jittery/Nervous
5. Active	5. Ashamed
6. Proud	6. Irritable
7. Attentive	7. Hostile

In using the emotions list, interviewees were instructed to select the top three emotions they associated with when they heard the skill defined. They were further instructed to pick their emotions based on how the skill would make them feel if they were asked to practice the skill at work. Lastly, for each emotion the interviewee selected, they were also asked to explain why they chose that emotion. While the emotions list was provided as a reference, informants were also encouraged to use unique emotion words that resonated with them to respond to this prompt.

### ***Likert Rating of Agree/Disagree of Mindfulness Skills and their Practicality in the Workplace***

For each of the five skills introduced in the interview, interviewees were asked two statements and then asked to rank their level of agreement/disagreement on a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. For example, in discussing the first skill, mindful listening, interviewees were provided the following statements: (a) mindful listening is something you would like to do and (b) mindful listening is something you think is practical in the workplace.

### ***Opinion Question***

To end the discussion of each skill, interviewees were asked to provide their opinion as to what the advantages and challenges are for integrating the skill into the workplace.

The final section of the protocol, *End of the Interview Questions*, included leaders choosing one of the five skills as the most practical to put into practice in the workplace and two questions related to their opinions about how their practice of mindfulness might be impacted if their boss openly practiced mindfulness.

Data was collected by asking informants the semi-structured interview questions and Likert scale statements as previously explained. Responses were recorded in a Zoom .mp4 video file, a .vtt transcript file, and I also documented responses by taking handwritten notes throughout the interview. Data collection ended after the 27<sup>th</sup> interview, when the data was no longer producing new information, reaching saturation. Braun and Clarke (2013) defined saturation as “the point at which new data stop generating any substantially new ideas” (p. 336).

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Preparing the Data***

Upon completion of all interviews and during the timeframe of July 25 through November 28, 2022, I carefully reviewed each Zoom transcript file to ensure accuracy. This was done by comparing each transcript file to the recorded interview while also referencing my handwritten notes. The review was necessary to correct any transcription errors, including missing or misspelled words and/or nonverbal behaviors—1,533 transcript pages were reviewed.

Then, to more efficiently analyze the data, I created an Excel document, enabling me to compile data in one comprehensive file. Within the Excel document, each participant was given a pseudonym and a participant number to ensure confidentiality when discussing the findings. Additionally, I crafted transcript summaries by condensing the informants' responses to the interview questions. For each summary, I outlined key findings from the interview, noted and identified recurring ideas/concepts, documented relevant quotes (if applicable), and entered the numeric ratings for the Likert statements. As such, the Excel document provides an overview of the data and was an important first step in beginning data analysis. Appendices C and D summarize additional qualitative data from the interviews.

### *Analyzing the Data*

I analyzed the data compiled from the Excel document coupled with the transcript files, using thematic analysis to uncover themes and/or trends necessary to answer the established research question.

According to Boyatzis (1998):

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit “code.” This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes,

indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms. (p. 4)

Given that my research is focused on understanding perceptions of mindfulness, identifying specific themes is crucial. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated, “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). In order to identify themes, Fugard and Potts (2019) explained, the researcher must first become familiar with the data by means of data collection and transcription and second by conducting multiple reads of the data set. In conjunction with conducting multiple reads, Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested several strategies for identifying themes that include “repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, and linguistic connectors” (pp. 89-92).

Most relevant to this research is the strategy of repetition. Ryan and Bernard (2003) explained repetitions as data that are repeated throughout a collection of texts, and “the more the same concept occurs in a text, the more likely it is a theme” (p. 89). As such, through multiple reads of the Excel document, I analyzed the data looking for repetitions or reoccurring ideas/concepts. Through my analysis, I identified positive and negative repetitions of thoughts, opinions, experiences, and/or beliefs held by my informants about mindfulness, mindfulness in the workplace, and mindfulness as related to leadership. Applying Ryan and Bernard’s (2003) logic, given the repetitions I identified were reoccurring through the data set, they are likely relevant themes that highlight commonly held perceptions of the practice of mindfulness. Additionally, during the analysis process, I was attentive to the demographic characteristics of

the interviewees, yet no meaningful patterns emerged, so these characteristics are not discussed in the results.

To ensure the validity of the themes, I conducted two validity checks. First, my dissertation chair independently analyzed the Excel document looking for repetitions or reoccurring ideas and compared them to my findings. Upon completion of her analysis, my chair and I discussed the similarities and differences in our findings in order to determine the validity or plausibility of the themes. Second, I randomly selected two informants to complete a member check. As explained by Fugard and Potts (2019), a member check includes sharing the analysis with informants and providing them a copy of their transcript in order to determine if they are in agreement with the themes. Feedback from the member check confirmed the validity of the themes, with informants stating that the themes were “logical, “detailed,” “well organized,” and “in line with my experiences of mindfulness in the workplace.” After completing these two validity checks, themes were organized by type and documented in the Results section.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

This study aimed to determine whether it is an appropriate time to integrate mindfulness practice into leadership development. Specifically, I wanted to get a sense of current, experienced leaders' receptiveness to mindfulness in the workplace. The interviews were therefore designed to answer one overarching research question: *What are organizational leaders' perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace?*

The first section of the interview asked informants to respond to questions regarding the practicality of and their receptiveness to five mindfulness skills in the workplace. Informants were asked to respond using a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. Tables 4-5 summarize the Likert scale means and standard deviation, illustrating that the majority of these informants perceive all five mindfulness skills as practical (see Table 4), and they are receptive to their use (see Table 5). Table 6 provides a summary of responses showing which of the five mindfulness skills interviewees thought was most practical to implement in the workplace. As indicated below, mindful listening ranked the highest, with informants stating it would be the most practical.



**Table 4***Standard Deviation for the Likert Statements Related to Practicality (N = 27)*

<b>Mindfulness Skill</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Mindful Speech is something you think is practical in the workplace.	4.407407407	0.5007117441
Mindful Listening is something you think is practical in the workplace.	4.592592593	0.5007117441
Non-Judgment is something you think is practical in the workplace.	3.703703704	1.030862776
Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention is something you think is practical in the workplace.	3.851851852	0.8639668665
Reflection is something you think is practical in the workplace.	4.481481481	0.8931521694

**Table 5***Standard Deviation for Likert Statements Related to Receptiveness (N = 27)*

<b>Mindfulness Skill</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Mindful Speech is something you would like to do.	4.740740741	0.4465760847
Mindful Listening is something you would like to do.	4.925925926	0.2668802563
Non-Judgment is something you would like to do.	4.407407407	0.6360490583
Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention is something you would like to do.	4.555555556	0.7510676162

**Table 5** (continued).

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Reflection is something you would like to do.	4.62962963	0.8388704928
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**Table 6**

*Summary of Responses to the “Most Practical Skill to Implement” (N = 27)*

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<b>Skill</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Mindful Listening	11
Reflection	8
Non-Judgment	4
Mindful Speech	2
Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention	2

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Data gleaned from the 27 interviews were analyzed, and the results identified four significant themes: (a) being mindful takes work, (b) mindfulness poses logistical challenges at work, (c) mindfulness is unknowingly practiced, and (d) successful integration requires modeling and allocation of resources. These themes were consistent across the demographic characteristics of the participants, and therefore, demographic characteristics are not referenced in the presentation of results. The next section presents the themes with supporting quotations from interview participants. All informant responses are referred to using their assigned pseudonyms.

## **Theme 1: Being Mindful Takes Work**

Many informants in the sample stated that practicing mindfulness, including the skills introduced in the interview, takes work—both physical and mental. In response to four out of the five mindfulness skills presented in the interview, informants used positive emotion words such as active, attentive, alert, interested, and curious to describe their emotional reaction to the skills such as mindful speech, mindful listening, self-regulation and sustained attention, and reflection. However, informants also expressed concerns about the skills being “hard to do” and used emotion words such as exhaustion, complicated, complex, stressed, worried, and tiring when providing their emotional responses. Even more interesting is a comparison and possible contradiction between the Likert responses and the valence of the words used in response to the emotion question. Specifically, while the Likert scale responses indicated the majority of the informants believed that the mindfulness skills presented in the interview were practical (see Table 4), they used a total of 65 negative emotion words compared to 30 positive emotion words. Further, the emotions list included seven positive and seven negative emotion words, and informants often added their own emotion words. In total, informants used 36 unique negative emotion words (29 more emotion words than what was originally included on the emotions list) and 14 unique positive emotion words (seven more emotion words than what was originally included on the emotions list). This point is worth noting, as it suggests significant concerns about mindfulness in the workplace and also demonstrates a high level of thoughtfulness and engagement in the interview process (i.e., informants were not randomly picking words from the provided list.)

Both the concerns about mindfulness being “hard to do” and examples of how some informants offered their unique emotion words are noted below. Rachel, a 35-year-old senior

vice president with 7 years of supervisory experience, explained that mindful listening can be exhausting to do on some days and noted:

Um, I don't see it on here [the emotions list], but I would also say like there's an element of *exhaustion*. Um, when you manage a really big team, um, I think that this is a wonderful concept, um, but it's also, it can be exhausting. Because it takes time to understand another person. So, um, so, yeah, it just, depending on the day, sometimes I feel delighted to spend time understanding somebody else, and other times it's exhausting.

Additionally, when reviewing the emotions list for self-regulation and sustained attention, Martin, a 37-year-old director with 5 years as a supervisor, stated: "It's not on here [the emotion], it feels a little *tiring* but, but ah, you know, that's like, that's kind of part of working a muscle, I think yeah."

While discussing the advantages and challenges of implementing non-judgment in the workplace, Sal, a research fellow with approximately 20 years of supervisory experience, remarked, "Challenges, you know, I don't know, I mean, the challenge is that it's *hard to do*, and you have to overcome your own instincts." Additionally, in relation to reflection, Glenda, a 60-year-old senior manager with 22 years as a supervisor, stated, "Ah, challenges are, it can be *difficult* to do as it's it's hard sometimes to face ourselves, especially when we have messed up."

In discussing self-regulation and sustained attention, Joanie, a 41-year-old communications manager with 1 year of experience as a supervisor, stated:

I, you know, over time, I realized early on, when I have a lot of meetings that I burn out, I flame out quickly, um, just because you know my energy store. I don't, I don't gather energy from other people. I love people, but at a point, I'm just done; you know, I need to

recharge. Um, and so now, when I have a wall of meetings, it really does freak me out, like I'm not gonna be able to, I'm not gonna be able to do this and be nice and be in the moment, and you know paying attention to all the things, both the other person and myself.

This theme, *Being Mindful Takes Work*, highlights that mindfulness can be “hard to do” while at work. The results of positive/negative comparisons show more negative emotional words were used, which could possibly indicate barriers to mindfulness at work, as supported by the next theme.

## **Theme 2: Mindfulness Poses Logistical Challenges at Work**

Recurring throughout the interviews were multiple examples describing how logistical challenges can impede the practice of mindfulness. These challenges can be grouped into two categories. The first category highlights the logistical challenges of practicing mindfulness given time and technological constraints. The second category illustrates the types of tensions that leaders acknowledged when practicing mindfulness at work.

### ***Time and Technological Constraints***

Despite the belief that the mindfulness skills presented in the interview are practical and that informants are receptive to them (see Tables 4 and 5), informants noted challenges with the practice, specifically related to time and technology. Informants expressed concerns related to trying to meet deadlines or completing tasks, changes in the work environment, and an increased reliance on technology. Compounded with those challenges, informant comments also revealed there is an unspoken message that mindfulness is acceptable only if you get your work done.

As related to difficulty in meeting deadlines, informants connected this challenge to concerns about time. Interestingly, approximately 18 out of the 27 informants made specific

references to time and not having enough time to practice mindfulness or use mindfulness skills when trying to complete work tasks. For example, in discussing reflection, Molly, a 56-year-old lecturer with 15 years of supervisory experience, stated, “So, yeah, the challenges I think are time, time there’s no time to reflect in the workplace.” In relation to mindful listening, Jessie, a 47-year-old manager with more than 7 years of supervisory experience, explained, “I think the challenge is the time and the effort it takes, right? If we’re really honest, being a great mindful listener takes a lot of effort and time. And I think that’s probably the challenge to it.” Lastly, Lexie, a 42-year-old manager with 2 years of supervisory experience, described how making mindfulness a priority is difficult when also trying to complete items on her to-do list:

One of the challenges, yes, finding the, just finding the time. Like, it’s, I think we also get kind of caught up in our daily work of things that we’ve got all these things on the list that we need to do, and it’s just to maintain the business, right, and all those things. And then some of this [mindfulness], I feel like, is kind of like, um, development of people, development of myself, and so making sure that those kinds of things become the priority is, it’s hard sometimes. It’s hard sometimes I feel like for me to take the time to do that for the people that work for me. And I also feel it’s hard for them to take, you know, make it a priority to do it for themselves. And I’m the same way, right like okay, okay, what do I want, how do I want to develop, but making it a priority is hard. So, I think that is definitely, um, the challenge is prioritizing and making even very important things be on the top of the list versus all the things that seem extremely urgent for that day to complete because of the [not audible], right or whatever, so I’d say that would be a challenge I would see.

Finally, connected to time and mentioned by several informants was the need for organizations to change their expectations related to productivity, quotas, and overall workload in order to practice mindfulness at work. Leo, a 43-year-old senior editor with more than 10 years as a supervisor, explained this when he stated:

I'll say this last thing, um, expectations need to be readjusted for employees' mental health. And I'm going the mental health angle with this mindfulness thing, like a collective, like organizational health, right? You can't expect the same, um, output if you're spending more time on the individual or on teams like this. I think that's actually the benefit in the long run. Um, you know, you might see increased productivity, over time, if people are healthier and happier and can, and can balance life through these mindfulness practices, if they feel safe and secure and heard, at work. Um, because, you know, how many of us have, like, woken up in the middle of the night and like thought about something at work that really angered us and just stewed on it for a while, right? You don't have that if you have like have better communication in your office. I think you have less turnover and more productivity, but maybe not at first. So, expectations need to be adjusted.

Another logistical challenge is related to the timing of the study. Data collection for this study occurred more than 2 years after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. COVID-19 stay-at-home orders forced many businesses and organizations to transition from traditional face-to-face work environments to more remote settings. As such, informants in this study observed difficulties in practicing mindfulness in these more remote settings and while using communication applications such as Slack or virtual platforms such as Zoom. According to informants, this reliance on technology countered the benefits of mindfulness by losing the face-

to-face human connection, creating technological challenges such as disruptions in audio or video connections (i.e., not being able to hear or see people), and increased occurrence of distractions (either due to multi-tasking or other people or pets in the home). Mindfulness, including mindfulness at work, is traditionally thought of as being practiced in person. As such, informants also stated that the lack of personal contact in the remote work settings resulted in behaviors such as not using cameras while on Zoom and ghosting their colleagues (e.g., being unresponsive to e-mails)—thus making the practice of mindfulness difficult at work as documented in these excerpts:

In current times, in a post-Pandemic or nearing the end of COVID, um, I'm finding there's lots of challenges um, in mindful listening. People are ghosting us. I feel like my students and the people that I work with ghost me. Do you know what I mean by ghosting? Not, not responsive, they're not, like emails, so this isn't always just face-to-face, I hope, and when you say [not audible], but they just they don't respond and, and I've seen it on all levels. Um, when you know students have reached out, not just to me, but to higher-ups, they're, they're being ghosted. And vice versa, I've reached out to students, and they ghost me. So, um, I think it goes kinda goes back to the, the willingness to participate and engage with people and want to do this. The buy-in for this is so crucial, in my opinion. And I find in this current time frame of COVID, I don't know what's going on, if it's people's mental status or what, it's a struggle, it's a struggle right now. (Molly, lecturer, 15 years of supervisory experience)

So, I was in the office a couple of months ago for an off-site, we're calling them off-sites now when we go to offices, which is hilarious. But anyway and, and after the meeting



ended, I was in the room with, with one of the people in the meeting, and we just chatted for five minutes. And it's like that 5 minutes of human interaction, and it was about the meeting, but it happened after the meeting and in a less official kind of like thing was allows you to connect in a more personal level. And I find that, that that hasn't been replaced through remote circumstances, you have to get on a call with somebody, and it always feels a little bit more formal. You know. You know, even if the recording light isn't on, it feels like you're in a very public space. And it's, and you know, you miss cues. It's harder to see, facial expressions you can pretty much get, but you know, body movements or people kind of moving in the chair or just general kind of the way people move through it. You miss things, which is, you know, it's, it's like, it's like driving in a video game versus driving in real life. You know, without the sense of being in a moving car, it's not the same, right, like you can get some of it, but you missed something. I think that's the, one of the challenges. (Stanley, 38-year-old director with 3 years of supervisory experience)

Lastly, some informants noted the practice seemed to be viewed as acceptable as long as work was completed. Thus, the practice of mindfulness appears to carry unspoken conditions that create challenges for feeling free to practice, as outlined by Jada, a 53-year-old HR Generalist when she stated:

But I can say that I do work in a place where it would, I really think it would be acceptable um, as long as your work is getting done. Now, if your, if your ability to do your job were impacted, um, which I guess, this is probably a deeper part of your study, if you take a few minutes for mindfulness, does your productivity increase, and maybe that's a part of it. But, there is that part of me, and here's my judgmental part, is going,

how come Employee A came to me and said, oh, I'm feeling so stressed, I can't get my work done, but yet they want to go take a 30-minute walk outside when they should be in here doing their work because they're complaining about not doing the work. You know, that's, I think it would take, maybe some [not audible] study, to see whether it really, you know, I would need to, I'm the data person, so I need to have the data and say, okay, these employees are all getting their work done just fine, so they could probably take, you know time to do this [mindfulness] and does that increase their [productivity]? You know, how, what does the data say?

### ***Mindfulness Tensions***

According to the informants, the practice of mindfulness at work presents interesting tensions for leaders, especially related to using mindful speech, the appropriateness of mindfulness for certain personalities or situations, applying non-judgment, and considering cultural differences.

**Mindful Speech.** In discussing mindful speech, several informants explained that using a more loving, gentle speech (Hanh, 2013) can make you look weak or soft. As such, there is a notable tension between a leader using mindful speech and how they are perceived by their employees. This tension is illustrated in the following examples:

I think it's almost the old barrier you used to hear, separation of church and state. I almost wonder if calling out a mindful practice, um, either labeled that way or referring to Buddhism, and ah saying in the company we want to implement this, there may be um, some, some, some people aren't as receptive. It might be thought of as, um, too soft.  
(Veronica, 56-year-old vice president with 18 years of supervisory experience)

Yeah, ah, I mean, I think, um, one of the challenges, I'll give you a good example, is like, ah, some of these behaviors can be again perceived as not genuine. Um, so, perception is everything here. So, um, if, if you are practicing mindful speech, you also have to like continually be trained on that, so it doesn't become ah, passive-aggressive, so it doesn't become um, like ah too weak and you're not able to get things done and, and, and I am a true fan of having radical candor. Um, and that requires more than mindful speech, it requires trust. And so, um, you should be able to say what you need to say and without mincing or having to, like, think too hard, sometimes, so I think those are some of the disadvantages. (Tonya, 40-year-old senior marketing manager with 2 years of supervisory experience)

You know, presenting the, the interaction in a very loving and caring way, you, you have to show empathy for the person, right, that's part of it, but, and being open-minded. But you also have to hold your ground to a certain extent, and you know it's, it's it, if you just lay back too much, then would that, then or will it, or if you don't keep the conversation on task, even though you're open mind, will you be too soft, right? [Not audible], I understand being soft and loving and open-minded are two separate things. So, you can be very strategic, but being very loving in the communication and open to it, but it would, it would take a lot of practice to get to both, both of those, both of those states, right?

You need a mixture. (Jefferson, 55-year-old commercial credit executive with 23 years of supervisory experience)

**Appropriateness of Mindfulness for Certain Personalities and/or Situations.** Some informants suggested that (a) not all personality types are receptive to being engaged by using

mindfulness techniques and (b) not all situations are appropriate for employing mindfulness. Given that mindfulness aims to be universally applicable, navigating the receptiveness and appropriateness of mindfulness based on personality types or situations creates a tension surrounding when and/or how to use the practice. This tension can be seen in the following excerpts:

And then I guess that, that proud part [his emotion] also kind of like slipped into distress [his emotion] of just like, um, but how does it come off to the other person I guess. The distressing part is I think I am practicing these things [mindful speech], um, and also where I work I am, I am involved with not only like, staff members that I know really well, but we also work a lot with volunteers. And so, I'm often interacting with someone that I have very little background knowledge of, like we don't have this rapport, and so, although I'm walking up thinking that I'm being, you know, cool and normal, maybe their reaction is like, oh and oftentimes they will tell me how um, you know you're, you're talking to me like I'm some kind of child. And so, I don't know what I did different, like my employees wouldn't have said something like that to me, or they seemingly don't feel that way, but this individual immediately felt like I was talking down to them. I was like, oh, that's not what I intended at all, but that was the distressing part, you know, regardless of me trying, sometimes it doesn't always work out. (Robert, a 30-year-old executive chef who has 6 years of supervisory experience)

[One of the] challenges is that everybody has, in my opinion, has a different personality, and some people may not like that approach because some people like, and they have told me, just tell me what it is. So, you know, just kind of balancing maybe this approach

with, you know, their personality in making maybe some, something that works for each person. (Shellie, 49-year-old chief executive officer with 7 years of supervisory experience)

**Non-Judgment.** According to informants, the application of non-judgment within a work setting creates a very interesting tension. In one way, judgment is needed in cases such as evaluating employees’ performance, completing project or program assessments, or determining budget allocations. Conversely, the mindfulness skill of non-judgment requires being impartial and non-evaluative by suspending judgment, removing assumptions and biases, and observing the situation, including your emotional reactions to it (Glomb et al., 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Despite the tension between needing to evaluate and remaining non-evaluative, Table 7 shows informants reacted favorably to wanting to practice this skill.

**Table 7**

*Results for Likert Statements Related to Non-Judgment in the Workplace (N = 27)*

<b>Mindfulness Skill</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Non-Judgment is something you would like to do.	4.407407407	0.6360490583
Non-Judgment is something you think is practical in the workplace.	3.703703704	1.030862776

Moreover, in their verbal interview comments, informants stated that non-judgment allows for risk-taking and innovation within an organizational culture. Additionally, non-judgment was repeatedly referenced in connection with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

initiatives in order to promote inclusion and equity, as explained by Bailey, a 37-year-old manager with 2 1/2 years of experience as a supervisor:

I think one of the advantages, um, is just around, sort of the uptick of the importance that has been placed on um, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Ah, and a lot of organizations, especially in corporate America, um, all of these companies have their own DEI initiatives, and I think, um, an advantage of bringing non-judgment tactics into that is it sort of gives you a, skill to approach some of these topics and these conversations and these different parts of your business that are going to be hard to confront. Um, it gives you these skills, you need to confront them in a more empathetic and human way, and I think that would bring overall success to the organization.

The lower mean reported in Table 7 reflects that some informants did not see non-judgment as practical and explained that having a non-judgmental approach at work is challenging and, in some cases, impossible. The types of tensions related to non-judgment in the workplace can be observed in the following excerpts:

So, there's a side of that that I wasn't really thinking about in the sense of, like, when I'm going to hire an employee, um I feel like it's practical to judge them. So, I guess I'm gonna say there, I "Neither Agree nor Disagree" because there are certain times where, there's certain aspects where judging is unacceptable. But then there's, certain aspects of, that I have to judge. And some of those things are like, um, you know physically fitness, you know, like and stuff of that nature, I do actually have to judge, because if one, if one person is going to be able to hang long or in a really hot in environment, which is our kitchen on your feet and the other person is not, that's a judgment that I'm in the unique

position to have to make for the team. (Robert, executive chef, 6 years of supervisory experience)

Oh, I'll go with "Agree," but it's remarkably hard, particularly because professional managers and supervisors strongly believe that they're in their position because of their judgment. So, practicing knowing when to have a judgment and put it aside, and knowing when I have a judgment, and I need to act on it is a critical skill, and it takes a very high-functioning individual to do that well. Um, you know if, if somebody is doing something criminal or fraudulent, I'm going to have a judgment. Should I put it aside, probably not. (Leonard, 63-year-old chief financial officer who has 30 years of experience as a supervisor)

The challenge, you know, especially in management, supervising, is you're trained, your job is making judgments, right? You do year-end evaluations, you rate employees on their performance, and you do de-briefs, where you look at what worked and didn't work, and you're making a judgment about why something was successful or not. Um, so, you're in a culture of judgment. Now judgment doesn't necessarily mean, you know, it's punitive, right, it's not. But you're assessing, you're evaluating, you're measuring, you're, you've, you've got goals, you've got quotas, and so, there's a constant, um, you're imbued in it, you're swimming in it. (Christian, 63-year-old director with 32 years of supervisory experience)

**Culture.** A unique finding that has either not been covered in other studies or only covered minimally sheds light on the importance of culture as related to mindfulness. Many

informants lead global teams with employees and colleagues who live in all parts of the world. This means that “being mindful” might look different and/or have different meanings in other cultures, and informants seem to acknowledge this and the challenges it presents. For example, Christian stated:

You know the company has offices, um, in another country where a lot of employees work. But in the U.S., the U.S. division, everybody works from home, so it’s, it’s trickier when you know 80% of your communication with your colleagues is email or Slack. We tend to do, you know, the meetings with the camera off because it makes most people more comfortable. So, some of the things that make, make it possible to have a mindful culture are a little bit more challenging in a company that is, you know, international, with two different cultures, the U.S. culture, and culture from the country of origin.

The evidence presented in this theme documents the reality of practicing mindfulness at work. While the data suggests the skills are deemed practical by the study’s informants, there are various logistical challenges that can impede the practice. Knowing and understanding these challenges and tensions has important implications for mindful leadership and the need for specific training to help managers develop this practice, to be elaborated on in the discussion in Chapter Five.

### **Theme 3: Mindfulness is Unknowingly Practiced**

The data in this study suggests that mindfulness, or aspects of mindfulness, are unknowingly being practiced at either the individual or organizational level. Furthermore, informant comments show that some organizations are integrating aspects of mindfulness within their leadership development training. Lastly, the data reveals a strong connection between mindfulness and DEI initiatives.



### *Individual Unknown Mindfulness Practices*

Most informants in this study were generally familiar with the term mindfulness. Only two informants said they either had to Google it or look it up before the interview. However, from their verbal comments, it is most intriguing to note that some informants were unknowingly practicing mindfulness because they understood and/or labeled it as something else, such as a communication practice or being kind, thoughtful, grateful, aware, and/or prayerful. Additionally, some informants thought of mindfulness as trying to be a better human, drawing upon the concepts in the Bible, or by enacting the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.” After reading my definition of mindfulness from the interview protocol, informants made comments like, “Oh, I didn’t realize that was mindfulness,” or, “I did not call it mindfulness.” Below are examples of this finding:

Like, in terms of interacting with other people in a mindful manner, I, um, think part of that was just me, you know, growing up and maturing and realizing like not everybody has the same experiences, not everybody has the same motivations, and not everybody has the same um, capabilities around communication. And so just kind of treating, ah, every interaction as, without trying to, you know, being judge, judgmental. However well that works or not, but just, you know, just trying to treat people, I guess, to use the terminology, like more mindfully, but really just, you know, be a better human, I think. So, that’s just kind of something that’s happened without necessarily actively putting the mindfulness label on it. (Kaylee, 40-year-old senior research scholar with 4 years of supervisory experience)

Later in the interview, Kaylee elaborated on this point when she said:

Yeah, I mean we all grew up, at least in the States, I would say, most of us grew up saying, like the Golden Rule, treat others as you want to be treated, and why is it that, you know, we tend to forget that as adults, you know, because it's me, you know, you don't know the day I've had. Well, okay, I don't know the day you've had either.

Well, I know it's a thing [mindfulness] people talk about. I don't have a whole lot of background in, in the definition. Ah, but having looked at your, like, the kind of communication concepts you've outlined here, um, I can say that I've done as much as I can to sort of honor those ideas, even though I wasn't maybe calling it mindfulness. I mean, I guess the way I'm approaching mindfulness is to, you know, a very supported, sort of communication style, to know, like, people can talk to me about, or I will talk to them. (Leo, senior editor with more than 10 years of supervisory experience)

Tonya, the senior marketing manager with 2 years of supervisory experience, emphasized her perception of the religious nature of mindfulness when she said:

Um, okay, um, so, what do I know much, I feel like maybe, um, the nature of mindfulness is something that is just kind of based on religion in general, right? Like so, I grew up in a pretty, um, nice southern, Baptist kind of church, it was pretty mid-sized to large. Um, so, the things that are kind of the foundations of that [mindfulness] as you described it, are the same things that are kind of biblically based on things that you should do, right? Like these are the tenants of being a good human. So, um, are they always practiced? No. And do I always see it at work? No. So, um, that kind of what is my experience with that. I think it would have been early in my life, um, from church all the way till kind of now. Do I practice in any kind of way? Yes, I still go to church, and

I'm prayerful, and I know how to sit still and be quiet and be empathetic when I need to be. Um, is it always intentional? No. Um, and, but, and I think it's one of those learned behaviors that sometimes it just comes out when you need it to.

### ***Organizational Unknown Mindfulness Practices***

According to informants, some organizations have integrated mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness into leadership development. Informants explained how companies they currently work for and/or previous companies where they worked integrated mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness within leadership development and did not formally call it mindfulness. This is evident in the following excerpts:

Again, not specifically using the mindfulness label. There um, one organization I worked at, they, um, offered management training. Um, and there were similar concepts in terms of like, okay, let's do some questionnaires or some role ah, role-playing and kind of figure out how our, ah, personal behaviors fit into, I forget the scale, but it's when, you know you have the two axes, and it's like here's your um assertiveness and there are a couple of adjectives and you kind of fall into a quadrant and think about how that plays out in your daily behaviors. And then think about, like one, of your subordinates or, or a manager like your own supervisor and think about how they might fit into the, um the, the axes and like what their approaches might be and um, how, how that factors into your interaction to the person. So, again, not the mindfulness label per se, but definitely thinking about, okay, think about your actions, think about somebody else's actions, what might be the most productive or constructive way to interact with that person, and then um, you know that might be different for every single person, and then you can apply that to situations, that kind of thing. Um, so, there's more of a human-centric focus than just,

okay, let's get the job done, and if you know someone is underperforming, just tell them to work harder. Um, there's more of, ah, yeah, human-focused approach without specifically calling it mindfulness. (Kaylee, senior research scholar, 4 years of supervisory experience)

I mean, we've had a series of, which were also implemented by this person, um of sort of the leadership training that ah, not directly coordinated with mindfulness per se but had a lot to do with sort of seeing people for who they are, rather than assigning your own judgments to them, um, accepting that there are many different kinds of people, but also many different kinds of approaches to work, and how to um, communicate with the styles that are different from your own. Um, so, I think that they are, um, sort of those are sort of related concepts. Um, so, yeah, I mean, we had some, it was pretty, ah, pretty time-intensive training around those kinds of concepts. So yeah, I mean, I would say, not to an extreme degree, have we tried to implement mindfulness, but there, there are some aspects of, of the company that seem to be leaning in that direction. (Lindy, 34-year-old director of finance operations with 7 years of supervisory experience)

Another way informants described that mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness were integrated into their organizations was in connection with DEI initiatives, with approximately 11 specific references to this connection from the 27 informants. This is evident in the following excerpts:

Um, I think I work for an organization that has a huge well-being push, right now. Right? So, since COVID, it's been incredibly, you know, all about being your own well-being. Um, I think, because of COVID, it has probably made the organization more

open and aware to, you know, people working way more than they should, people not taking PTO, not being supportive of somebody who had to take their kids to the doctor in the middle of the day. So, I do think it has played a factor into it. Um, I think, I think one of the very cool things that they do is many meetings will start with a DEI, like diversity, equity, inclusion question or thought, and it's, it's meant to be a conversation starter, and it's, I think it's to open the door to, to people's unconscious bias and all those kind of conversations. So, I think that has probably played into it. (Jessie, manager, more than 7 years of supervisory experience)

In explaining the emotion words she chose related to non-judgment, Veronica, a vice president with 18 years of supervisory experience, stated:

So, um, interested, certainly, I work to be a person who is non-judgmental. And I think I'm seen like that. However, we all have biases, and you know, have tapes in our minds and judge things. Um, but I am very interested in this as a skill set. Um, attentive, like I kind of really was reading every word, and you know, very interested in how this might be applied in a practical sense. And then cautious, I guess. I'm not sure why that word came up for me exactly, although in reading this piece about non-judgment and biases, what I thought about is, um, the awareness that more employers and workplaces are having, and how they're trying to put into practice diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Whether mindfulness was seen as integrated within leadership development or in its connection to DEI initiatives, it is interesting to note that the term mindfulness is not formally used, either intentionally or unintentionally, but instead referenced as something else. The types of references informants shared included "a human-centric focus," "a well-being push," "focus

Fridays,” “equity pauses,” “mental health training,” and “recharge days.” In some cases, informants either made recommendations that I not use words such as mindfulness or Buddhism when implementing mindfulness in the workplace or voiced their concerns about it. Highlighting this is seen in the examples below:

Well, the challenges are that we have an eclectic group of people, who, um, are going to not particularly be interested in the term Buddhism. Period. Period. Right? I mean, I think if you talked about mindfulness and strategies for communication improvement, that's one thing, but if you start saying Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Plan, I think a lot of folks are just automatically kind of fade away. So, that would be a challenge. And so, the challenge would have to be in how you presented it. (Yesra, 72-year-old director with 32 years of supervisory experience)

Both personally and work-wise, um, I have done, you know, yoga on YouTube from time to time. But for me personally, as a Christian, I made sure to, ah, to be mindful, no pun intended, of um, you know, the focus for me was on the physical strength of the stretching and the um, you know, the body connection. So, I personally kind of purposefully did not want to engage in the Buddhist side of it. (Jada, HR Generalist)

Lastly, as a vice president with 18 years of supervisory experience, Veronica made this statement about the logistical challenges of mindful speech (also presented in Theme #2), which also supports the idea of using different language to bring mindfulness to the workplace:

I think, it's almost the old barrier you used to hear, separation of church and state. I almost wonder if calling out a mindful practice, um, either labeled that way or referring

to Buddhism, and ah saying in the company we want to implement this, there may be um, some, some, some people aren't as receptive. It might be thought of as, um, too soft.

The findings in this theme suggest that individuals and organizations value mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness. Yet, they are either not well informed about the scope of the practice (i.e., what it is or what it entails) or, as evident by not using the term mindfulness, knowingly or unknowingly show a hesitancy toward it and indicate the presence of a stigma placed on the practice of mindfulness.

#### **Theme 4: Successful Integration Requires Modeling and Allocation of Resources**

As related to modeling, the interview protocol specifically asked informants how seeing their boss use mindfulness might impact them or the workplace. Listed below are the specific interview questions:

1. If your boss openly practiced mindfulness (e.g., scheduled time for mindfulness on their work calendar), how would that impact your own practice?
2. If your boss explained to you that mindfulness is acceptable and permissible to practice while at work, how would that impact your own practice?

In response to those questions, overall, informants' opinions reinforced the notion that modeling the mindfulness practice of organizational leaders is a fundamental aspect of employee buy-in and successful integration. In fact, 22 informants stated it would be positive, and five were either mixed or neutral about it (see Appendix D). However, none of my informants saw it as a negative or harmful practice. Even the informants who were more neutral still stated that having a supervisor who practiced mindfulness would help them feel more positive about their boss, company, or culture.

Additionally, the following quotes serve as evidence supporting that the practice of mindfulness is impacted by the leader-follower relationship, which in turn, determines the overall success of employee buy-in:

I think, it's really interesting it's like, we're really interested in corporate mindfulness and like in community mindfulness but where I think a lot of leaders and organizations miss, miss it completely is that if you're not a mindful leader, you can do that until you're blue in the face as an organization, and it will have zero impact on your employees because if you're not practicing, um, then they will not replicate it. (Rachel, senior vice president, 7 years of supervisory experience)

I think that's part of the value of seeing this [mindfulness] from, from a leader of some sort because, ah, like generally, you know, like you, you, you look to a manager or boss, um, to sort of like guide you in the way of doing things. So, I think that's super valuable. And, yes, it would be motivating because, um, you know, like, I see my boss as someone who has succeeded, um, professionally, and you know, me personally, like by nature, I want that, as well, like that, that, seems really nice. And I think it's so valuable to see someone, who again is like, say, C-Suite or you know, a VP or like whoever, whoever's boss is, but like seeing that they believe in this and practice it, but also will like actually talk to you about it. You know, like there, there's in terms of like, scheduling time on a calendar, you know that's like beautiful, and it's also it's like not say, passive in a negative sense, but you know it's sort of like there for folks to, to find but actually, almost assertively saying, like this is, this is great we do this at work, I think, is really



powerful, and again, it gives people like a form of, ah of inspiration and permission to, to do it.” (Martin, director, 5 years of supervisory experience)

Leaders need to have, ah, I think I wrote something about this when I filled out the, the first form [demographic questionnaire], it needs to be intentional and expected, and leaders need to model it. So, I think if leaders don’t do that, then it’s not going to show up and be practical in the workplace. (Molly, lecturer, 15 years of supervisory experience)

Related to modeling, several informants mentioned mindful listening as an important skill for leaders to practice and model. Informants stated that mindful listening is necessary for establishing trust and is essential for building and maintaining harmonious relationships, and it creates an openness wherein employees feel valued, heard, and understood. Stanley, the director with 3 years of supervisory experience, stated that mindful listening is “The cornerstone of what makes good leadership and not just leadership, but good collaboration in general.” The connection between modeling, mindful listening, and good leadership is noteworthy. As indicated in Table 6, informants ranked mindful listening highest out of all five mindfulness skills, with 11 out of 27 informants stating it would be the most practical.

A second finding related to the successful integration of mindfulness in the workplace centers on the allocation of resources. In many cases, informants explained they are receptive to mindfulness, welcome it, and find value in it but note the need for leadership support, time to practice it, and resources or tools to assist them in their integration of mindfulness within their teams and/or departments. The acknowledgment by informants of needed resources shows that the informants in this study are interested in the practice but lack the support or tools necessary to sustain the initiative. Outlined below are examples of this finding:

I think that I would want to have some funding. Um, and again, it will be for some of the activities that we don't, that aren't openly kind of sanctioned by the company. But if it was something that, you know, executives, are like, hey, we wanted this to be a priority, um, I would want to actively plan some things, um, even in because I have a small team, right now, it might even be kind of personalized. It would be something I would work with individually on with those people, instead of let's, let's all you know, take 30 minutes to, you know, do yoga or something you know, like. I would, I would expect there to be some, not just the time and, and allowances for the time, but also some money to, to implement those things. (Barry, 44-year-old associate manager with more than 5 years of supervisory experience)

I do think that if someone said, here are some great courses you can do, and I'm going, to, um, um, set up the conference room, um, as you know, one of the small conference rooms, as a timeout or a quiet space for ah, when people need a break from the screen. And I think it's just a bit, you know, yes, if somebody, if your boss was able to come up with some ways to implement things that seem to support the concepts of that, or I'm going to set up ah, you know and ask for people to come over and do workshops on um, mediation or conflict resolution. I think anytime your boss does anything like that, it's positive because then it makes you feel like it's okay. (Yesra, director, 32 years of supervisory experience)

Connected to the allocation of resources, but more specifically related to designing an organizational mindfulness program, informants shared their thoughts about topics such as program ownership, messaging/education, and the importance of choice. As related to program

ownership, Chanelle, a 51-year-old instructional designer with 3 years of supervisory experience, explained how the lack of ownership resulted in issues of consistency and sustainability. Chanelle explained:

One of the places I work now is, has tried really hard to [do] that like [a mindfulness program], but it's sort of like this thing that nobody's hired to be your mindfulness coordinator. And, you know, we've had, we read books and had authors come in and talk about things and ah, we've had a little month-long like, spend an hour a day doing this thing, but nobody's in charge of it, so it's just who happens to be passionate about it right now. And it will go on really hot and heavy for about a week and a half or two. And then it kinda of falls away because nobody, somebody's just taking this on as their passion project, and not really as a part of their job. And um, they don't even switch up leadership, it's just like somebody is like, I think we need to do this. And they go and do it and, and then you know, of course, they burn out because you can't sustain that. I think mindfulness is one of those things that you can't do mindfulness week and then have the rest of the year just be nothing.

Next, several informants mentioned the importance of messaging and the presentation of mindfulness to employees, which included the use of consistent messaging and presenting mindfulness in small chunks. These points are obvious when Yesra, the director with 32 years of supervisory experience, explained her thoughts on how to implement these mindful skills:

As I said earlier, presentation, of processes, strategies conversations, that's always the challenging part, right? How you, you know, you can't walk into, hey, we're going to now do mindful listening. Um, but I think having, um, it's, it's just like the workshops they do on campus now on diversity. I don't know if you have taken any of those. Well

the diversity training, and they do a good job at it, and they kind of start like it at a base, they said, like what is diversity. And then it's like, you know, how does it benefit to you know, blah, blah, blah. And the next thing is like strategies to improve diversity, some are operational, some personal, some are emotional. What are resources to learn more about it. So, I think, you know, they've done a good job of kind of making it more bite-sized and work their way into saying at the very end, like these are things you would not say or do, right, because they could be offensive, this is language that could be offensive or these actions that could be offensive. And, um, why does it matter, right? So, I think that same thing here, so I think the challenges that, they're not great. But I do think that how you present and/or train folks to use some of these tools is really going to be important.

Finally, there were several references related to the importance of including personal choice when implementing mindfulness. This means offering employees choices and/or different ways for them to practice mindfulness. Barry, an associate manager with more than 5 years of supervisory experience, highlights the importance of choice when discussing reflection:

I feel like, there, I think there might be some generational, um, differences in how people would accept reflection activities. Or, you know, um, I guess, I think, as long as you could make, allow for some choice, some personal choice in how that happens, I think it's absolutely a plus and would not be, it would be less challenging the more, the more personal choice. You know, maybe it's part of a personal, personal development or career development. Um, you know, you could tie it in with certain interests and make it, make it pleasurable for people, make it something they want to do.

The data indicated within this theme demonstrates how the perception of mindfulness can be positively or negatively impacted by two key variables, modeling and the allocation of

resources. The use of modeling creates a foundation for integration and buy-in. Additionally, since the data indicates that mindful listening was most often described as the most practical skill, mindful listening provides a starting point for how to initiate mindfulness in a workplace. Finally, understanding how program ownership, messaging/education, and the importance of choice relate to employee buy-in and program sustainability are key factors in perception and receptivity. These implications will be described in more detail in the Discussion section.

The identification of the four noted themes provides significant insight into how leaders perceive the practice of mindfulness. The last chapter will provide a discussion of these results, implications, and the study's conclusion.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

Much has been written on the value of mindfulness. Given the ample research supporting this practice, leaders might consider implementing mindfulness as a daily practice to take advantage of its wide-ranging benefits and applications for personal, professional, relational, and organizational contexts. However, despite the value of mindfulness, its benefits, and the timeliness of this practice as related to organizational leadership, it is unclear whether organizations and/or leaders will embrace the practice. For example, this study highlights an important discrepancy between the ideal and the reality of practicing mindfulness at work. The results from the Likert scale statements revealed that leaders want to practice the mindfulness skills presented in this study and believe those skills are practical in the workplace. And yet, informant comments also confirm various logistical challenges that compete with wanting to practice mindfulness versus what is realistic in terms of being able to practice—illustrating an overarching theme that acknowledges there are numerous benefits of mindfulness, yet the practice does require “work.” As such, this project recognizes that any movement toward encouraging leaders to integrate mindfulness into their practice will need to take full account of how it is perceived by organizational leaders in order to determine their receptiveness to the idea and obstacles to adoption. My analysis of 27 interviews with current or previous supervisors resulted in the emergence of four significant themes: (a) being mindful takes work, (b) mindfulness poses logistical challenges at work, (c) mindfulness is unknowingly practiced, and (d) successful integration requires modeling and allocation of resources. In the next section, these themes will be discussed in relation to the study’s RQ: *What are organizational leaders’ perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace?*

## **Theme 1: Being Mindful Takes Work**

Practicing mindfulness is “hard to do” at work. This finding is not explicitly addressed in the mindfulness and/or leadership literature. Instead, scholars and practitioners have traditionally placed a heavy focus on the benefits of mindfulness. As explained in the literature review, these benefits include improved physical and mental well-being, healthy relationships, and better work outcomes.

Notably, Kabat-Zinn (1990) has described the work of mindfulness by stating, “you will need to bring a particular kind of energy or motivation to your practice” (p. 31). Additionally, Kabat-Zinn (1990) explained that mindfulness does not just happen. Instead, it requires a strong dedication to the practice. Kabat-Zinn (1990) compared the mindset needed for mindfulness to that of an athlete and the commitment needed for mindfulness to the commitment an athlete makes to their training. Other scholars, including Reitz and Chaskalson (2016) and Thompson (2018), discuss commitment to the practice; however, they connect commitment to efficacy, not to work. In discussing commitment, Kabat-Zinn (1990) stated, “The athlete trains regularly, every day, rain or shine, whether she feels good or not, whether the goal seems worth it or not on any particular day” (p. 32). When confronting patients’ attitudes toward mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn (1990) encourages them to keep practicing. Kabat-Zinn (1990), while not formally describing mindfulness as “hard to do,” acknowledges that mindfulness requires a certain energy or motivation, mindset, and commitment to practice, all of which require work. As such, my interpretation of Kabat-Zinn’s (1990) beliefs regarding the type of dedication needed to practice mindfulness confirms that mindfulness does require work and can be correlated to findings within this theme. For example, many informants stated that practicing mindfulness, including the skills introduced in the interview, takes work—both physical and mental. Informants used

emotion words such as exhaustion, complicated, complex, stressed, worried, and tiring when providing their emotional response toward mindfulness skills presented in the interview.

This study highlights a disconnect between the ideal and reality of practicing mindfulness in the workplace. To the general public, myself included, mindfulness is primarily promoted with a focus on benefits, with little attention given to what is needed to be successful in practicing it. This disconnect does not align with the user's expectations, meaning the user perceives mindfulness as beneficial yet is not fully aware of the work that is required to achieve its benefits. This insight could explain the results of the positive/negative word comparison, which indicated more negative words were used when informants provided their emotional responses to the mindfulness skills.

The theme that mindfulness takes "work" is important as it contradicts its very nature of being able to induce a peaceful, calming state. While I expected references to commitment and/or dedication to surface in the data, I did not expect those references to align with the concept of work and to carry a more negative connotation. The designation of mindfulness as work is significant when related to how leaders perceive it and their receptiveness towards it. Today's organizational leaders face many unique challenges and demands. As Vann et al. (2017) explained, today's leaders are accountable for a wide variety of organizational responsibilities, such as decision-making, problem-solving, perspective-taking, conflict management, and demonstrating emotional intelligence. The workload for today's leaders is immense, and integrating a practice such as mindfulness, should not be perceived as adding or requiring additional work. This study revealed an enhanced understanding of mindfulness that recognizes the practice does require work. With this understanding, scholars and practitioners need to more accurately promote and describe the practice as requiring work in order to reap the benefits.



Doing so will address the noted disconnect and create more realistic expectations for users, positively impacting the perception of mindfulness in the workplace.

## **Theme 2: Mindfulness Poses Logistical Challenges at Work**

Time constraints, technology-altered work environments, and mindfulness tensions create logistical challenges for practicing mindfulness at work.

Mindfulness requires individuals to be aware, attentive, present in the current moment and demonstrate curiosity, openness, acceptance, and a non-judgmental attitude (Bishop et al., 2004; Glomb et al., 2011; Hanh, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). However, these mindfulness characteristics are not always easily adapted by leaders, given the complexities of today's work environment. For example, Baron et al. (2018) and Ehrlich (2017) believed that factors such as fast-paced work environments, extreme competition, and rapidly changing technology, coupled with lower budgets, the demand for faster communication and products, and the existence of multiple forms of technological distractions adversely affect leaders' ability to make decisions, think clearly, remain calm, develop meaningful relationships, and understand how to how to take care of themselves or others. Given these challenges, this study suggests that mindfulness could be helpful to managers, but engaging the practice would require intentional communication about the value of mindfulness and guidance on how to integrate it into daily routines.

### ***Time and Technological Constraints***

In order to complete work tasks mindfully, it is necessary to make time to practice mindfulness and to find ways to manage technological distractions.

**Making Time to Practice Mindfulness.** The data revealed that the majority of the informants responded favorably to the Likert statements regarding the practicality of the different mindfulness skills presented in the interview—believing the skills are practical in the workplace.

However, informants also cited time constraints as a significant challenge to their practice, with approximately 18 out of the 27 informants expressing not having enough time to practice mindfulness or use mindfulness skills when trying to complete work tasks.

As discussed in the literature review, some scholars view mindfulness as a skill that requires practice and suggest shorter intervals of time to help counter issues with time constraints and commitment to the practice. Reitz and Chaskalson (2016) provided two examples that illustrate how leaders can integrate the practice of mindfulness in shorter intervals. First, commit to practicing mindfulness daily for at least 10 minutes, as doing so will help build mindfulness skills. Second, start meetings with a “mindful minute” (p. 5), wherein some type of meditation or breathing process is practiced at the start of the meeting as a means to assist attendees in quieting their minds and promoting attentiveness to others and the moment. Supporting this, some informants in this study shared that either when they facilitated or participated in staff meetings, the meeting started with a short mindfulness activity such as a DEI question or thought meant to be a conversation starter, a quiet pause, or even a meditation. Understanding that the practice of mindfulness is both accepted and beneficial in shorter intervals of time provides deeper insights into how mindfulness can be integrated into the workplace.

Additionally, some informants suggested that in order to make time to practice mindfulness at work, senior leadership would need to change organizational expectations as related to overall workload, including productivity, quotas, and output, so that the practice of mindfulness could be integrated into the workday. As such, this study suggests that scholars and practitioners need to address the importance of changing organizational workload expectations in order to implement mindfulness practices.

**Managing Technological Distractions.** In addition to time constraints, technology-altered work environments pose challenges to practicing mindfulness at work. Previous literature has addressed issues of work-life balance and how technology has contributed to increased levels of stress and burnout (Wright et al., 2014). However, due to COVID-19, today's work environment has been further altered with an increased reliance on technology which poses additional challenges to mindfulness at work. In an attempt to integrate mindfulness into the workplace, literature has suggested the need to re-design workspaces (Good et al., 2016; Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016) but has not directly addressed how to reduce or manage technical distractions.

As noted in Table 5, the majority of the informants indicated receptiveness toward the different mindfulness skills presented in the interviewed—demonstrating informants are willing to practice the skills in their workplace. However, informants also indicated that feelings of frustration, stress, and being overwhelmed have increased as a result of today's altered work environment. While I expected to see technology impacting work-life balance as it is an ongoing issue, I did not expect the impact to be this extreme. Informants also believe the increased reliance on technology has adversely affected their ability to connect with others and that new technologies in the workplace have also brought new types of technological challenges that have further elevated levels of distraction. Interestingly, despite the negative effects of the technology-altered work environment, informant comments also show they desire to improve their leadership skills, help their employees, and develop stronger relationships with them.

Although previous literature has not directly addressed how to reduce or manage technical distractions, data gleaned from informants show examples of how they/their organizations are working to manage more technology-induced environments and promote a more human connection:

1. Recharge Days: Created with the onset of COVID-19 wherein people were not leaving their homes and were not taking time away from work, these days are intended to push people away from work and foster more work/life balance.
2. Focus Fridays: Involve refraining from e-mailing colleagues after noon on Fridays to create quiet time and enable focus.
3. Purposely Refraining from Technology: Before the start of a meeting, individuals are asked to turn off their cell phones, close e-mails, and put Do Not Disturb on instant messaging to limit distractions and foster connection with team members.
4. G-Pause: Involves employees taking a moment to pause and create serenity for themselves, focusing on what is important to them. These moments are meant to foster quietness and stillness.

Additionally, to reduce distance and promote a more human connection, informants shared examples of organizationally or personally created initiatives. For example, one informant explained that the organization he works at encourages the “personal connection” by making time to get to know one another at all levels—from a manager to their supervisor and from a manager to their direct reports. Additionally, another informant shared how she created “Mindset Mondays” as a pause before the week starts wherein individually, she meets with each employee; they set the intention for the week, listen to one another, find ways to work together, and connect on both a personal and professional level.

The relevance of the aforementioned data is that it clearly shows informants are willing to practice mindfulness yet are hindered by today’s work environment. Technology has created more distance between leaders and employees, or employees in general, making mindfulness even more important. For scholars and practitioners, this obstacle provides a clearer

understanding of the types and gravity of technical distractions that need to be addressed when considering the integration of mindfulness in the workplace. Additionally, scholars and practitioners can see from the examples cited that solutions to managing technological distractions can be relatively simple yet remain effective, which can positively impact the perception and receptiveness of mindfulness in the workplace. Lastly, while mindfulness remains a relevant topic in the workplace, scholars and practitioners need to address how to more systematically share best practices and solutions.

### *Mindfulness Tensions*

Interviews revealed several tensions informants faced when trying to practice mindfulness at work. When discussing mindfulness skills, scholars have traditionally defined a skill or concept, given examples that illustrate how to enact the skill, and/or provided a description. In this way, enacting a particular skill is presented as relatively straightforward. However, the tensions associated with the enactment of a particular skill are not addressed in the literature. I define tension here as the contradiction between a mindfulness skill and the reality of being able to enact it.

According to the informants in the study, this type of tension was experienced specifically related to using mindful speech, applying a non-judgmental approach, and wherein cultural differences are present. For example, several informants explained that using a more loving, gentle speech (Hanh, 2013) can make you look weak or soft, come off as passive-aggressive, or inhibit your ability to get your work done (i.e., being firm or holding your ground when needed). Informants also noted that not all personality types are receptive to mindful speech, nor are all situations appropriate for employing it. In trying to apply a non-judgmental approach, informants noted a contradiction between trying to remain impartial and having to

make managerial judgments, such as evaluating the qualifications of an interview candidate or assessing an employee's work performance. Furthermore, informants stated that non-judgment allows for risk-taking and innovation within an organizational culture. As such, informant comments demonstrate the importance of non-judgment and the tension for managers in creating an environment where employees know when they are in a safe space to be creative and take risks versus when managers must be evaluative. In relation to culture, informants shared how "being mindful" might look different and/or have different meanings in other cultures and explained how the forms of communication necessary to work in global environments, such as e-mail, Slack, and the Zoom camera, create a tension, a contradiction in being able to enact mindfulness.

Important to scholars is that the identification of these tensions points to a gap in the literature. While the literature reminds us what mindfulness entails, previous work has not directly addressed the tensions created for leaders when trying to integrate this practice. As such, the discovery of mindful tensions is an important contribution to this study. Recognizing these tensions demonstrate that practicing mindfulness in the workplace can be a tricky balancing act that confirms the need for mindful leadership training. Additionally, Glomb et al. (2011) explained that previous research on mindfulness utilized non-workplace settings and non-workplace samples such as students and/or patients. By talking with current or previous supervisors, this study provides useful insights that were missing from the current discussion of mindfulness in the workplace.

In summary, the logistical challenges of time constraints, technology, and tensions of mindful leadership help shed light on leaders' receptiveness to mindfulness at work. While time constraints are a barrier to adopting the practice, informants suggested viable solutions, such as

integrating mindfulness in shorter intervals of time throughout the day and changing organizational workload expectations. With respect to the changes in today's work environment and an increased reliance on technology, mindfulness in terms of listening, communicating, and connecting with employees may be a solution to the distraction and distance imposed by the reliance on technology. The identification of mindfulness tensions is extremely relevant to the study's RQ as scholars and practitioners need to understand that while the overall practice of mindfulness aims to be universally applicable, both its usage and perception can vary based on individuals (either the user and/or the recipient) and/or certain contexts and/or situations. Finally, informants expressed that the logistical challenges are not insurmountable. The types of solutions informants suggested were low to no cost, could be easily implemented, and could potentially improve perceptions of and receptiveness to mindfulness practice at work.

### **Theme 3: Mindfulness is Unknowingly Practiced**

Mindfulness, or aspects of mindfulness, are unknowingly being practiced at either the individual or organizational level. Mindfulness, as unknowingly practiced, is not directly addressed in the literature. However, what is addressed is that mindfulness is hard to define. In fact, scholars agree that mindfulness is not easily defined or operationalized (Bishop et al., 2004; Glomb et al., 2011; Good et al., 2016; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Additionally, there are many different definitions of mindfulness that may also incorporate different skills, and those skills may be referred to using a variety of names. As such, the practice of mindfulness is often labeled or known by different names.

### *Individual Unknown Mindfulness Practices*

Relevant to this study is the realization that different mindfulness skills may be labeled as something else, such as empathic listening, or known as something else, such as a Biblical concept or even the Golden Rule.

Some informants in this study were unknowingly practicing mindfulness because they understood and/or labeled it as something else, such as a communication practice or being kind, thoughtful, grateful, aware, and/or prayerful. To demonstrate this point of being unknowingly practiced, the mindfulness skill of listening, known as mindfulness listening, is sometimes labeled as empathic listening because both skills are similar in their definitions. For example, mindful listening requires being calm, relaxed, and focused and demonstrating a desire to learn another person's perspective (Shafir, 2003). Empathic listening, according to Covey (1989), means you listen to understand the whole person, their perspective, and their feelings. In examining these two definitions, we see commonalities, and central to both is the intent to understand the other person. From this examination, it is clear how the lines between the two skills are easily blurred—an individual may be practicing what they believe to be empathic listening when, in fact, they are also practicing what is referred to or known as mindful listening. Using this logic, it is understandable that informants labeled different mindfulness skills as something else, suggesting that mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness are unknowingly being practiced at the individual level.

The realization that different mindfulness skills may be labeled or known as something else is noteworthy, as it suggests there is an issue related to the messaging of mindfulness. Inconsistent or unclear messaging of mindfulness impacts its perception, including personal choice (i.e., how individuals view and practice mindfulness) as well as the stigma that sometimes



surrounds the practice. From this study, several informants noted the importance of how to present mindfulness to employees and the need for consistent messaging. As such, the data suggest that scholars and practitioners will need to address how to message mindfulness to ensure individuals know what the practice is and the skills involved in it.

**A Mindfulness/Religious Connection.** Another significant observation found that some informants thought of mindfulness as trying to be a better human, or as drawing upon the concepts in the Bible, or by enacting the Golden Rule. After reading my definition of mindfulness from the interview protocol, informants made comments like, “Oh, I didn’t realize that was mindfulness,” or, “I did not call it mindfulness.” While this finding was unexpected, what is most intriguing is the association informants made about mindfulness. Associating mindfulness with the Bible, the Golden Rule, or simply being a better human is significant because it signals that informants are connecting mindfulness to a more human-centered approach rooted in kindness toward others. As leaders themselves, informants chose to participate in this study and made comments such as they wanted to learn more about mindfulness or acquire skills that would help them be better leaders.

The association of mindfulness with a more human approach, coupled with a desire to become better leaders, confirms Petriglieri’s (2020) belief that novel approaches to leadership are needed and that the reliance on outdated theories that are proving less relevant in today’s organizational settings. As explained in the literature review, Petriglieri (2020) strongly advocated for a “truly human management” (para. 26), which recognizes the whole person—their body, spirit, intellect, and skills. Informants in this study acknowledge this, and their comments point to their acceptance of it. So, while informants may be unknowingly practicing mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness because they understood and/or labeled it as something

else, the informants' connection between mindfulness and a more human-centered approach confirms leaders show a positive perception toward mindfulness. Additionally, this connection responds to Petriglieri's (2020) call for a more human-centered approach, which is what mindfulness is. Informants' connection between mindfulness and a more human-centered approach points to mindfulness as the solution to Petriglieri's (2020) call. With this in mind, this study advances leadership practices and contributes to the literature by recommending that now is an appropriate time to integrate mindfulness practice into leadership development.

### ***Organizational Unknown Mindfulness Practices***

Nearly one-half of the informants revealed that it is not uncommon for organizations to integrate mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness within leadership development training but not always refer to it as mindfulness. This finding is supported by the literature. For example, Brendel and Bennett (2016) noted that leadership scholars and practitioners have applied more holistic approaches to leadership development programs in order to create organizational culture change initiatives. To this point, Brendel and Bennett outlined two examples: (a) *Presencing*, which was created by Senge and Scharmer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Scharmer, 2009; Senge, Scharmer, et al., 2004 ) to assist with innovation, focuses on being present in the moment and suspending judgment to envision the future as it appears and (b) *Humble Inquiry*, which was created by Schein (2013) and focuses on the Buddhist attitude of "beginner's mind" and teaches leaders to open their minds as a novice/amateur/inexpert in order to expand their creativity. These two leadership development programs integrated mindfulness as the content for the programs, but interestingly, did not use the term mindfulness in the program name or description.

While integrating mindfulness or mindfulness skills within leadership development is not novel, what is compelling is that, either intentionally or unintentionally, the term mindfulness is not always used but instead referenced as something else, contributing to the unknown use of mindfulness. In my interviews, the types of references informants shared included “a human-centric focus,” “a well-being push,” “focus Fridays,” “equity pauses,” “mental health training,” and “recharge days.” From this, a similar conclusion can be made as was made with individual unknown mindfulness practices, while organizations may be intentionally or unintentionally integrating mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness into their leadership development programs by labeling or naming it something else, mindfulness is still being integrated at the organizational level. Additionally, the types of references informants shared clearly show that organizations value mindfulness and are leaning toward a more human-centered approach to management.

The realization that mindfulness is labeled or named as something else is noteworthy as it suggests the same messaging issue noted at the individual level also exists at the organizational level. Inconsistent or unclear messaging of mindfulness impacts its perception and contributes to its stigma. The data from this study suggest that leaders are receptive to mindfulness, are willing to practice it, and believe that a human-centered approach is needed. Additionally, the data reveals that organizations are already including mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness in leadership development, supporting the value of a mindful leadership approach. For example, companies such as Google, Target, Intel, and General Mills have implemented mindfulness programs to help decrease stress and improve emotional intelligence, mental focus, listening, decision-making, and overall well-being (Schaufenbuel, 2015). As further noted by Schaufenbuel, 2015, after Intel launched their mindfulness program in 2012, *Awake@Intel*:

On average, participants report a two-point decrease (on a scale of 1 to 10) in stress and feeling overwhelmed, a three-point increase in overall happiness and well-being, and a two-point increase in new ideas, insights, mental clarity, creativity, ability to focus, quality of relationships at work, and level of engagement in meetings, projects, and team efforts— all articulated goals of the program. (para. 7)

As such, this study recommends that organizations embrace mindfulness in both name (i.e., calling it mindfulness) and in practice to fully reap its benefits and to reduce stigma. Scholars can assist with this recommendation by addressing how the messaging of mindfulness—the use of different names or labels contributes to the unknowingness of mindfulness and further increases its stigma.

**A Mindfulness/DEI Connection.** Study informants recognize an important connection—one between mindfulness and DEI. Most scholars who discuss mindfulness and leadership do not outright connect mindfulness and DEI initiatives. Yet, in the case of leadership development described above, the mindfulness literature generally addresses skills or characteristics that are aligned with or supportive of DEI initiatives. Examples include compassion (Wood, 2004), non-judgment (Glomb et al., 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), self-regulation (Bishop et al., 2004; Ehrlich, 2017; Mir & Abbasi, 2012; Wells, 2015), as well as emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and empathy (Ehrlich, 2017; Mir & Abbasi, 2012; Wells, 2015). One scholar who has made this connection directly is Shah (2021), who believes mindfulness is the answer to creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces and deems mindfulness essential for DEI. Shah (2021) states, “Mindfulness leads to self-awareness and self-acceptance. When people feel accepted, they bring their authentic selves, diverse skills, and unique ideas to the workplace. This is the core of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)” (p. 193).

Additional parallels between mindfulness and DEI are evident in the fact that mindfulness is credited with enhancing relationships through improved communication, increased compassion for self and others, and an enhanced ability to navigate conflict and interact with others empathically and with a non-judgmental approach (Glomb et al., 2011; Manusev & Harvey-Knowles, 2015). Enhancing workplace relationships helps to foster teamwork and collaboration, which are pivotal for creating an inclusive work environment and for establishing DEI.

In this study, informants seem to recognize this mindfulness/DEI relationship as they repeatedly noted parallels between mindfulness and DEI initiatives, with approximately 11 specific references to this connection from the 27 informants. This unique connection was not anticipated and is not only relevant but extremely timely. As previously explained, the United States is dealing with the grave reality of deeply rooted injustices. As such, recognizing the parallels between mindfulness and DEI is of great importance in finding solutions to counter injustices such as discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, which also impact the workplace.

In connection with finding solutions to counter injustices, it is necessary to address the topic of mindlessness. Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) directly linked mindlessness, also known as acting on autopilot, to social issues such as prejudice and stereotyping. Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) believed that mindlessness is perpetuated by the reliance on previously established behaviors, thinking, and decision-making. Drawing upon Langer and Moldoveanu's (2000) correlation of mindlessness as linked to prejudice and stereotyping, mindfulness offers solutions to countering societal and workplace injustices.

Considering that informants in this study are receptive to the practice of mindfulness, countering mindlessness with the enactment of mindfulness in today's workplace could naturally be supported within a DEI initiative and could serve to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The fact that informants recognize the connection between mindfulness and DEI in the workplace is significant because this connection has only recently been addressed in the literature (Shah, 2021). This study confirms there is a natural relationship between mindfulness and DEI, DEI could be used as a vehicle for (a) implementing mindfulness within an organization and (b) implementing mindfulness training for leaders. This finding carries implications for overcoming the stigma or resistance that can be associated with mindfulness could be reduced.

### ***The Presence of Stigma***

This theme recognizes that mindfulness is often practiced under different labels or names and highlights important perceptions surrounding what individuals and organizations know, think, and believe about mindfulness. It also raises the question, *Why is the term mindfulness, either intentionally or unintentionally, not always being used?* One answer could be the presence of stigma. As explained in the introduction and addressed in the literature review, the practice of mindfulness is associated with some stigma and resistance in Western societies due to its historical roots in Buddhism. And as expected, a few informant comments did indicate a slight presence of stigma in the workplace. For example, one informant suggested that I not use words such as mindfulness or Buddhism when implementing mindfulness in the workplace, citing concerns relating to religion, politics, and/or that it is too touchy-feely for the workplace. Another informant made clear her Christian beliefs and explained that she is careful not to enact any part of the mindfulness practice that was connected to its Buddhist roots. Lastly, two other

informants explained it was okay to call it mindfulness but suggested that I not link it to Buddhism. In total, there were four informants out of 27 who brought up issues related to stigma. With respect to this number, this study recognizes the presence of stigma exists but views it as existing at a minimal level. As previously explained, several informants in this study noted the importance of how to present mindfulness to employees and the need for consistent messaging. With this in mind, this study suggests that scholars and practitioners should place great emphasis on how mindfulness is presented and on educating individuals and organizations about what the practice is, what it involves, and, most importantly, that it is not meant to replace or negate one's religious or spiritual beliefs.

To conclude, the data in this theme present some unique findings and offer scholars and practitioners new insights into how to integrate mindfulness in the workplace. First, despite being unknowingly practiced, leaders tend to be generally receptive to mindfulness and/or aspects of mindfulness and are positively connecting mindfulness to leading with a human-centered approach. Doing so advances leadership practices. Second, while issues of stigma exist, solutions such as education and careful presentation and messaging of mindfulness could effectively counter these issues. Lastly, the mindfulness/DEI connection indicates the presence of a natural relationship between the two, thus positioning DEI as a possible vehicle for implementing mindfulness organizationally and within leadership training. Furthermore, positioning DEI within leadership training would make leadership development more robust, offering leaders the skills, tools, and solutions they need to navigate today's unique workplace challenges and relevant social issues.

#### **Theme 4: Successful Integration Requires Modeling and Allocation of Resources**

For a successful mindfulness integration, leaders need to model the behavior and allocate resources in order to increase the adoption of desired behaviors and communication.

Modeling is an important leadership behavior and is necessary for managing the expectations of followers. Both leadership and mindfulness literature denote modeling as an essential aspect of organizational change. Whether it is a new practice, program, or policy, by modeling the expectation, employees are more likely to follow, and this rings true with a mindfulness integration as well. Thompson (2017) explained, “Leaders act as role models, and their followers witness their behaviors daily” (p. 57). Connected to mindfulness, when leaders apply a mindful approach to their leadership, the positive behaviors associated with mindfulness can be modeled by followers (Thompson, 2018), which can positively impact the organizational culture. Additionally, it is essential for senior leadership to support an intervention by reinforcing its value through their own enactment (Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016). Lastly, the benefits of modeling, especially mindful modeling, extend beyond simply having followers mimic their leader’s behaviors. The combination of modeling and organizational support from senior leadership positively impacts employees in the form of higher job satisfaction and increased organizational citizenship behaviors (Ehrlich, 2017).

The importance of modeling was confirmed by at least seven of the informants in this study. The majority of informants’ opinions reflect positively toward the notion that modeling mindfulness, especially mindful listening, is a fundamental aspect of successful integration and buy-in. Additionally, informants commented that modeling mindfulness by their leadership promoted interest in the practice and fostered feelings of inspiration, empowerment, and freedom for establishing their own commitment toward the practice of mindfulness. Related to modeling,



several informants mentioned mindful listening as an important skill for leaders to practice. In their rating of the most practical skill to implement in the workplace, informants ranked mindful listening as the highest of all five skills, citing it was necessary for establishing trust and is essential for building and maintaining harmonious relationships and creating an openness wherein employees feel valued, heard, and understood.

The practice of modeling, while not novel, when connected to a mindfulness integration, offers a proven strategy and helpful insights toward a successful mindfulness integration. As this study indicated earlier, informants are connecting mindfulness to a more human-centered approach rooted in kindness toward others. In this way, the study suggests that if leaders use the term mindful leadership and if they model mindfulness, it may help reduce stigma because the term would be understood for what it is, a human-centered approach to leadership that encompasses both work and wellness. Lastly, mindful listening was ranked as the most practical skill to implement in the workplace, this newfound knowledge provides a deeper understanding of its value as related to the practice of mindfulness and suggests a starting point for a mindfulness intervention.

The second variable, the allocation of resources, was not highly visible in the literature. Most references relating to the allocation of resources centered on recommendations or tips for how to integrate mindful practices, such as redesigning workplaces and creating quiet and private spaces for people to practice mindfulness (Good et al., 2016; Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016) or, as Reitz and Chaskalson (2016) suggested, designing a “taster session” (p. 7) to gauge interest, or offering “guided meditation practice” (Reitz et al., 2020, p. 235). Interestingly, only a brief mention from Reitz et al. (2020) regarding “support from management” (p. 235) was identified.

This study makes an important contribution to the current conversation on mindful leadership by highlighting additional practices that would support its adoption in the workplace. Informants in this study explained they value the practice, yet, they also expressed the need for management support, time to practice it, and resources or tools to assist them in their integration of mindfulness within their teams and/or departments. Adding to the discussion of resource allocation, informants also outlined topics that need to be addressed when designing an organizational mindfulness program. These include: (a) program ownership by a designated person or department is needed to ensure sustainability, (b) the use of consistent messaging and the presentation of mindfulness in smaller chunks is essential for buy-in, and (c) the inclusion of personal choice for how employees want to practice mindfulness is critical for acceptance.

Because informant recommendations were based on personal experiences in organizational settings, they offer helpful and practical insights into designing a successful program. As a final point, leaders must advocate for these resources by clearly articulating the value of mindfulness for employees and the organization. For scholars and practitioners, it is essential to more fully address the need for resources in order to sustain this practice but also recognize the leverage afforded by labeling the practice as mindfulness.

In summary, this theme carries several implications for integrating mindfulness into the workplace. First, informant comments reveal a positive perception and acceptance of mindfulness when modeled by leadership, which is in alignment with the literature and, as such, strongly supports the power of modeling mindfulness as a crucial factor for successful integration. Second, mindful listening is a topic that not only resonated with informants mostly due to their familiarity with it but was also viewed positively due to its value in the workplace. Additionally, independently, both modeling and mindful listening seem to be favorably accepted.

As such, coupling them together presents a viable starting point for integrating a mindfulness program within an organization. Third, the lack of resources seems to cause frustration and create barriers that negatively impact sustaining this practice in the workplace. As such, seeking feedback from employees on the types of tools and resources they need, as well as providing support from management in the forms of funding, making time for mindfulness practice, and appointing someone who is responsible for the mindfulness program would improve leaders' perceptions of mindfulness and increase their likelihood of practicing it.

While these discussions offer valuable insights into how mindfulness is perceived by leaders and their receptiveness toward it, understanding the study's limitations provides a foundation for implications and future research.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study can be grouped into three main areas, which include participant demographics, connection to mental health, and the discovery of two leading questions.

First, the demographics of the study's participants included 23 White or Caucasian informants, three Black or African American informants, and one Hispanic informant. Given that today's workplaces are more global and that organizations are focusing on DEI initiatives, the study would have benefited from a more diverse sampling. Next, the study included 18 females and nine males. A more balanced gender representation could provide insights related to whether receptiveness toward the practice is impacted by gender. Additionally, the age range of participants was 30-72, with only 11 informants who were 50 or more years old. Perceptions and receptiveness toward the practice of mindfulness could be impacted by age. For example, informants in the age range of 30-53 made comments suggesting that younger people will be

more receptive to mindfulness and also made references to the “old guard” or “old timers” in relation to potential resistance to the practice. Interestingly, out of the four participants who mentioned stigma, three were over the age of 50, and one was under the age of 50. Having more participants over the age of 50 might have been advantageous in understanding whether there is a relationship between age, mindfulness stigma, and overall receptivity toward the idea of mindful leadership. Lastly, 13 informants were affiliated with a particular religion, 13 were not, and one informant chose not to answer. Of those affiliated with a particular religion, their described affiliations included Christian, Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Nature Spiritual. Given the concerns about stigma and resistance toward mindfulness in the workplace, including more non-Christian participants as well as agnostics and atheists might have provided a more well-rounded perspective of mindfulness.

In relation to the participant demographics, informants self-selected into this study due to their interest in the topic—either for a desire to learn new skills or techniques that would enhance their leadership abilities or because they currently or previously participated in mindfulness. Despite their reason for participation, most participants were biased toward mindfulness as they were generally open toward the topic and/or toward learning more about it.

This self-selection bias makes the discussion of stigma in this study even more noteworthy. It would have been advantageous to talk to more organizational leaders or managers who are *not* open to mindfulness in order to learn more about how to overcome obstacles to integrating mindfulness into leadership development practices.

Another potential limitation of this study is that mindfulness is often discussed in connection with supporting mental health and well-being, which was not directly addressed in this study. Mindfulness gained popularity in the 1970s with its integration into the clinical setting

for therapeutic treatment of psychological and psychiatric conditions. Given (a) the widespread awareness of and attention to mental health and (b) today's leaders are managing immense workloads and responsibilities, including a more explicit connection to mindfulness practice and mental health in the workplace would have provided an enhanced understanding surrounding the relationship between leadership and the need for mindfulness. For example, it might have been worthwhile to develop interview questions to learn more about informants' perceptions of the need to address mental health in the workplace and if they believe mindful leadership would help them support themselves and their employees. If so, it would provide a strong argument for adopting mindfulness in the workplace.

Lastly, through my discussion of the study's results, I discovered that two of my interview questions were written in a way that produced a leading effect. These questions were included in the final section of the interview protocol, wherein informants were asked two questions related to how their practice of mindfulness might be impacted if their boss openly practiced mindfulness. In retrospect, the design of these questions may have led informants to the topic of modeling and the importance of leaders modeling mindfulness as a means to promote buy-in and successful integration. As such, a more open-ended question about how leaders could integrate mindfulness into the workplace would have been more appropriate, thus ensuring accuracy and possibly generating unique insights.

### **Implications**

Existing literature on mindfulness and leadership fails to explicitly connect mindfulness, leadership, and the workplace. Glomb et al. (2011) explained that previous research on mindfulness utilized non-workplace settings and non-workplace samples such as students and/or patients. Seeking to respond to the gap in the literature and make contributions to mindfulness

and leadership literature, this study aimed to understand how mindfulness is perceived by leaders in order to determine whether it is an appropriate time to integrate mindfulness practice into leadership development. In contrast to previous research on mindfulness conducted in non-work settings, this study interviewed current or previous supervisors who work/ed in a variety of settings and industries. As such, I was able to get a sense of experienced leaders' receptiveness to mindfulness in the workplace. The analysis of data resulted in the identification of unique findings that contribute theoretical and practical implications regarding leaders' perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This study offers several contributions to leadership and mindfulness literature that have a direct impact on leaders' perception and receptiveness toward mindfulness in the workplace.

First, this study reveals that mindfulness needs to be accurately portrayed in the literature. My data confirms that mindfulness is hard to do at work, yet the literature seems to focus on its benefits, creating a disconnect between the ideal and reality of practicing mindfulness in the workplace. By identifying this disconnect, my work advances the current conversation of mindfulness practice and creates an opening for scholars to more accurately promote and describe the practice as requiring work in order to reap the benefits. Additionally, addressing the noted disconnect more accurately in the literature will create realistic expectations for users, which can positively impact the perception of mindfulness in the workplace.

Second, the analysis of the data brought to light that mindfulness carries certain tensions when practicing at work. A mindfulness tension, as I define it, is the contradiction between a mindfulness skill and the practicality of being able to enact it. While the literature reminds us what mindfulness entails, previous work has not directly addressed the tensions created for

supervisors when trying to integrate this practice, pointing to a gap in the literature. Both the identification of a mindfulness tension and my definition of it contribute to the discussion of mindfulness at work in two ways: (a) the discovery of these tensions shows that while mindfulness aims to be universally applicable, its usage and perception can vary based on individuals (either the user and/or the recipient) and certain contexts and/or situations, and 2) expanding the literature by addressing these tensions will provide leaders knowledge and tools for navigating mindfulness tensions, which may support and encourage adoption of mindfulness in the workplace.

Third, my study indicates that informants may be unknowingly practicing mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness because they understood and/or labeled it as something else. In fact, many informants associated mindfulness with the Bible, the Golden Rule, or simply being a better human. For both leadership and mindfulness literature, this is significant because it signals informants are connecting mindfulness to a more human-centered approach rooted in kindness toward others. The informants' connection between mindfulness and a more human-centered approach confirms leaders show a positive perception toward mindfulness. Additionally, this connection responds to Petriglieri's (2020) call for a more human-centered approach to management, which is what mindfulness is. Informants' connection between mindfulness and a more human-centered approach points to mindfulness as the solution to Petriglieri's (2020) call. With this in mind, this study advances leadership practices and contributes to the literature by confirming that now is an appropriate time to integrate mindfulness practice into leadership development.

## ***Practical Implications***

Beyond the theoretical implications, this study offers several practical implications that impact how mindfulness is perceived and received by organizational leaders. These implications are outlined in the form of recommendations relating to implementing mindfulness within an organization and within leadership development.

**Implementing Organizational Mindfulness.** Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations provide new insights into how organizations should consider the implementation of mindfulness:

***Changing Expectations.*** The issue of time constraints as related to the practice of mindfulness has been previously discussed in the literature, and both scholars and practitioners have recommended solutions. However, an important implication related to making time for mindfulness in the workplace is that organizations need to change their expectations related to workload, including productivity, quotas, and output. While both mindfulness and leadership literature touts the organizational benefits of mindfulness, including increased productivity, informants in this study revealed that they could not balance completing tasks mindfully while maintaining the same levels of productivity. Informants also mentioned that not adjusting expectations with a mindfulness integration actually increased employee stress, thus defeating the original intent of implementing mindfulness. With this in mind, practitioners will need to determine how organizational workloads and output expectations can be adjusted so that mindfulness practices can be integrated.

***Managing Technological Distractions.*** Work-life balance and increased levels of stress and burnout connected to technology use are ongoing issues in the workplace. This study found these concerns have been compounded due to COVID-19, which has increased reliance on



technology in the workplace, creating more distance between employees and further diminishing the “human connection.” This study indicates that solutions to this issue can be relatively simple and customized based on the work settings, industries, and preferences of employees. As indicated by informants, examples of solutions include recharge days, focus Fridays, and g-pause, all of which involve an intentional refraining from technology. To create a more favorable acceptance of mindfulness in the workplace, practitioners will need to address the issue of technology-altered work environments when considering mindfulness in the workplace and involve employees in discussions related to creating solutions. Furthermore, given technology-altered work environments will remain a constant challenge, practitioners should look for methods to systematically share best practices and solutions.

*Allocations of Resources.* An interesting discovery from this study is that while the topic of mindfulness has received a significant amount of coverage, there is a limited discussion by scholars and practitioners about the allocation of resources, either individually or organizationally. From this study, informants viewed individual resources as the need for management support, time to practice it, and resources or tools to assist them in their integration of mindfulness within their teams and/or departments. From the organizational perspective, informants also outlined topics that need to be addressed when designing an organizational mindfulness program. These include (a) program ownership by a designated person or department is needed to ensure sustainability, (b) the use of consistent messaging and the presentation of mindfulness in smaller chunks is essential for buy-in, and (c) the inclusion of personal choice for how employees want to practice mindfulness is critical for acceptance.

The identification of the limited coverage regarding the resources needed to practice mindfulness shows a deficiency and reveals an opportunity for practitioners to address this area

through education and the identification of best practices. Practitioners will need to have important discussions with senior leadership about how to demonstrate support for the practice, including the viability of allocating time for employees to practice and the feasibility of providing funding and tools to assist with sustaining the practice. Furthermore, to promote buy-in and ensure the sustainability of an organizational mindfulness intervention, practitioners need to address how to appropriately customize programs to account for ownership, messaging, presentation of mindfulness, and personal choice. Beyond addressing these components, it is highly recommended that practitioners involve employees in the program design via the creation of an employee task force. Involving employees in this way increases the likelihood of buy-in.

***Modeling.*** While the relationship between leadership and modeling is already recognized by scholars and practitioners as essential for creating organizational change, modeling mindfulness by leaders was confirmed by informants as a crucial factor for a successful mindfulness intervention. Supporting this, Schaufenbuel (2015) stated, “Managers who model and promote mindful practices with their teams create an environment of engagement” (para. 2). Additionally, several informants mentioned the importance of messaging, as in promoting or marketing mindfulness to employees, and the presentation of mindfulness to employees, as in how mindfulness is presented to employees.

In this way, this study suggests to practitioners that modeling is not only effective for a successful mindfulness intervention but it is also an effective way to promote and present mindfulness to employees.

**Implementing Mindfulness Into Leadership Development.** The findings of this study offer practitioners new insights into how mindfulness can be integrated into leadership development.

***Messaging and Naming.*** Practitioners and scholars should give careful consideration to the messaging of mindfulness and to the naming of a mindfulness initiative. Related to messaging of mindfulness, this study confirms the following: (a) mindfulness is practiced under different labels or names, (b) not using the term mindfulness may contribute to the confusion about what mindfulness is and prevent individuals and organizations from it reaping its full benefits, and (c) stigma does exist but only at a minimal level. With this in mind, practitioners should place great emphasis on how to message mindfulness and how it is presented to employees. To do this, practitioners should focus efforts on educating individuals and organizations about what the practice is, what it involves, and, most importantly, it is not meant to replace or negate one's religious or spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, practitioners can guide organizations in the messaging of mindfulness and steer them away from the use of different names or labels in order to counter the unknowingness of mindfulness and to help decrease stigma.

In regards to naming, my data reveals that leaders are receptive to mindfulness and that organizations are already including mindfulness or aspects of mindfulness in leadership development, confirming the value of a mindful leadership approach. In this way, the study suggests that if leaders use the term mindful leadership and if they model mindfulness, it may help reduce stigma because the term would be understood for what it is, a human-centered approach. As such, this study recommends the term mindfulness be used and fully embraced by leaders and the organizations they work for. By fully embracing mindfulness in both name (i.e., calling it mindfulness) and in practice, leaders and organizations will more fully reap its benefits. Finally, practitioners should work with leaders to increase their discipline and commitment toward the practice, even if only in short time intervals. Leaders' commitment to the practice is

pivotal in creating a dominion effect, positively impacting modeling and, from that, employee buy-in.

**Training.** As noted in the literature and confirmed by study informants, integrating mindfulness into leadership development is already occurring despite not always being named or referred to as mindfulness. Additionally, from this study, informants indicated they were receptive to mindfulness practice and skills. As such, this study recognizes integrating mindfulness into leadership training is an effective method for successfully implementing the practice in the workplace, and practitioners should continue utilizing leadership training as a method for integration. However, as previously explained, practitioners should use the label of mindfulness to ensure consistent messaging, focusing on mindfulness as a human-centered approach with benefits to both work and wellness.

Beyond that, and most relevant to practitioners is that informants in this study are connecting mindfulness with DEI and DEI initiatives. This is a significant connection and was only found to be noted by one scholar (Shah, 2021). Given DEI programs and initiatives are becoming increasingly important in today's organizations, practitioners should also consider DEI as another method for integrating mindfulness into leadership development.

As a final note about DEI, given its parallels to mindfulness and a foundation rooted in kindness to all, DEI makes a suitable place to house my "Return to Buddhist Roots" approach, as explained in the introduction. Hyland (2017) noted that mindfulness has been commodified, producing McM mindfulness, a commercialized version of mindfulness that ignores its ethical roots of meditation and traditional foundations and, as such, defeats its true benefits. As a means to counter McM mindfulness, I recommend that practitioners design content for DEI that honors the values of Buddhism, which include compassion, honesty, kind and loving speech, respect toward

all living things, doing useful work, being helpful to others, encouraging good thoughts, being mindful, and practicing meditation in order to calm the mind (United Religions Initiative, 2023). While this study recognizes the minimal presence of stigma, this type of DEI content would not employ the name Buddhism, but rather its fundamentals and values, which this study has confirmed are viable. For example, the informants in this study were receptive to the mindfulness skills I presented in the interview, which align with some of the Buddhist tenets. Additionally, integrating skills that draw on those tenants and values is also in alignment with a human-centered approach. As such, this type of DEI content would enhance initiatives toward creating inclusive work environments and would offer leaders new approaches to the practice of mindfulness and the enactment of leadership. Finally, this type of DEI content would give leaders the skills, tools, and solutions they need to navigate today's unique workplace challenges and relevant social issues.

***Content and Proportion.*** When determining how mindfulness can be integrated into leadership development, practitioners need to consider two important factors, content, and proportion. By proportion, I mean the amount or quantity of content. First, in considering content for leadership development, this study recommends that practitioners use the five mindfulness skills presented in this study as an initial foundation, with mindfulness listening as the starting point. This recommendation is based on the following: (a) informants responded favorably to the five skills presented in this study, (b) some of these skills were known to informants by other names/labels (e.g., mindful listening), or were already practiced in some form (e.g., reflection), indicating familiarity, and (c) all five skills can be connected to a more human-centered approach to management rooted in kindness toward others.

Second, as related to proportion, one informant commented that training should focus on presenting mindfulness in smaller, “bite-size” chunks. While this was the only reference to the amount or quantity of content that should be covered, it proves valuable, given it is based on a “user’s perspective.” Additionally, this comment is also in line with concerns about time constraints and the belief that practicing mindfulness should not create more work for leaders. As such, practitioners need to take into consideration the amount of mindfulness content that should be included within leadership development programs, as this can positively or negatively impact leaders’ perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace. In light of these implications, the study identifies several topics for future research, which are outlined in the following section.

### **Future Research**

Given the interviews revealed that leaders were willing to practice the mindfulness skills presented in this study and that they believed those skills were practical in the workplace, future research on leaders’ perceptions of mindfulness in the workplace offers a variety of avenues to explore. Several areas emerged as relevant topics for future research on mindful leadership, such as gender and age, culture, technology, and mental health. Examples are discussed below.

#### ***Gender and Age***

Some informants made comments in regard to how mindfulness might be perceived, received, or enacted at work based on gender and/or age. For example, are older or younger leaders more or less receptive to the practice? Also, are women more receptive to mindfulness than men? These demographic factors might carry unique observations toward the perception of mindfulness in the workplace, which would advance this study’s findings.

## ***Culture***

Future studies should also explore mindfulness at work in relation to culture—specifically, cultural norms and expectations. Based on informant comments and their personal experiences, the topic of culture and mindfulness at work presents distinctive challenges. As was previously noted, today’s work environments are more global, and employees are based all around the world. When considering implementing mindfulness, an organization will also need to consider its global employees and understand that mindfulness may be perceived and enacted differently based on cultural norms and expectations. As such, a study that focuses on the relationship between culture, the workplace, and mindfulness would be advantageous for today’s global workplace and its leadership.

## ***Technology***

This study also revealed how the practice of mindfulness has been impacted by an increased reliance on technology as a result of remote settings, communication applications, and virtual platforms. In comparison to the traditional face-to-face practice of mindfulness, informants observed difficulties in practicing mindfulness virtually. Conducting research on leaders’ perceptions and receptiveness toward technology and mindfulness in the workplace could provide useful information related to how leaders can practice mindfulness within technology-induced work settings.

## ***Mental Health***

In response to an informant who voiced questions about why my study did not include mental health, I identified mental health as a limitation of this study, and I also consider it a serious topic in the workplace that warrants further research. As previously noted, today’s leaders are managing immense workloads, balancing numerous responsibilities, and navigating

unique organizational demands and social issues. In my study, data shows that informants were open to mindfulness. Furthermore, they also expressed they were searching for ways to become better leaders and seeking strategies for managing their workload. As such, a study that looks at leaders' perceptions of mental health and mindfulness in the workplace would be timely, given we are in the midst of a mental crisis. Mindfulness has numerous benefits and provides essential coping mechanisms. As such, it could provide valuable strategies and best practices enabling leaders to more effectively manage their workload and responsibilities, care for their employees, and, more importantly, care for themselves.

Finally, to conclude this section and to fully understand leaders' perceptions and receptiveness toward mindfulness in the workplace, two final recommendations for future work include:

1. Conducting a study that compares the practice of mindfulness when integrated into different industries. Several informants made references that the perceptions and receptiveness to mindfulness would be different based on different industries—citing work environments, demands, and expectations vary by industry and not all industries or work environments are conducive to the practice of mindfulness.
2. Designing a study that could tangibly measure and display the benefits of mindfulness and link those benefits to an organization's bottom line. This recommendation was suggested by one informant as a way to create more support from organizational leaders for implementing and sustaining mindfulness within the workplace. As such, this type of study could provide valuable data related to leaders' perceptions of mindfulness.



## **Conclusion**

This study confirms that leaders perceive mindfulness in the workplace as favorable and practical. Those perceptions, coupled with the findings and data collected in this study, demonstrate that now is an appropriate time to integrate mindfulness practice into leadership development. The data gleaned from the 27 interviews provide credible insights from leaders who work or worked in a variety of industries and settings, bringing unique perspectives of mindfulness from real-world work settings, including its benefits and challenges. This sampling is in contrast to other studies on mindfulness that have used student samples or been conducted in a clinical setting (Glomb, 2011). As such, the study has made contributions to leadership and mindfulness scholarship and responds to the gap in the literature by explicitly connecting mindfulness, leadership, and the workplace, which was missing from previous discussions. This connection offers newfound knowledge and insights regarding the adoption of mindfulness and the workplace.

First, informants link mindfulness with a human-centered approach rooted in kindness toward all, responding to Petriglieri's (2020) call for a more human-centered approach to management. This is of significance as a human-centered approach provides leaders with a clear and specific way of communicating with their employees that enhances personal and professional relationships as well as their ability to effectively navigate today's organizational challenges, such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, and employee mental health and wellbeing.

Second, this study identified that leaders are receptive toward mindfulness and believe in the power of modeling it, and they link mindfulness to a human-centered approach. Additionally, organizations value the practice as they are already integrating it into leadership development.

However, intentionally or not, the term mindfulness is not always used, either because individuals and organizational leaders are adopting mindfulness principles unknowingly or due to perceived stigma. While interviews in this study confirmed some level of stigma exists, it appears to be at a minimal level. As such, the study contributes a recommendation that leaders and organizations fully embrace the use of the term mindfulness. Fully embracing the term mindfulness can promote commitment and modeling from leaders, reduce stigma and create a welcoming environment for buy-in, wherein all members of the organization can reap the benefits of mindfulness, such as improved mental and physical health and overall well-being, reduced stress, healthier relationships, increased focus, and better work outcomes. As such, this opens the door to overcoming the challenge of McMindfulness, a term that suggests many organizations use a watered-down version of mindfulness (Hyland, 2017).

The receptiveness found to mindfulness in this study supports those few existing studies that have investigated the impact of mindfulness training for leadership development (Brendel et al., 2016). Given the unique challenges and relevant social issues leaders are navigating today, specialized training and skills development that foster self- and other awareness, such as mindfulness, could be transformational for our workplaces. The aforementioned data collected in this study, coupled with the recommendation to fully embrace the term mindfulness, provide a strong foundation for future research in this area and confirm that the time is ripe for additional research on and practice of mindful leadership.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### IRB Approved Demographic Questionnaire

#### General Information:

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What gender do you identify with? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you affiliate with a particular religion? If so, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Education and Work Experience:

Highest level of education obtained: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of full-time work status: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of industry: \_\_\_\_\_

Job title: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you or have you previously been in a supervisory role? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes,

How many years have you been a supervisor? \_\_\_\_\_

How many individuals have you supervised? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, are you on a track to supervise others in the future? \_\_\_\_\_

#### BASELINE QUESTION REGARDING MINDFULNESS:

For this study, the definition of mindfulness recognizes mindfulness as an experience that also includes enactment. Below, please read the definition of mindfulness provided, and then please answer the following question. Additionally, you may keep this definition with you and refer to it as needed throughout the interview. Lastly, prior to the interview, please e-mail this completed document to Lori Mackowski at lamackow@ncsu.edu.

**Definition of Mindfulness:** To experience mindfulness, one must be fully present in each moment, practice both observance and regulation of both the internal and external stimuli by means of stillness, awareness, and attentiveness, and requires an acceptance of what is, balanced through a spirit of inquiry, and a non-judgmental attitude. To enact mindfulness, one applies the experiential aspects of mindfulness to their interactions with others in a compassionate and empathic way by means of mindful speech and mindful listening.

**Baseline Question:** In your management position (current or past), what is your opinion about applying a mindfulness approach to those you supervise?

## Appendix B

### IRB Approved Interview Protocol With Transitions

There are three main categories of Interview Questions: 1) Experiences with Mindfulness, 2) Introduction of Specific Skills, and 3) End of Interview Questions

#### EXPERIENCES WITH MINDFULNESS

1. What are your experiences with mindfulness?

Possible follow-up questions:

- If you practice mindfulness, what are some of your successes? What do you see as some of your challenges with practicing mindfulness?
- If you practice mindfulness, what tools/apps or ways do you practice being mindful (e.g., meditation)?

2. Have you worked at an organization that tried to implement mindfulness?

Possible follow-up questions:

- If yes, what do you see as the organization's successes?
- What do you see as their challenges?

#### INTRODUCTION OF SPECIFIC SKILLS

##### SKILL#1: MINDFUL SPEECH

Mindful speech requires Right Diligence and Right Speech, which are components of Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path. Mindful speech is created by using loving speech, a gentle speech in which the individual lets go of all anger, fear, and suspicion in an effort to understand another person.

1. Using the listing of emotions below, select the top 3 emotions you associate with when you think of mindful speech -- *How does this skill make you feel? Or, How would you feel if you were asked to practice this skill at work?* For each emotion you select, explain why you would feel that way.

<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b>	<b>NEGATIVE EMOTIONS</b>
1. Enthusiastic/Excited	1. Afraid/Scared
2. Interested	2. Upset
3. Inspired	3. Distressed
4. Alert	4. Jittery/Nervous
5. Active	5. Ashamed
6. Proud	6. Irritable
7. Attentive	7. Hostile

2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree, and 5 being Strongly Agree, how would you answer these statements:

<b>Mindful Speech</b>	<b>1 – Strongly disagree</b>	<b>2 – Disagree</b>	<b>3 – Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>4 – Agree</b>	<b>5 – Strongly agree</b>
Mindful Speech is something you would like to do.					
Mindful Speech is something you think is practical in the workplace.					

**RECAP:** Mindful speech requires Right Diligence and Right Speech, which are components of Buddhism’s Noble Eightfold Path. Mindful speech is created by using loving speech, a gentle speech in which the individual lets go of all anger, fear, and suspicion in an effort to understand another person.

3. What advantages or challenges do you see in integrating the practice of mindful speech in your workplace?

**SKILL #2: MINDFUL LISTENING.**

Mindful listening requires being calm, relaxed, focused, and demonstrating a desire to learn another person’s perspective. Practicing mindful listening allows people to feel valued and understood, which promotes trust and respect.

1. Using the listing of emotions below, select the top 3 emotions you associate with when you think of mindful listening -- *How does this skill make you feel? Or, How would you feel if you were asked to practice this skill at work?* For each emotion you select, explain why you would feel that way.

<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b>	<b>NEGATIVE EMOTIONS</b>
1. Enthusiastic/Excited	1. Afraid/Scared
2. Interested	2. Upset
3. Inspired	3. Distressed
4. Alert	4. Jittery/Nervous
5. Active	5. Ashamed
6. Proud	6. Irritable
7. Attentive	7. Hostile

2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree, how would you answer these statements:

<b>Mindful Listening</b>	<b>1 – Strongly disagree</b>	<b>2 – Disagree</b>	<b>3 – Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>4 – Agree</b>	<b>5 – Strongly agree</b>
Mindful Listening is something you would like to do.					
Mindful Listening is something you think is practical in the workplace.					

RECAP: Mindful listening requires being calm, relaxed, focused, and demonstrating a desire to learn another person’s perspective. Practicing mindful listening allows people to feel valued and understood, which promotes trust and respect.

3. What advantages or challenges do you see in integrating the practice of mindful listening in your workplace?

**SKILL #3: NON-JUDGMENT:**

When practicing mindfulness, it is necessary to recognize your own judging habits while intentionally suspending these judgments by being impartial and simply observing what is happening, including your emotions/reactions. Non-judgment requires removing all personal assumptions or biases.

1. Using the listing of emotions provided below, select the top 3 emotions you associate with when you think of non-judgment -- *How does this skill make you feel? Or, How would you feel if you were asked to practice this skill at work?* For each emotion you select, explain why you would feel that way.

<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b>	<b>NEGATIVE EMOTIONS</b>
1. Enthusiastic/Excited	1. Afraid/Scared
2. Interested	2. Upset
3. Inspired	3. Distressed
4. Alert	4. Jittery/Nervous
5. Active	5. Ashamed
6. Proud	6. Irritable
7. Attentive	7. Hostile

2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree, and 5 being Strongly Agree, how would you answer these statements:

<b>Non-Judgment</b>	<b>1 – Strongly disagree</b>	<b>2 – Disagree</b>	<b>3 – Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>4 – Agree</b>	<b>5 – Strongly agree</b>
Non-Judgment is something you would like to do.					
Non-Judgment is something you think is practical in the workplace.					

**RECAP:** When practicing mindfulness, it is necessary to recognize your own judging habits while intentionally suspending these judgments by being impartial and simply observing what is happening, including your emotions/reactions. Non-judgment requires removing all personal assumptions or biases.

3. What advantages or challenges do you see in integrating a non-judgmental approach in your workplace?

**SKILL #4: SELF-REGULATION AND SUSTAINED ATTENTION**

Practicing self-regulation and sustained attention requires observing one’s feelings, thoughts, and sensations in the current moment and maintaining attention to the current experience over a period of time.

1. Using the listing of emotions provided below, select the top 3 emotions you associate with when you think of Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention -- *How does this skill make you feel? Or, How would you feel if you were asked to practice this skill at work?* For each emotion you select, explain why you would feel that way.

<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b>	<b>NEGATIVE EMOTIONS</b>
1. Enthusiastic/Excited	1. Afraid/Scared
2. Interested	2. Upset
3. Inspired	3. Distressed
4. Alert	4. Jittery/Nervous
5. Active	5. Ashamed
6. Proud	6. Irritable
7. Attentive	7. Hostile

2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree, and 5 being Strongly Agree, how would you answer these statements:

<b>Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention</b>	<b>1 – Strongly disagree</b>	<b>2 – Disagree</b>	<b>3 – Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>4 – Agree</b>	<b>5 – Strongly agree</b>
Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention is something you would like to do.					
Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention is something you think is practical in the workplace.					



RECAP: Practicing self-regulation and sustained attention requires observing one’s feelings, thoughts, and sensations in the current moment and maintaining attention to the current experience over a period of time.

3. What advantages or challenges do you see in integrating the practice of self-regulation and sustained attention in your workplace?

**SKILL #5: REFLECTION:**

Reflective practice is known as a process of “stepping back” in order to critically reflect upon what has happened either to ourselves and/or others and helps to develop self-awareness. Reflection can include the following types of activities: reflective journaling or writing, membership in learning communities, and/or skills assessments such as Myers-Briggs.

1. Using the listing of emotions provided below, select the top 3 emotions you associate with when you think of Reflection -- *How does this skill make you feel? Or, How would you feel if you were asked to practice this skill at work?* For each emotion you select, explain why you would feel that way.

<b>POSITIVE EMOTIONS</b>	<b>NEGATIVE EMOTIONS</b>
1. Enthusiastic/Excited	1. Afraid/Scared
2. Interested	2. Upset
3. Inspired	3. Distressed
4. Alert	4. Jittery/Nervous
5. Active	5. Ashamed
6. Proud	6. Irritable
7. Attentive	7. Hostile

2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree, how would you answer these statements:

<b>Reflection</b>	<b>1 – Strongly disagree</b>	<b>2 – Disagree</b>	<b>3 – Neither agree or disagree</b>	<b>4 – Agree</b>	<b>5 – Strongly agree</b>
Reflection is something you would like to do.					
Reflection is something you think is practical in the workplace.					

RECAP: Reflective practice is known as a process of “stepping back” in order to critically reflect upon what has happened either to ourselves and/or others and helps to develop self-awareness. Reflection can include the following types of activities: reflective journaling or writing, membership in learning communities, and/or skills assessments such as Myers-Briggs.

3. What advantages or challenges do you see in integrating the practice of Reflection in your workplace?

**FINAL QUESTION FOR THIS SECTION:** From the 5 skills just discussed, which one stands out as the most practical to put into practice in the workplace? Why would you say that skill is the most practical?

1. Mindful Speech
2. Mindful Listening
3. Non-Judgment
4. Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention
5. Reflection

**END OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

1. If your boss openly practiced mindfulness (e.g., scheduled time for mindfulness on their work calendar), how would that impact your own practice?
2. If your boss explained to you that mindfulness is acceptable and permissible to practice while at work, how would that impact your own practice?

## Appendix C

### Summary of Emotional Responses

#### Mindful Speech

Types of Positive Emotions	Types of Negative Emotions
<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Interested, Inspired, Attentive, Active, Alert, Proud, Enthusiastic/Excited</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Comfortable, Surprise, Curious</p>	<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Ashamed, Distressed, Jittery/Nervous, Irritable, Afraid/Scared</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Exhaustion, Hesitant</p>

#### Mindful Listening

Types of Positive Emotions	Types of Negative Emotions
<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Attentive, Active, Inspired, Enthusiastic/Excited, Excited, Proud, Alert, Interested,</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Reverent, Meaningful, Supportive</p>	<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Jittery/Nervous, Nervous/Concerned, Upset, Nervous, Irritable, Afraid/Scared, Afraid,</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Exhausted, Hopeless</p>

#### Non-Judgement

Types of Positive Emotions	Types of Negative Emotions
<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Alert, Attentive, Enthusiastic, Active, Interested, Inspired, Excited, Proud,</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Beautiful, Supportive, Aspire Forgiving</p>	<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Jittery/Nervous, Afraid, Ashamed, Afraid/Scared, Upset/Distressed, Nervous, Distressed, Upset, Irritable</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Hesitant, Apprehensive &amp; Afraid, Cautious, Skeptical, Rebellious/Resistant, Neutral, Tentative, Forgiving</p>

### Self-Regulation and Sustained Attention

Types of Positive Emotions	Types of Negative Emotions
<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Inspired, Alert, Interested, Attentive, Active, Enthusiastic, Enthusiastic/Excited</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> None</p>	<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Afraid/Scared, Jittery/Nervous, Ashamed, Nervous, Scared, Irritable, Distressed, Upset/Frustrated, Exhausted, Tiring, Nervous,</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Disappointed (wistful, ashamed, convicted), Complicated, Complex, Important and Necessary, Worried/Stressed, Fear, Qualified Agreement, Hesitation, Situationally Dependent, Challenged,</p>

### Reflection

Types of Positive Emotions	Types of Negative Emotions
<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Inspired, Interested, Active, Proud, Attentive, Enthusiastic, Excited, Proud, Alert, Inspirational</p> <p>2 individuals stated: All 7 of the positive emotions: Enthusiastic/Excited, Interested, Inspired, Alert, Active, Proud, Attentive</p> <p><b>Unique Emotions Stated:</b> Self-Interested, Supportive, Useful,</p>	<p><b>Reoccurring Emotions:</b> Irritable, Ashamed, Upset, Distressed, Afraid, Overwhelmed, Unenthused, Afraid/Scared, Upset, Distressed, Jittery/Nervous</p> <p>Hostile, Fear, Situational, An Imperative,</p>

## Appendix D

### Summary for How the Practice of Mindfulness Would Be Impacted by Their Boss' Practice

**Question #1:** If your boss openly practiced mindfulness (e.g., scheduled time for mindfulness on their work calendar), how would that impact your own practice?

#### **22 Positive Responses With the Following Types of Remark Stated:**

- It would make me want to do it. / It would inspire me to do it.
- I would be more apt to do it. / I would be interested in trying it.
- It's okay for me to do it too. / It would give me permission to do it.
- It would make me feel empowered. / I would feel wonderful!
- I would think it is a priority. / I should be doing this too.
- I would be more open to it.
- Seeing leadership do it would make me want to do it. I would see it is not just lip service. It would set the tone.
- I think it would be great. / It would be highly positive.
- That would be a game-changer! / That would be big!

#### **5 Mixed or Neutral Responses With the Following Types of Remarks Stated:**

- It would not affect me, but it would affect my perception of the company that the company values this practice.
- Glad they are doing it
- It would not influence me too much. / It would not impact me at all.

**Note:** No negative responses were identified in response to this question.

**Question #2:** If your boss explained to you that mindfulness is acceptable and permissible to practice while at work, how would that impact your own practice?

#### **11 Positive Responses With the Following Types of Remarks Stated:**

- It would make me feel empowered.
- I would be open to doing it. / I would be more receptive.
- It would allow me to be more open about it and set the expectation for everyone else
- I think it would be cool.
- Seeing leadership believe in and practice it—it's beautiful.
- If I am allowed, I would practice it. It's a great thing.
- I think it would be good; it would be positive.

#### **15 Mixed or Neutral Responses With the Following Types of Remarks Stated:**

- Not nearly as powerful as the first question. But feels like an organizational value or expectation.
- Would need time allocations and funding
- Not only saying it is allowed or permissible but also offering support
- Can't just be an item to check off the "to-do" list
- It would not impact my practice because I already do it.

- It's all leadership and culture, and implementing this is about leadership.
- I welcome mindfulness but don't want to feel pressure to do it.
- I can't do it in my staff meetings because they are too large. I would do this on an individual level.
- It may cause a decrease in productivity at first, but in the long run, people will be happier.
- I would spend more time. And how much time is permissible?
- What would impact me is not only knowing it is acceptable and permissible but also giving the tools to create the time to be mindful.
- It would not impact me as mindfulness is not about carving out time; it is about a way of living.
- How would it be viewed? People might question the necessity of it in relation to actually getting work done.
- I don't think it would impact me at all.

**No response:** 1 no response as interview time ran out

**Note:** No negative responses were identified in response to this question.