Meditation and its Relationships within the Workplace

Mansi Mansi
Doctoral Scholar
School of Management
RMIT University
Email: mansi.mansi@rmit.edu.au

Associate Professor Adela McMurray
Deputy Head Business (Research)
College of Business
School of Management
RMIT University
Email: adela.mcmurray@rmit.edu.au
Abstract: Meditation is primarily examined within leisure contexts yet a review of the literature shows a recent trend where studies are making forays into workplace settings. An in-depth-analysis of the international Meditation literature across the business, medicine and psychology disciplines was conducted so as to uncover the relationships between Meditation and the workplace. The two general categories of Internal and External Meditation Benefit were generated and uncovered relationships between Meditation and Physical Health, Psychological Health, Workplace Benefits, and Family and Society. These categories formed an integrated overarching framework providing the foundation from which to progress to the next stage of in-depth analysis addressing Meditation in the Workplace and its elements thereby generating an innovative conceptual ‘Meditation and workplace’ model.

Paper Type: Conceptual Paper

Key Words: Meditation, Workplace, Literature Review, Conceptual Model

The concept of ‘Meditation’ and ‘Workplace’ may sound diametrically opposed however this paper highlights the direct relationship between them and their complementariness. The research question underpinning this paper is:

‘What are the relationships between Meditation and the Workplace?’

History shows that Meditation techniques were traditionally practised to experience spiritual awakening such as inner growth of consciousness and was viewed as an envoy of inner peace, well being and harmony. Thus the purpose of this conceptual paper was to consolidate the existing international Meditation literature to provide a cross-disciplinary understanding of Meditation and its interrelated relationships within the workplace. To achieve this high-level analysis, in the first instance, the paper consolidated the literature across the business, medicine and psychology disciplines and uncovered the five categories of Physical Health, Psychological Health, Workplace, Family and Surrounding. Each of the five categories is comprised of a multitude of elements consolidated from the literature. The paper then progresses to the next level of in-depth analysis by focussing solely on the workplace category and its elements as uncovered in the literature thus far. By focusing on the workplace literature, we developed a conceptual model specific to Meditation and its relationships within the workplace as this is an emerging new trend in the literature which has not as yet been consolidated to show the relationships between Meditation and the workplace. This
conceptual model provides the first comprehensive consolidation of the disparate literature and provides justification for the importance of Meditation in the workplace and the emerging fields for researchers to address.

DEFINING MEDITATION

Meditation is neither a physiological state nor a psychological feeling nor is it a religion or philosophy but a combination of all these (Girdano & Everly, 1979). Meditation is so basic that it transcends time, culture, races, religions and ideologies. Different religions such as Buddhism, Zen, Hinduism, and Sufi interpret Meditation from their own embedded paradigms consequently, definitions are rich and varied. For example, Sharma (2008) notes Meditation and Medicine come from the same root word ‘medere’ - making whole. Meditation is defined as a systematic technique for taking hold of and concentrating to the utmost degree our latent mental power (Easwaran, 1979). Meditation is a general term applied to the methods of steadying, quieting or opening the mind for the purpose of altering states of consciousness and entails training the mind, especially one’s attention and the will, so that one may set forth from the surface level of consciousness and journey into the very depth of raised consciousness (Hewitt, 1977). The term is viewed as the simplest form of human awareness (Roth, 1987) where consciousness is open only to itself. That is, open to its own full potential and is the unified field of law, which modern quantum physics describes as the source of the infinite creativity and intelligence of nature. Furthermore O’Hara (1995) defines Meditation as the repeated practice of attempting to keep the attention on one designated object, thought or image and states Meditation assists with stopping the torrent to thoughts and repeated worrisome images that may be the downfall in stress management. For employees, Meditation in the workplace means to bring out the best of oneself, therefore utilizing the optimum potential of ones capability without dissipating time and energy. Losyk (2005), states that Herbert Benson was the first researcher to conclusively uncover links between the benefits of Meditation with western medicine.

As can be seen the literature provides a plethora of terminology, which endeavours to define Meditation in a unique and diverse style hence we note that there is no universally accepted Meditation definition as the concept is a complex and multi-dimensional term. Hence, we suggest that
Meditation facilitates a deep sense of responsibility and generates recognition of unity synchronization, cooperativeness, holistic well being, stability in thoughts and peace of mind with all living beings, environment, and workplace colleagues. This conceptual paper provides two interrelated literature analyses yielding in the first instance a Holistic Meditation Framework and then a specific Meditation and Workplace Conceptual Model.

**HOLISTIC MEDITATION FRAMEWORK**

A holistic framework which consolidates the Meditation literature was developed by the authors as shown in figure 1 below. The framework is broadly classified into the two Meditation dimensions of Internal Benefits and External Benefits of Meditation. The Internal Benefits category was further analysed to reveal the two sub categories of Physical and Psychological health. These include Meditation studies conducted by medical scientists and psychologists, which provide evidence that Meditation profoundly influenced the human mind, emotions, feelings and a person’s physical state. The External Benefits of Meditation category was also further analysed and uncovered the two sub categories of Family and Society. These contain studies which claim that Meditation had the potential to influence personal relations, the environment and society.

Through directional arrows, the holistic framework shows the general overarching relationships between Meditation and Internal and External Benefits. Of note and the focus of this paper is the centrally placed category entitled Workplace Benefits which exhibits, through interconnected arrows, that the Internal and External Benefits influence the workplace which is the focus category of our paper as this is a newly studied field.

-----------------------------

**INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

-----------------------------

The holistic model shows that internal and external benefits are vastly unified and interdependent with each other and suggests that the Workplace Benefits category is not self-determining and independent from a person’s internal and external dimensions but instead mutually
linked as workplace employees carry their physical well being and psychological health states to the workplace. The World Health Organization’s (1998) definition of health asserts “…health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” which clearly supports our proposed holistic framework. This is confirmed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development who defined health as “a physical, psychological, mental, and social state of tolerance and compensation outside the limits of which any situation is perceived by the individual (Emmet, 1991). Finally, businesses have discovered that employees bring both their minds and bodies to work therefore it becomes vital to promote the concept of balance between work and life (Hacker & Doolen, 2003). Consequently the holistic framework is supported by perspectives drawn from the medical, psychological and business disciplines.

MEDITATION AND WORKPLACE

This section provides the third layer of in-depth analysis and examines the affiliation between Meditation and the workplace. The literature reveals that Meditation and the workplace share certain crucial relationships with one another such as Meditation increasing tolerance (Toja, 1975), improving workplace relationships and decreasing the desire to change job (Frew, 1974), increasing moral imagination (Forge, 2004), and ecological sustainable behaviour (Jacob et al, 2008). In addition, Meditation in the workplace studies have also shown increased trust between management and employees, motivation among staff, feeling of interconnectedness and co-operation with the organization, and expanding the radius of organizational corporate spirituality. This Meditation-Workplace Relationship conceptual model exclusively addresses the four interrelated dimensions of Workplace Creativity, Workplace Stress, Workplace Productivity and Workplace Environment with each dimension complementing the other.

Research addressing the costs associated with workplace stress, absenteeism and productivity was conducted by Econtech (2008) on behalf of Medibank Private and found 6 disquieting statistics:

- Workplace stress costs the Australian economy $14.81 billion annually
- Stress related presenteeism and absenteeism directly cost Australian Employers $10.11 billion annually
- 3.2 days per worker are lost each year through workplace stress
- 1.36% annual productivity loss in Australia
- $10.11 billion direct cost to employers
- 1.01% total cost on economy (GDP)

(Source: Medibank, 2008)

One of the plausible reasons why Meditation and alternative therapies are gaining momentum is the consequential link to stress and mind-body related issues that manifest tension within workplace responsibilities. The above statistics are deeply disturbing due to the following repercussions: Firstly, what will the impact of workplace stress have (despite the annual $14.81 billion financial loss) on the Australian economy, business, and society, family, individual and future generations? And how do these influence future workplaces? Secondly, what are the elucidations and antidotes for these statistics? What measures may be taken to curb these figures? The statistics undoubtedly show that the cost of workplace stress is enormous and the number of workers undergoing this syndrome is huge. Meditation therapy, as an alternative and preventive intervention, may provide a future solution to such alarming issues. The National Centre for Complementary and Alternate Medicine reports that 8% of Americans use Meditation as a health tool (Sharma, 2008) and is a seven billion dollar business in the U.S. with Meditation as one of the top 10 alternative therapies used by its population.

The workplace stress data provided by Medibank is extended by medical studies which claim that Meditation impacts on the mind in a positive manner and links the body and mind to enhance optimism and reduce workplace stress. (Frew 1974; Moore & Malinouwski 2009; Davis 2009). Today’s economic stresses place further pressure on people and organizations to remain competitive and for this reason, should reduce workplace stress and tension in order to minimise its impact on the business bottom line (PWC, 2008) and promote their worker’s health and organizational sustainability (ILO 1986; 1992). Workers who are stressed are more likely to be unhappy, unhealthy, less motivated, less productive and less safe at work and their organizations are less likely to prosper.
(Leka et al., 2003). An Australian survey conducted by Accenture (2006) revealed that nearly two-thirds of 1029 full-time employees reported an increased workload during the past 1 to 2 years. Work-related stress has links with coronary heart disease, mental breakdown, poor health behaviours, job dissatisfaction, accidents, absenteeism, lost productivity, family problems and certain forms of cancer (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994). The Meditation literature claims that this syndrome may be minimised and reversed by engaging in Meditation regularly. Thus, we propose that Meditation in the workplace fulfils two goals. The first being that Meditation relaxes the mind by reducing stress and secondly Meditation creates workplace efficiency by generating awareness.

To provide this in-depth analysis, the authors delved deeper into the literature and developed a conceptual model of Meditation and the Workplace which shows how the studies may be classified into the four sub-divisions of Workplace Creativity, Workplace Productivity, Workplace Stress and Workplace Environment. The research studies included in the model show that Meditation shares an influential relationship with these four sub-divisions.

The conceptual model addresses seminal and recent studies drawn from the literature specific to Meditation and the workplace revealing the correlation between an employee and a sense of holistic attunement with professional responsibilities and self-awareness facilitating in positive organizational activities.

The first seminal study examining Meditation in the workplace was conducted by Frew (1974) and showed significant differences between meditators who held full time jobs and a control group of non-meditators. His study uncovered job performance and job satisfaction of those that engaged in Meditation increased, while desire to change jobs decreased. Forty two participants took part in the study and completed a survey. The average age of the respondents was 26 years, with 66% of the participants being male and 76% being married. The findings of the study reported that
Meditation was positively related to productivity, job satisfaction, improved performance, less desire
to change jobs (turnover), and better interpersonal relationships with superiors and co-workers.
According to IR Research Publications (2000) wellbeing is measured by Employee Productivity,
Stress, Absenteeism, Company Loyalty, Product Loyalty and Job Satisfaction - these form the
divisions as shown within the conceptual model.

Medical Science has established that Meditation and alternative therapies have an astonishing
impact on the human body (Pace et al, 2009). For example, in their medical study, Jevning et al.,
(1978) researched the biochemistry of deep rest and found that Plasma Cortisol was a stress hormone
that decreased during the Transcendental Meditation technique, whereas it did not change
significantly in control subjects during relaxation.

Analysis of the research methods undertaken within the Meditation in the workplace literature
revealed that the studies were predominantly based in the US (Frew,1974; Harung et al,1996;
Workplace conducted in Australia are silent with no studies being uncovered in the literature review.

In terms of research method, the existing studies predominantly employed multi-method
techniques such as questionnaires, control groups and interviews. The studies predominantly
examined Meditation-workplace relationships addressing the three categories of Productivity,
Performance, and Leadership and were undertaken in the manufacturing, health and the food sectors.

When addressing reliability and validity, the literature review analysis clearly showed there
was an inconsistency in reporting the Cronbach Alpha value of the instruments used in the various
studies. Out of seven quantitative studies only two reported the reliability values of their instruments.
However, the two studies that reported the reliability values of their instruments did so in great detail.
For example, Jacob et al., (2008) in their US study employed three instruments and comprehensively
reported their Cronbach alpha values as ranging from: Subjective Well-being (Cronbach’s alpha
0.912), Mindful Meditation (Cronbach’s alpha 0.804), and Ecological Sustainable Behaviour
comprised of three sub scales of Recycling Behaviouir (Cronbach’s alpha 0.875), Sustainable
Household Choices (Cronbach’s alpha 0.772) and Sustainable Food Practices (Cronbach’s alpha 0.646).

Another example was Moore and Malinowski’s (2009) comparative study conducted in the UK between Buddhist meditators and several business professionals where they established a relationship between Meditation practices improving mindfulness skills thus having a positive effect on cognitive flexibility and the ability to sustain attention. They reported the reliability of their instruments as being the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness (KIMS) skills comprised of four sub scales: Observing (Cronbach’s alpha 0.91), Describing (Cronbach’s alpha 0.84), Acting with Awareness (Cronbach’s alpha 0.83) and Accepting without Judgement (Cronbach’s alpha 0.87).

The above section discussed the seminal and more recent studies addressing mediation and its relationships within the workplace. It can be concluded that Meditation and Workplace Productivity, Creativity, Stress and Environment are interlinked with each other.

In addressing the relationship between health and the workplace, Medibank (2008) commissioned research that uncovered that healthy employees are three times more productive than unhealthy employees whereas unhealthy employees take nine times more sick leave than healthy employees do. Girdano & Everly (1979) state that sometimes stress disorders are also caused by chronic, long-term overactivity. A medical study conducted by Wallace (1971) proves that continuous practice of Meditation improves longevity and relaxation as breath rates fall from 14 breaths per minute to 11 breaths per minute, which is natural, effortless and comfortable. Unquestionably Wallace’s findings claim Meditation can create a deep sense of relaxation on the mind of the practitioner and reduce workplace stress and mind-body issues.

Losyk (2005) states that Meditation facilitates better working relationships with others by enabling calm and clear thinking. An employee engaging in regular Meditation practices has the ability to forgive and accept the shortcomings of their workplace colleagues in a more enlightened manner. The literature states that Meditation pulls out the hidden reservoir of energy and vigour, which is the source, and the governing power of all living beings. Fox (1994) says the higher self is fully aware that the purpose of life and work is both sacred and material. This may require an
understanding that life and work are not two separate entities. They are both unified and dependent on each other which is supported by the business and psychology literature.

For many today, it remains a challenge to maintain focus and clarity in the workplace and its related responsibilities. Meditation assists to be in the present moment and strengthens the mind-body correlation. In the times of crisis, financial collapse and economic calamity, Meditation may be viewed as a shock absorber in achieving peace and tranquillity including sustainability. From the above literature review and analysis, it is evident that, there is an undeniable relationship between workplace and Meditation.

CONCLUSION

Consolidation of the literature yielded the holistic framework and the conceptual model which shows that Meditation and the workplace share significant relationships. The framework in this conceptual paper identified the five categories of Physical Benefits, Psychological Benefits, Workplace Benefits, Family and Society which are interconnected. In particular, the framework provided insights into progressing to the next stage of analysis addressing Meditation in the Workplace where the conceptual model showed relationships between Workplace Creativity, Workplace Productivity, Workplace Stress and Workplace Environment.

By consolidating the literature, this study uncovered the five different dimensions of the Meditation and workplace relationship and proposes that Meditation is an innovative tool fostering the holistic development of an organization where Meditation provides a powerful and enduring technique especially for economic stress, psychological well being and business productivity. The paper discusses fundamental workplace issues such as stress, environment, creativity and its relationships to Meditation.

Finally, the conglomeration of the various aspects of Meditation and workplace relationships such as Physical, Psychological, Society, Workplace and Family provides insights that the workforce is comprised of several interrelated variables beneficial to personal and organizational development.
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although comprehensive, this international literature review was limited by including studies that were published only in English and across three disciplines of Medical Science, Business and Psychology. In addition our study embraced Meditation as a general concept and did not delve into the various types of mediation such as Buddhist Meditation, Zen Meditation and Mahayana Meditation. The reason for this was that insufficient information was provided within the existing bodies of literature.

Future studies may like to consider examining Meditation and managerial experience including the philosophical and wisdom related issues of Meditation within workplace settings.
REFERENCES


Liu TS & Trompennars T (2006) In Maak T & Pless N M. Towards responsible leadership through reconciling dilemmas (p.149), New York: Routledge,


MEDITATION

**Physical Health**
- Low blood pressure (Wallace et al., 1983)
- Migraines (Buse & Andras, 2009)
- Enhance antibodies (Davidson et al., 2003)
- Decreased symptoms of Asthma (Honsberger & Wilson, 1973)
- Reduced Anxiety (Epplie et al., 1985)
- Lower Cholesterol (Cooper & Aygen, 1979)
- Reduced use of Addictive Drugs (Monahan, 1977)
- Reduced Cardiovascular Risk Factors (Wallace et al., 1982)
- Reduced Cortisol (Jevning et al., 1978)
- Lower breath rate (Wallace, 1971)
- Improves Depression, Anxiety and Satisfaction (Shapiro et al., 2005)
- Cancer (Carlson et al., 2003)
- Longetivity (Alexender et al., 1989)

**Psychological Health**
- Reduces Stress (Michaels, 1976)
- Psychotherapy (Hones et al., 1983)
- Increase Self-Actualization (Nidich et al., 1972)
- Self Regulation (Shapiro et al., 1983)
- Decreased anxiety (Epplie et al., 1985)
- Increased Positive Emotions (Goleman et al., 2003)
- Younger Biological Age (Wallace et al., 1982)
- Increased Intelligence (Toja, 1975)
- Improved self-concept (Turnbull & Norris, 1982)

**Workplace Benefits**
- Increase Self compassion (Shapiro et al., 2005, 2007)
- Cognitive Flexibility (Moore, 2009)
- Focused Attention (Ospina et al., 2007)
- Decreased conflicts (Dillbeck & Davies, 1987)
- Development of personality (Nidich, et al., 1973)
- Improved relations at work (Frew, 1974)
- Increased productivity (Frew, 1974)
- Increased learning ability (Dillbeck, 1982)
- Increased tolerance (Toja, 1975)
- Ability to focus (Pelletier, 1986)
- Decrease desire to change job (Frew, 1974)
- Increased Learning Ability (Dillbeck, 1982)
- Mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

**Family**
- Moral Maturity (Nidich et al., 1983)
- Moral Imagination (Forge, 2004)
- Improved quality of life (Dillbeck et al., 1987)
- Improved Quality of Life (Rosdeller et al., 2009)
- Heightened clarity of perception, Creativity, Fluidity in problem Solving (Saradth, 2003)

**Society**
- Ecological Sustainable Behaviour (Jacob et al., 2008)
- Pro-Environmental Behavior (Jacob et al., 2008)
- Improved economic trends (Dillbeck & Davies, 1987)
- Reduced Violence (Orme Johnson et al., 1987)
- Decreased crime (Dillbeck et al., 1981)
- Reduced need for medical care (Orme-Johnson, 1987)
- Reduced use of Tobacco, Alcohol, Marijuana & Drugs (Monahan, 1977)
- Higher ethical conduct (McNaughton, 2008)

**Source:** Authors
MEDITATION

**Workplace Creativity**
- Increased Learning Ability (Dillbeck, 1982)
- Focused Attention (Ospina et al., 2007)
- Moral Imagination (Forge, 2004)

**Workplace Productivity**
- Increased Productivity, Job Satisfaction (Frew, 1974)
- Heightened clarity of perception (Saradth, 2003)
- Less desire to change job (Frew, 1974)
- Development of personality (Nidich et al., 1973)
- Increase Mindfulness, cognitive flexibility (Moore & Malinowski, 2009)

**Workplace Stress**
- Decreased conflicts (Dillbeck & Davies, 1987)
- Improved Relations at work (Frew, 1974)
- Increased tolerance (Toja, 1975)
- Increased Self Compassion (Shapiro et al., 2005)

**Workplace Environment**
- Increase ecological sustainable behaviour (Jacob et al., 2008)
- Higher ethical Conduct (McNaughton, 2003)
- Moral Maturity (Nidich et al., 1983)

Source: Authors