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# Experts' observations on the requirements for and outcomes of workplace mindfulness programs: A qualitative study

Maren M. Michaelsen<sup>a,\*</sup>, Lena Langer<sup>a</sup>, Terje Sparby<sup>b,c,d</sup>, Tobias Esch<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Institute for Integrative Health Care and Health Promotion, Faculty of Health, Witten/Herdecke University, Witten, Germany

<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology and Psychotherapy, Faculty of Health, Witten/Herdecke University, Witten, Germany

<sup>c</sup> Integrated Curriculum for Anthroposophic Psychology, Witten/Herdecke University, Witten, Germany

<sup>d</sup> Steiner University College, Oslo, Norway

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The findings derived from quantitative research indicate that mindfulness possesses a valuable potential for fostering the health and well-being of employees, as well as facilitating organizational change. However, despite the perceived objectivity and comprehensiveness often associated with quantitative studies, quantitative investigations are constrained by i) their ability to only portray predefined changes measured through questionnaires, and ii) their inability to elucidate the contextual factors that facilitate the sustained cultivation of mindfulness within an organization.

**Objectives:** We undertook a qualitative study with the aim of uncovering novel facets concerning the prospective influence of mindfulness integration in the workplace, and identifying the determinants contributing to its long-term establishment.

**Methods:** We employed a qualitative research approach comprising sixteen expert interviews and a critical friend interview with mindfulness experts working in small to large organizations. Subsequently, we employed a data-driven qualitative content analysis.

**Results:** The findings from the expert interviews revealed three key outcomes of mindfulness integration in the workplace: strengthening of individual competencies (e.g., presence), improved understanding of work meaningfulness and positive affect (e.g., joy), and fostering a more positive work atmosphere (e.g., gratitude). Additionally, the requirements for establishing mindfulness in the workplace can be classified into three categories: organizational structure (e.g., designated places), organizational culture (e.g., transparency), and mindfulness program structure (e.g., transferability).

**Conclusions:** These findings help to generate new hypotheses about the efficacy of mindfulness at the workplace, can support scholars to advance this line of research and provide guidance for practitioners considering implementing mindfulness (interventions) for employees.

## 1. Introduction

To address the escalating complexities encountered within work organizations (Mack et al., 2016; von Ameln & Wimmer, 2016), an increasing number of employees are being presented with opportunities to enhance their mindfulness capabilities through specialized training sessions and informative lectures delivered by esteemed mindfulness coaches, as well as through the utilization of mindfulness apps (Sutcliffe et al., 2016). The introduction of mindfulness practices to employees serves the purpose of fostering organizational and cultural transformation in alignment with both a global trend and a reorientation of

(corporate) values (Kohtes & Rosmann, 2014). The prevailing definition of mindfulness is described as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010). Enhancing mindfulness can be attained through a range of structured and unstructured techniques, including comprehensive programs that integrate multiple approaches. Many of these exercises can be categorized as a collective set of “complex trainings that regulate emotions and attention”, utilized for diverse objectives such as cultivating well-being and attaining emotional balance [Lutz et al., 2008, p. 163].

The enhancement of mindfulness has been linked to improvements in

\* Corresponding author at: Alfred-Herrhausen-Str. 50, 58448, Witten, Germany.

E-mail address: [maren.michaelsen@uni-wh.de](mailto:maren.michaelsen@uni-wh.de) (M.M. Michaelsen).

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attention regulation, body awareness, emotion regulation, and self-awareness, which can be attributed to neurological or neurophysiological modifications (Esch, 2014; Esch, 2021; Hölzel et al., 2011). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses, encompassing workplace mindfulness interventions, have consistently demonstrated improvements in both deficit-oriented factors such as burnout and depression, as well as resource-oriented factors such as job satisfaction and job performance, across a wide range of occupational groups (Michaelsen et al., 2021; Bartlett et al., 2019; Lomas et al., 2018; Michaelsen et al., 2023; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Vonderlin et al., 2020a). Overall, the results indicate that mindfulness interventions serve as a valuable resource for enhancing various aspects of employee health, well-being, and facilitating organizational change. However, it is worth noting that while these quantitative findings are often considered objective and comprehensive, they may offer limited insights into the multifaceted nature of mindfulness within the workplace. For instance, the delivery of mindfulness to employees does not always occur through formal, defined interventions, but rather through informal integration facilitated by experienced colleagues who intermittently teach mindfulness to their peers (Michaelsen et al., 2021). In such instances, pre-post evaluations may be ineffective in capturing the full scope of the phenomenon. Furthermore, quantitative studies employing questionnaires are limited to assessing predefined changes, i.e., those that were anticipated, and included in the survey measures. Consequently, unexpected or atypical changes may go unnoticed in these study designs. However, gaining additional perspectives on the potential outcomes of mindfulness training is possible by consulting practitioners themselves, their instructors, or employers. Moreover, prior research has neglected to thoroughly analyze the circumstances, precursors, or prerequisites that foster the long-term cultivation of mindfulness within an organization. Although mindfulness interventions have shown short-term benefits, research has rarely examined the sustainability of mindfulness cultivation after formal programs conclude. Existing quantitative studies often overlook how mindfulness can become an enduring resource integrated into daily work practices. Building on the *Conservation of Resources (COR) theory* (Hobfoll, 1989) and the *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this study conceptualizes mindfulness as a personal and organizational resource whose long-term maintenance depends on supportive contextual conditions such as leadership, culture, and structural continuity. By focusing on expert perspectives, the study seeks to clarify the mechanisms that enable sustained mindfulness in organizations. This includes exploring the moderators or inhibitors that influence the establishment of mindfulness in the workplace, as well as the relevant contextual factors such as the provision of on-site practice rooms (Lyddy & Good, 2016; Reina & Kudesia, 2020; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). To address these two areas, a qualitative research approach was employed, involving sixteen semi-structured expert interviews and one critical friend interview. The data collected from these interviews were subjected to a data-driven qualitative content analysis, following the methodological framework outlined by (Kuckartz, 2019), to generate thematic categories. Through this analysis, we aimed to uncover potential outcomes of organizational mindfulness that had not been previously mentioned and to identify factors that facilitate the cultivation of mindfulness within the workplace. The findings of this study not only offer practical guidance for practitioners but also open up new avenues for future research in this field.

## 2. Methods

In reporting the study, we followed the SRQR guidelines (O'Brien et al., 2014). The database consists of sixteen expert interviews conducted by one member of the study team (MM). The researcher possesses dual expertise with a PhD in economics and a PhD in theoretical medicine. She has accumulated significant experience in practicing mindfulness and has imparted teachings on meditation and yoga in various contexts, primarily within Germany, including yoga centers and

educational institutions. Her personal stance towards meditation is generally favorable, as she firmly believes in its potential to enhance both health and overall quality of life. Nevertheless, she maintains an open-minded, reflective approach and acknowledges the need to critically assess the effectiveness of mindfulness trainings within work settings. Additionally, she has received training in conducting interviews, including proficiency in the microphenomenological interview technique [see, e.g., Bitbol & Petitmengin, 2017], through collaboration with colleagues and fellow researchers.

The selection process for interview participants involved initially identifying seventeen potential candidates through individual contacts of the authors and recommendations from the organizing team of the biennial German conference "Meditation & Wissenschaft" (in English: Meditation & Science) (<https://www.meditation-wissenschaft.org/>). With the exception of one expert, all of the contacted individuals expressed their willingness to participate in the study.

The project team developed an interview guide that underwent iterative revisions in light of the findings from the initial thirteen interviews. The key interview questions addressed in this article were: 1) "What observable changes have you noticed in the participants? Have there been any surprising changes?" and 2) "What are the prerequisites for establishing mindfulness in the workplace?"

The average duration of the interviews was 35 minutes. All but one interview were conducted in German, while the remaining one was conducted in English. The first three interviews were recorded and transcribed as memory transcripts. Due to the richness of information provided in the interviews, the remaining interviews were audio recorded with the interviewees' consent and later transcribed verbatim by two student assistants. Following the thirteenth interview, a critical friends (CF) interview was conducted with another member of the research team (TE), who is a content expert with extensive experience in the field and conducts mindfulness trainings in organizations and with leaders at retreat centers. This interview served as a member check: The interviewer and the content expert engaged in a thorough discussion of the findings aimed to assess the thematic density of the data as an indicator of data saturation. Together, they reformulated previously formulated themes and re-structured the data based on the codes identified by the first author. Data saturation for some themes was achieved, while for others, the final three interviews were necessary to achieve data saturation, i.e. no new themes emerged in the 15th and 16th interview. For reference, the interview guide can be found in Appendix 1. The interviews were subjected to data-driven (inductive) qualitative content analysis, utilizing the framework outlined by Kuckartz (2019) and supported by Nvivo software. This approach facilitated an exploratory examination of the themes within the research domain. Any information that could potentially reveal the identities of the experts was anonymized. To ensure accuracy and transparency, all participants were given the opportunity to review and make revisions to the interview transcripts.

## 3. Characteristics of the experts

Most interviewed experts were employees within their organizations, teaching mindfulness formally or informally. Others were self-employed teachers contracted by companies, and three had academic affiliations. The experts came from diverse sectors like manufacturing, finance, and freelance professions, all maintaining long-term personal mindfulness practices and sharing their experiences through structured training and informal professional meetings. Their offerings varied widely in technique, scope, context, and topics.

About one-third taught Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program or incorporated its elements. Another third worked with programs developed with Awaris, which also drew on MBSR principles. Two respondents used the Search Inside Yourself program, while others developed their own curricula integrating Buddhist, Sufi, Christian traditions, and physical relaxation techniques

like Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).

The duration of the programs varied from one-time workshops to multi-week courses lasting up to ten months. Mixed formats included intensive one-day sessions followed by ongoing meetings and digital training elements like newsletters, online seminars, and apps.

Program design was shaped by company needs and expectations, tailored to organizational goals. Half of the experts focused on applying mindfulness to the work context, addressing mindful leadership, team cohesion, communication, work organization, and integrating meditation into the workplace. Other topics included resilience, emotion regulation, focus, compassion, stress management, and neurobiological effects of mindfulness. Training formats combined theoretical input, discussions, and practical exercises, with some experts also offering “rooms of silence” and group meditations at the workplace.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Outcomes of mindfulness at work as observed by the experts

The observations of the interviewed experts demonstrate a diverse range of outcomes that align with the findings of quantitative studies. However, the experts’ insights provide a deeper and more detailed understanding of these outcomes. The observations can be categorized into three main types: individual competencies, meaning and positive affect, and work atmosphere. These experiences are summarized in a table in Appendix 2 and described further below.

#### 4.1.1. Individual competencies

Numerous experts have documented a notable enhancement in various competencies and skills among their participants.

They have reported that participants exhibited an improved level of self-awareness, demonstrating a heightened ability to recognize their own emotions and thoughts while also gaining a more perceptive understanding of their surroundings, as exemplified by the quote “It is an interesting consequence of one’s own awareness” (I3). The respondents have also highlighted the observable development of enhanced presence, signifying increased attentiveness to the current moment: “And then you also see that the colleagues are more attentive” (I7). Additionally, individuals have demonstrated the capacity to detach or distance themselves, allowing for a sense of separation from their own thoughts, emotions, and feelings, in the sense of “I am not the pain” (I15). This distancing mechanism has proven effective in enabling individuals to dissociate from negative emotions and facilitate self-regulation, as the following quote demonstrates: “One is more likely to be able to step out of one’s own concernment.” (I8). The experts further noted that participants displayed heightened self-control, reduced impulsiveness, and greater thoughtfulness: “Yes, that they are not so impulsive” (I3). Moreover, there was evidence of improved ability to discern between various roles, encompassing operational roles within the work context (such as leader, assistant, organizer, etc.) and psychological roles like rescuer, persecutor, and victim. Through differentiating between these roles, mindfulness practitioners have learned to not take personal offense to criticism from supervisors, but rather to perceive it within the framework of their role as employees: “My relationship with my boss has changed because I suddenly realized that when he criticizes me, it’s not against me but against my role.” (I1). Similarly, practitioners have become more compassionate towards clients, understanding that any complaints are not directed at them personally, but rather at their role as service providers.

Several facets commonly associated with mindfulness practice have been identified, including increased acceptance of unsolvable issues, as one participant described as “[...] but sometimes also the ability to better bear and accept things that cannot be solved now.” (CF). In addition a sense of equanimity, reduced inclination to pass judgment (both on oneself and others), and enhanced internal adaptability were also mentioned, as the following quotes signify: “I experience this

equanimity, this attitude with colleagues, already after 10 weeks.” (I16), “[...] to develop an inner flexibility.” (CF), “[...] and this non-judgemental, that also sticks relatively well, yes.” (I8). These aspects align with the perceived greater openness reported by certain interviewees, e.g.: “And then you also see that the colleagues are [...] more open.” (I7). In fact, one participant summarized this as a more effective approach to navigating the inevitable “ups and downs” of life (CF).

Furthermore, it has been reported that participants approached work-related problems in a different manner, resulting in improved and expedited solutions, as is demonstrated by the quote “And then we see that they solve problems differently because they understand that listening without judgement, positive attitude and so on make an important difference in problem-solving ability.” (I4). For instance, when individuals acknowledged the distressing nature of a problem, they were able to address it more promptly. Another interviewee emphasized that the improved problem-solving ability cultivated through mindfulness did not necessarily imply quicker resolutions in the traditional sense. Rather, it expanded the range of possibilities for problem management. By accepting the circumstances surrounding a problem, individuals could arrive at more effective solutions through alternative approaches. Thus, recognizing the limitations of solving certain issues led to greater acceptance. Moreover, mindfulness training was found to foster patience, enabling participants to observe situations before taking immediate action. Several experts highlighted that improved problem-solving skills were also attributed to an enhanced ability to consider different perspectives: “This allowed individuals to “better perceive the other person’s point of view” (I3), approach difficult situations from fresh angles, and contextualize problematic incidents differently. Interviewees further noted that mindfulness training empowered participants to take control of their own well-being because “they themselves get an idea of what they can do to make it better for themselves” (I2). One expert also mentioned that participants were able to allow for creative impulses: “that they can also allow more creative impulses more easily” (I3), and one was certain that the training had reduced employees’ perception of stress: “[...] but for eighty per cent it actually does increase satisfaction and reduce stress.” (I8). Lastly, the newfound mindfulness skills were found to extend beyond the training itself, influencing various aspects of participants’ lives, including daily routines, personal relationships, and some individuals even incorporated regular mindfulness practice outside of the training setting: “[...] people also report that ‘it has changed my relationship with my family’, and things like that.” (I6).

#### 4.1.2. Meaning and positive affect

A number of experts reported that mindfulness training resulted in an enhanced perception of the meaningfulness of work for many participants. Through mindfulness practice, employees gained a deeper understanding of why they engage in their work and whether it contributes to their overall well-being. This training empowered individuals to critically evaluate their tasks, working conditions, and potential lack of purpose. One of the experts, a lecturer, said: “[...] that suddenly the exam stress is different or that they suddenly start thinking about the sense and nonsense of free time and what I’m doing there, so where you notice there is an understanding taking place” (I10). This process, often described as “coming to one’s senses” (CF), could lead to unexpected outcomes, as some interviewees noted. In this context, several interviewees mentioned the example of a study that showed that several employees of a call center had chosen to quit after mindfulness training [see Walach et al., 2007a]. These experts shared their own experiences and acknowledged the phenomenon of employees leaving after engaging in mindfulness training. “This is not an isolated case. It is an interesting consequence of one’s own awareness. Of course, it is not the goal, but sometimes it is the case that only with such a time-out and with such a deeper experience can one suddenly see what an unsolvable conflict one is stuck in” (I3). It is important to note that this consequence should not be perceived solely in a negative light, as one interviewee

elaborated:

“Certainly [it is] better in the end to let frustrated, angry, or constrained staff go. If someone then quits for that reason, then that is also good for the company. If a company fears that employees will become more outspoken, more open, more self-confident, then something is probably wrong in that company.... And if that’s the case, well, then you’re already at the wrong company per se” (Interview I3).

The experts additionally disclosed a correlation between the significance of work and the attainment of joy, as this quote signifies: “[...] and I often see that you can recognise a certain shine in the faces, that is, also a certain joy.” (CF). A specific interviewee noted that participants who underwent mindfulness training had encountered a state of tranquility or calmness, as in “[...] and I am always amazed at how practically calm [...] that makes people.” (I8), and expressed higher levels of satisfaction or contentment in a general sense. This transformation evidently extends to “an impact on supply chains” as well, as highlighted by one interviewee (I16). Moreover, two experts observed that individuals had developed a distinct and more positive disposition, as this quote shows: “[...] and then we see that [...] positive attitude and so on make an important difference” (I4).

#### 4.1.3. Work atmosphere

Several observations were made regarding factors associated with the work environment. One prominent aspect that was frequently mentioned involved the improvement of interpersonal communication. This improvement was attributed to an enhanced ability to express one’s own emotions effectively and the development of active listening skills, which facilitated more constructive conversations. Notably, participants demonstrated the capacity to “communicate empathetically even under stress” (I10). In line with this, some experts also observed that mindfulness training fostered the strengthening of relationships within teams and across various hierarchical levels: “[...] not only to peers, so to speak, but also top down or bottom up relationships are strengthened.” (CF). Through mindfulness practice, individuals learned that work encompasses “not only about facts but also about how people interact” (I7). An additional observation highlighted the improvement not only in relationships at the same hierarchical level but also in relationships that encompassed top-down and bottom-up dynamics. This improvement was often characterized by a heightened appreciation for the roles of colleagues and one’s own role. As one expert elucidated, traditional roles, boundaries, and offensive behaviors appeared to have softened: “[...] you see that these classical roles and the classical boundaries, the classical counter-mechanisms are no longer so strong.” (CF). Some interviewees also mentioned that participants experienced a greater sense of gratitude for their own work and the tasks they were assigned: “I would like to add ‘appreciation’ here, because I have experienced this very often in companies.” (CF). This heightened gratitude could foster a stronger sense of connection and community within the workforce: “And above all, there is also a great bond between the people.” (I6). Moreover, participants exhibited the ability to extend their gratitude to others, as observed by some experts. Furthermore, it was suggested by these experts that gratitude and a sense of connectedness have an influence on the overall atmosphere or spirit within a company: “And above all, there is a great connectedness between the people. In the group. And everyone always finds that very valuable.” (I6). Interestingly, external observers were also noted to be capable of perceiving this atmosphere:

“You come into the hall downstairs, you arrive at the gatekeeper’s desk and you already feel where this company stands, and if you know the company from before, you notice whether something has changed. And THAT is what mindfulness can do.” (CF).

Moreover, it was asserted that the aforementioned sense of meaningfulness in one’s work engendered a heightened willingness to contribute, as employees who participated in mindfulness training perceived themselves as integral to the broader entrepreneurial process. Illustratively, an interviewee mentioned two individuals who took initiative within their company by implementing mindfulness training

and successfully establishing a dedicated meditation room in their workplace. Furthermore, one observation was described as follows: “She always pushed [...] for a mediation room to be set up at [Company X], where she now also offers yoga once a week, yoga with meditation.” (I1).

#### 4.2. Requirements for establishing mindfulness in the workplace

The successful establishment of mindfulness within an organization depends on multiple factors, as suggested by the analysis of the interviews. These factors serve as antecedents for mindfulness (Hobfoll, 1989), can be categorized into three main areas: i) organization-specific aspects related to the organizational structure, ii) organizational culture encompassing social aspects, and iii) characteristics of the mindfulness program itself. A summary of these three categories of requirements is presented in a table in Appendix 3 and further elaborated upon below.

##### 4.2.1. Organizational structure

When queried about the necessary conditions for establishing mindfulness within an organization, the experts unanimously emphasized the significance of creating a conducive environment, often described as a dedicated “island” in the workplace where individuals can retreat: “Spatial resources are very important, it is advantageous if there is an extra room for it.” (I13). Many interviewees stressed the importance of having a “room of silence” exclusively designated for meditation, with strict regulations prohibiting activities such as sleeping. Simultaneously, it was emphasized that the designated space should be utilized, as its non-utilization could diminish the perceived relevance of mindfulness within the organization, making it more challenging to establish mindfulness practices among the workforce. According to one interviewee, the presence of a dedicated meditation room would also serve as a tangible demonstration of management’s commitment, motivating employees to engage in mindfulness practices. However, a few experts expressed that a dedicated meditation room was not an absolute necessity, as individuals could retreat inward and practice mindfulness in any location or at any time. Nevertheless, the specific circumstances of the organization must be taken into consideration. For instance, if employees work closely together in a shared office space where phone calls are frequent, practicing meditation can be particularly challenging, especially for beginners. Moreover, the reactions of colleagues who are unfamiliar with meditation may discourage individuals practicing mindfulness in an open-plan office setting.

In addition to the importance of having a designated space for mindfulness in the organization, experts also highlighted the value of establishing an area in the canteen dedicated to mindful eating. This would provide opportunities for employees to engage in mindful breaks during meal times. Mindful eating, which involves consuming food in silence while attentively focusing on one’s senses such as taste, smell, and texture, was identified as an informal mindfulness practice.

Furthermore, the experts emphasized the significance of developing an ongoing mindfulness practice beyond the initial training. They acknowledged that incorporating formal mindfulness practices may be challenging in certain organizations where employees have continuous interactions with customers or patients. In such cases, informal practices can be more easily integrated into the daily work routine. Informal practices, such as mindful walking or intentional mindful communication, are not bound by specific spatial or temporal structures.

Several respondents also emphasized the importance of consistent application of mindfulness in various work contexts, such as meetings, one-on-one conversations, and coaching sessions, rather than relying solely on the training itself. One respondent said that “it needs continuity.” (I1). To support this continuous application, one interviewee mentioned offering a mindfulness app that can be used after the training, providing employees with ongoing support and resources.

In addition to a dedicated room or area for mindfulness practice, one interviewee highlighted the necessity of establishing a “mindfulness

unit" or department within the organization, as this quote demonstrates: "My credo is always that it has a lot to do with the motivation of the commissioning institution." (I10). This department should have a defined place within the organizational chart and designated individuals responsible for promoting mindfulness. The interviewee mentioned that larger companies like Google often have a specific role called "Chief Evangelist" dedicated to promoting mindfulness. While it may not be feasible for every organization to have a dedicated mindfulness position, it is crucial to clearly define the role of mindfulness and ensure it is reflected in the staffing and organizational structure for long-term establishment. Establishing a mindfulness department or appointing a representative for mindfulness would demonstrate the organization's commitment and motivation towards mindfulness integration.

Furthermore, some experts expressed that the impetus to promote mindfulness within the organization should ideally arise from within the staff, preferably from someone in a leadership position. This "motivation from within" gives a human face to the mindfulness initiative: "So for that to really establish itself in a sustainable way, it needs a face." (I2). This could be fulfilled by colleagues who serve as protagonists, representing and embodying the principles of mindfulness and acting as multipliers within the organization. According to these experts, this aspect is vital in cultivating mindfulness practices throughout the organization.

#### 4.2.2. Organizational culture

Numerous interviewees underscored the crucial aspect of management's genuine intention in fostering mindfulness within the organization. Implicitly, respondents raised the question of whether management's interests solely revolved around enhancing performance or also encompassed the well-being and health of employees. Some experts emphasized that while the stated reason might be of secondary importance, clear and authentic communication of management's intention was vital. They highlighted that authenticity and transparency carried more significance than conveying non-economic or seemingly altruistic motives that lacked credibility: "[...] if the company commissions it, then it has some goal that it's pursuing with it, and that's of course the best thing if it's clearly communicated." (I10)

Furthermore, the experts stressed the tremendous significance of management support. If management provided employees with opportunities to practice mindfulness during work hours but regarded it merely as a superficial "gimmick", the potential for mindfulness to flourish would be compromised, as is demonstrated by the quote: "It needs [...] acceptance at a leadership level." (I2). Ideally, as several experts suggested, there should be a prevailing organizational culture: "Topics like mindfulness are not a process or a way of working, but a topic that has to be very strongly embedded in the corporate culture." (I14). In this culture, mindfulness practitioners or units would pervade the organization and positively influence others, in addition to having a motivated management. Although it is possible for this dynamic to work in the reverse direction, establishing a connection between these two levels is essential for success.

Alongside management intent, the intention of the mindfulness instructor was also identified as a relevant factor: "What is also very important is that you need the right teachers." (I9). It was emphasized that mindfulness teachers should themselves embody the principles of mindfulness, underscoring the importance of their personal commitment to the practice.

Certain experts highlighted that when organizations provide mindfulness training to employees, it is important for management to avoid expecting behavioral changes without reciprocation. They emphasized that addressing the work environment is essential to ensure a balance between employees' efforts in practicing mindfulness and management's efforts in enhancing working conditions. To this regard, one interviewee said: "Where I always see a problem is when you make pure behavioral prevention out of mindfulness, you have to [...] about what that means for the working conditions." (I11). In this regard, sustained

success of mindfulness training necessitates the integration of mindfulness into the organization's values and the cultivation of a positive perception of mindfulness within the organizational culture.

#### 4.2.3. Program characteristics

An aspect frequently discussed regarding mindfulness programs pertained to the cost of the training itself. While some experts argued that employer-provided mindfulness training should be offered free of charge, others did not consider this aspect as an absolute requirement. A more nuanced perspective on this topic emerged during the CF interview. The interviewee expressed the view that mindfulness training should be integrated into the organizational context, ensuring that there are no barriers to participation. This could involve offering the training for free or deducting the cost from employees' income. For instance, co-financing options could include deductions from income taxes, remuneration adjustments, or the reduction of social, ancillary wage, or social insurance costs. "In this respect, I would say that free of charge is good, and that should be the goal in terms of the organization's self-image, but I would say [...] that [this is] not an absolute condition" (CF).

A significant number of interviewees stressed the importance of voluntary participation in mindfulness training programs that spanned several hours or weeks, as demonstrated by one expert: "So we have also found that forcing people to do this makes no sense at all." (I13). Experts highlighted that the effectiveness and long-term impact of such training would be highly questionable if employees were compelled to participate against their will. However, regarding informal mindfulness exercises incorporated into the daily work routine, the requirement for voluntary participation could be more flexible (CF). For instance, if a mindful minute was introduced at the start of a meeting, it could be expected that everyone would participate. However, for activities that deviated from the regular or "usual" routine, consent from all participants would be necessary: "As soon as one person does not agree, we have to stick to the norm." (CF).

Several experts provided insights on the legitimacy of organizational mindfulness training conducted outside of working hours and the expectation of "homework" assignments. One interviewee succinctly addressed the question of whether compulsory practice time outside working hours was justified, emphasizing the importance of a quid pro quo from management. The interviewee said,

"[...] that it is important for the appreciation of this issue that somehow the employer also puts something in the balance scale. Not only possibly paying the trainer, or the coach or something, but [...] also on the issue of working time actually, something has to be thrown into the scales" (CF).

Several interviewees acknowledged that the feasibility of integrating mindfulness exercises into everyday work life is contingent upon the structures and tasks of the organization. They emphasized that it may not always be possible to incorporate mindfulness training within regular working hours, but "if the training takes place within working hours, it is taken more seriously by the employees." (I13). One interviewee shared an example of a specifically designed eight-hour intervention for assistant doctors, which only achieved sufficient participation when scheduled outside of work hours. The interviewee explained that attempting to implement the intervention during working hours resulted in "an extreme amount of argumentation with the chief physicians" (I10). Furthermore, according to one interviewee, it could be justified to encourage employees to practice mindfulness outside of work hours, as workplace mindfulness training can also bring benefits to their personal lives. The distinction between the individual perspective and the organizational perspective, as well as between individual behavior and organizational circumstances, is becoming increasingly blurred, as reported by the experts.

Three additional points raised in the interviews pertain to the content of mindfulness training. Firstly, there is a need to integrate the work context into mindfulness training, demonstrating how the learned practices can be applied to everyday work situations. Several

interviewees emphasized that it is crucial for the training content to directly relate to participants' specific work experiences, as one exemplary quote shows: "So the training has to be work-oriented first and foremost." (I14). This is particularly important when aiming to inspire not only "white-collar" employees but also "blue-collar" employees to engage in mindfulness practices. Some interviewees noted that including factual content, such as information on physiological changes in the brain through meditation, could be particularly motivating for technically or scientifically oriented professional groups. Additionally, incorporating measurements of clinical parameters like heart rate variability or cortisol levels as part of mindfulness training served as an incentive for certain employees, while also helping to reduce the gender gap among participants.

Secondly, the topic of religion and spirituality emerged repeatedly in the interviews. While almost all experts agreed that mindfulness training should be free from any reference to religion or spirituality, pointed out by one expert in the following: "It has to be inclusive enough that it can work for everyone, no matter what the person believes in" (I5). However, one interviewee highlighted that other approaches have been observed, especially in organizations outside Germany. The acceptance of spirituality in mindfulness training depended primarily on the organization's level of maturity, which reflects the extent to which mindfulness is already understood and embraced within the workforce and whether spirituality is a part of the corporate identity.

"Some organizations that already have a higher degree of maturity, so to speak, have no problem inviting a Buddhist monk, for example, like a large German hospital group that brought in a well-known Buddhist for a two-day training for personnel managers" (CF).

Therefore, when the topic "has already migrated a bit into the matrix of the organization, [...] the separation is no longer quite so crucial." (CF). The necessity of distancing from religion and spirituality depends on the maturity of the organization, the industry, and the cultural context of the country. Overall, it is important for training programs to be inclusive. On the other hand, a designated "room of silence" should be strictly free from religious practices and serve solely for formal mindfulness practice, as emphasized by multiple experts.

Thirdly, the organization must establish "[...] a container of emotional security, that's the most important thing." (I4). This refers to an atmosphere created through collectively agreed-upon rules of communication, active listening, appreciation, and confidentiality. It is crucial to cultivate a safe community and space where personal experiences shared verbally remain confidential and are not exploited. The willingness to authentically, appreciatively, empathetically, and mindfully listen to others and communicate in this manner signals and assures individuals that they are safe within this space. Trust plays a significant role in establishing such an environment.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Discussion of findings regarding outcomes of mindfulness at work

The findings based on the experts' statements reveal three major themes of observed outcomes. While some of these outcomes align with existing research, certain aspects have not yet been substantiated. Consequently, these findings provide a basis for formulating hypotheses regarding the benefits of workplace mindfulness. These hypotheses of outcomes of workplace mindfulness (H1) are formulated below, accompanied by a brief discussion of relevant literature if available.

**H1a.** Mindfulness at work improves individual competencies including awareness, presence, distancing, self-regulation, acceptance, differentiation between roles, inner flexibility, non-judging, equanimity, openness, creativity, empowerment, perspectives taking, problem solving, coping with stress, and transfer into private life.

The observations made by the experts regarding the enhancement of individual competencies align with findings from previous studies on the

effects of meditation and mindfulness. For instance, the concept of awareness has been explored in the work of Reb *et al.* (Reb, Narayanan, & Ho, 2015). The authors define awareness as the conscious recognition of one's actions, feelings, thoughts, perceptions, or sensations (p. 112). Their review of existing literature demonstrates that mindfulness training in the workplace has a subsequent impact on employee well-being and job performance.

The experts' observations of increased presence and a non-judgmental attitude among trainees are consistent with the core themes of mindfulness, namely, paying attention purposefully, in the present moment, and without judgment. However, to the best of our knowledge, the specific constructs of presence and non-judgment have not been examined as standalone outcomes in the mindfulness literature.

Acceptance, another competency highlighted by the experts, aligns with the goals of, e.g., Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is a mindfulness-informed group therapy frequently applied in workplace settings (Michaelsen *et al.*, 2023). Acceptance can be assessed using tools like the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II; Bond *et al.*, 2011) and has been found to increase among mindfulness trainees in workplace contexts (Moran, 2015).

Studies on the neurobiological and psychological mechanisms of mindfulness have demonstrated its potential to promote a more differentiated self-perception (Esch, 2014; Michaelsen & Esch, 2021). This differentiated self-image involves distinguishing between the ego-based self-image that extends over time and the actual, momentary self-experience (Farb *et al.*, 2007). This ability to distance oneself from internal experiences is referred to as decentering or disidentification (Britton *et al.*, 2021), aligning with the notion of distancing mentioned by the experts.

The observation of improved inner flexibility mentioned by the experts can be linked to the concept of psychological flexibility, which is a key outcome targeted in ACT (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2010). Enhanced inner mobility also relates to the capacity for perspective change (Britton *et al.*, 2021), which has been frequently mentioned by the experts.

Self-regulation is a prominent theme examined in the literature on workplace mindfulness (Hülshager & Alberts, 2021a). It has been associated with improvements in workplace well-being, relationships, and performance (Good *et al.*, 2015). The ability to differentiate between roles, another aspect highlighted in the interviews, has received limited attention in the literature, primarily in relation to role conflicts, which appear to decrease with mindfulness training (Valentine *et al.*, 2010).

In contrast to these relatively well explored phenomena, openness is a relatively under-researched aspect, although suggestive evidence proposes a positive association between mindfulness and openness to experiences (Michel *et al.*, 2021). The relationship between mindfulness and creativity is also a topic that has received limited attention in the literature. One study aimed to advance the understanding of individual mindfulness on creative process engagement in several ways (Awan *et al.*, 2024). The authors found that mindfulness enables individuals to self-regulate in specific situations, enhancing their effectiveness in fostering creative process engagement. Furthermore, they highlight that mindfulness motivates individuals to focus more on developing quality working relationships, although they seem less inclined to participate in idea generation and problem-solving activities (Awan *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, intrinsic motivation was found to mediate the negative relationship between job insecurity and innovative work behavior (Montani *et al.*, 2021). The authors found that high levels of trait mindfulness attenuate the negative impact of job insecurity on intrinsic motivation and, indirectly, on innovative behavior. These findings elucidate how mindfulness can help employees to maintain their innovative potential despite insecure work conditions 39]. A meta-analysis conducted by (Lebuda *et al.*, 2016) found a weak correlation between mindfulness and creativity, but few included studies specifically examined workplace mindfulness. Currently, there is a lack of studies demonstrating a measurable increase in creativity within workplace settings. Some

studies provide preliminary evidence that mindfulness enhances problem-solving skills (Forjan et al., 2020; Ostafin & Kassman, 2012), although concrete evidence is limited.

Empowerment is a theme that has received limited attention in the context of workplace mindfulness. While the potential benefits of mindfulness training for empowerment in the workplace are conceptually plausible, empirical research specifically investigating this construct in relation to mindfulness interventions is currently lacking. Further research is needed to explore the potential impact of mindfulness on empowerment within the work context.

Existing evidence suggests that the development of awareness, disidentification from thoughts and emotions, and a deeper understanding of one's role can contribute to a more effective coping strategy for stressful thoughts, emotions, psychosocial or psychological stress, and negative self-beliefs (Ernst et al., 2008; Hülshager et al., 2013; Shoham et al., 2017; Walach et al., 2007b). Such experiences of self-efficacy or a sense of authentic internal control (Sonntag et al., 2010) may in turn enhance the assumption of responsibility for one's own health (Shoham et al., 2017; Walach et al., 2007b) and improve individuals' ability to exert control over their work processes.

Equanimity is a well-documented outcome of regular mindfulness practice in meditation research (Desbordes et al., 2014; Rahl et al., 2017; Schnitker, 2012). However, it has received relatively little emphasis as a relevant outcome in the work context. Similarly, the ability to change perspective, as described by the interviewed experts, can be considered a form of empathy. This aligns with the broader definition of empathy, which refers to our general capacity to resonate with the emotional states of others, regardless of their valence (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). The mentioned ability to change perspective reflects a form of resonating with others' experiences. Research conducted in a large-scale project has demonstrated that meditation can enhance various facets of empathy (Trautwein et al., 2020), including in the workplace context (Good et al., 2015). The ability to change perspectives, or empathy, has been found to have a direct impact on the ability to relate to others in the workplace, as demonstrated by (Longmire & Harrison, 2018). However, previous randomized controlled trials (RCTs) examining mindfulness in the workplace have rarely investigated interpersonal relationships as an outcome.

Gratitude and appreciation have been identified as factors that can help reduce work-related stress and enhance extra-role performance behaviors (Ford et al., 2018; Winslow et al., 2017). As a result, mindfulness interventions incorporating gratitude exercises have gained popularity in organizational settings (Sawyer et al., 2022; Winslow et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the transfer of mindfulness-related skills into one's personal life is a theme that has received limited attention in the literature. While there is extensive research on the benefits of mindfulness in various domains, such as mental health and well-being, the specific examination of how organizational mindfulness practices cultivated in the workplace may extend beyond work-related contexts is relatively unexplored.

**H1b.** Mindfulness at work improves meaningfulness and positive affect, including meaning, positive attitude, joy, quiescence and satisfaction.

In the scientific literature, the concept of meaningfulness of work encompasses the legitimacy of tasks and has been linked to various health-related aspects. Studies have demonstrated the importance of meaningful work for well-being, as shown by, e.g., (van Wingerden & van der Stoep, 2018). Additionally, (Ivtzan et al., 2013) found that meaningfulness of work influences individual work engagement and commitment, while (Listopad, Esch, & Michaelsen, 2021; Listopad, Michaelsen, et al., 2021) discussed the role of meaningfulness of work in the development of burnout.

Research examining the relationship between mindfulness and well-being has included more specific analyses of the connection between

mindfulness and positive affect, joy, and satisfaction. For instance, (Mahlo & Windsor, 2021) found that greater state mindfulness is associated with affective well-being, although not specifically with positive emotional states, such as joy. (López et al., 2016) identified mindfulness as a strong predictor of positive affect. Work and life satisfaction have frequently been examined as outcomes in mindfulness studies conducted in the workplace, with systematic reviews indicating that the effects observed in randomized controlled trials tend to be small to moderate (Michaelsen & Esch, 2021; Vonderlin et al., 2020b).

Quiescence, or calmness, is an aspect that has received limited attention in the quantitative literature on mindfulness. However, qualitative studies, as highlighted in a mixed-methods review on workplace mindfulness for nurses by (Guillaumie et al., 2017), have consistently identified increased calmness as a result of mindfulness training.

To further understand the impact of mindfulness on quiescence and its potential benefits in the workplace, there is a need for quantitative studies that examine this aspect in more depth, by also including physiological outcomes, such as heart rate and heart rate variability. It would be valuable to explore the relationship between mindfulness and quiescence, as well as investigate whether calmness is associated with other mindfulness-related outcomes, such as equanimity. Additionally, analyzing the causal relationships between mindfulness, calmness, and other outcomes of workplace mindfulness training could provide valuable insights.

**H1c.** Mindfulness at work improves work atmosphere through improvements in communication, connection, gratitude, motivation to contribute, sense of community, softening and strengthening of relationships.

That mindfulness has an impact on work atmosphere has been explored in some, mostly qualitative, studies, of which the majority relate to contexts outside workplace organizations. In a study by (Ketay et al., 2022), the role of mindfulness in enhancing critical relational processes such as self-disclosure and responsiveness was explored. Their findings indicate that individual trait mindfulness significantly influences these processes during initial social interactions. Additionally, the mindfulness of interaction partners also shapes one's social behaviors, suggesting that mindfulness can have a reciprocal effect in conversations with new acquaintances. While this study was not conducted in a work context, its implications for workplace settings are substantial. Mindfulness can facilitate the integration of new colleagues, enhance communication among team members, and ensure that clients feel acknowledged and understood, thereby improving overall workplace dynamics. A qualitative study by (Reina et al., 2022) further supports these findings by showing that mindfulness in workplace interactions strengthens relationships and improves the overall work atmosphere. Through expert interviews, the study revealed that mindfulness fosters high-quality connections, psychological safety, and trust among co-workers. According to (Burgoon et al., 2000) these improvements can be attributed to mindfulness practices as they promote a deeper understanding of oneself and others, reduce automatic and habitual responses, and enhance the ability to listen and respond thoughtfully. Jones and Hansen (Jones & Hansen, 2015) present a theoretical model of mindful supportive communication and report findings from three exploratory studies that examine the relationship between mindfulness and factors influencing supportive communication, such as social skills, communicative coping, and reappraisals. Their work underscores the importance of mindfulness in enhancing supportive communication processes within teams.

Despite the rarity of studies on gratitude in the workplace, (O'Leary & Dockray, 2015) demonstrated the positive effects of a gratitude intervention on well-being outside the work context. Gratitude is integral in promoting helping behavior and teamwork, but the modern workplace's complex demands often hinder employees from fully experiencing gratitude. (Sawyer et al., 2022) explored how mindfulness can stimulate gratitude through positive affect and perspective-taking,

leading to increased prosocial motivation and helping behavior at work. Additionally, mindfulness has been shown to increase motivation to contribute at various levels, including individual, team, and organizational engagement (Kumprang & Suriyankietkaew, 2024).

Furthermore, motivation and joy, linked to work performance as described above, are also associated with mindfulness practices. Studies by (Dubreuil et al., 2014; van Knippenberg, 2000) highlight that mindfulness can improve concentration, presence, and overall job performance. Mindfulness enables individuals to manage difficult work situations more effectively, reducing offensive behaviors and enhancing conflict resolution (Lyddy & Good, 2016), all of which are likely to increase positive relationships and connectedness at work. All in all, the suggested outcomes posed by the experts are in line with the literature, whilst there is partially only limited evidence, especially for the workplace setting.

## 5.2. Discussion of findings regarding requirements for mindfulness at work

This study has identified several requirements and situational factors that can facilitate the establishment of mindfulness at the workplace. In this study, these requirements have been categorized into aspects related to organizational structure, organizational culture, and the mindfulness program itself. While alternative categorizations could have been considered, this study provides a preliminary framework for further research in this area.

Given the limited existing knowledge base and the nascent state of research on organizational mindfulness prerequisites, there are only a few studies directly related to the findings of this study. Therefore, hypotheses generated from the current findings should be considered as exploratory and require further investigation.

**H2a.** Factors related to an organization's structure, including designated place(s) ("islands"), continuity, internal ambassadors, and organizational intention, positively contribute to the establishment of mindfulness at work.

Factors related to an organization's structure, such as designated places ("islands"), continuity, internal ambassadors, and organizational intention, have been discussed to some extent in the literature. [19 identified that mindfulness at work is influenced by situational, behavioral, and individual antecedents. Their findings suggest that organizational mindfulness is supported by a quiet work environment, such as rooms of silence or single offices. (Lyddy et al., 2016) highlighted that external environmental factors like noise, task demands, and social context can significantly impact the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in the workplace. (Micklitz et al., 2021) found that in workplaces lacking private or dedicated mindfulness spaces, participants feared interruptions and felt exposed, which negatively affected their ability to practice mindfulness and reduced their engagement. (Lyddy & Good, 2016) concluded that null effects from mindfulness interventions often stem from individuals practicing in distracting environments or feeling unconfident in employing mindfulness techniques at work, rather than from issues with mindfulness itself.

Behavioral factors such as continuity are also crucial, with the effectiveness of mindfulness practices being enhanced by regular and cumulative meditation experience (Lyddy & Good, 2016). Continuity is also vital for the long-term sustainability of workplace mindfulness training programs, according to (Eby et al., 2019). The authors state that the current management literature provides limited insight into sustaining the benefits of organizational mindfulness over time, particularly how the post-training workplace context can facilitate the continued application and benefits of mindfulness practices (Eby et al., 2019).

Internal ambassadors and organizational intention also play a crucial role according to (Sutcliffe et al., 2016). The authors differentiate between the antecedents of individual mindfulness and collective

mindfulness. On an individual level, they discussed an online survey of working adults by Reb et al. (Reb, Sim, et al., 2015), who found that supervisor support was positively related to employee awareness, a context-specific dimension of mindfulness capturing employees' awareness of their experiences, actions, and feelings at work. If supervisors do not explicitly support mindfulness initiatives, employees may be reluctant to engage due to concerns about potential disadvantages of 'taking time off for self-care' (Micklitz et al., 2021; van Berkel et al., 2013). Effective support involves not only verbal endorsement but also practical facilitation, such as flexible work arrangements that enable participation in mindfulness training. Conversely, organizational constraints, such as conflicting job demands, were negatively related to employee awareness and positively related to employee absentmindedness, another context-specific dimension of mindfulness (Reb, Sim, et al., 2015). In this respect, supervisor support can be interpreted a medium of organizational intention. Further investigations are crucial to understand the mechanisms in detail.

**H2b.** Factors related to an organization's culture including embedment, intention of the trainer, transparency, investment of management and support from management positively contribute to the establishment of mindfulness at work.

The hypothesis posits that various factors related to an organization's culture—including embedment, intention of the trainer, transparency, investment of management, and support from management—positively contribute to the establishment of mindfulness at work. A small number of studies investigated how these factors influence the successful integration of mindfulness within an organizational context.

According to (Paterson et al., 2024), embedment refers to the alignment and integration of mindfulness-based interventions with an organization's values, policies, and structures. This alignment ensures that mindfulness practices are not only introduced but also effectively embedded within the organizational culture. An intervention that coheres with organizational values and integrates seamlessly with current policies is more likely to be accepted and sustained over time. This integration enhances the likelihood that mindfulness practices will become a natural and enduring part of the organizational environment (Paterson et al., 2024).

That transparency is a key factor in fostering collective mindfulness within an organization, has previously been described by Vogus and Sutcliffe (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). Quantitative studies further support this, demonstrating the importance of trust in leadership (Sutcliffe et al., 2016) and supportive leadership (Ausserhofer et al., 2013) for the cultivation of organizational mindfulness. Some literature provides evidence for the hypothesis that support from management is critical for the successful implementation of mindfulness programs at work. (Paterson et al., 2024) emphasized that managerial support impacts various domains, including the effective implementation of mindfulness practices. When organizations offer mindfulness-based programs, employees perceive this as a sign of care and appreciation, which enhances their engagement with the program (Micklitz et al., 2021). This investment supports employees' participation and fosters a broader commitment to self-care, thereby supporting the establishment of mindfulness at work.

Currently, there is a lack of research specifically addressing the impact of the trainer's intention on the effectiveness of mindfulness programs within organizations, despite some notions on the importance of the trainer-participant relationship (van Berkel et al., 2013). Further investigation is needed to understand how the trainer's goals and approaches may influence the outcomes of mindfulness interventions.

**H2c.** Factors related to the program's structure, such as shared or no costs, voluntariness, during working hours, transferability, inclusivity, and security / safety, positively contribute to the establishment of mindfulness at work.

Quantitative studies on workplace mindfulness often lack detailed

reporting of key training characteristics, which limits the ability to thoroughly assess the benefits and barriers associated with specific features of mindfulness programs. (Michaelsen et al., 2023) highlight the need for detailed reporting on aspects such as the voluntary nature of the training, associated costs, inclusiveness, scheduling (i.e., during or outside working hours), and whether participants experience a safe space. Such details are essential for understanding the comprehensive impact of mindfulness interventions and for identifying factors that may facilitate or hinder their effectiveness.

Qualitative literature supports the observation that mindfulness, when used as a secular technique in workplace settings, often focuses on improving specific outcomes such as employee performance, stress reduction, and concentration (Purser, 2019). This secularization of mindfulness tends to overlook its ethical and spiritual origins. According to Purser and Milillo (Purser & Milillo, 2014) the foundational aim of mindfulness is to transcend the illusion of a separate self, promoting broader collective benefits such as ethical behavior, social harmony, and compassion. The commercialization of mindfulness within organizations, as a tool for addressing work-related issues, contrasts with its traditional purpose and reduces it to a mere performance-enhancing technique (Purser, 2019). Mindfulness trainers are encouraged to transparently disclose the spiritual aspects and any associated religious influences of mindfulness training programs within the organizational context (Brown, 2017). This transparency is crucial for ensuring that participants are fully informed about the potential broader implications of their mindfulness practice.

Referring to inclusivity, the literature underscores the importance of addressing mental models related to mental health issues, stigma, and confidentiality concerns. Previous studies have identified stigma and confidentiality as significant barriers to seeking help and engaging in mindfulness interventions (Hoffmann et al., 2014; Paterson et al., 2024; Schelvis et al., 2016). It was also mentioned that participants in mindfulness-based programs may encounter unpleasant sensations or difficult emotions, such as pain, tension, restlessness, sadness, irritability, or boredom (Banerjee et al., 2017; Hugh-Jones et al., 2018; Irving, 2011; Islam et al., 2022). The process of becoming aware of and exploring these difficulties is central to mindfulness practice. In a workplace setting, there may be concerns that expressing vulnerability could negatively impact one's professional image (Micklitz et al., 2021). Therefore, creating a safe environment where participants feel secure to explore and share their emotional experiences is crucial, as our experts noted. When participants perceive a supportive and accepting context, normalization of stress and distress, and acceptance from the group or trainer can lead to greater self-acceptance and compassion (Micklitz et al., 2021).

Future quantitative studies on workplace mindfulness should provide more detailed accounts of their intervention characteristics. Such comprehensive reporting will enhance the ability to identify both facilitating and obstructing factors in mindfulness programs, thereby improving the understanding and implementation of effective mindfulness practices in organizational settings.

### 5.3. Relevance of the findings and limitations

This study highlights the diverse outcomes of formal and informal mindfulness trainings in the workplace, which encompass various individual and organizational processes and activities. The findings from the expert interviews revealed 1) three key outcomes of mindfulness integration in the workplace: a) strengthening of individual competencies, including awareness, presence, distancing, self-regulation, acceptance, differentiation between roles, inner flexibility, non-judging, equanimity, openness, creativity, empowerment, perspectives taking, problem solving, coping with stress, and transfer into private life, b) improved understanding of work meaningfulness and positive affect, including meaning, positive attitude, joy, quiescence and satisfaction, and c) and fostering a more positive work atmosphere, such as

improvements in communication, connection, gratitude, motivation to contribute, sense of community, softening and strengthening of relationships. Additionally, the 2) requirements for establishing mindfulness in the workplace can be classified into three categories: a) organizational structure including designated place(s) ("islands"), continuity, internal ambassadors, and organizational intention, b) organizational culture, such as embedment, intention of the trainer, transparency, investment of management and support from management positively contribute to the establishment of mindfulness at work, and c) mindfulness program structure, e.g., shared or no costs, voluntariness, during working hours, transferability, inclusivity, and security / safety. While many of the reported outcomes align with findings from quantitative studies, several aspects discussed in this study have not been extensively explored in previous research. Although data saturation regarding observed outcomes was achieved through the interviews, it is important to acknowledge that the reported observations are not exhaustive, and additional aspects may emerge from interviewing different mindfulness experts. This study contributes to the existing body of research by providing insights into the multifaceted consequences of implementing mindfulness in the workplace. To further validate the results and determine the significance of each identified observation, it is recommended that future research utilizes existing measurement instruments or develops new questionnaires specifically designed for organizational mindfulness intervention studies. By employing rigorous measurement approaches, future studies can enhance our understanding of the specific outcomes and effect sizes associated with mindfulness interventions in the workplace. This will contribute to the development of evidence-based practices and inform the design and implementation of effective organizational mindfulness programs.

The establishment of mindfulness in an organization is influenced by various factors related to the organization's structure, culture, and mindfulness programs. Understanding the conditions that facilitate the development of mindfulness in organizations after intervention provides an opportunity to critically examine the potentially small or negligible effect sizes often found in quantitative studies. Future research can investigate whether these conducive conditions were present or lacking within the organization when mindfulness was introduced. By identifying and considering these conditions, intervention developers can adapt mindfulness training to better align with the organization's circumstances and create the necessary conditions for success. This has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of mindfulness training and subsequently increase work engagement, given the positive association between employee mindfulness and work engagement identified. Furthermore, future research could explore variations in the effects of mindfulness interventions across different sectors and occupations, providing deeper insights into the contextual factors that influence mindfulness outcomes in specific organizational settings. Detailed reporting of intervention characteristics is crucial in this regard.

Our study has a number of limitations. First, while we achieved data saturation in our study, several outcomes and antecedents of organizational mindfulness remain unexplored in this publication. The results, therefore, cannot provide a comprehensive overview of all potential outcomes of mindfulness in workplace settings or all necessary conditions for mindfulness to flourish in an organization. Rather, we offer new insights that have been overlooked, especially in the quantitative literature. An advantage of our study is that some of the experts interviewed also provide informal mindfulness practices at work and can therefore provide new insights into the benefits of such endeavors beyond well-defined mindfulness-based programs, which are usually the subject of research, including in the qualitative literature we identified and discussed. Second, we must acknowledge that we are unable to describe the evidence base of the observations made by the interviewed experts. The observations are third-party reports from experts who provided insights into the changes resulting from mindfulness interventions. The results may therefore be susceptible to interviewer or expert bias. Furthermore,

we did not delve into the characteristics of the participants who underwent the experts' training, despite knowing the industries in which the experts are actively providing mindfulness training. This limitation restricts our ability to generalize the findings across different participant demographics, sectors and organizational contexts. Third, despite the growing literature on the so-called negative consequences of mindfulness, our study did not explicitly address these potential downsides. Although we asked about "unexpected" events or outcomes observed by the experts, this question allowed for the description of negative consequences. These were not explicitly mentioned by the experts, and future qualitative research should more directly investigate both positive and negative outcomes of workplace mindfulness training to provide a balanced understanding of its effects.

Future quantitative research should build upon these qualitative findings by empirically testing the hypothesized outcomes and prerequisites of workplace mindfulness using validated, multidimensional instruments. To operationalize individual competencies such as awareness, presence, and self-regulation, future studies may employ the *Mindfulness@Work Scale* (Hülshager & Alberts, 2021b) or the *Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire* (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2006), which capture work-specific and general aspects of mindfulness, respectively. Constructs such as acceptance and psychological flexibility can be measured with the *Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II* (AAQ-II) (Bond et al., 2011), while equanimity may be operationalized using the *Equanimity Scale* (Desbordes, Gard, et al., 2014). Positive affect, joy, and calmness can be assessed through subscales of the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (PANAS) (Watson et al., 1988) or the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985). Meaningfulness of work can be measured via the *Work and Meaning Inventory* (WAMI) (Steger et al., 2012), and the sense of community and gratitude at work may be captured using the *Psychological Sense of Community at Work Scale* (Burroughs & Eby, 1998) and the *Gratitude Questionnaire-6* (GQ-6) (McCullough et al., 2002). At the organizational level, improvements in communication, connectedness, and perceived support could be assessed with scales such as the *Team Climate Inventory* (Anderson & West, 1998) or the *Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument* (OCAI) (Maher, 2000).

In addition to testing these associations, future research should adopt longitudinal and multilevel designs to explore how individual-level outcomes (e.g., presence, acceptance) interact with organizational factors (e.g., leadership mindfulness, structural support) over time. Studies could, for instance, examine whether mindfulness-induced increases in equanimity or perspective taking mediate the relationship between individual mindfulness and team cohesion, or whether management support moderates the transfer of mindfulness practices beyond formal training sessions. Incorporating physiological indicators such as heart rate variability or cortisol (Thayer et al., 2012) alongside self-report measures may also provide a more nuanced understanding of the psychophysiological mechanisms underlying workplace mindfulness. Finally, future research should investigate sector-specific variations and compare formal versus informal mindfulness implementations (e.g., ad hoc "mindful moments" vs. structured programs) to identify boundary conditions and optimize intervention design. Such multi-method approaches would not only validate the current qualitative findings but also advance theory building on how mindfulness becomes embedded and sustained within organizational systems.

The findings of this study offer preliminary guidance for practitioners aiming to implement mindfulness within organizations. Given that many of the identified mechanisms and effects remain hypothetical, future controlled and longitudinal studies are needed to substantiate them. In practice, mindfulness should be approached as an ongoing organizational process rather than a discrete intervention. Practitioners are encouraged to work closely with leadership to ensure authentic commitment, transparent communication of objectives, and alignment with the organization's values. Establishing continuity through regular practice opportunities and visible structures—such as designated spaces or mindful routines—can signal long-term dedication. Furthermore,

fostering internal ambassadors and safeguarding voluntariness and psychological safety appear essential for meaningful and sustainable integration. Practitioners should remain attentive to contextual nuances and avoid applying a one-size-fits-all approach; mindfulness initiatives are most effective when adapted to the specific organizational culture, structure, and workforce characteristics.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has unveiled new insights into the benefits and challenges of implementing mindfulness training in the workplace through expert interviews, revealing aspects that have not been extensively explored in existing literature. The primary outcomes identified by the experts include enhancements in individual competencies such as presence and distancing, as well as the experience of meaningfulness in work and positive affects like satisfaction and joy. Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of fostering a supportive work atmosphere, which includes cultivating a sense of community and gratitude.

The findings also highlight the critical requirements for establishing mindfulness in the workplace, including suitable organizational structures, cultural support, and well-designed mindfulness programs. These insights are essential for understanding how mindfulness can be effectively integrated and sustained within organizational settings.

It is recommended that future quantitative studies incorporate these aspects to deepen the current understanding of workplace mindfulness and guide research in meaningful directions. By addressing these factors, organizations can more effectively promote mindfulness, thereby enhancing employee well-being and work performance. This approach will contribute to the development of evidence-based practices and inform the design and implementation of effective organizational mindfulness programs.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Maren M. Michaelsen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Lena Langer:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology. **Terje Sparby:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **Tobias Esch:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

## Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

## Consent to publish

n.a.

## Consent

Interviewed experts have consented to publish the anonymized transcripts of their interviews.

## Ethics approval

It was not necessary to get an ethics approval for this study.

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## Declaration of competing interest

Authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2026.106225>.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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