Positioning mindfulness as psychological capital

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Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the existing literature on workplace mindfulness and suggest positive organizational behavior (POB) scholarship as a suitable domain to understand the scientific and secular nature of mindfulness.

Design/Methodology- This conceptual paper is based on the critical analysis of the literature on positive organizational behavior and contemporary mindfulness at work. The paper highlights the limitations of workplace mindfulness in terms of its research and practice. Then, the limitations of workplace mindfulness are analyzed in relation to positive organizational behavior scholarship to suggest a way forward for research and practice.

Findings- The findings imply that contemporary mindfulness meets the inclusion criteria of psychological capital and thus it can be adopted and investigated in the workplace using the POB scholarship.

Originality- Mindfulness is an interesting topic for organizational researchers and many organizations are adopting mindfulness to improve their workplace functioning. In recent years, scholars have highlighted potential ethical issues with the adoption of the spiritual and religious nature of mindfulness for workplace benefits. In this regard, the understanding of scientific and secular nature of mindfulness is limited in organizational literature. The paper advances the knowledge of the literature on contemporary mindfulness and positive organizational behavior and argues the importance of the inclusion of mindfulness in psychological capital.

Implications- It suggests implications for research and practice by considering mindfulness as a psychological capital construct in the workplace context.

Keywords- Workplace mindfulness, Positive organizational behavior, Psychological capital

Paper Type- Conceptual

Introduction

Mindfulness is defined as a state of present-moment awareness (Brown and Ryan, 2003). In clinical psychology, mindfulness practices are commonly used to treat patients with psychological and mental health challenges (Baer, 2003; 2015). In the workplace, research has shown that mindfulness intervention can improve employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and performance (Hulsheger *et al.*, 2012; Pang and Ruch, 2019; Sajjad and Shahbaz, 2020). Recently, many organizations have adopted mindfulness practices to improve employee's well-being, relationship, and performance and there has been a notable increase in research focused on mindfulness in work settings (Eby *et al.*, 2019; Qiu and Rooney, 2019; Shahbaz and Parker, 2022).

As mindfulness interventions have gained popularity in an organizational context, critics have raised concerns regarding the ethical use of mindfulness for workplace benefits such as stress reduction and performance improvement. The critics highlighted that the commercialization of mindfulness interventions in organizations, which was originally a religious practice, is unethical. For example, Purser and Loy (2013) critiqued the use of mindfulness as a secular practice in the workplace, arguing that it overlooks the ethical and spiritual foundation of mindfulness. The core purpose of religious mindfulness is "to free human beings from the delusion of being a separate self" (Purser, 2018, p. 106). Critics argue that mindfulness, originally a religious practice aimed at fostering collective benefits like ethical behavior, social harmony, and compassion. However, it has been commercialized in organizational settings as a one-size-fits-all solution to work-related issues, often referred to as "McMindfulness" (Purser and Loy, 2013). The term McMindfulness represents secular mindfulness as a quick-fix technique, centered narrowly on workplace gains, and stripped of its ethical basis. Purser and Loy (2013) and others (Good *et al.*, 2016; Harrington and Dunne,

2015; Purser and Milillo, 2015) highlight the need to employ mindfulness in organizations with a focus on ethical values and social responsibility.

Currently, the issue of ethical conduct of mindfulness practices as a workplace intervention is evolving (Hafenbrack, 2017). While the commercialization of mindfulness interventions in organizations is criticized as unethical due to their religious and spiritual origins (Purser and Loy, 2013), some scholars offer counterarguments justifying its ethical use. They point out that mindfulness is interpreted in various ways within the Buddhist tradition, leading to questions about who has the authority to define "right" or "wrong" mindfulness (Purser and Milillo, 2015; Payne, 2018). To address ethical concerns, some scholars propose using the term "heedfulness" instead of "mindfulness" (Krägeloh, 2018). Some scholars argue that no one holds the authority to determine what constitutes ethical or unethical mindfulness, as it is a universal phenomenon related to the human mind and behavior rather than a strictly religious one (Harrington and Dunne, 2015; Purser and Milillo, 2015).

Some psychologists propose that Buddha's teachings on mindfulness align more closely with psychology than with religion or philosophy, highlighting mental training to relieve personal suffering (Mikulas, 2018). Baer (2015) argued that mindfulness has compelling theoretical and empirical roots in psychological sciences, supporting its exploration as a secular practice or construct. For example, social psychology views mindfulness as an inherent ability to create "novel distinctions" in the present, emphasizing attention to mental content to avoid mindlessness (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000). In clinical psychology, mindfulness is applied as a practice or program to improve mental health and reduce psychological suffering (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Numerous studies demonstrate the clinical benefits of secular mindfulness practices and programs (Landau and Jones, 2021). While debates continue about the secular nature of mindfulness in psychology domain, further in-

depth investigation on mindfulness within organizational science from a positive psychology perspective is needed.

In this study, we argue that the positive organizational behavior (POB) domain offers a foundation for studying and practising mindfulness in a scientific and secular way. We argued that mindfulness aligns with the inclusion criteria of psychological capital (PsyCap) and it can be recognized as a PsyCap construct within the field of POB. PsyCap represents a positive organizational strength, exemplified by employees' hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans *et al.*, 2017). While previous studies have considered mindfulness a potential component of PsyCap (e.g., Luthans *et al.*, 2017; Marianetti and Passmore, 2009; Roche *et al.*, 2014; Roche and Haar, 2019), there is limited understanding of how mindfulness could be systematically researched as a PsyCap construct through the lens of POB. Existing studies have not critically explored workplace mindfulness within POB literature to further the discussion of mindfulness as a PsyCap construct. Positioning mindfulness as a PsyCap construct within the POB literature enables a deeper understanding of its psychological basis (Roemer *et al.*, 2021). The POB domain offers standardized methods for evaluating mindfulness, providing a quantifiable basis for its application in organizational psychology. This scientific approach highlights the secular and scientific dimensions of mindfulness, framing it as a universally applicable and evidence-based practice that is ethically neutral for workplace settings.

Defining Mindfulness

Individuals tend to be different from each other in terms of their capacity or ability to be mindful (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Brown *et al.,* 2007). Mindfulness is commonly defined as "the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present" (Brown and Ryan, 2003, p. 822). *Attention* refers to noticing present experiences such as feelings, thoughts, emotions, and sensations. *Awareness* entails monitoring the experiences through detached

perspective. Thus, mindfulness involves monitoring thoughts and feelings without getting attached to these experiences (Reina and Kudesia, 2020). Another definition of mindfulness suggests that mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Thus, mindfulness can be considered a state of present-moment awareness.

Organizational literature categorizes mindfulness into a trait, state, intervention, and practice (Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017; Roche *et al.,* 2020). Trait mindfulness refers to a stable individual ability to engage in the mindfulness processes, meaning that some individuals might be more mindful than others (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017). State mindfulness refers to a temporary psychological state of present-moment consciousness that is intentionally cultivated and fluctuates within individuals in everyday life. While trait mindfulness is a stable individual capacity, state mindfulness mainly depends on individual and situational factors, varying from moment to moment (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Chiesa, 2013; Hulsheger *et al.,* 2012).

Mindfulness practice serves as a method for improving both state and trait mindfulness (Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017). These practices develop attention and awareness skills through both formal sessions and informal daily activities (Hart *et al*., 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Common mindfulness practices include body scanning, sitting meditation, and mindful yoga. The body scanning technique involves paying attention to various body parts while sitting meditation focuses on breathing, body sensations, thoughts, and emotions. Mindful yoga comprises awareness of the body during yoga practices (Kang and Whittingham, 2010; Sauer-Zavala *et al.,* 2013). Another mindfulness practice is loving-kindness meditation which focuses on positive feelings of compassion and love for themselves and others. During this practice,

participants close their eyes and focus on the present moment and recite phrases such as "May I be safe", "May I be happy", "May I be healthy", and "May I be peaceful". This technique fosters a positive connection of self with humanity (Johnson *et al.,* 2009). Mindfulness is often implemented through structured interventions, such as the eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which incorporates practices like breathing exercise, meditation, body scanning, and group discussions to enhance a fully present, non-judgmental approach to each moment (Baer, 2003; Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017; Khoury *et al.,* 2017).

Contrasting Contemporary Mindfulness and Buddhist Mindfulness

Literature commonly distinguishes between contemporary mindfulness and Buddhist mindfulness. Contemporary mindfulness practices involve focusing on a specific object with sustained, present-centered attention while non-judgmentally monitoring for and disengaging from distractions. Attention is then reoriented back to the target object. These core practices share similarities with elements found in programs such as MBSR (Dunne, 2015). The concept of mindfulness in Buddhism has a rich history spanning over 2,500 years (Ditrich, 2016). In Buddhist teaching two main sources of mindfulness include classic and nondual mindfulness. Classic Buddhist mindfulness (rooted in the Abhidharma paradigm) is analytical, focusing on ethical judgement and present-centred attention to mental states. Nondual Buddhist mindfulness (rooted in the Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen traditions of Tibet and the Chan traditions of China), however, seeks to dissolve the distinction between subject and object, promoting spontaneous, non-conceptual awareness without judgment. The former emphasizes evaluation, while the latter suspends it to move beyond duality (Dunne, 2015). It suggests that contemporary mindfulness practices involve focused, present-centred attention and disengagement from distractions. While, Buddhism mindfulness is seen in two main forms: classic mindfulness, which is analytical and judgment-based, and nondual mindfulness, which seeks to transcend duality through non-conceptual awareness without judgment.

According to Payne (2018) Right mindfulness (*sammā sati*), as part of the Noble Eightfold Path, is seen as mindfulness that is aligned with ethical conduct and spiritual goals, leading to liberation. It is interwoven with other path factors, ensuring that mindfulness practices contribute to moral and psychological well-being. On the other hand, "wrong mindfulness" or contemporary mindfulness refers to the potential misuse of mindfulness practices when they are disconnected from ethical and spiritual contexts. In this sense, mindfulness could be employed for unethical purposes or could reinforce negative states of mind, rather than contributing to liberation and well-being. Lindahl (2015) argued that contemporary mindfulness may not fully align with "right mindfulness" and that it may be incomplete due to the lack of a Buddhist ethical framework. "Right mindfulness" whether traditional or contemporary, is inherently situated within a Buddhist ethical framework. Thus, from the perspective of normative Buddhism, contemporary mindfulness could be considered "wrong mindfulness". Right mindfulness has much more to offer than merely the health and well-being benefits in clinical and scientific contexts.

Mindfulness entered the domain of western clinical psychology through Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s, who developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. MBSR was originally designed to treat physical and psychological issues like chronic pain and addiction by promoting self-regulation of adverse conditions (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; 2003; Ie *et al*., 2014). Initially aimed at health-related treatments, MBSR quickly gained popularity in clinical psychology and later expanded as a general stress reduction program in non-clinical contexts (Glomb *et al*., 2011). In social psychology, Ellen Langer introduced mindfulness as "the process of drawing novel distinctions" (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 1), describing it as a cognitive state that promotes greater sensitivity to the environment, openness to new information, and awareness of multiple perspectives. Langer describes mindfulness as a state of being present, sensitive to

context, and free from rigid routines or rules. In contrast, mindlessness involves automatic responses based on past experiences (Langer, 2014). Thus, mindfulness has been scientifically developed in both clinical and social psychology as a tool for self-regulation and a cognitive process for creating possibilities.

Over the past two decades, mindfulness has been increasingly applied in various work settings, including banks, hospital, high-tech companies, and the military, to enhance workers' well-being while fostering productivity, adaptability, and more effective decision-making (Dunne, 2015; Qiu and Rooney, 2019). In organizational research, several studies contrast contemporary mindfulness with Buddhist mindfulness and explore the potential drawbacks of applying contemporary mindfulness in the workplace. For example, Vu and Burton (2024) investigate Buddhist mindfulness practitioners' views on inclusion and exclusion, challenging the Western assumption that inclusion is inherently positive and exclusion negative. Their study reveals that practitioners may find inclusion burdensome due to the pressure to meet others' expectations, whereas exclusion can provide freedom from such pressures. They highlight the importance of incorporating Buddhist mindfulness perspectives into discussions of workplace inclusion and moral reasoning. Vu and Gill (2018) explore mindfulness practices among Vietnamese leaders who follow Buddhist mindfulness perspective. They argue that contemporary mindfulness, as a workplace tool, may be misused if it is grounded in organizational self-interest, greed, or hidden agendas. In contrast, Buddhist mindfulness emphasizes wisdom, compassion, and non-attachment. Thus, organizational leaders should consider the mindfulness based on Buddhist principles rather than contemporary mindfulness based on organizational selfishness, greed, and a hidden agenda.

Further critiques come from Willmott (2018), who argues that mindfulness is frequently applied to address personal issues, such as stress, while overlooking the structural issues, like

inequality, that contribute to these problems. He synthesizes socio-political literature to suggest that mindfulness should bridge personal and public issues to address broader social inequalities, rather than focusing solely on individual relief (see also Sajjad and Shahbaz, 2020). Weick and Putnam (2006) highlight key differences between Eastern and Western mindfulness perspectives. Eastern mindfulness focuses on internal steadiness and present awareness to cultivate wisdom, as detailed in the Abhidhamma, while Western mindfulness, as described by Langer, involves engagement with external events and mental content, emphasizing a more analytical and dynamic interaction with one's environment. They emphasize on integrating both Eastern and Western mindfulness perspectives to get a more profound understanding of attention in organizational contexts, fostering continuous organizing, reducing mistakes, and enabling wiser actions. In sum, the literature on workplace mindfulness discusses the distinction between contemporary mindfulness and Buddhist mindfulness, with scholars highlighting significant risks associated with the adoption of contemporary mindfulness in organizational settings. While contemporary mindfulness involves risk at work, it can also be unethical because it often lacks the ethical and spiritual foundation present in Buddhist mindfulness teaching.

Ethical conduct of mindfulness practices at work

While contemporary mindfulness is commonly adopted by the modern business world, some critics highlighted that intervention of contemporary mindfulness in the workplace might involve certain ethical issues because of their association with a Buddhist tradition (Monteiro *et al.,* 2015; Purser and Loy, 2013; Purser, 2018). Such ethical concerns might constrain the application of mindfulness at work for individual and workplace benefits. Scholars in behavioral health sciences discussed the implicit and explicit nature of ethics in mindfulness practices. They argued that there is a need for explicit ethics while incorporating mindfulness

in the workplace. For instance, Monteiro *et al*. (2015) argued that the expected outcome of mindfulness practices in the corporate world might not be consistent with the expectation of traditional Buddhist mindfulness. Therefore, teachers and practitioners of mindfulness in the workplace context should follow an ethical code of conduct. These authors suggested that mindfulness training programmes need to add instructions related to an ethical code of conduct concerning mindfulness practices. Brown (2017) highlighted that it is an ethical obligation of mindfulness trainers to remain transparent while conducting mindfulness training programmes in the workplace. Hence mindfulness trainers need to disclose information concerning the risks of harmful as well as spiritual impacts of mindfulness practices. Moreover, it is important to disclose any religious association of the trainers in terms of concepts, values, practices, and communities.

To address the ethical challenges associated with the application of mindfulness in the workplace many scholars have offered various suggestions and justification. For instance, Mikulas (2018) discussed the three Yanas of Buddhist teachings including Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Hinayana (often identified with Theravada) is described as the earliest form of Buddhism, focusing on individual enlightenment through strict adherence to the Buddha's original teachings. Mahayana expands the focus to include the enlightenment of all beings, emphasizing compassion and the Bodhisattva ideal. Vajrayana, builds on Mahayana with specific practices and rituals intended to rapidly achieve enlightenment, and it is particularly associated with Tibetan Buddhism. Each Yana represents a different approach to spiritual development within Buddhism. Mikulas argues that all three Yanas align more closely with psychology than with religion or philosophy. Thus, the core principles of Buddhism, which he refers to as "essential Buddhism," are universal and pertain to psychological well-being rather than religious or philosophical dogma. Qiu and Rooney (2019) proposed a four-stage model of mindfulness development in the workplace including preliminary

concentration, deep concentration, self-transcendence, and reengagement. Each stage has distinct characteristics and impacts on both individuals and organizations, offering a more comprehensive view of workplace mindfulness as an ethics-based and long-term process.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that mindfulness practices are naturally ethical and thus require no specific ethical framework. They highlighted that scientific domain such as organizational psychology provide a suitable ground for the application of mindfulness in the workplace in a secular and ethical way. They argued that mindfulness interventions such as MBSR and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) are well-structured programmes where trainers or teachers of the programme follow a code of ethical conduct. Moreover, compassion, kindness, and ethical conduct towards self and others are core components of mindfulness practices. It means that mindfulness practices are inherently ethical. These authors further added that it is important to focus on optimising the benefits of mindfulness for humanity rather than focusing on the alignment of contemporary mindfulness with Buddhist mindfulness (Baer, 2015; Cheung, 2018; DeSteno, 2013). Another scholar suggested that there is a need to explore mindfulness-related concepts and replace the broader term of mindfulness with other terms such as heedfulness, i.e. the monitoring of cognitive functions to safeguard goal orientation. Such replacement of terms might be helpful to reduce the theoretical confusion raised due to the umbrella term of mindfulness (Krageloh, 2018).

In recent years, organizations have adopted various mindfulness-based programs, asserting that these initiatives ethically balance employee well-being with organizational success through practices rooted in kindness, compassion, and ethical awareness. For instance, the mindfulness-based programs offered at Aetna can serves as a case study of how companies can ethically adopt mindfulness practices to balance employee well-being and organizational goals. These programs are offered voluntarily to employees, demonstrated measurable benefits,

including a 28% reduction in stress levels and a 20% improvement in sleep quality among participants. Aetna also reported significant reductions in healthcare costs and gains in productivity. It suggests that mindfulness could align ethical employee care with corporate success (Gelles, 2015). Additionally, well-known mindfulness-based workplace programs like Google's "Search Inside Yourself" are based on practices that emphasize kindness, compassion, and ethical awareness. In this program, the instructors follow ethical codes of conduct, mindfulness itself is inherently ethical, and the practice promotes kindness and compassion toward both oneself and others (Baer, 2015; Schaufenbuet, 2015). While some argue that contemporary workplace mindfulness programs are inherently ethical due to their focus on compassion, kindness, and ethical awareness (Baer, 2015), others challenge this view, contending that these programs are inconsistent with traditional Buddhist mindfulness (Monteiro et al., 2015; Purser and Loy, 2013). To contribute to the discussion on the ethical application of mindfulness in the workplace, we explored the POB domain to better understand contemporary mindfulness from a scientific perspective.

Positive organizational behavior

The concept of POB is an outcome of the positive psychology movement. The positive psychology movement was started in 1998 by Seligman and colleagues. The movement aimed to change the focus in the field of psychology from solving life problems to strengthening positive human strengths (Dutton *et al*., 2006). In the field of psychology, considerable attention is given to negativity or human suffering as compared to positivity or human strengths (Luthans, 2002). Cameron (2008) argued that negativity dominates over positivity in terms of intensity, novelty, adaptation, and singularity. While there is a psychological inclination of humans towards negativity, positive psychology highlights the importance of developing positive subjective experiences in terms of well-being, contentment, satisfaction, hope, optimism, flow, and happiness (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) as opposed to focusing

on worst life experiences or negativity. The purpose of positive psychology is to balance the emphasis on positivity and negativity, in both research and practice rather than undermine the importance of negativity (Luthans *et al.,* 2017).

Positive organizational scholarship (POS) is related to positive psychology in the organizational domain and focuses on the organizational role in explaining positivity at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Dutton *et al*., 2006). POS highlights the importance of positivity in research and practice within the organizational domain. In this regard, POS is often considered a broader term used for positive traits, states, perspectives, relationships, processes, practices, and outcomes in the organizational domain (Cameron and Spreitzer 2012; Luthans *et al*., 2017). POB is a branch of POS introduced by Fred Luthans in the organizational literature. POB focuses on micro-level and state-like positive individual strengths and capacities that can be measured, developed, and maintained in the organization for performance management (Luthans *et al.,* 2002). It means that when compared with POS, POB provides a more specific individual-level perspective of positive psychology in the organization.

In POB literature, individual-level positive strengths and capacities are termed as psychological capital or PsyCap. To differentiate PsyCap from other similar individual constructs or resources, POB described the following inclusion criteria of PsyCap: PsyCap must be (a) supported by theory and research, (b) measurable, (c) developable, and (d) related to work performance (Luthans, 2002; Luthans *et al.,* 2007). Following the inclusion criteria, four constructs of PsyCap are identified including hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans *et al.,* 2007; 2017). Hope involves individual willpower to achieve goals and the ability to create alternative plans in difficult situations to achieve goals (Snyder *et al*., 1991). Efficacy relates to individual confidence and belief related to creating alternative plans, taking

actions, and achieving goals (Avey *et al.,* 2008; Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998). Resilience is the individual ability to bounce back from a difficult situation (Luthans, 2002;) and optimism is the individual ability to expect positive outcomes from themselves irrespective of their ability (Avey *et al.*, 2008; Seligman, 1998). While individual hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism are key dimensions of PsyCap other individual positive resources at work such as individual creativity, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and spirituality have the potential to be considered as PsyCap (Luthans *et al.,* 2015; 2017).

Mindfulness as Psychological Capital

Some studies have suggested considering mindfulness as a PsyCap construct within the POB domain. For instance, Roche and Haar (2019) tested the potential of mindfulness as the fifth dimension of psychological capital over two studies. In study one, with a sample of 812 New Zealand professionals, they tested the role of psychological capital and mindfulness as predictors of job and life satisfaction. The results revealed that the combined measure of psychological capital and mindfulness was a stronger predictor as compared to individual constructs separately. In study two, they used a daily design testing approach to measure the Psychological Capital-Mindfulness of 222 leaders on their daily fluctuations towards positive and negative affect. They found that the new PsyCap-M is a stronger predictor as compared to individual constructs. This study paves the way for the inclusion of mindfulness within the domain of psychological capital.

In another study, Roche *et al*. (2014) examined the relationship between mindfulness, PsyCap, and the wellbeing of organizational leaders. The study found that mindfulness and PsyCap are the strengths of the leaders that have a positive relationship with their wellbeing. Similarly, another study examined the relationships between mindfulness, PsyCap, and positive emotions of employees. The study found that when PsyCap is low, the relationship

between mindfulness and positive emotions is strong. It means that mindfulness compensates for the role of PsyCap in predicting positive emotions (Avey *et al.,* 2008). Another study examined the relationship between mindfulness, PsyCap, and workplace outcomes in terms of work engagement and the well-being of employees. The study found that mindfulness is positively related to workplace engagement and fully mediated by PsyCap. In addition, mindfulness is positively related to well-being and partially mediated by PsyCap. Thus, a mindful individual is more engaged in their work and psychologically healthier than others. This relationship is explained by PsyCap (Malinowski and Lim, 2015). It means that mindfulness might be considered as a PsyCap construct or employees' positive strength at work as it can compensate the role of PsyCap.

How mindfulness meets the inclusion criteria of PsyCap

The literature indicates that contempoary mindfulness meets the criteria for inclusion as a component of PsyCap. The first criterion for PsyCap requires it to have a state-like nature, supported by theory and research. Numerous organizational studies have explored the state-like nature of mindfulness, showing that employees can intentionally cultivate a temporary state of mindfulness at work (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Chiepa, 2013; Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017; Hulsheger *et al*., 2012; Roche *et al*., 2020). Theories that examine state mindfulness in the workplace, such as Conservation of Resources (COR) theory explains the dynamics of state mindfulness (Hulsheger *et al*., 2018). Lawrie *et al*. (2018) employed job demands-resources model to demonstrate how psychological demands impede, while job control improves state mindfulness at work. Other studies have also explored state mindfulness as a daily experience in organizational settings (e.g., Cigolla and Brown, 2011; Irving *et al*., 2014; Lyddy *et al*., 2016). Mindfulness could be examined as a state-like measure, as evidenced by studies

affirming that state mindfulness is both theoretically grounded and empirically supported within the organizational context.

The second criterion for PsyCap relates to its measurability, and state mindfulness can be effectively measured using tools like the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) (Lau *et al.*, 2006). The TMS includes items such as "I noticed subtle changes in my mood" and "I was more concerned with being open to my experiences than controlling or changing them" (Sauer *et al.*, 2013), and has been applied in workplace mindfulness research (e.g., Bilal and Zia-ur-Rehman, 2017; Cleirigh and Greaney, 2015; Malarkey *et al.*, 2013). The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), another tool that measures state mindfulness, has been used to assess employees' mindfulness (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Hulsheger *et al.*, 2012; Lawrie *et al.*, 2018).

We propose that mindfulness also meets the third PsyCap criterion, which involves its development. State mindfulness can be cultivated through various practices and interventions (Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017; Sajjad and Shahbaz, 2020). Mindfulness interventions can enhance individual mindfulness (e.g., Hulsheger *et al.*, 2012; Roeser *et al.*, 2013; Wolever *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, various individual and workplace conditions can foster everyday mindfulness or state mindfulness among employees. For instance, state mindfulness can be developed through factors such as psychological conditions, sleep quality (Hulsheger *et al.*, 2018), work engagement (Tuckey *et al.*, 2018), psychological demands, job control (Lawrie *et al.*, 2018), and metacognitive beliefs (Reina and Kudesia, 2020). These studies demonstrate that employees' state mindfulness can be enhanced both with and without direct mindfulness practices and interventions.

Finally, we propose that mindfulness is linked to work performance, aligning with the fourth criterion of PsyCap. Some empirical studies have shown that employees' mindfulness

positively impacts their work performance. For example, research indicates that mindfulness enhances task performance by increasing problem-solving confidence (Forjan *et al*., 2020) and boosts employee creativity by promoting engagement in creative processes (Cheung *et al*., 2020). Additionally, studies have identified a link between mindfulness and overall job performance (Dane and Brummel, 2014; Lyddy and Good, 2017). Other research suggests that workplace mindfulness interventions can improve task performance (Pang and Ruch, 2019) as well as task motivation and focus (Hafenbrack and Vohs, 2018; Reb *et al*., 2017; Hyland *et al*., 2015).

In sum, Luthans (2002) and Luthans *et al*. (2007) argued that PsyCap must be (a) grounded in theory and research, (b) measurable, (c) capable of development, and (d) linked to work performance. The workplace mindfulness literature suggests that mindfulness meets the criteria for inclusion as a component of PsyCap. Mindfulness is state-like, meaning it can be intentionally cultivated by employees, and this is supported by theories like the Conservation of Resources theory and the extended job demands-resources model. It can be effectively measured using tools such as the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) and Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Mindfulness can be developed through various practices and workplace conditions, and studies show it positively impacts work performance by enhancing problem-solving, creativity, and job motivation. Overall, mindfulness is theoretically grounded and supported by empirical research as a valuable component of PsyCap in organizational settings. The table 1 summarize how mindfulness meets the inclusion criteria of psychological capital with implications for both theory and practise.

Inclusion Criteria of Psychological Capital	How Mindfulness Meets the Criteria	Theoretical Implications	Practical Implications
Grounded in Theory and Research	Mindfulness at workplace can be explained through theories such as the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and the extended job demands-resources (JD-R) model.	These theories could explain how mindfulness contributes to conserving psychological resources, minimizing stress and improving well-being.	These interventions in the workplace could offer solutions to reduce burnout, stress and improve well-being for managers and leaders.
Measurable	Mindfulness as a construct can be measured using validated tools like the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS).	Such scales offer reliable measures of mindfulness, granting for clear evaluation in both research and practice.	This has implications for organizations to assess mindfulness levels over time and improve the precision of interventions.
Capable of Development	Mindfulness is a state-like construct, suggesting it can be deliberately developed through practice, training, and workplace provisions.	The capacity to advance mindfulness is reinforced by empirical research, highlighting its malleability through targeted methods.	Workplace mindfulness programs can be employed to improve employee skills, adjusting productivity, flexibility, and well-being.
Linked to Work Performance	Prior research highlights that Mindfulness impacts work performance positively, including problem-solving, creativity, and job motivation.	Mindfulness nurtures psychological flexibility and strength, that can improve job performance and productivity.	Mindfulness practices can be included into employee training programs to improve performance, resourcefulness, and job satisfaction.

Table 1: Mindfulness as a Key Component of PsyCap

Luthans and his colleagues' concerns relating to mindfulness as PsyCap

Luthans *et al*. (2015) posited that mindfulness meets the theory-based, state-like, measurable, and work outcomes-related criteria for inclusion as psycap. However, they questioned whether mindfulness meets the psycap requirements of an agentic mechanism (i.e., intentional actions or decisions) and its relationship with work performance. This article argues that mindfulness is indeed linked to work performance (Cheung *et al*., 2020; Dane and Brummel, 2014; Forjan *et al*., 2020; Hafenbrack and Vohs, 2018; Lyddy and Good, 2017; Pang and Ruch, 2019). Additionally, research on workplace mindfulness suggests that everyday mindfulness can be intentionally cultivated or experienced in the workplace (Cigolla and Brown, 2011; Forjan *et al*., 2020; Hulsheger *et al*., 2018; Irving *et al*., 2014; Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017; Lyddy and Good, 2017). For example, a study found that therapeutic staff consciously choose to be mindful in their personal and professional lives, dealing with patients with attention, awareness, openness, compassion, and acceptance (Cigolla and Brown, 2011). Other studies indicate that mindfulness in everyday life is experienced as an intentional state of being rather than simply doing, marked by enhanced awareness of cognitions, sensations, and emotions (Irving *et al*., 2014; Lyddy and Good, 2017). Thus, mindfulness meets the psycap criteria for an agentic mechanism and its connection to work performance.

Luthans *et al*. (2015) asserted that mindfulness, by promoting non-judgmental awareness of present experiences, does not fully align with the PsyCap criteria related to the positive appraisal of circumstances and success probabilities. While many mindfulness practices emphasize non-judgmental awareness, some, such as compassion and loving-kindness practices, actively encourage a positive appraisal of present circumstances for the practitioner's well-being (Hofmann *et al*., 2011). These practices differ in focus: loving-kindness centers on unconditional kindness, while compassion emphasizes deep sympathy for oneself and others (Grossman and Van Dam, 2011; Hopkins, 2001). They involve wishing for the mental and physical well-being of others, including both supportive and challenging

individuals (Hofmann *et al.*, 2011; The Dalai Lama, 2001). In this context, mindfulness can indeed foster a positive appraisal of emotions, motivations, and behaviors toward oneself and others (Salzberg, 1995). Salzberg (2011) also emphasized that mindfulness is not about neutrality but about awareness and discerning feelings and reactions, such as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral emotions. This awareness allows individuals to explore options and choose how to respond. Moreover, mindfulness can contribute to cultivating a positive outlook on future outcomes or success probabilities.

Overall, Luthans *et al.* (2015) argued that mindfulness fulfils key criteria for inclusion as a component of PsyCap, such as being theory-based, state-like, measurable, and related to work outcomes, but questioned its alignment with agentic mechanisms and positive appraisal of success. This article argues that mindfulness is indeed linked to work performance and can be intentionally cultivated in the workplace, meeting the PsyCap requirement for agentic mechanisms. Additionally, mindfulness practices like compassion and loving-kindness promote positive appraisals of circumstances, further supporting its inclusion as a PsyCap component. Overall, mindfulness meets all criteria for PsyCap and can be considered part of it.

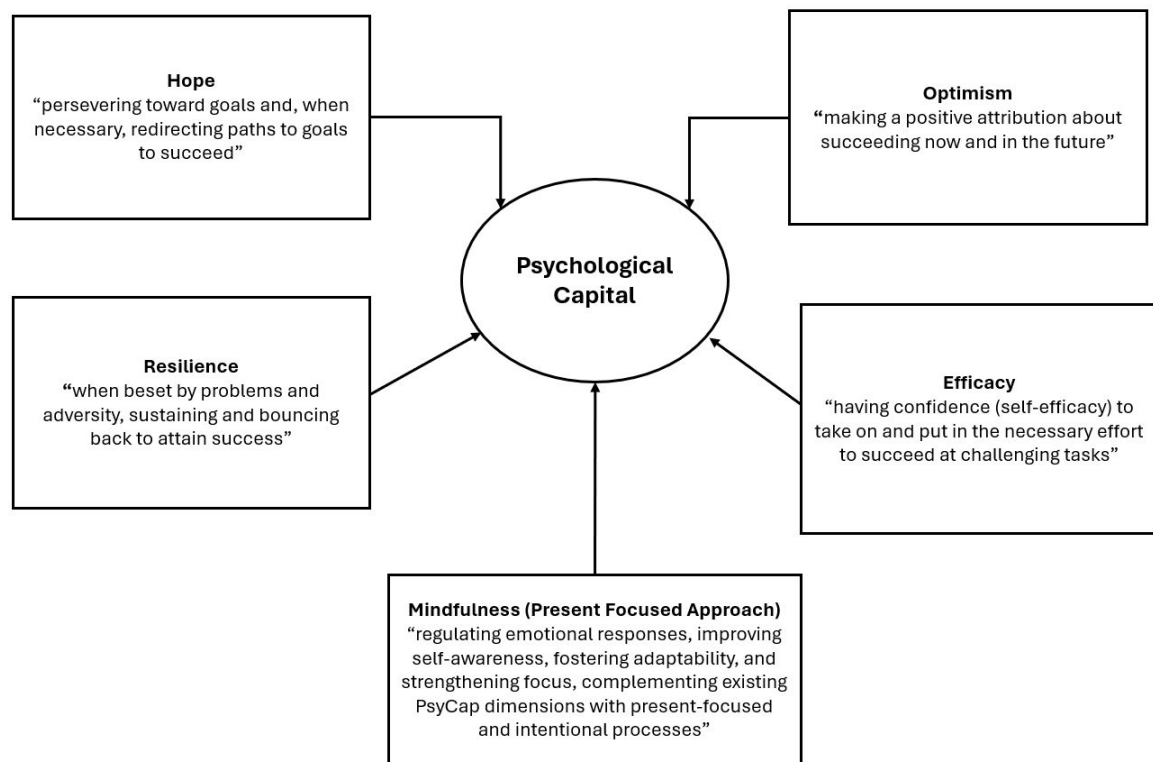*Unique Contribution of Mindfulness as Psychological Capital*

Mindfulness uniquely influences PsyCap by extending through a mechanism of action that complements the current components of hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. While these components have a future-oriented focus on achieving goals, having a positive viewpoint and bouncing from adverse circumstances (Mikus and Teoh, 2022), mindfulness on the other hand emphasizes awareness of the present moment as well as accepting experiences without judgement (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

As shown in Figure 1, we propose that this present-focused awareness could uniquely advance our understanding of psychological capital in the following ways. First, mindfulness activities facilitate individuals to regulate their emotional and cognitive reactivity to stressful situations and challenges (Ahne and Rosselli, 2024) thereby preventing them from engaging in impulsive responses. This aspect complements and adds to the resilience dimension but functions differently, by adopting self-control and equanimity rather than just healing. Second, mindfulness enhances metacognition and enables individuals to better identify and manage their strengths and weaknesses (Aránega *et al*., 2020). This enhanced self-awareness complements and adds to the efficacy dimension by providing clarity in actions and decision-making. Third, mindfulness helps individuals to adapt to changing situations and be more adaptable and flexible in their approach (Dunn and Larson, 2023). This advances and goes beyond the optimism dimension which focuses on maintaining a positive outlook. Fourth, mindfulness also enables individuals to have sustained focus and attention (Bajestani *et al.,* 2024) that helps goal-directed behavior that indirectly contributes to hope and efficacy dimensions by enabling a foundation for measured action. This aspect is not addressed in other dimensions. Hence, mindfulness contributes to psychological capital by not only extending the current dimensions but also significantly enhancing psychological functioning through a present-focused approach, emotional regulation, self-awareness, adaptability and improvement in focus and attention.

Figure 1: Proposing Mindfulness as psychological capital (adapted from Newman et al., 2014)

Discussion

Mindfulness interventions at work have emerged as a promising tool for enhancing employee well-being, relationships, and performance (Good *et al.*, 2016). However, the spiritual and religious origins of mindfulness can raise ethical concerns about its application in organizational settings (Monteiro *et al.*, 2015; Purser and Loy, 2013; Purser, 2018). Some scholars have highlighted the secular and scientific aspects of mindfulness (Baer, 2015; Cheung, 2018; DeSteno, 2013), arguing that the field of POB offers a basis for understanding contemporary mindfulness in a non-religious, evidence-based context (Avey *et al.*, 2008; Luthans *et al.*, 2017; Malinowski and Lim, 2015; Marianetti and Passmore, 2009; Roche *et al.*, 2014; Roche and Haar, 2019). However, these studies have not provided a comprehensive

literature review to fully understand mindfulness within the POB domain. Our comprehensive review of the POB literature highlights the secular and scientific nature of contemporary workplace mindfulness, addresses ethical concerns, and contributes to POB by proposing mindfulness as a potential fifth component of PsyCap. Specifically, we compare and contrast Buddhist and contemporary conceptualization of mindfulness and then argue that contemporary mindfulness aligns with the inclusion criteria of PsyCap relating to the theoretical and research foundations, measurability, developmental potential, and its relationship to work performance.

Research Implications

This article contributes significantly to the ongoing discussion about the ethical application of mindfulness in the workplace (Baer, 2015; Cheung, 2018; DeSteno, 2013; Mikulas, 2018). Previous research has suggested that the scientific field of psychology offers a suitable domain for the ethical application of contemporary mindfulness in organizational settings (Baer, 2015; Cheung, 2018; DeSteno, 2013; Mikulas, 2018). By providing a more thorough and rigorous analysis of POB literature, this article enhances the discussion on contemporary mindfulness, proposing it as a potential construct of PsyCap. It argues that the POB field effectively supports understanding the scientific and secular nature of mindfulness in workplace contexts, offering a valuable foundation for organizational researchers.

While some studies have suggested that mindfulness could be included as PsyCap due to its alignment with the basic inclusion criteria (Marianetti and Passmore, 2009; Luthans *et al*., 2015; Luthans *et al*., 2017; Roche and Haar, 2019), there has been a lack of in-depth discussion on this topic. This article addresses that gap by critically evaluating the current literature on workplace mindfulness and PsyCap, aiding organizational researchers in understanding this relationship. It argues that mindfulness meets the PsyCap criteria of being

theory-based, measurable, developable, and related to work performance. Luthans *et al*. (2015) raised concerns about mindfulness fulfilling PsyCap requirements, particularly regarding the agentic mechanism, work performance relationship, and positive appraisal. This article examines these concerns in light of current workplace mindfulness literature, providing empirical evidence of mindfulness connection to work and task performance (e.g., Cheung *et al*., 2020; Dane and Brummel, 2014; Forjan *et al*., 2020; Hafenbrack and Vohs, 2018) and its intentional cultivation in the workplace (Cigolla and Brown, 2011; Forjan *et al*., 2020; Hulsheger *et al*., 2018; Irving *et al*., 2014; Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017; Lyddy and Good, 2017). Additionally, mindfulness practices, such as loving-kindness and compassion, involve a positive appraisal of circumstances and success possibilities (Grossman and Van Dam, 2011; Hofmann *et al*., 2011; Hopkins, 2001; Salzberg, 1995, 2011; The Dalai Lama, 2001), suggesting that mindfulness could be considered a potential PsyCap within POB, alongside hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism.

Furthermore, the article identifies areas for future research through an in-depth evaluation of workplace mindfulness in POB literature. While most research has focused on trait mindfulness and mindfulness interventions (e.g., Allen and Kiburz, 2012; Zhang *et al*., 2013; Wolever *et al*., 2012), there has been limited exploration of state mindfulness (Forjan *et al*., 2020; Hulsheger *et al*., 2018). For instance, the nature of state mindfulness in everyday workplace contexts remains unclear, as does the distinction between state mindfulness and informal mindfulness practices like mindful reading, driving, and eating (Kiken *et al*., 2015). The majority of existing mindfulness-based scales measure trait mindfulness, with only two (MAAS and TMS) measuring state mindfulness (Bergomi *et al*., 2013; Sauer *et al*., 2013). To better understand state mindfulness as a PsyCap construct, further research is needed on its nature and measurement. The article highlights the need for more research on the intersection of POB and workplace mindfulness, noting that while POB is a promising field for studying

mindfulness and workplace outcomes, its application in organizational literature remains limited (Shahbaz and Parker, 2022).

Practical implications

This article presents three key practical implications. First, while mindfulness interventions are often recognised as effective tools for enhancing employee well-being and performance (Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Lomas *et al.*, 2017; Sajjad and Shahbaz, 2020), organizational leaders and employees may hesitate to adopt these practices due to their spiritual and religious origins (Monteiro *et al.*, 2015; Purser and Loy, 2013; Purser, 2018). This article clarifies the nature of contemporary mindfulness within the workplace, emphasizing its scientific and secular aspects. A deeper understanding of mindfulness as a secular and evidence-based intervention could increase the confidence of those considering its integration into organizational practices for workplace benefits.

Secondly, Luthans *et al.* (2004) argued that organizations can gain a competitive edge not by merely addressing existing problems but by investing in their PsyCap, such as confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience. This article proposes a new perspective by suggesting mindfulness as a potential PsyCap construct. Traditional mindfulness programs like MBSR, MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy), and DBT have primarily focused on managing issues like anxiety, depression, and personality disorders (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Teasdale *et al.*, 2000; Linehan, 1993). While these programs aim to reduce negative outcomes in line with psychological approaches focused on deficit reduction (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), they also lead to enhancements in areas such as positive affect, cognitive functioning, self-regulation, positive appraisal, and improved interpersonal interactions (Geschwind *et al.*, 2011; Goleman, 2006; Holzel *et al.*, 2011; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Therefore, practitioners should consider incorporating mindfulness not merely as a

solution to workplace problems but as a positive strength that can offer multifaceted benefits to organizations.

Third, viewing mindfulness as a positive strength and component of PsyCap could also enhance the employee recruitment process. Mindful employees are likely to contribute positively to the organization's psychological capital and may perform better than others (e.g., Cheung *et al*., 2020; Dane and Brummel, 2014; Forjan *et al*., 2020; Hafenbrack and Vohs, 2018). Consequently, organizational leaders might consider mindfulness as an important criterion when hiring new employees, recognising its potential to bolster overall organizational performance.

Conclusion

Mindfulness is an emerging concept in the workplace, but the limited understanding of its scientific and secular aspects may hinder its research and application in the workplace context. Drawing from the mindfulness and POB literature, we offer a deeper insight into contemporary mindfulness, arguing that it meets the criteria for inclusion as a PsyCap construct. As such, it could be recognized as a potential element of positive psychology in the workplace. Conceptualizing mindfulness as a PsyCap construct enables researchers to investigate it within the established field of POB and allows professionals to implement mindfulness practices in a scientifically grounded manner.

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