Guest editorial: Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations: enabling content, context and process

Introduction

Business organizations and the environments in which they function are facing grand challenges – complex problems that transcend corporate and country borders (Buckley *et al.*, 2017; Degbey *et al.*, 2023; Howard-Grenville, 2021) and often involve social, psychological, economic and technological issues (Eisenhardt *et al.*, 2016) to which organizations need to respond. These challenges disrupt organizational processes and systems that influence employees' and managers' behaviors, attitudes and well-being (McFarland *et al.*, 2020; Vaziri *et al.*, 2020). These challenges and similar unprecedented changes to the business world make it problematic for organizations and their workforce to (re)flourish without strong human-centered management (Pirson, 2017). As a result, there is a call for employees and managers to develop and adopt mindfulness, which represents monitoring one's attention to and regulating it toward present events in a nonjudgmental way (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Good *et al.*, 2016; Reina and Kudesia, 2020), as well as build high-quality relational systems, e.g. strong relational attachments (Ehrhardt and Ragins, 2019) in work settings.

Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations can enable managers and leaders to safeguard against threats posed by grand challenges, including radical technological disruption in the future of work (e.g. Balliester and Elsheikhi, 2018; Rodgers *et al.*, 2021; Rodgers *et al.*, 2023), demographic changes (e.g. aging societies – Taneva and Arnold, 2018) and climate change (Falcke *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, given the tendency of contemporary organizations to favor collective outcomes over singular outcomes, examining the interactivity of mindfulness with relational systems can be vital to fostering effective human functioning and eliciting positive outcomes. Yet, their joint influences are often not discussed.

For instance, on the one hand, previous research has underscored the pivotal role of mindfulness in enhancing positive outcomes across vital spheres of life, e.g. fostering high-quality social interactions (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Good *et al.*, 2016), shielding against conflicts and social undermining (Yu and Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018), promoting innovative work behavior (Montani *et al.*, 2020), nurturing romantic relationships (Carson *et al.*, 2007), facilitating emotional regulation (Molina and O'Shea, 2020), empowering individuals with limited cognitive resources to multitask without experiencing mental fatigue (Kudesia *et al.*, 2022) and cultivating a sense of interpersonal intimacy (Brown and Kasser, 2005). Additionally, research supports the importance of mindfulness in key aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as emotional intelligence (e.g. Baer *et al.*, 2006; Brown and Ryan, 2003), which has a positive relationship with empathic perspective-taking and cooperative response patterns (Schutte *et al.*, 2001). Furthermore, preliminary evidence indicates that mindfulness

can protect against the suffering experienced by an individual who lost his/her social connectedness owing to social exclusion (Allen and Knight, 2005).

On the other hand, relational systems research has long highlighted that human systems, in general, are relational (Schein, 1993) but can be severely damaged by crises, given that they disrupt and upend the connections and attachments of their system members (Kahn *et al.*, 2013). However, we know little about how the underlying processes of relational systems, e.g. joint problem-solving, communication and mutuality (Wynne, 1984), intermingle with mindfulness to foster favorable or minimize adverse outcomes in the work milieu. For instance, research highlights the demands of extreme conditions, such as the migrant crisis (Pécoud, 2020) and pandemics (Rigotti *et al.*, 2020; Rudolph *et al.*, 2020; Wright *et al.*, 2020) and possible ways to enable interventions. Such crises, as mentioned above, including other grand challenges, have serious consequences for migrants and ethnic minorities with respect to workplace diversity and inclusivity. Hence, positive relational systems and mindfulness across varying levels, such as individual, team and organizational, can produce valuable managerial, social and psychological understanding for inclusive organizing and workplace diversity for employees, including other minority groups, to flourish.

Consequently, our special issue seeks to advance empirical knowledge regarding the joint role of mindfulness and relational systems in organizational settings. More specifically, it aims to expand understanding of the contents, contexts and processes that undergird the combined research on mindfulness and relational systems in management and organization literature. Insights from these studies are likely to foster positive outcomes within the organizational setting, including creative process engagement (Awan *et al.*, 2024), employee safety behaviors (Liu *et al.*, 2024), team resilience (Degbey and Einola, 2020), employee retention (Degbey *et al.*, 2021), employee work engagement (Conte *et al.*, 2019) and employee innovative behavior (Wang *et al.*, 2019), or minimize negative outcomes (e.g. pandemic-induced concerns on LMX–TMX relationships – Alo *et al.*, 2024; employee career regret – Budjanovcanin *et al.*, 2019; abusive supervision – Shen *et al.*, 2019; unethical pro-organizational behavior – Xu and Lv, 2018). In the following section, we provide a 10-year snapshot of where the extant research stands.

The current state of the field

Our literature search in the leading management and organization journals (i.e. based on the British ABS 3 and above rankings) during the last decade (January 2014 to February 2024) indicated a growing trend in the phenomenon of mindfulness (see Figure 1). During this
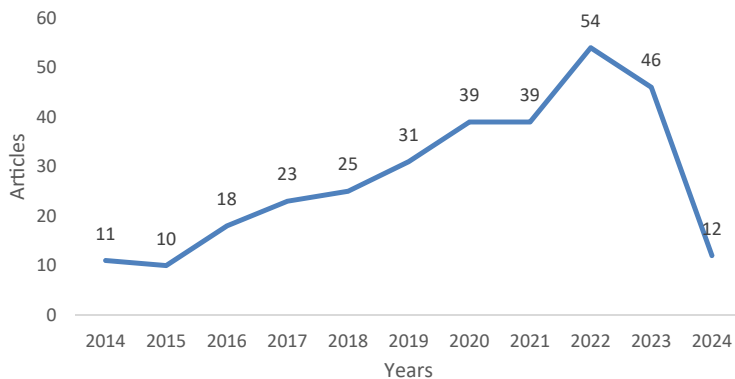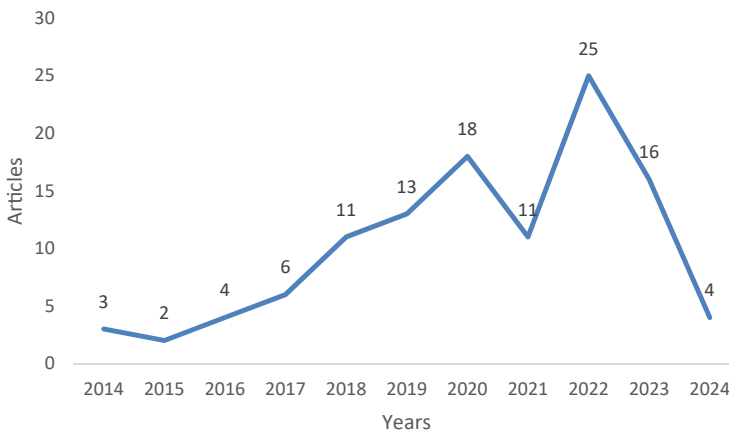
Source(s): Authors' creation

period, a total of 308 articles on mindfulness alone were published in leading journals. Moreover, when we extended the search to include relational systems with mindfulness, we retrieved a total of 113 articles using the same search criteria.

Overall, we observe growth in the number of studies in this research domain. For instance, in 2014, studies on mindfulness alone in the leading management and organizational journals were only 11 compared to 46 articles at the end of year 2023 (a growth rate of 76%). Additionally, we observe an overall upward trend in mindfulness research combined with studies on relational systems within the organizational setting (see Figure 2). For instance, in 2014, the combined studies on mindfulness and relational systems in the leading management and organizational journals were only three compared to 25 and 16 articles at the end of 2022 and 2023, respectively (a growth rate of 88 and 81%, respectively).

Besides the trend, the search showed underlying *content*, *context* and *process* elements of mindfulness and relational systems, which help us understand key transformations in this area of research inquiry (Pettigrew, 1987, 2012). According to Pettigrew (1987), an inquiry into key transformations in organizations involves questions relating to the content, context and process of the transformation coupled with the interactions between them. Specifically, we use *author keywords* to categorize each article ($n = 113$) into key content, context, process and outcomes of mindfulness and relational systems research (see Table 1) to show how the final seven articles included in our Special Issue fit, complement and advance extant scholarship in this research domain. We mark in italic fonts the elements of the seven articles that match prior research in Table 1. In the next section, we summarize the seven empirical articles.

This special issue

The purpose of this special issue is to advance research in the joint domains of mindfulness and relational systems in organizations. To achieve that goal, we highlight how the articles focus on contents, contexts and processes that shape mindfulness and relational systems across different levels in managerial psychology. We invited empirical submissions that explore the joint and interactive role of mindfulness and relational systems to expand the psychosocial understanding and effect of management in organizations. Out of 31 submissions, seven were accepted for publication after the review process. The seven articles advance and expand theory and practice on mindfulness and relational systems.

Figure 2.
Combined research on mindfulness and relational systems in organizations (January 2014 to February 2024)

Source(s): Authors' creation

Table 1. Content, context, process and outcome elements of mindfulness and relational systems' research in organizations (January 2014 to February 2024)

Content			Process	Context	Outcome
Abusive supervision	Leadership development	Role conflict	Interpersonal processes	*COVID-19*	Agility
Affect	*LMX*	Role self-awareness	Sensemaking	Health care	Abusive supervisory behavior
Aggression	Lodging recovery experience	Routines	*Creative process engagement*	Health IT	Work–life balance
Ambivalence	Management mindfulness	*Rumination*	Knowledge-sharing hostility	*Information technology (IT)*	Employee well-being
Anger	Managerial cognition	Sabotage	Feedback	Social media	Cognitive flexibility
Anomia	Managerial psychology	Safety	Coping mechanism	University	Cognitive adjustment at work
Apology	Meaningful work	*Safety behavior*	Sensemaking	Agricultural supply chain	Psychological health and well-being
Attention	Meaningfulness	Safety climate	Relationship management	Smart tourism	Ambidexterity
Authentic leadership	Mind wandering	Safety compliance	Transformation	Social identity theory	Market agility
Authoritarian leadership	Moments of care	Safety participation	Integration	Daily diary	Goal attainment
Awareness	Moral awareness	Self-brand connection	Reconfiguration	*Projects*	Goal orientation
Blame attribution	Moral meaningfulness	Self-compassion	Management learning	Replication study	Job satisfaction
Boundary management	Moral reasoning	Self-control depletion	Governmentality	Healthcare consumers	Intended and unintended consequences
Brand ritual	Moral responsibility	Self-discrepancies	Segmentation	Emergency medical services	Organizational citizenship behavior
Business ethics	Motivation	Self-management	Sustainable processes	Smart tourism	Deviant behavior
Business model innovation	Motivational control	Self-managing teams	Mindful organizing	Individual level	Satisfaction
Capabilities	Motivational trajectory	Self-regulated attention	Information processing	Social constructionism	Environmental sustainability
Chronic mindfulness variability	Multiple identities	Self-regulation	Waste generation and recycling	Multisource study	Extra-role performance
Cognitive rumination	Negative affect	Self-regulation impairment	Continuous improvement	E-tourism	Burnout
Communication	Negative emotions	Self-transformation	Data analysis capability	Churches	Firm performance
Compassion	Negative mood	Silence	Development	Family firms	Green creativity

Content			Process	Context	Outcome
Consumer values	Negative rumination	Sleep quality	Integration	Standards organizations	Job performance
Contemplative leadership	Neuroticism	Social capital	Digital transformation	Hospitality industry	Employee creativity
Customer mistreatment	Nonapology	Social loafing	Mindfulness intervention	Buddhism	Counterproductive work behavior
Daily mindfulness shift	Online deviance	Social mindfulness	*Knowledge sharing*	Religion	Creative performance
Defensive silence	Opportunity recognition	Social relations	Information elaboration	United States	Cultural adjustment
Dialogic conversation	Optimism	Social reproduction	Self-regulatory depletion	Multilevel analysis	Employee performance
Discernment	*Organizational support systems*	Social rumination	Error management	Mixed methods	Employee health
Displaced workplace deviance	Organizational attention	Social sharing of negative events	*Employee resilience*	Practice-based studies	Innovation
Dispositional employability	Organizational behavior	Socioemotional wealth	Change	Meta-analysis	*Employee safety behaviors*
Doubt	Organizational justice	Somatic engagement	Processing capacity	Serial mediation	Employee resilience
Ego depletion	Organizational mindfulness	Spillover	Mindfulness practices	Typology	Recovery
Emotional demands	Organizational norms	Spirituality	*Perceived environmental uncertainty*	Interviews	Organizational resilience
Emotional exhaustion	Organizational paranoia	Strain	Mindfulness training	Field study	Peer-focused OCB
Emotional intelligence	Organizational routines	Strategies		Australia	Resources sustainability
Emotional labour	Ostracism	*Stress*		*Africa*	Role conflict
Emotions	Other-regarding compassion	*Stressors*		Literature review	Task engagement
Empathic concern	Overwork	Subjective experience		Saudi Arabia	Task performance
Ethical leadership	Paranoid cognition	Surface acting		Digital detox	*Team performance*
Ethics of care	Patient luxury experience	Talents		Digital free tourism	Thriving
Ethics of leadership	Perceived authenticity	Task conflict		Social entrepreneurship	Social sustainability
Ethics of responsibility	Perceived CSR	Team job demands		Intrapreneurship	Firm performance
Family emotional exhaustion	Perceived health risks	*Team mindfulness*		Crisis	Work–home enrichment

Table 1.

Table 1.

Content	Content	Process	Context	Outcome
Family incivility	Perceived homophily	Team relational stress	Entrepreneurial experience	Instigated workplace incivility
Fatigue	Perceived workplace safety practices	Team relationship conflict	Implicit mindfulness theory	Innovative behavior
Fear	Perception of organizational politics	Technostress	Arabian Gulf	Interpersonal citizenship
Forgiveness	Personal innovativeness in IT	Temporal focus	Stressor-detachment model	*Taking charge*
Global mindset	Political skill	Time pressure	Activation theory	Perceived internal career prospects
Green mindfulness	Positive regard	*TMX*	Path analysis	Turnover intention
Individual work reflection	Positive relationships	Top management mindfulness	Organizational level	Productivity
Insomnia	Primary appraisal	Training perceived as developmental	Group level	Work–life balance
Interpersonal deviance	Procedural justice enactment	*Trait mindfulness*	Conservation of resources theory	Car-sharing behavior
Interpersonal interactions	Production deviance	Trust	Behavioral reasoning theory	Well-being
Interpersonal justice	Prosocial ethics	User personality	Social reproduction theory	Corporate wellness
Interpersonal relationships	Psychological capital	Virtue ethics	Randomized controlled trial	
Interpersonal sensemaking	Psychological detachment	Work boundaries	Functional leadership theory	
IT mindfulness	Psychosocial safety climate	Work relationships	Content analysis	
Job attitudes	Purchase motivation	Work rumination	Experience sampling method	
Job control	Quantitative demands	Work unit structure	Experience sampling methodology	
Job crafting	Rationality	Workaholism	Experiment	

Content	Process	Context	Outcome
Job demands	Relational climate	Work-based learning	Entrainment theory
Justice rule adherence	Relational organizational behavior	Work–home interference	Actor–partner interdependence model
Leader authenticity	Relational support systems	Workload	Behavioral reasoning theory
Leader humility	Respectful leadership	Workplace deviance	Dynamic capabilities view
Leader mindfulness	Retaliation	Workplace discrimination	Broaden and build theory
Leader–member congruence	Revenge	Workplace harassment	Qualitative research
Leader–member exchange	Rework	Workplace interactions	Diary study
Leadership	Rhythm	Workplace learning	Experience sampling method
Leadership behaviors	Ritualistic behaviors	Workplace ostracism	Qualitative research

Source(s): Authors' creation

Table 1.

In the first article, "*Mindfulness and creative process engagement: The mediating role of workplace relational systems,*" Awan *et al.* (2024) draw on motivated information processing theory to empirically examine whether and how mindfulness motivates individuals toward creative process engagement. Their findings show that mindfulness enables individuals to self-regulate in specific situations and effectively foster creative process engagement while also extending research on relational information processing by connecting it with mindfulness and creative process engagement. Moreover, their findings emphasize that mindfulness motivates individuals to focus more on developing quality working relationships. They provide insights that suggest that even less willingness to participate in idea generation and problem-solving solutions have important implications for creativity within the work milieu.

In the second article, "*True knowledge vs empowering knowledge: conceptualizing a theory of mindfulness and knowledge transfer (TMKT),*" Issac *et al.* (2024) explore the influence of mindfulness on different elements of knowledge management: knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding using an inductive reasoning approach. They found that mindfulness enables an open environment and improves thought clarity, which helps in creating knowledge effectively. They add that a realistic comprehension of present situations inspires employees to share knowledge and prepares them for effective collaboration and teamwork. Moreover, in contrast to knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, they found that mindfulness fosters result orientation, which in turn produces the tendency of employees to hide knowledge from their co-workers by purposefully targeting specific self-centered outcomes. Beyond the positive outcomes of mindfulness, their paper illuminates the dark side of mindfulness concerning organizational knowledge management, such as agenda-based knowledge hiding, and thus provides an opening for future research to explore further.

The third article, "*Leader mindfulness and employee safety behaviors in the workplace: a moderated mediation study,*" focuses on the effects of leader mindfulness on employee safety behaviors through the mediating and moderating roles of employee resilience and perceived environmental uncertainty, respectively. In the study, Liu *et al.* (2024) found that leader mindfulness has positive impacts on employee safety behaviors (i.e. employee safety compliance and safety participation), mediated by employee resilience. Moreover, they found that the impacts of leader mindfulness on employee resilience were moderated by perceived environmental uncertainty and the indirect effects of leader mindfulness on safety behaviors (i.e. safety compliance and safety participation) through employee resilience.

In the fourth article, "*Dark side of leadership and information technology project success: the role of mindfulness,*" Mubarak *et al.* (2024) examine the impacts of despotic leadership on information technology project success through the mediating role of employees' negative emotions and the moderating role of employee mindfulness. The authors found that despotic leadership increases employees' emotions, which in turn harms information technology project success. In addition, they found that employee mindfulness serves as a buffer that limits the damaging impact of despotic leadership on employees' emotions. These findings thus open avenues for future research and practice to further explore how project-based organizations can strive for project success amidst dark leadership styles.

The fifth article, "*Feeling stressed but in full flow? Leader mindfulness shapes subordinates' perseverative cognition and reaction,*" also focuses on leaders. Xie and Feng (2024) found that problem-solving pondering transmits the nonlinear impact of challenge stressors on flow, whereby affective rumination mediates the negative effect of hindrance stressors on flow. In addition, they found that leader mindfulness increases subordinates' inclination to ruminate concerning the positive aspects of challenge stressors, thereby enhancing their positive reactions and flow. Moreover, they found that leader mindfulness acts as a buffer that limits

the damaging effects of affective rumination on the flow experience, even though it does not stop followers from ruminating less on hindrance stressors.

The sixth article by Zhang *et al.* (2024), *"Birds of a feather flock together? Leader–member trait mindfulness congruence effects on work outcomes"* focuses on leadership. The authors employ person–supervisor fit theory to examine how leader–member trait mindfulness (in) congruence affects leader–member exchange and how the former indirectly influences taking charge. The authors found that leader–member exchange rises as leaders' and members' trait mindfulness are more aligned such that leader–member exchange is higher when leader– member dyads are congruent at high levels compared to low levels. Concerning incongruence, they found that leader–member exchange is higher when the member's trait mindfulness goes above the leader's. Moreover, they found that leader–member exchange mediates the linkage between leader–member trait mindfulness (in)congruence and taking charge.

The last article by Alo *et al.* (2024), *"Exploring the limits of mindfulness during the COVID-19 pandemic: qualitative evidence from African context,"* explores the linkage between the COVID-19 pandemic and the boundaries of mindfulness in an African organizational work setting. They found that the pandemic-induced worries during its peak limit the practice of mindfulness, mainly due to the worsening already harsh economic conditions, social uncertainties and institutional challenges in Africa. This, in turn, led to an absence of employee engagement and commitment and ultimately negatively influencing the overall team performance and mindfulness at work. Further, they found leaders' or managers' emotional intelligence, social skills and organizational support systems helpful in such extreme conditions. The findings thus open further opportunities for future research and practice to examine how mindfulness and relational systems manifest and their meanings construed in extreme conditions and developing country contexts bedeviled by existing socio-economic challenges.

We hope the journal's readership finds these seven articles interesting to read and as important contributions that can help advance future studies on mindfulness and relational systems in organizations.

William Y. Degbey
School of Management, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland
Shlomo Tarba
Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK
Baniyelme D. Zoogah
DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada, and
Cary Cooper
Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

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