

Need for Mindfulness Programs in the Workplace and Organizations

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Mindfulness practices are becoming increasingly necessary in today's fast paced society. Individuals and organizations should consider integrating the practice of mindfulness in daily life, including during work. Mindfulness is the intentional, non-judgmental conscious awareness of the present moment (4). Recently, mindfulness practices have been proven to have many psychological and physiological benefits. There are various ways to practice mindfulness and two very effective techniques are through the practice of yoga and meditation.

Meditation, in general, is the practice of focusing one's attention or concentration on something particular such as, breathing, visualization, relaxation, and even transcending thought all together. Meditation has its roots historically across the globe and more recently within the scientific community. For decades now, we have known that various forms of concentration have its positive effects on the human body's ability to maintain a healthy and productive lifestyle.

Mindfulness meditation, in particular, has been shown to block the sympathetic nervous system's secretion of the stress hormones adrenaline and epinephrine. These hormones trigger our bodies into "fight or flight" mode, a primitive instinct that prepare our bodies to repel or run away from an aggressor. In today's world, however, emotional and mental stress takes the place of physical stress. Unfortunately, this still creates the same side effects, in turn leading to an overabundance of these hormones contributing to conditions such as anxiety, hypertension, cardiac rhythms, insomnia, etc., the list goes on. The National Institute of Health created the National Center for Complementary & Integrative Health in the summer of 2016 to support studies of various complements and substitutes to traditional western medicine. They found that mindfulness practices are able to decrease the stress hormones produced by the nervous system (those natural fight or flight animal instincts) (1).

The evidence is clear on the positive effects of mindfulness activities on the mind and body, as well as the vast improvements it promotes within organizations. Studies have found that our fast-paced society has created challenges in the workplace, such as stress, anxiety, an increase in sick days, burnout and turnover. Mindfulness activities within an organizational environment has been proven to decrease health costs and turnover, increase morale, productivity and innovation. Reports show that stress results in as much as \$300 billion annually in loss of productivity, almost \$200 billion in stress related illness and one million workers being absent every day (2). Helping to streamline preventive health goals, health insurance companies are now jumping on board and providing organizations discounts on their group health insurance plans for providing mindfulness activities in the workplace, as well as allocating funds to support such programs. Overall, it is evident that mindfulness in the workplace promotes a more collaborative, productive, and thriving culture.



Organizations such as Google, Intel, The U.S. Military, and Harvard have pioneered implementing mindfulness programs at the workplace. For example, The US Military has incorporated mindfulness programs such as Operations Warrior Wellness, enrolling 30,000 veterans in meditation practice over 3 years. Studies showed that veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan reduced PTSD symptoms by 50% in 8 weeks. Various other military studies show improvement in mood, memory, concentration, emotional regulation and cost savings, along with decreased depression and mental illness (3). In 2014, Intel implemented Awake @Intel, reaching 100,000 employees in 63 countries and showing a decrease in stress per a pre and post self-assessment questionnaire. Aetna Health Insurance implemented a yoga and meditation program in 2015, with a reported average of 28% reduction in participant stress levels (4).

Mindfulness activities in the workplace occur in many ways including workshops, yoga and meditation classes, employee wellness programs, leadership training and web-based programs. Despite potential challenges with cost, time required, expertise and participant retention, the advantages outweigh as workers learn to handle stress, prevent burnout, increase productivity, while boosting memory, creativity and focus. Mindfulness has shown improvement in mood and sleep quality amongst teachers. With healthcare providers, mindfulness training reduced burnout, mood disturbance and stress (4). There is also evidence of behavior modifications, such as smoking cessation and substance abuse prevention (5).

Zesa Wellness has created an evidence-based mindfulness program that provides various tools and techniques proven to increase mindfulness. When the balance of mind and body are improved, overall well-being is inevitable. Zesa Wellness has proven that their program has its own benefits, including positive results with stress level, ability to relax when stressed, energy level, muscle strength, flexibility and mental clarity.

Zesa Wellness, in a small study (n=92) implemented their 10-week evidence-based mindfulness program through the practice of yoga and meditation with the adult employees of a high stress corporate client. There were two classes, each meeting once a week for a 10-week series. A pre and post survey assessment was conducted over a 11-month time period (April 2018 – February 2019) for participants to provide feedback on six measures along a five-point Likert scale, 5 being the strongest agreement. There were positive results in all six measures, including stress level, ability to relax when stressed, participant energy level, muscle strength, flexibility and mental clarity. Participants reported a perceived improvement by scoring a 4 and 5 on all six measures post Zesa class series (see Table 1).

Integrating a culture of mindfulness in the workplace and organizational settings has the ability to not only improve creativity, focus, and productivity, but also to better manage stress, improve communication, and morale. Zesa's mindfulness programs are customizable, convenient, and approachable for all levels. For more information you may reach us at hello@zesawellness.com.

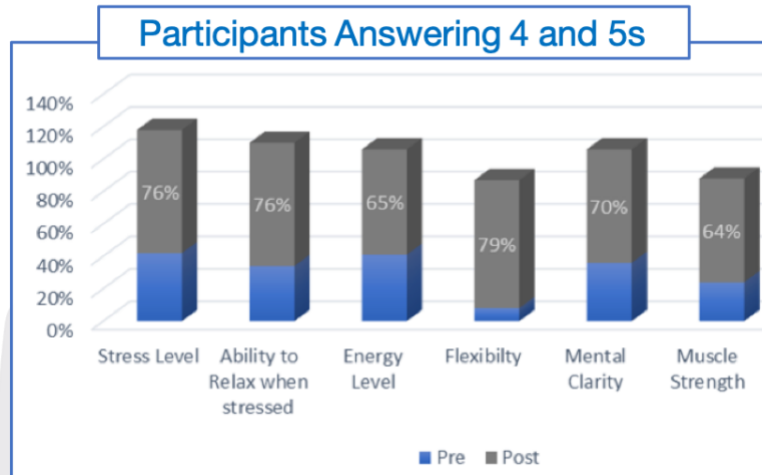


Table 1

References:

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