



The purpose of this paper is to present findings that help clarify the process of behavioral development that may be involved, as well as contributing to a better understanding of why leaders attribute improved effectiveness to mindfulness. Data were collected through 42 modified behavioral-event interviews with senior organizational leaders from ten countries.

The authors cite additional studies that reported the beneficial effects on mental focus, academic performance, and emotional intelligence (EI), as well as indications of a positive relationship to employee work engagement (Leroy et al., 2013) and specific aspects of job performance (Dane and Brummel, 2014; Glomb et al., 2011; Dane, 2011). EI can be viewed as a framework that links elements of personality with a theory of action and job performance. Also relevant to this study is EI literature reporting that mindfulness has been shown to have a positive impact on competencies associated with improved leadership effectiveness, as well as establishing a link between mindfulness and higher overall levels of EI (Davidson, 2012; Kerr et al., 2013; Baer et al., 2006; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Schutte and Malouff, 2011; Sinclair and Feigenbaum, 2012; Snowden et al., 2015; Harrison and Clough, 2006; Rosete and Ciarrochi, 2005; Bar-On and Parker, 2000; George, 2000; Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

This study was designed with the intention of helping to better understand why, in the absence of conclusive evidence, organizational leaders chose to invest in mindfulness training and practice. The major themes emerging from data analysis referenced changes to awareness, and development of behaviors contributing to improved leadership effectiveness. All study participants reported that mindfulness contributed to positive, enduring changes to awareness. These changes were described as being the catalyst for conscious development of specific behaviors intended to improve their leadership effectiveness. Descriptions of personal transformation also included changes in the way many leaders thought and felt about others. This included a significant increase in the value they placed on the opinions and contributions of their coworkers, which contributed to more productive working relationships. This change was related to new realizations about their own fallibility, as well as recognition of unrealistic expectations about how they should be treated in the workplace as a leader. It also contributed to an understanding of the importance of trust and empathy in workplace relationships. Mindfulness was also credited with helping to earn the trust of subordinates, peers, and superiors, as well as articulate vision and create emotional appeal.

The third finding focuses on reports of improved cognitive function in multiple areas, such as attentional focus, decision making, and deliberate management of reactions associated with interpersonal conflict. Participants also mentioned consciously developing better abilities to manage external distractions and judgmental thinking. Other examples included positive changes to environmental observation and information-gathering capabilities, and also referenced more effective responses during times of crisis. Many of these descriptions aligned with the way mindfulness is believed to help minimize cognitive impairment

caused by stress. Furthermore, participants' descriptions of improved self-awareness and cognitive function appear to support literature indicating that mindfulness affects areas of the brain that influence perception, emotional regulation, introspection, complex thinking, sense of self, and other internal functions that influence behavior (Congleton et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2014; Frewen et al., 2010).

These reports align with research indicating that mindfulness assists practitioners with reductions in anxiety and stress levels, in addition to contributing to positive changes in mood, strengthening emotional self-management, and the ability to redirect attention to present-moment sensory awareness (Johnson et al., 2014; Rosenkranz et al., 2013; Ortner et al., 2007; Carmody et al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998; Davidson, 2012; Lazar et al., 2005; Kerr et al., 2013; Farb et al., 2012)

Mindfulness is perceived by practitioners as significantly influencing the development of behaviors, and changes to awareness, that they link to improved leadership effectiveness. Mindfulness is also perceived as enhancing cognitive function, and may contribute to the development of emotional intelligence competencies linked to increased leadership performance.

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