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## Guest editorial: Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations: enabling content, context and process

**Author(s):** Degbey, William Y.; Tarba, Shlomo; Zoogah, Baniyelme D.; Cooper, Cary

**Title:** Guest editorial: Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations: enabling content, context and process

**Year:** 2024

**Version:** Accepted manuscript

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### **Please cite the original version:**

Degbey, W. Y., Tarba, S., Zoogah, B. D. & Cooper, C. (2024). Guest editorial: Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations: enabling content, context and process. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 39(3), 229-240. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-04-2024-715>

**Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations:  
Enabling content, context, and process**

**William Y. Degbey**

School of Management,  
University of Vaasa, Wolffintie 32,  
65200 Vaasa, Finland.  
[william.degbey@uwasa.fi](mailto:william.degbey@uwasa.fi)

**Shlomo Tarba**

Birmingham Business School,  
University of Birmingham,  
Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK.  
[s.tarba@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.tarba@bham.ac.uk)

**Baniyelme D. Zoogah**

DeGroote School of Business,  
McMaster University,  
1280 Main St W, Hamilton, ON L8S 4L8, Canada.  
[zoogahb@mcmaster.ca](mailto:zoogahb@mcmaster.ca)

**Sir Cary Cooper**

Alliance Manchester Business School,  
University of Manchester,  
Booth Street West, Manchester, M15 6PB, England, UK.  
[cary.cooper@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:cary.cooper@manchester.ac.uk)

## **Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations: Enabling content, context, and process**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this special issue is to advance research in the joint domains of mindfulness and relational systems in organizations. It seeks a greater empirical understanding of the role of content, context, and process that shapes mindfulness and relational systems across different levels from a managerial psychology perspective for effective human functioning in organizations.

**Design/methodology/approach** – We review the literature and integrate the articles in the special issue to join the conversation.

**Findings** – The literature overview shows substantial growth in the combined research domains of mindfulness and relational systems in organizations for the last decade (2014 – February 2024).

**Originality/value** – We provide a brief overview of where extant research on the subject matter stands and summarize the articles in the special issue to illuminate how they build on and advance current research across a number of important topics in the areas of inquiry.

**Keywords** mindfulness, relational systems, organization, content, context, process

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Business organizations and the environments in which they function are facing grand challenges – complex problems that transcend corporate and country borders (Buckley et al., 2017; Degbey, Pelto, Öberg, & Carmeli, 2023; Howard-Grenville, 2021) and often involve social, psychological, economic, and technological issues (Eisenhardt et al., 2016) to which organizations need to respond. These challenges disrupt organizational processes and systems that influence employees' and managers' behaviors, attitudes, and well-being (McFarland et al., 2020; Vaziri et al., 2020). These challenges and similar unprecedented changes to the business world make it problematic for organizations and their workforce to (re)flourish without strong human-centered management (Pirson, 2017). As a result, there is a call for employees and managers to develop and adopt mindfulness, which represents monitoring one's attention to and regulating it toward present events in a non-judgemental way (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Good et al., 2016; Reina & Kudesia, 2020), as well as build high-quality relational systems, e.g., strong relational attachments (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2019) in work settings.

Mindfulness and relational systems in organizations can enable managers and leaders to safeguard against threats posed by grand challenges, including radical technological disruption in the future of work (e.g., Balliester & Elsheikhi, 2018; Rodgers, Yeung, Odindo & Degbey, 2021; Rodgers et al., 2023), demographic changes (e.g., aging societies - Taneva & Arnold, 2018), and climate change (Falcke, Zobel & Comello, 2023). Moreover, given the tendency of contemporary organizations to favor collective outcomes over singular outcomes, examining the interactivity of mindfulness with relational systems can be vital to fostering

effective human functioning and eliciting positive outcomes. Yet, their joint influences are often not discussed.

For instance, on the one hand, previous research has underscored the pivotal role of mindfulness in enhancing positive outcomes across vital spheres of life, e.g., fostering high-quality social interactions (Brown et al., 2007; Good et al., 2016), shielding against conflicts and social undermining (Yu & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018), promoting innovative work behavior (Montani et al., 2020), nurturing romantic relationships (Carson et al., 2007), facilitating emotional regulation (Molina & O'Shea, 2020), empowering individuals with limited cognitive resources to multitask without experiencing mental fatigue (Kudesia, Pandey, & Reina, 2022), and cultivating a sense of interpersonal intimacy (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Additionally, research supports the importance of mindfulness in key aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as emotional intelligence (e.g., Baer et al., 2006; Brown & Ryan, 2003), which has a positive relationship with empathic perspective-taking and cooperative response patterns (Schutte et al., 2001). Furthermore, preliminary evidence indicates that mindfulness can protect against the suffering experienced by an individual who lost his/her social connectedness owing to social exclusion (Allen & Knight, 2005).

On the other hand, relational systems research has long highlighted that human systems, in general, are relational (Schein, 1993) but can be severely damaged by crises, given that they disrupt and upend the connections and attachments of their system members (Kahn et al., 2013). However, we know little about how the underlying processes of relational systems, e.g., joint problem-solving, communication, and mutuality (Wynne, 1984), intermingle with mindfulness to foster favorable or minimize adverse outcomes in the work milieu. For instance, research highlights the demands of extreme conditions, such as the migrant crisis (Pécoud, 2020) and pandemics (Rigotti et al., 2020; Rudolph et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020) and

possible ways to enable interventions. Such crises, as mentioned above, including other grand challenges, have serious consequences for migrants and ethnic minorities with respect to workplace diversity and inclusivity. Hence, positive relational systems and mindfulness across varying levels, such as individual, team, and organizational, can produce valuable managerial, social, and psychological understanding for inclusive organizing and workplace diversity for employees, including other minority groups, to flourish.

Consequently, our special issue seeks to advance empirical knowledge regarding the joint role of mindfulness and relational systems in organizational settings. More specifically, it aims to expand understanding of the contents, contexts, and processes that undergird the combined research on mindfulness and relational systems in management and organization literature. Insights from these studies are likely to foster positive outcomes within the organizational setting, including creative process engagement (Awan et al., 2024), employee safety behaviors (Liu et al., 2023), team resilience (Degbey & Einola, 2020), employee retention (Degbey et al., 2021), employee work engagement (Conte et al., 2019), and employee innovative behavior (Wang, Meng & Cai, 2019) or minimize negative outcomes (e.g., pandemic-induced concerns on LMX-TMX relationships – Alo, Arslan, Tian & Pereira, 2023; employee career regret – Budjanovcanin et al., 2019; abusive supervision – Shen et al., 2019; unethical pro-organizational behavior – Xu & Lv, 2018). In the following section, we provide a ten-year snapshot of where the extant research stands.

### **The current state of the field**

Our literature search in the leading management and organization journals (i.e., based on the British ABS 3 and above rankings) during the last decade (January 2014 to February 2024) indicated a growing trend in the phenomenon of mindfulness (see Figure 1). During this period,

a total of 308 articles on mindfulness alone were published in leading journals. Moreover, when we extended the search to include relational systems with mindfulness, we retrieved a total of 113 articles using the same search criteria.

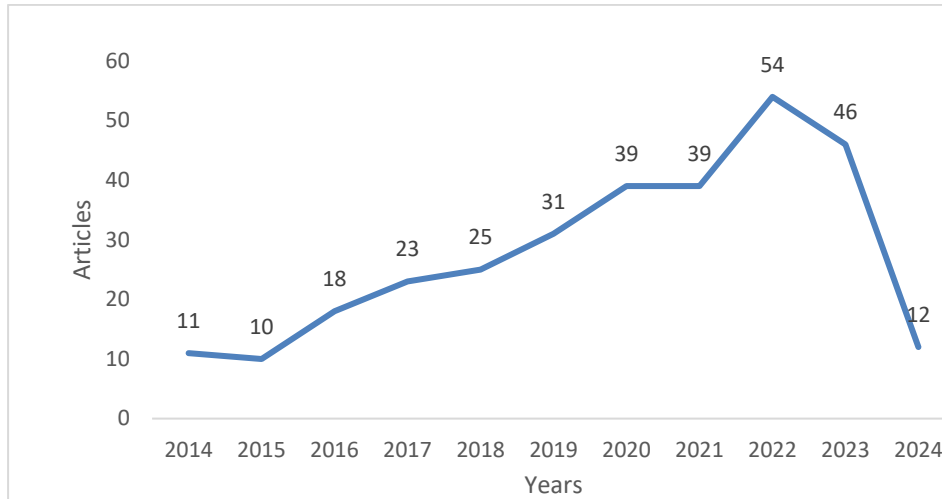


Figure 1. Mindfulness research in organizations (January 2014 to February 2024) (Source: Authors' creation)

Overall, we observe growth in the number of studies in this research domain. For instance, in 2014, studies on mindfulness alone in the leading management and organizational journals were only 11 compared to 46 articles at the end of year 2023 (a growth rate of 76%). Additionally, we observe an overall upward trend in mindfulness research combined with studies on relational systems within the organizational setting (see Figure 2). For instance, in 2014, the combined studies on mindfulness and relational systems in the leading management and organizational journals were only three compared to 25 and 16 articles at the end of 2022 and 2023, respectively (a growth rate of 88% and 81%, respectively).

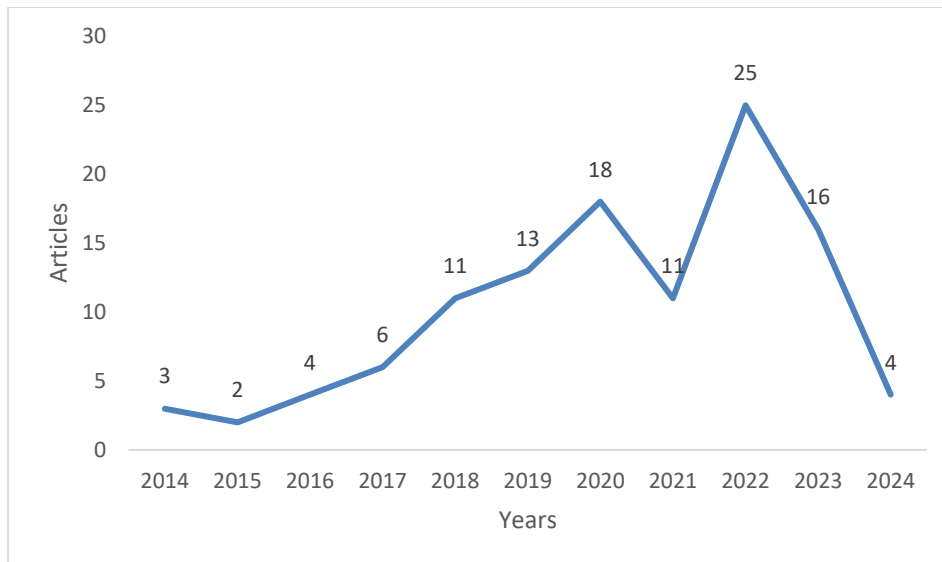


Figure 1. Combined research on mindfulness and relational systems in organizations (January 2014 to February 2024) (Source: Authors' creation)

Besides the trend, the search showed underlying *content*, *context*, and *process* elements of mindfulness and relational systems, which help us understand key transformations in this area of research inquiry (Pettigrew, 1987; 2012). According to Pettigrew (1987), an inquiry into key transformations in organizations involves questions relating to the content, context, and process of the transformation coupled with the interactions between them. Specifically, we use *author keywords* to categorize each article (n = 113) into key content, context, process, and outcomes of mindfulness and relational systems research (see Table 1) to show how the final seven articles included in our Special Issue fit, complement, and advance extant scholarship in this research domain. We mark in bold fonts the elements of the seven articles that match prior research in Table 1. In the next section, we summarize the seven empirical articles.

Table 1. Content, context, process, and outcome elements of mindfulness and relational systems' research in organizations (January 2014 to February 2024) (Source: Authors' creation)

[insert Table 1 here]



## This Special Issue:

The purpose of this special issue is to advance research in the joint domains of mindfulness and relational systems in organizations. To achieve that goal, we highlight how the articles focus on contents, contexts, and processes that shape mindfulness and relational systems across different levels in managerial psychology. We invited empirical submissions that explore the joint and interactive role of mindfulness and relational systems to expand the psychosocial understanding and effect of management in organizations. Out of thirty-one submissions, seven were accepted for publication after the review process. The seven articles advance and expand theory and practice on mindfulness and relational systems.

In the first article, "*Mindfulness and creative process engagement: The mediating role of workplace relational systems*," Awan et al. (2024) draw on motivated information processing theory to empirically examine whether and how mindfulness motivates individuals toward creative process engagement. Their findings show that mindfulness enables individuals to self-regulate in specific situations and effectively foster creative process engagement while also extending research on relational information processing by connecting it with mindfulness and creative process engagement. Moreover, their findings emphasize that mindfulness motivates individuals to focus more on developing quality working relationships. They provide insight that suggests that even less willingness to participate in idea generation and problem-solving solutions has important implications for creativity within the work milieu.

In the second article, "*True knowledge vs. empowering knowledge: Conceptualizing a theory of mindfulness and knowledge transfer (TMKT)*," Issac et al. (2024) explore the influence of mindfulness on different elements of knowledge management: knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge hiding using an inductive reasoning approach. They found that mindfulness enables an open environment and improves thought clarity, which

helps in creating knowledge effectively. They add that a realistic comprehension of present situations inspires employees to share knowledge and prepares them for effective collaboration and teamwork. Moreover, in contrast to knowledge creation and knowledge sharing, they found that mindfulness fosters result orientation, which in turn produces the tendency of employees to hide knowledge from their co-workers by purposefully targeting specific self-centered outcomes. Beyond the positive outcomes of mindfulness, their paper illuminates the dark side of mindfulness concerning organizational knowledge management, such as agenda-based knowledge hiding, and thus provides an opening for future research to explore further.

The third article, “*Leader mindfulness and employee safety behaviors in the workplace: a moderated mediation study*,” focuses on the effects of leader mindfulness on employee safety behaviors through the mediating and moderating roles of employee resilience and perceived environmental uncertainty, respectively. In the study, Liu et al. (2023) found that leader mindfulness has positive impacts on employee safety behaviors (i.e., employee safety compliance and safety participation), mediated by employee resilience. Moreover, they found that the impacts of leader mindfulness on employee resilience were moderated by perceived environmental uncertainty and the indirect effects of leader mindfulness on safety behaviors (i.e., safety compliance and safety participation) through employee resilience.

In the fourth article, “*Dark side of leadership and information technology project success: the role of mindfulness*,” Mubarak et al. (2023) examine the impacts of despotic leadership on information technology project success through the mediating role of employees’ negative emotions and the moderating role of employee mindfulness. The authors found that despotic leadership increases employees’ emotions, which in turn harms information technology project success. In addition, they found that employee mindfulness serves as a buffer that limits the damaging impact of despotic leadership on employees’ emotions. These

findings thus open avenues for future research and practice to further explore how project-based organizations can strive for project success amidst dark leadership styles.

The fifth article, *“Feeling stressed but in full flow? Leader mindfulness shapes subordinates’ perseverative cognition and reaction,”* also focuses on leaders. Xie and Feng (2023) found that problem-solving pondering transmits the nonlinear impact of challenge stressors on flow, whereby affective rumination mediates the negative effect of hindrance stressors on flow. In addition, they found that leader mindfulness increases subordinates’ inclination to ruminate concerning the positive aspects of challenge stressors, thereby enhancing their positive reactions and flow. Moreover, they found that leader mindfulness acts as a buffer that limits the damaging effects of affective rumination on the flow experience, even though it does not stop followers from ruminating less on hindrance stressors.

The sixth article by Zhang et al. (2023), *“Birds of a feather flock together? Leader–member trait mindfulness congruence effects on work outcomes”* focuses on leadership. The authors employ person–supervisor fit theory to examine how leader–member trait mindfulness (in)congruence affect leader–member exchange and how the former indirectly influence taking charge. The authors found that leader–member exchange rises as leaders’ and members’ trait mindfulness are more aligned, such that leader–member exchange is higher when leader–member dyads are congruent at high levels compared to low levels. Concerning incongruence, they found that leader–member exchange is higher when the member's trait mindfulness goes above the leader's. Moreover, they found that leader–member exchange mediates the linkage between leader–member trait mindfulness (in)congruence and taking charge.

The last article by Alo et al. (2023), *“exploring the limits of mindfulness during the covid-19 pandemic: qualitative evidence from African context,”* explores the linkage between the COVID-19 pandemic and the boundaries of mindfulness in an African organizational work

Accepted Article

setting. They found that the pandemic-induced worries during its peak limit the practice of mindfulness, mainly due to the worsening already harsh economic conditions, social uncertainties, and institutional challenges in Africa. This, in turn, led to an absence of employee engagement and commitment, and ultimately negatively influencing the overall team performance and mindfulness at work. Further, they found leaders' or managers' emotional intelligence, social skills, and organizational support systems helpful in such extreme conditions. The findings thus open further opportunities for future research and practice to examine how mindfulness and relational systems manifest and their meanings construed in extreme conditions and developing country contexts bedeviled by existing socio-economic challenges.

We hope the journal's readership finds these seven articles interesting to read and as important contributions that can help advance future studies on mindfulness and relational systems in organizations.

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Content			Process	Context	Outcome
abusive supervision	leadership development	role conflict	interpersonal processes	COVID-19	agility abusive supervisory behavior
affect	<b>LMX</b> lodging recovery	role awareness	self-sensemaking <b>creative process engagement</b>	health care	
aggression	experience management	routines	knowledge-sharing hostility	health IT <b>information technology (IT)</b>	work-life balance employee well-being cognitive flexibility cognitive adjustment
ambivalence	mindfulness managerial cognition	<b>rumination</b>	feedback	social media	at work psychological health and well-being
anger	managerial psychology	sabotage	coping mechanism	university	
anomia	meaningful work	<b>safety behavior</b>	sensemaking relationship management	agricultural supply chain	
apology	meaningfulness	safety climate safety	transformation	smart tourism social identity theory	ambidexterity market agility
attention	mind wandering	compliance safety	integration	daily diary	goal attainment
authentic leadership	moments of care	participation self-brand	reconfiguration management	<b>projects</b>	goal orientation
authoritarian leadership	moral awareness	connection	learning	replication study	job satisfaction intended and unintended consequences
awareness	moral meaningfulness	self-compassion	governmentality	healthcare consumers	organizational citizenship behavior
blame attribution	moral reasoning	self-control depletion	segmentation sustainable processes	emergency medical services	deviant behavior
boundary management	moral responsibility	self-discrepancies self-management	mindful organizing information processing	smart tourism	
brand ritual	motivation	self-managing teams self-regulated attention		individual level social constructionism	satisfaction environmental sustainability
business ethics	motivational control		waste generation and recycling continuous improvement data analysis	multi-source study	extra-role performance
business model innovation	motivational trajectory		development	e-tourism	burnout
capabilities	multiple identities	self-regulation self-regulation impairment self-transformation	capability development	churches family firms standards	firm performance green creativity
chronic mindfulness variability	negative affect negative emotions	silence	integration digital transformation mindfulness intervention	organizations hospitality industry	job performance employee creativity counterproductive work behaviour
cognitive rumination	negative mood negative rumination	sleep quality		buddhism	
communication	neuroticism	social capital			
compassion	nonapology	social loafing			
consumer values					
contemplative leadership					
customer mistreatment					

Content			Process	Context	Outcome
daily mindfulness shift	online deviance	social mindfulness	<b>knowledge sharing</b>	religion	creative performance
defensive silence	opportunity recognition	social relations	information elaboration	United States	cultural adjustment
dialogic conversation	optimism	social reproduction	self-regulatory depletion	multi-level analysis	employee performance
discernment	<b>organizational support systems</b>	social rumination	error management	mixed methods	employee health
displaced workplace deviance	organizational attention	social sharing of negative events	<b>employee resilience</b>	practice-based studies	innovation
dispositional employability	organizational behavior	socioemotional wealth	change processing capacity	meta-analysis	<b>employee safety behaviors</b>
doubt	organizational justice	somatic engagement	mindfulness practices	serial mediation	employee resilience
ego depletion	organizational mindfulness	spillover	<b>perceived environmental uncertainty</b>	typology	recovery
emotional demands	organizational norms	spirituality	mindfulness training	interviews	organizational resilience
emotional exhaustion	organizational paranoia	strain		field study	peer-focused OCB
emotional intelligence	organizational routines	strategies		Australia	resources sustainability
emotional labour	ostracism	<b>stress</b>		<b>Africa</b>	role conflict
emotions	other-regarding compassion	<b>stressors</b>		literature review	task engagement
empathic concern	overwork	subjective experience		Saudi arabia	task performance
ethical leadership	paranoid cognition	surface acting		digital detox	<b>team performance</b>
ethics of care	patient luxury experience	talents		digital free tourism	thriving social sustainability
ethics of leadership	perceived authenticity	task conflict		social entrepreneurship	social sustainability
ethics of responsibility	perceived CSR	team demands		intrapreneurship	firm performance
family emotional exhaustion	perceived health risks	<b>team mindfulness</b>		crisis	work-home enrichment
family incivility	perceived homophily	team relational stress		entrepreneurial experience	instigated workplace incivility
fatigue	perceived workplace safety practices	team relationship conflict		implicit mindfulness theory	innovative behavior
fear	perception of organizational politics	technostress		Arabian gulf	interpersonal citizenship
forgiveness	personal innovativeness in IT	temporal focus		stressor-detachment model	<b>taking charge</b>
global mindset	political skill	time pressure		activation theory	perceived internal career prospects

Content		Process	Context	Outcome
green mindfulness individual work reflection	positive regard	<b>TMX</b>	path analysis	turnover intention
insomnia	positive relationships	top management mindfulness training perceived as developmental	organizational level	productivity
interpersonal deviance interpersonal interactions	primary appraisal procedural justice enactment production deviance	<b>trait mindfulness</b> trust	group level	work-life balance
interpersonal justice interpersonal relationships interpersonal sensemaking IT mindfulness	prosocial ethics psychological capital psychological detachment psychosocial safety climate purchase motivation	user personality virtue ethics work boundaries work relationships	conservation of resources theory behavioral reasoning theory social reproduction theory randomized controlled trial functional leadership theory	car sharing behavior well-being corporate wellness
job attitudes	quantitative demands	work rumination	content analysis experience sampling method experience sampling methodology	
job control job crafting job demands	rationality relational climate relational organizational behavior relational support systems respectful leadership	work unit structure workaholism work-based learning	experiment entrainment theory actor-partner interdependence model behavioral reasoning theory dynamic capabilities view broaden and build theory	
justice rule adherence leader authenticity leader humility <b>leader mindfulness leader-member congruence leader-member exchange</b>	retaliation	work-home interference workload workplace deviance workplace discrimination	qualitative research	
leadership leadership behaviors	revenge rhythm ritualistic behaviors	workplace harassment workplace interactions workplace learning workplace ostracism	diary study experience sampling method Qualitative research	