



SIGMA Mindfulness

Sparking Creativity Using Mindfulness: A Business Case

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Sparking Creativity Using Mindfulness

A Business Case for Meditation at Work

The Issue

Delivering creative and compelling ideas and solutions in the face of time pressure and distractions can be difficult. Research has found that 47% of the time people are not focused on the task at hand,¹ and 68% of employees in the US are disengaged at work.²

The ability to limit distraction and focus one's attention can be strengthened by practicing mindfulness.³ Over 30 years of research support the efficacy of mindfulness for reducing stress and enhancing well-being, and more recent research is demonstrating the utility of mindfulness practices for enhancing focus, creativity, and decision-making.

What is Mindfulness?

"Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally." - Jon Kabat-Zinn

Being able to control one's focus of attention and notice internal and external distractions reduces stress, enhances interpersonal relationships, and helps people make better decisions.⁴

Why Mindfulness is Good for Business

People who are more mindful experience higher levels of well-being and engagement at work, and are less likely to want to quit their jobs.⁵ People with mindful managers experience higher levels of well-being and engagement.⁶ Research has shown that employees who practice mindfulness are more productive, with some research showing a 20% increase as well as higher manager performance ratings.⁷

How Mindfulness Enhances Creativity

Creative work requires an open, relaxed, but focused state of mind that is free from distractions and anxiety so that new connections and insights can arise. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls this flow, and found that innovative high achievers are frequently in a flow state.⁸

A growing body of research shows that people who are more mindful are better able to solve problems creatively.^{9, 10} For instance, research has shown that people who did an open-awareness meditation practice produced more creative ideas¹¹, and in another study people who practiced mindfulness were more cognitively flexible.¹²

There is also a connection between positive emotions and creativity¹³ and the more present-focused people are, the better they report feeling¹, further bolstering the mindfulness-creativity link. Finally, people who are more mindful are more resilient¹⁴, and resilience is critical for people to bounce back from the stress and anxiety that can impede creative flow states.

A daily mindfulness practice not only encourages a calmer state, it can help people recognize when they are distracted, stuck, or stressed, and take steps to optimize their environment (for instance, by reducing multitasking and setting aside time to focus on a problem) and their approach to their work (for instance, adopting a growth versus a fixed mindset, seeking out new information, or sharing ideas with others).

Mindfulness practices also help people to reframe problems by encouraging the development of several helpful perspectives or ways of relating towards their experiences:

- *Beginner's Mind*: seeing things as if for the first time can lead to new ideas and insights
- *Nonjudgment/Noticing Judgments*: encourages clarity and response flexibility
- *Curiosity*: asking questions fuels learning
- *Acceptance*: enhances decision-making by reducing biases
- *Letting Go*: moving on when stuck, being open to new ideas and feedback
- *Non-Striving*: flow is encouraged by focusing on the process, not the outcome
- *Compassion*: enhances empathy towards customers, reduces perfectionist tendencies

In summary, mindfulness practices help people to move from a place of distraction and continuous partial attention to a place where they can focus on their work more fully¹⁵, making it more likely that they will produce creative and innovation solutions.

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Research Citations

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