

## Workplace Mindfulness: Interpersonal Effects and Mechanisms

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### Abstract

The benefits of workplace mindfulness in the interpersonal domain are increasingly prominent, necessitating clarification of its new trends in conceptual development and interpersonal functioning to provide insights for organizations in shaping positive workplace environments. Research reveals that there currently exist two distinct conceptual development trends in workplace mindfulness: outcome-oriented and process-oriented. The former focuses on the trend toward conceptual and measurement unification in workplace contexts to explore beneficial outcome sets, while the latter emphasizes uncovering the process mechanisms through which mindfulness is embedded in interpersonal interactions. Workplace mindfulness influences quality- and function-related interpersonal outcomes through four coupling mechanisms: (1) knowledge coupling that captures information through open attention during interactions to coordinate interdependent work; (2) affective coupling that reduces self-inference related to internal and external emotional experiences and strengthens belonging, support, and care toward others; (3) resource coupling that promotes resource accumulation and inhibits resource depletion during interactions; and (4) exchange coupling that navigates resource flow directions and influences willingness for value exchange. Resource and exchange coupling mechanisms can assist in facilitating knowledge and affective coupling mechanisms. Future research needs to more deeply explore the interpersonal effects of workplace mindfulness in challenging work domains such as digital and AI technology, remote work, workplace diversity, equity and inclusion culture, and stigma management.

### Full Text

## The Interpersonal Effects and Mechanisms of Workplace Mindfulness

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**Abstract:** As the interpersonal benefits of workplace mindfulness become increasingly prominent, it is essential to clarify emerging trends in its conceptual development and interpersonal functioning to inform the cultivation of positive workplace environments. This review reveals two distinct trajectories in the conceptual evolution of workplace mindfulness: outcome-oriented and process-oriented perspectives. The former emphasizes achieving conceptual and measurement consistency within workplace contexts to identify beneficial outcome sets, while the latter focuses on unpacking the mechanisms through which mindfulness becomes embedded in interpersonal interactions. Workplace mindfulness influences quality-related and function-related interpersonal outcomes through four connection mechanisms: (1) intellectual connections that capture information through open attention to coordinate interdependent work during interactions; (2) emotional connections that reduce self-referential inferences tied to internal and external emotional experiences while strengthening belonging, support, and care toward others; (3) resource connections that promote resource accumulation and inhibit resource loss during interactions; and (4) exchange connections that navigate resource flow directions and influence willingness to engage in value exchange. Resource and exchange connections serve to facilitate intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms. Future research should more deeply examine the interpersonal functions of workplace mindfulness in challenging work domains such as digitalization and AI technology, remote work, and the development of organizational cultures centered on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and stigmatization management.

**Keywords:** mindfulness, workplace, interpersonal effect, connection mechanism

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In an era of uncertain business environments, rapid iteration of digital technologies and shifting work modes have not only immersed employees in habitual busyness and anxious work states but also transformed how they interact with others in the workplace (Heaphy et al., 2018; Schinoff & Byron, 2023). This presents challenges for cultivating healthy workplace environments, as without appropriate “self-management tools,” employees struggle to balance attention between self-directed tasks and interactive tasks (Chupinina, 2022; Reina, Kreiner, et al., 2023). Introducing mindfulness into the workplace may address these challenges (Reina, Kreiner, et al., 2023). Mindfulness refers to the awareness and attention rooted in the present moment with a non-judgmental, accepting, and open attitude (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Numerous companies such as Google, Aetna, and Intel have adopted mindfulness training to improve employee stress and emotional states while enhancing decision quality and well-being (Lau, 2020). However, mindfulness is not merely about internal cognitive awareness (Zhu et al., 2020); it also involves strong external awareness focused on others (Brown et al., 2007) and has recently been recognized as beneficial for interpersonal interaction processes and outcomes in the workplace (Ni et al., 2023; Reina, Kreiner, et al., 2023; Reina, Mills, & Sumpter, 2023; Sawyer et al.,

2022). For example, Reina, Kreiner, et al. (2023) proposed a mindfulness infusion model emphasizing that individuals bringing mindfulness practices into workplace interactions can improve both interaction quality and relationship quality with others. Despite growing theoretical and practical attention to the interpersonal effects of workplace mindfulness, systematic knowledge integration in this domain remains lacking.

Previous literature (e.g., Zheng & Ni, 2018; Zhang et al., 2017; Good et al., 2016; Shahbaz & Parker, 2022; Sutcliffe et al., 2016) has focused on summarizing how workplace mindfulness effectively reduces psychological stress (Johnson et al., 2021), promotes cognitive resource recovery (Hülshager et al., 2014), achieves emotion regulation (Forjan et al., 2020; Hülshager et al., 2013), and enhances well-being and job performance (Cheung et al., 2020; Dust et al., 2022; Leroy et al., 2013). While these works reveal the benefits of workplace mindfulness for internal cognitive processes, they have not adequately considered how these benefits connect to ubiquitous interpersonal interactions in the workplace, thereby limiting theoretical development and practical application in the interpersonal domain. Workplace mindfulness focuses on the present moment within work contexts (Hülshager & Alberts, 2021), rather than becoming entangled in self-centered internal dialogues and interpretations through preoccupation with the future or rumination about the past (Reina, Kreiner, et al., 2023). Thus, mindful individuals can consciously invest and allocate attention to real-time interpersonal interaction processes (Reina, Mills, & Sumpter, 2023), achieving positive connections with others to accomplish interdependent work (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Hugander, 2023). Moreover, given that work increasingly requires collaboration, cooperation, boundary-spanning, cross-spatial coordination, and technological interdependence (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008; Schinoff & Byron, 2023), comprehensive knowledge about how workplace mindfulness becomes integrated into or influences interpersonal interactions is particularly important for promoting organizational coordination and improving decision quality and effectiveness. Additionally, given scholars' concerns about the clarity of workplace mindfulness concepts, measurement, and applications (Liu et al., 2023), timely integration of existing findings can better illuminate its conceptual foundations and developmental trends, thereby effectively guiding future research design and interpersonal applications.

Following Cronin and George's (2023) recommendations, this review focuses on the interpersonal effects of workplace mindfulness to generate new insights for this research domain. The review proceeds along two dimensions: First, we summarize conceptual development trends by examining two broader perspectives—outcome-oriented (focusing on the results and instrumentality of workplace mindfulness) and process-oriented (focusing on the processes and modes of being of workplace mindfulness)—to present current advances in the operationalization and processualization of workplace mindfulness concepts. Second, we integrate interpersonal effects and mechanisms by constructing a framework centered on interaction modes (intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms) and internal experiences (resource and exchange connection mechanisms) to unpack

how workplace mindfulness influences interaction-related outcomes (quality and functional outcomes), thereby moving beyond previous consensus on its cognitive functions (e.g., Zhu et al., 2020). We further propose that future research should emphasize examining the interpersonal functions of workplace mindfulness in challenging work domains such as digitalization and AI technology, remote work, and the development of organizational cultures promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and stigmatization management, to enhance understanding of its transformative, agile, and adaptive roles in rapidly changing environments.

## 2.1 The Concept and Dimensions of Mindfulness

The operational definition of mindfulness originates from psychology. Although scholars have offered varying definitions (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), consensus has emerged regarding its multidimensional structure, with all definitions pointing to two core aspects: attention and decentering (or experiential orientation) (Bishop et al., 2004; Choi et al., 2022). The attention component involves present-focused awareness of internal and external consciousness. By attending to events in the current moment, mindfulness generates awareness of internal phenomena (e.g., cognitions, bodily sensations) and external phenomena (e.g., environment, social interactions) (Brown et al., 2007). This characteristic distinguishes mindfulness from reflecting on the past or worrying about the future, focusing instead on experiencing what is happening (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Decentering means interpreting incoming information in a manner that is neither judgmental nor self-centered (Brown et al., 2007; Good et al., 2016), approaching experiences with an objective, accepting, and non-critical attitude that decouples thoughts from emotions, thereby reducing automatic reactions and response biases (Bishop et al., 2004; Shapiro et al., 2006).

Mindfulness can be conceptualized as a trait, state, or implementable practice (Choi et al., 2022), with conceptual development and operational applications in workplace contexts showing considerable diversity. Drawing on Reina, Kreiner, et al. (2023), this review identifies two conceptual development pathways: outcome-oriented and process-oriented. The former focuses on what beneficial outcomes can be obtained through the operationalization of workplace mindfulness, while the latter simultaneously examines both processes and outcomes to unpack how workplace mindfulness operates within interpersonal interactions to generate continuous benefits.

### Outcome-Oriented Development Perspective

The essence of the outcome-oriented development perspective is a “borrowing” approach (Kudesia, 2019), which currently dominates the organizational management field. This developmental trend can be summarized into two categories: embedded borrowing and differentiated borrowing. The former involves extracting core dimensions of mindfulness from psychology and embedding them into

workplace contexts, thereby maintaining conceptual and measurement consistency to challenge the current scholarly consensus that focuses primarily on the attention dimension. The latter involves selecting independent dimensions that match research purposes for application.

### 2.2.1 Embedded Borrowing

Scholars following the embedded borrowing path have made substantial progress in conceptual development, dimensional cognition, operational evolution, and cross-cultural exploration. First, regarding operationalization, the mainstream approach involves adapting psychological scales for workplace application, such as the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006). However, as research has deepened, controversies and limitations of this approach have emerged. First, these scales were not developed for workplace contexts and may fail to capture authentic workplace mindfulness (Zheng et al., 2023). Second, there are construct deficiencies, such as MAAS overemphasizing attention and awareness while neglecting multidimensionality (Hülsheger & Alberts, 2021; Zheng et al., 2023). Consequently, the organizational management field has begun developing concepts and measurement tools appropriate for workplace contexts that comprehensively capture mindfulness components. For example, Zheng et al. (2023) defined workplace mindfulness as a set of skills for maintaining attention and awareness of present internal experiences and external work environments while maintaining acceptance at work, developing a three-dimensional scale (awareness, attention, and acceptance). Hülsheger and Alberts (2021) described it as individuals shifting attention and awareness to present experiences at work, manifested as non-judging, non-reacting, and acting with awareness, developing a four-dimensional scale (describing, non-reacting, non-judging, and acting with awareness). Second, these new conceptual and scale developments provide opportunities for cross-cultural exploration. Zheng et al.'s (2023) scale development used Chinese employee samples, expanding the inclusivity of current mindfulness scales for Asian populations. Hülsheger and Alberts' s (2021) scale samples covered Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania, demonstrating cross-cultural universality. Thus, emerging scale development has balanced both indigenous and cross-cultural contexts, providing options for scholars conducting research in different cultural settings.

### 2.2.2 Differentiated Borrowing

The differentiated borrowing path involves two selection strategies. First, researchers may select appropriate dimensions based on research questions. For example, Dietl and Reb (2021) and Harvey and Kudesia (2023) focused only on the attention dimension of mindfulness due to their interest in leaders' mindful attention. Second, researchers may explore the effects of different dimensions separately. For instance, Liang et al. (2018) distinguished mindful awareness and mindful acceptance to explore how each buffers the effect of hostility on

workplace aggression. Reina and Kudesia (2020) divided mindfulness into mindful attention and mindful metacognition to explore its antecedents, while Gupta and Reina (2023) tested their respective moderating effects on emotional exhaustion and counterproductive behaviors. Reina, Mills, and Sumpter (2023) further proposed that attention and decentering can combine to form three distinct patterns: non-mindfulness (low attention and low decentering), surface mindfulness (high attention and low decentering), and deep mindfulness (high attention and high decentering). Both embedded and differentiated borrowing help address practical issues in mindfulness concept and measurement, and they are not mutually exclusive—scholars can select appropriate concepts and measurement tools based on specific research questions.

Furthermore, experimental interventions and quasi-experimental studies have gradually been applied in workplace contexts alongside scale-based operations (Hafenbrack et al., 2014; Mrazek et al., 2012). For example, Schuh et al. (2019) induced leader mindfulness states through 2-minute instructional segments and 8-minute practice segments. Ni et al. (2023) conducted a quasi-experiment in a food company, manipulating and assessing leader mindfulness by having leaders participate in a 15-minute daily mindfulness meditation program for two weeks. Additionally, Hafenbrack et al. (2020) manipulated mindfulness states by having participants listen to mindfulness intervention audio recordings, obtaining differences in prosocial behavior across conditions while distinguishing between focused-breathing and loving-kindness meditation conditions to identify compassionate expressions. The application of diverse methods has advanced understanding of workplace mindfulness benefits. For instance, regarding work experiences, workplace mindfulness can reduce stress and turnover intentions while improving emotional states and job satisfaction (Hülshager & Alberts, 2021; Zheng et al., 2023). Regarding job performance, it can enhance intrinsic motivation, work engagement, and job performance (Dust et al., 2022; Hülshager & Alberts, 2021; Schuh et al., 2019). Regarding leadership development, it can foster transformational leadership, servant leadership, and leader characteristics such as empathy, humility, and authenticity (Dietl & Reb, 2021; Ni et al., 2023; Pinck & Sonnentag, 2018; Verdorfer, 2016).

### 2.3 Process-Oriented Development Perspective

Kudesia's (2019) perspective on mindfulness as metacognitive practice provides the theoretical foundation for process-oriented development. This theory emphasizes that employees adjust their information processing patterns according to surrounding contexts, preventing mind-wandering beyond the situation and effectively limiting conceptual processing (i.e., automatic reactions to recurring situations). Therefore, mindfulness is not essentially an information processing mode but a metacognitive process that adjusts information processing strategies: (1) when people monitor their current information processing state, they receive signals about what information to process and how to process it; (2) beliefs about information processing constrain their adjustments; and (3) when

adjusting information processing, people respond more flexibly to situations. By continuously monitoring the environment to change metacognitive patterns of information processing, employees can form joint responses to situations, helping organizations disperse risks, develop close connections, and amplify benefits.

Subsequently, Reina, Kreiner, et al. (2023) proposed a mindfulness infusion model at work and found that individuals can infuse mindfulness into interactions and relationships. From a process and practice perspective, they dissected how formal and informal mindfulness practices help individuals shift from self-focus to other-focus, thereby affecting both short-term interaction quality and long-term relationship quality with others. However, they only examined unilateral mindfulness practice experiences. Since interpersonal interactions represent patterns of mutual influence between entities (e.g., individuals, groups) over time (Ferris et al., 2009), it is necessary to examine bilateral mindful interactions. Accordingly, Reina, Mills, and Sumpster (2023) subsequently proposed the concept of mindful relating, exploring how attention- and decentering-based interactions affect relationship trajectories. Thus, the work of Kudesia (2019), Reina, Kreiner, et al. (2023), and Reina, Mills, and Sumpster (2023) demonstrates that the process-oriented development perspective emphasizes a “blending” approach for achieving holistic, coherent benefits, providing valuable insights for advancing workplace mindfulness concepts and theories.

### 3 Interpersonal Effects of Workplace Mindfulness

Historically, improving employee behaviors and psychological states has been the mainstream focus of mindfulness development in organizational management, yet workplace mindfulness is fundamentally related to interpersonal interactions and relationships (Reb et al., 2020). Tracing back to its Buddhist origins, mindfulness is viewed as a philosophy of virtuous conduct (Kay & Young, 2022), where focusing on bodily, emotional, and cognitive aspects are merely byproducts, and its core function is achieving mature mental states through profound insight and compassionate empathy (Purser & Milillo, 2015). From a self-determination perspective, focused and open awareness better facilitates choices aligned with relational needs and values compared to automatic or controlled processing modes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). From an organizational context perspective, mindfulness can only exert greater utility when embedded in organizational culture, work processes, and tasks (Reb et al., 2020), because heightened attention and awareness integrate interpersonal phenomena into employee cognition (Choi et al., 2022), enabling them to transcend default self-focused biases and achieve natural connection with others (Hafenbrack et al., 2020). For example, when conversing with colleagues, mindful individuals can quickly detect subtle emotional undertones (Brown & Ryan, 2003), thereby strengthening relational grasp and awareness quality control to establish friendly care and connection. Therefore, whether considering mindfulness’ s origins, essence, or organizational context, its interpersonal effects cannot be ignored. What interpersonal outcomes do outcome- and process-oriented development perspec-

tives involve? This is key to understanding workplace mindfulness conceptual development and interpersonal mechanisms.

From an outcome-oriented perspective, workplace mindfulness involves two types of interpersonal outcomes: quality outcomes and functional outcomes (Heaphy et al., 2018). Quality outcomes refer to interacting entities' judgments and feelings about interaction processes (Methot et al., 2017), including relationship quality and relationship satisfaction. For example, Arendt et al. (2019) found that subordinates can identify leader mindfulness during communication, triggering satisfaction with both leader-subordinate communication and the leader. Both leader mindfulness and employee mindfulness have been found to increase leader-member exchange (Zhang et al., 2018; Reb et al., 2019). Functional outcomes refer to behavioral manifestations triggered during interpersonal processes (Heaphy et al., 2018), including cooperation, conflict, and interpersonal behaviors. For instance, Kay and Skarlicki (2020) proposed that mindfulness can increase cooperation and avoid conflict by enabling perspective-taking. Hafenbrack et al. (2020) demonstrated that mindful employees significantly increase prosocial behavior in work contexts. Additionally, workplace mindfulness relates to interpersonal citizenship behavior, incivility, aggressive behavior, and other interpersonal phenomena.

### 3.2 Interpersonal Outcomes from a Process-Oriented Development Perspective

From a process-oriented perspective, the interpersonal effects of workplace mindfulness primarily focus on quality outcomes, such as short-term interaction quality, long-term relationship quality, and relationship quality trajectories. Reina, Kreiner, et al. (2023) distinguished two types of mindfulness infusion processes that promote interaction and relationship quality through interviews: formal practice exercises and informal practice exercises. Formal practice exercises involve shifting from self-focus to other-focus through meditation, intention setting, mindful thought-body connection, and other techniques. For example, Respondent 13 noted, "...it helps people connect with each other and move their work forward together" (p. 732). Informal practice exercises involve attending to others through present-moment focus, listening, slowing down, compassion, and emotion regulation. For instance, Respondent 3 stated, "Mindfulness practice is about creating a pause; one minute can make the difference between war and peace" (p. 741), while Respondent 6 mentioned, "The deepest level of mindfulness is caring, connecting, thoughtful, and intentional..." (p. 741). Reina, Kreiner, et al. argued that these processes can overlap to shape both self and others' work experiences and relationship quality. Although their work timely addressed gaps in workplace mindfulness interpersonal applications, it did not examine bilateral interactions or temporal factors.

Reina, Mills, and Sumpter (2023) proposed a mindful relating framework from a bilateral interaction perspective to explore how employees utilize mindful interactions over time to achieve changes in relationship trajectories. They focused

on the neglected decentering characteristic, proposing that as individuals direct attention toward others, decentering helps them detach from situational interpretations and evaluations attached to self-related thoughts and emotions. This non-self-referential experiential processing mode subsequently promotes interaction quality and relationship trajectories. Based on this, mindful relating manifests in three patterns: deep mindfulness, surface mindfulness, and non-mindfulness. When both parties exhibit consistent patterns, only deep mindfulness relating promotes positive interaction quality and relationship trajectories. When patterns are inconsistent, the deep mindfulness party becomes the driver of positive relationship trajectories but may be constrained by situational power differences. Although their framework considered bilateral interactions and temporal effects, it awaits further empirical validation.

In summary, as workplace mindfulness has flourished, scholars have both deeply considered how to expand beneficial interpersonal outcomes (e.g., Hafenbrack et al., 2020; Reb et al., 2019) and continuously explored how workplace mindfulness operates in interpersonal contexts (e.g., Kudesia, 2019; Reina, Kreiner, et al., 2023; Reina, Mills, & Sumpter, 2023). What are the distinctions and connections between these two emerging interpersonal development pathways? First, they differ in research purposes and methodologies. Outcome-oriented interpersonal effect exploration primarily uses quantitative or intervention approaches to seek beneficial outcome sets, whereas process-oriented research centers on qualitative studies and theoretical construction to demonstrate continuous benefits. Second, although they appear parallel, they are actually intertwined and complementary. The emergence of outcome-oriented interpersonal effects catalyzed process-oriented conceptual development (e.g., Reb et al.'s early 2014 focus on leader mindfulness). Conversely, process-oriented conceptual development pushes interpersonal effects to the forefront of workplace mindfulness research, thereby benefiting process explanations in outcome-oriented studies. Next, we delve into the interpersonal mechanisms of workplace mindfulness.

#### 4 Interpersonal Mechanisms of Workplace Mindfulness

Why does workplace mindfulness produce interpersonal effects? Connections represent the core mechanism. First, workplace mindfulness is key to establishing interpersonal connections. Quinn (2007) noted that awareness and interaction are necessary conditions for generating interpersonal connections. Adams (2022) argued that physical proximity is not a prerequisite for building positive workplace connections; rather, individuals in interactions must intentionally and purposefully initiate positive connections. In other words, individuals must invest internal effort and resources in interactions, such as attention, energy, negotiation, and sharing (Heaphy et al., 2018). Similarly, Gittel and Douglass (2012) emphasized that maintaining reciprocal relationships requires interactants to maintain attention toward others. According to mindfulness functions, mindfulness can direct attention to aspects of real-time experiences, thereby reducing mind-wandering. Therefore, when mindful individuals engage

in workplace interpersonal processes such as interactions, communication, exchanges, and meetings, stable attention and non-self-referential awareness help them establish connections between self and others. Second, interpersonal connections are key to achieving positive interpersonal outcomes. Research shows that high-quality connections enable both parties to generate energy together, promoting positive work outcomes (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). As Matt Gosney, Vice President of UHealth, noted, “Connection is how all work gets done and the prerequisite for progress” (Adams, 2022). Therefore, as a microcosm of relationships (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008), connections constitute the basic pattern linking relationship quality and functioning (short- or long-term) and serve as the vehicle through which mindful entities connect internal and external awareness systems (Reina, Mills, & Sumpter, 2023).

What connection mechanisms are involved in workplace mindfulness’ s interpersonal effects? Existing literature involves two connection characteristics: (1) focusing on interaction modes and (2) focusing on internal experiences (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Quinn, 2007). First, entity connection processes involve three interaction modes: emotional transmission (intensity and scope of emotional expression), tension processing (degree of handling negative experiences such as conflict and friction), and connectivity (openness and generativity of ideas) (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), suggesting that intellectual connectivity and emotional processing are fundamental elements of interaction modes. Second, Dutton and Heaphy (2003) further emphasized that maintaining effective interaction modes depends on three internal experiences: vitality and energy (sense of energy), positive regard (feeling understood), and mutuality (mutual active engagement), suggesting that resource flow and exchange support are fundamental elements of internal experiences. Based on this, relevant literature further supports the role of these four fundamental elements in interpersonal interactions. First, intellectual and emotional elements, as two types of elements directly involved in interpersonal interactions, have gained consistent scholarly recognition. For example, Myers (2018) noted that bidirectional communication between individuals can shape experiences and emotions to make interactions more effective. Kahn (2007) argued that positive interpersonal relationships help employees achieve intellectual and emotional availability. Adams (2022) pointed out that workplace interpersonal interactions involve intellectual connections and emotional connections. Second, resource and exchange characteristics are viewed as supportive elements that facilitate interpersonal interactions and maintain interaction modes. For instance, Quinn (2007) stated that connections typically require energy as a vehicle for emotional and intellectual interaction, and that positive interpersonal interactions are always energizing, whereas energy is necessary to form positive connections (Quinn, 2007). Meanwhile, interpersonal connection processes depend on reciprocal or exchange relationships to ensure effective resource transfer. Gittel and Douglass (2012) emphasized that reciprocal relationships promote interactants’ attention to situations and each other, facilitating resource flow between individuals to implement care and exchange knowledge, thereby sustaining subsequent relationships (Quinn, 2007). Thus,

resources and exchange can synergistically promote the effective operation of intellectual and emotional interaction modes.

Integrating workplace mindfulness functions, we further argue that intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms centered on interaction modes play dominant roles, while resource and exchange connection mechanisms centered on internal experiences provide supportive and safeguarding functions. First, workplace mindfulness can mobilize intellectual or emotional connections according to situational demands to achieve more direct interpersonal effects. The intellectual connection mechanism refers to workplace mindfulness activating attention and awareness during interactions, maintaining openness and acceptance, and utilizing people, ideas, and information in interactions to better coordinate interdependent work, such as learning how to obtain information, coordinate team cooperation, and mitigate task conflict and tension (Adams, 2022). The emotional connection mechanism refers to workplace mindfulness reducing self-centered inferences that weaken focus on negative interaction experiences while maintaining interest in positive experiences, thereby strengthening belonging, care, meaning, and mutual support with others. This involves enhancing emotional expression and processing negative emotional experiences, such as eliciting positive interpersonal emotions, mitigating negative interpersonal emotions, sharing work meaning, and providing difficult feedback in caring ways (Adams, 2022). Second, activating and maintaining resource safeguards and exchange willingness can promote the smooth operation of interpersonal interaction modes. The resource connection mechanism manifests as mindful individuals accumulating resources through obtained information, knowledge, and positive experiences during interactions, or inhibiting resource loss by calming negative experiences. The exchange connection mechanism involves navigating resource flow directions and influencing willingness to engage in value exchange, such as mindful leaders promoting exchange relationships with subordinates.

How are these four connection mechanisms interrelated? Intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms depend on the safeguarding support and synergistic promotion of resource and exchange connection mechanisms. First, both intellectual and emotional connections have clear interaction and beneficiary targets. For example, leader mindfulness promotes subordinates' knowledge sharing and performance (Zheng et al., 2023; Reb et al., 2019), while team mindfulness promotes team emotional support and interpersonal citizenship behavior (Ni et al., 2021). Specific interaction targets imply that enhanced exchange relationships occur within particular exchange scopes. Second, resources typically accompany intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms and are fed back into connection processes. For instance, team mindfulness pools strong attention resources, enabling members to develop cooperation-oriented rather than competition-oriented responses based on others' needs (Ni et al., 2022). Individuals induced into mindfulness states can transmit energy to others, thereby increasing empathy and eliciting compassionate responses toward others (Hafenbrack et al., 2020). Therefore, resource connections help entities obtain information and emotional resources from self or interactions, stimulating interaction

motivation, improving information processing patterns, or stabilizing emotional rhythms (Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, positive reciprocity enables energy replenishment, accumulation, or spiraling (Scandura & Meuser, 2022), and stable resource circulation enables entities to continue investing in reciprocal processes (Quinn, 2007). Thus, their synergy helps stabilize intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms. In summary, the four connection mechanisms coordinate to jointly achieve workplace mindfulness' s interpersonal effects (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]).

**Note:** Given that organizations accomplish work through interactions, connections, and communication among entities including employees, leaders, and groups (Ragins & Dutton, 2007), the research framework (see Figure 1) incorporates workplace mindfulness at multiple levels (self mindfulness, leader mindfulness, and team mindfulness) and their mechanisms and outcomes. On one hand, these entities involve convergent conceptual connotations, and integrating them into an overall framework can greatly enrich cross-domain knowledge between workplace mindfulness and interpersonal relationship literature. On the other hand, different levels may involve distinct mechanisms due to different interaction targets (e.g., individual and leader mindfulness examine how unilateral mindfulness affects interactions, whereas team mindfulness involves shared perceptions of member mindfulness interactions; Yu & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018). Detailing entity-specific connection mechanisms based on an overall framework can ensure the validity and rigor of findings. Additionally, in exploring workplace mindfulness' s interpersonal effects, this review adopts an implicit theoretical assumption of self-regulation processes, including attentional self-regulation (control) and metacognitive practice (monitoring) (Bishop et al., 2004; Kudesia, 2019). Self-regulated attention involves three aspects: sustained attention (maintaining alertness, anchoring attention in the present, stabilizing thoughts and feelings in the stream of consciousness), switching capacity (maintaining flexibility of attentional focus, returning attention to the present after noticing thoughts and feelings), and non-elaborative awareness (inhibiting secondary elaborative processing of thoughts and feelings in the stream of consciousness, merely observing rather than becoming distracted or evaluative), which can provide more cognitive resources for entity investment in connection processes. Furthermore, metacognitive practice can change entities' initial perceptions of situations and meaning by monitoring the stream of consciousness and information contexts, separating thoughts from emotions from an objective perspective to avoid automatic reactions, thereby flexibly adjusting information processing modes in interpersonal interactions.

#### 4.1 Intellectual Connection Mechanism of Workplace Mindfulness

The intellectual connection mechanism of workplace mindfulness is closely related to information and feedback in contexts, focusing on effects on functional outcomes. Its operation can be summarized along two routes. First, adjusting information processing modes and bringing them into interaction processes

primarily involves self mindfulness and team mindfulness interpersonal effects. Specifically, Masters-Waage et al. (2021) argued that mindfulness reduces self-processing-related biases by developing non-self-centered awareness, helping individuals regulate emotions and behaviors to adapt to negotiation contexts and transcend self-centeredness to increase interdependence with others, achieving better cooperation. By manipulating mindfulness states, they found that highly mindful individuals tend to choose win-win Pareto-optimal agreements and fair distribution actions. Similarly, Kay and Skarlicki (2020) found that mindfulness provides employees greater cooperative leeway in evaluating and responding to conflict by continuously monitoring and adjusting their own situations for flexible reactions and cognitive reappraisal. At the team level, team mindfulness is believed to orient toward cooperation and reduce competition because members constantly attend to common task dynamics, goals, and team needs, thereby triggering convergent collective action (Ni et al., 2022). Zhao et al. (2023) found that team mindfulness can better converge to team shared perceptions by focusing on team experiences and needs, strengthening the relationship between team territorial behavior and team psychological safety and increasing team knowledge sharing.

Second, mindful interactions trigger changes in information processing modes, primarily at the leader mindfulness level. Zheng et al. (2023) noted that mindful leaders fully attend to the present, accept employee suggestions non-judgmentally, and keenly detect and solve task problems, thereby promoting employee knowledge exchange and sharing. Reb et al. (2019) and Schuh et al. (2019) simultaneously found that leader mindfulness can promote employees' perceptions of organizational justice (interpersonal and procedural justice) because mindful leaders do not casually label employees but observe and respond from objective perspectives, enabling employees to quickly adjust their self-states to promote in-role performance and organizational citizenship behavior.

#### 4.2.1 Negative Emotional Connection Mechanism

The negative emotional connection mechanism focuses on regulating, buffering, and eliminating negative emotions, concentrating at self mindfulness and team mindfulness levels. Current research primarily focuses on overcoming negative emotions and experiences in the workplace, such as hostility and discrimination. Since negative emotions narrow people's attention and action repertoires (Hafenbrack et al., 2020) and consume substantial resources to cope with threats, people typically need to adjust such negative experiences promptly (the Mindful Sedation Hypothesis; Purser, 2019). The emotion regulation process model (Gross & John, 2003) provides the theoretical foundation for understanding mindful sedation. This model suggests that emotions are generated over time from situation perception to response triggering, thus emotion regulation includes two temporal deployment strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression. Workplace mindfulness can regulate both mechanisms to affect

subsequent quality and functional outcomes.

First, cognitive reappraisal occurs before complete emotional responses are triggered. Mindfulness can help employees change the cognitive meaning of situational cues and thus alter emotional trajectories by continuously adjusting attention to present experiences, reducing automatic reactions and self-centeredness (Hülshager et al., 2013). For example, by maintaining a detached mindset to avoid narrow thinking, mindfulness can mitigate resistance to injustice, reducing rumination, hostile emotions, and dysfunctional responses such as revenge and interpersonal deviance (Krishnakumar, 2015; Long & Christian, 2015). Simultaneously, mindfulness can generate guilt by timely detecting one's own incivility toward others and its negative effects, enabling individuals to face responsibility from an objective perspective (Hülshager et al., 2021).

Second, expression suppression occurs after emotional responses or negative experiences are activated. Mindful individuals can buffer or eliminate negative experiences by stepping outside self-centered perspectives with objective acceptance. For example, they detect adverse workplace events (e.g., hostility) faster, realize that others' hostility triggers more sensitive emotional experiences, then reduce habitual reactions and instead adopt open and accepting attitudes to prevent self-inference and situational transference, thereby releasing cognitive resources to reduce workplace aggression (Liang et al., 2018). Another study by Liang and colleagues (2016) found that mindful leaders can reduce abusive supervision by timely recognizing hostility toward subordinates. Thoroughgood et al. (2020) conducted an experience sampling study with 105 transgender employees, finding that mindfulness buffers daily perceived discrimination and reduces next-day paranoid cognition and emotional exhaustion because mindfulness prevents excessive focus on the past or vigilance about the future, reducing interpersonal sensitivity and persecutory thinking. At the team level, by accepting behavioral differences among members, team mindfulness prevents members from narrowing thinking and making attribution biases when facing conflict, thereby preventing escalation of team conflict into personalized orientation (Yu & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018). However, Kay et al. (2023) research indicates that mindfulness may trigger the Mindful Enlivening Hypothesis, finding that mindful individuals increase moral concern for others when witnessing injustice, thereby eliciting moral outrage and further implementing condemnatory prosocial behavior. This finding timely supplements the dark-side effects of mindfulness in interpersonal domains and draws attention to third-party perspectives.

#### **4.2.2 Positive Emotional Connection Mechanism**

The positive emotional connection mechanism focuses on activating and amplifying positive emotions and broadening corresponding positive actions, involving self, leader, and team levels. Based on the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson, 2004), workplace mindfulness allows entities to maintain acceptance and openness to identify others' subtle needs in broader interpersonal

activities, thereby eliciting positive experiences that broaden momentary action repertoires (broadening hypothesis) and build enduring resources (building hypothesis) to contribute to quality and functional outcomes.

Positive emotional connection includes two pathways. First, mindfulness can elicit positive interpersonal emotions in the self. Ni et al. (2023) argued that mindful leaders are more likely to detect members' emotional states and activate self-transcendent mindsets through prior attention, avoiding narrow evaluation and automatic reactions to achieve empathic concern, which employees can subsequently learn and apply to interpersonal activities. Sawyer et al. (2022) found that mindfulness' s inherent decoupling process is particularly relevant to cultivating gratitude because mindfulness can better increase awareness of personal benefits and recognition of costs paid by benefit providers through moment-to-moment attention. They first demonstrated through two experiments that mindfulness can detect surrounding benefits to elicit helping intentions, then used two diary studies to examine how mindfulness can promote gratitude and prosocial motivation to enhance prosocial behavior. Similarly, Hafenbrack et al. (2020) found that mindfulness can cultivate positive emotions, empathy, and perspective-taking in the self, eliciting compassionate responses toward others in interactions. At the team level, team mindfulness enables members to obtain shared emotional support because when members direct attention toward others, they also gain others' attentional followership, making psychological activities such as team goal understanding, need satisfaction, and perspective acceptance more likely to converge among members (Ni et al., 2021).

Second, mindfulness in interaction contexts can strengthen others' positive emotions. On one hand, mindful leaders can induce positive perceptions in subordinates. For example, Arendt et al. (2019) found that subordinates can identify leader mindfulness during communication, thereby enhancing communication satisfaction. Dietl and Reb (2021) found that mindfulness-regulated attention helps leaders maintain connection with their core selves, triggering subordinates' authenticity evaluations of leaders. On the other hand, mindfulness can promote others' positive emotions. Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. (2021) found that coworker mindfulness can promote employees' positive emotions at work and relaxation at home, further promoting organizational citizenship behavior. Conversely, mindful individuals also consider coworkers' feelings; for example, Mihelič and Culiberg (2019) argued that mindful individuals have greater external awareness and caring orientations toward others, reducing social loafing.

### 4.3 Resource Connection Mechanism of Workplace Mindfulness

The resource connection mechanism aims to synergize with exchange connection mechanisms to provide resource safeguards for intellectual and emotional connection mechanisms, involving two pathways: promoting resource accumulation (acquisition, investment, and absorption) and inhibiting resource loss (defending or withdrawing) (Hobfoll et al., 2018). First, through agile present-moment attention and keen insight, mindfulness helps entities simultaneously identify

“others’ needs” and “others’ contributions to self needs,” thereby facilitating resource acquisition and investment into interpersonal interactions or promoting others’ resource absorption during interactions. For example, self mindfulness can identify benefits in the environment, increase prosocial interpersonal emotions such as gratitude, empathy, and compassion, and transmit positive energy to others (Hafenbrack et al., 2020; Sawyer et al., 2022). Leader mindfulness can reduce employee stress, promote ongoing leader-member exchange relationships (Reb et al., 2019), and enhance team psychological safety to promote resource acquisition and absorption beneficial to knowledge sharing processes (Zheng et al., 2023). Team mindfulness as a resource input can increase team emotional support to obtain additional resources and enhance team satisfaction (Ni et al., 2021).

Second, inhibiting resource loss includes self-regulation to defend against and withdraw resource consumption toward others. Conservation of resources theory posits that under stressful situations, individuals promptly cease resource consumption to preserve existing resources or use existing resources to acquire new resources to reduce resource loss (Hobfoll et al., 2018). With decentering at its core, mindfulness prevents thoughts and emotions from wandering and escapes self-centeredness, enabling rapid dual awareness of “whether others have generated negative experiences toward me” and “whether I have generated negative experiences toward others.” To avoid resource loss, entities promptly shift to objective perspectives to defend against self-resource loss and withdraw resource consumption toward others. For example, Liang et al. (2016) found that mindful individuals can defend against resource consumption caused by mind-wandering in hostile environments, while mindful individuals can also quickly recognize hostility toward others and promptly withdraw this bias (Liang et al., 2018). Similarly, when facing conflict, team mindfulness helps members integrate opinion differences and increase perspective-taking rather than blaming each other and exacerbating consumption, thereby reducing competition and increasing cooperation (Ni et al., 2022).

#### 4.4 Exchange Connection Mechanism of Workplace Mindfulness

Interpersonal activities in the workplace depend on established organizational structures and work connections. According to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), positive exchange enables both interacting parties to benefit from resource acquisition and flow (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Current workplace mindfulness exchange connections primarily involve three types: self mindfulness bringing into broad workplace relationships, leader mindfulness bringing into leader-subordinate relationships, and team mindfulness bringing into team relationships, aiming to navigate resource flow directions and value exchange willingness. First, although self mindfulness can be brought into broad workplace interpersonal interactions, this form of exchange relationship is relatively weak because it requires mindful individuals to expend effort identifying resource inputs in workplace relationships (not limited to specific targets) and reciprocating

them into relationships. For example, mindfulness can reduce social loafing by broadening external awareness to care for others and reducing selfish tendencies (Mihelič & Culiberg, 2019), and increase gratitude and prosocial behavior by identifying others' paid costs and self-received benefits (Hafenbrack et al., 2020; Sawyer et al., 2022). Second, leader mindfulness can promote exchange relationships with subordinates. The attention and followership awareness invested by mindful leaders provide positive supportive resources for superior-subordinate interactions to safeguard stable exchange relationships. For example, studies have found that leader mindfulness can enhance leader-member exchange quality (Zhang et al., 2018; Reb et al., 2019). Finally, team members' mindful interactions can also stimulate positive relationships within teams. Given the universality of teamwork, maintaining stable intra-team relationships is particularly important (Ni et al., 2022). High team mindfulness means members mutually invest followership awareness and supportive resources and prevent interactions from deviating from present situations to maintain stable exchange processes, enabling them to embrace different viewpoints with open minds to promote resource flow and goal achievement (Ni et al., 2021; Ni et al., 2022; Yu & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018).

## 5 Summary and Future Directions

This review identifies two workplace mindfulness development trends: conceptual development trends based on outcome-oriented and process-oriented perspectives, and interpersonal effects and mechanisms of workplace mindfulness. First, outcome-oriented conceptual development has made substantial progress in integrating workplace contexts with multidimensional features and cross-cultural development, while process-oriented conceptual development provides beneficial insights for theoretical exploration of workplace mindfulness. Second, workplace mindfulness can affect interpersonal quality and functional outcomes through intellectual, emotional, resource, and exchange connection mechanisms. Exploring workplace mindfulness' s interpersonal functions can enrich literature knowledge, shift future research focus, promote deeper connections between workplace mindfulness and interpersonal domains, and provide inspiration for reshaping positive workplace cultures in the post-pandemic era. Additionally, future research should continue advancing mindfulness theory development and expanding its interpersonal processes and outcomes, such as exploring mindfulness interactions in dual-earner work-family domains, cross-level flow processes of mindfulness, and third-party perspective mindfulness effects. Furthermore, we encourage future research to deeply examine several promising directions.

First, advance research on workplace mindfulness interpersonal processes and outcomes in the context of digitalization and artificial intelligence. Machine learning, digital employees, ChatGPT, and other AI technologies are rapidly proliferating in workplaces, transforming the interpersonal interaction-centered workplace toward a "non-social system" (Tang et al., 2023). Although AI technologies can transcend human information processing limitations, greatly en-

hancing productivity and competitive advantage (Kemp, 2023), workplace culture building faces consequent challenges. For example, AI can weaken physical space interactions and interdependence (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021), reduce social connections (Heaphy et al., 2018), increase loneliness (Tang et al., 2023), and trigger widespread job replacement crises (Marken & Nicola, 2023). Workplace mindfulness may address current AI challenges. On one hand, workplace mindfulness may help resolve AI-triggered interpersonal emotional crises. Mindful individuals can not only use moment-to-moment followership attention to increase meaning and personalized communication during interactions (Clark, 2023) but also exclude AI interference in interpersonal interactions through non-judgmental and open awareness, thereby fulfilling intrinsic relational needs and promoting emotional support (Tang et al., 2023). On the other hand, mindful individuals can use AI technology to consolidate professional intellectual connections. Professionalism has become an important means of solving social problems and maintaining social order through autonomy and authority (Huising, 2022), making it crucial to realize how AI technology enhances professional knowledge to maintain organizational advantages. Pakarinen and Huising (2023) argued that an effective pathway for AI to fulfill its potential is embedding it in interpersonal interaction networks as a new organizational role. When highly mindful professional employees invest attention in task interactions, open and curious attitudes enable them to friendly embrace new technologies and roles and flexibly initiate learning states to better serve intellectual connections through AI technology roles. Additionally, leader attention and motivation are viewed as important roles in promoting collaboration between entities and technology (Bammens & Hünermund, 2023), providing broader opportunities for examining how workplace mindfulness participates in interpersonal interactions in AI technology application contexts.

Second, enrich cross-domain knowledge between remote work and workplace mindfulness. A recent Gallup survey shows that the proportion of time working remotely during normal working hours is increasing (Jones, 2023), meaning hybrid work models have become the trend. In this context, both human resource management practices and team network configurations face important challenges. For example, when relying on technological communication, how can organizational justice be ensured? How can intra-team cooperation be better promoted? How can cross-functional/departmental cooperation be conducted? How can positive work relationships under new team network configurations be promoted? Workplace mindfulness may provide insights for building workplace relationship practices under hybrid work models. On one hand, both mindful managers and employees have been found to possess high authenticity (Dietl & Reb, 2021; Leroy et al., 2013), which helps them increase inclusivity during interactions even when in separate spaces (Schertler et al., 2023). Meanwhile, non-judgmental and non-reactive characteristics prevent them from attempting to infer others' intentions when unable to see facial expressions and movements during remote communication, greatly avoiding conflict escalation during task discussion and collaboration. On the other hand, under new normal crisis en-

vironments, team relationships within organizations continuously face complex patterns of creation, loss, and activation (Wu et al., 2021). Integrating mindfulness into interaction processes may promote the establishment of positive work-related imagined interactions (Schinoff & Byron, 2023)—that is, mentally simulating how to interact with others at work. This can prepare for future remote team interaction expectations because mindful individuals are endowed with characteristics such as empathy, compassion, and authenticity (Dietl & Reb, 2021; Hafenbrack et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2023) and typically do not engage in self-referential inferences, making them highly suitable for promoting positive interaction imagination to compensate for insufficient real interactions in remote work (Schinoff & Byron, 2023). Therefore, future research could combine remote work contexts to explore remote interaction mechanisms of workplace mindfulness.

Finally, connect workplace mindfulness with DEI initiative implementation and stigmatization management. DEI initiatives aim to address workplace bias, discrimination, and injustice, and successful DEI implementation can enhance change capacity and promote positive workplace culture (Michels et al., 2023). Although individual scholars have found workplace mindfulness' s improving effects on discrimination (e.g., Thoroughgood et al., 2020), how workplace mindfulness prompts managers to implement DEI strategies remains unclear. Reports indicate that 99% of the time, self-interest, power, stubbornness, and internal bias hinder positive change (Ingram, 2023), suggesting that leader internal characteristics are key to successful DEI initiative implementation. Given that mindful leaders are associated with broad acceptance and fairness (Reb et al., 2019; Schuh et al., 2019), future research could examine leader mindfulness' s role in improving bias, discrimination, and injustice. Additionally, scholars could connect workplace mindfulness with more general stigmatization phenomena (a discrediting attribute or mark; Goffman, 1963, p. 3). Since stigmatization manifests psychologically (e.g., stress, emotional labor), identity-wise (e.g., decreased identification), and behaviorally (e.g., social exclusion, bullying, and harassment) (Kreiner et al., 2022), and improving stigmatization essentially means improving highly aversive social evaluation, future research could further explore how workplace mindfulness mitigates such negative social construction phenomena to shape more positive and healthy workplace environments.

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### Footnote

1. Due to different scholars referencing different mindfulness concepts, terminology expressions for core dimensions vary, but their connotations correspond to mindful attention and decentering.

*Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.*

*Source: ChinaXiv – Machine translation. Verify with original.*