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THE MINDFUL SELF-LEADER: INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SELF-LEADERSHIP AND MINDFULNESS

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Although self-leadership and mindfulness comprise the same self-regulatory core (observation) regarding attention in relation to mental states and have similar outcomes (e.g., stress reduction, increased performance), the relationships between self-leadership and mindfulness have not yet been examined. In this study, 174 participants completed self-report measures of self-leadership and mindfulness. Results showed that self-leadership was positively related to the observing facet of mindfulness. The importance of observation and the role of openness to experience in self-leadership and mindfulness are discussed.

Keywords: self-leadership, mindfulness, self-regulation, attention, mental states, observation, openness to experience.

Self-leadership is a self-influencing process that increases personal effectivity and performance (Furtner, Rauthmann, & Sachse, 2015). It contains three main strategy domains (Furtner et al., 2015): behavior-focused strategies (self-goal setting, self-observation, self-reward, self-punishment, and self-cueing), natural reward strategies (fostering intrinsic motivation), and constructive thought pattern strategies (visualizing successful performance, self-talk, and evaluating beliefs and assumptions). *Mindfulness* is the intentional (purposeful) and nonjudgmental observation of all experiences in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). It entails self-regulation of attention (perception of current mental states) and

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orientation (curiosity, openness, and acceptance) toward experiences at the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004). Baer, Smith, and Allen (2004) described four facets of mindfulness: observe, describe, act with awareness, and accept without judgment. *Observe* refers to the attentive witnessing of all internal and external stimuli (e.g., cognitions, emotions, environmental cues). *Describe* represents the conscious conceptual defining of perceived phenomena. *Act with awareness* refers to paying focused attention to one's efforts, and *accept without judgment* describes holding a nonjudgmental attitude toward current experiences (Stroehle, Nachtigall, Michalak, & Heidenreich, 2010).

A mindful self-leader has both high mindfulness and self-leadership capabilities; continuously monitors all internal (e.g., thoughts, emotions) and external processes (e.g., social interactions); and is aware of all current thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Bishop et al., 2004; MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2015). The observing component of mindfulness could enhance self-regulation and self-leadership (Bishop et al., 2004). Thus, a mindful self-leader may act more consciously and use self-leadership strategies (e.g., self-goal setting, self-reward, self-talk, evaluating beliefs and assumptions) more effectively than does a self-leader who is not mindful. Through continuous observation, mindful self-leaders attain awareness about internal and external processes (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 1982). According to control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998), individuals control their behavior through comparison between an input (current state) and a standard value (e.g., goal). To achieve goals, individuals need a high level of self-observation (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Both self-leadership (self-goal setting and self-observation) and mindfulness are closely related to self-regulatory processes and exhibit positive effects on mental health (see, e.g., Canby, Cameron, Calhoun, & Buchanan, 2015; Lucke & Furtner, 2015; Unsworth & Mason, 2012) and job performance (e.g., Furtner et al., 2015; Phang, Mukhtar, Ibrahim, Keng, & Mohd, 2015).

Self-leadership and mindfulness have in common an emphasis on the importance of self-focused observation processes to reach one's goals (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Furtner et al., 2015; MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2015). Mindfulness is aimed at the nonjudgmental observation of every moment, and self-leadership at increasing personal effectivity and performance. Accordingly, to reach these respective goals, self-regulatory observation may have an important role in self-leadership and mindfulness (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Through the observing facet of mindfulness, self-leadership strategies could be used more effectively (Bishop et al., 2004; Furtner et al., 2015). Therefore, we hypothesized that the observing facet of mindfulness would be positively associated with self-leadership.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants comprised 174 students at the University of Innsbruck, of whom 139 were women (79.9%) and 35 were men (21.1%), with a mean age of 21.87 years (*SD* = 1.81, range = 18–31). They completed online self-report surveys on self-leadership and mindfulness, and obtained credit points in exchange for participating. Informed consent was obtained from all participants who took part in the study.

Measures

Self-leadership. Self-leadership was measured with the German version of the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (Andressen & Konradt, 2007; Houghton & Neck, 2002), which comprises 27 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*).

Mindfulness. Mindfulness was measured with the German version of the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS; Baer et al., 2004; Stroehle et al., 2010), comprising 39 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all like me* to 5 = *exactly like me*). The KIMS has four dimensions: observe (e.g., "I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior"), describe (e.g., "I'm good at finding the words to describe my feelings"), act with awareness (e.g., "When I'm doing something, I'm only focused on what I'm doing, nothing else"), and accept without judgment (e.g., "I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad").

Statistical Analyses

To examine the associations between self-leadership and mindfulness, we used different data analytical strategies applied via SPSS version 21. First, common method variance (CMV) was investigated using Harman's single-factor test. In this procedure, all items are factor analyzed, and it is checked (1) if there is a single factor, or (2) if one factor subsumes most of the variance from all extracted factors (Spector, 2006). Second, bivariate zero-order Pearson correlations were computed to investigate the relationships between self-leadership and mindfulness (with facets). Third, we assessed the relative importance of the four mindfulness facets in predicting self-leadership.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

To examine the possible effect of CMV, we conducted an analysis at the item level. Self-leadership and mindfulness items were pooled (66 items) and factor

analyzed (unrotated factor solution). Eighteen factors (total explained variance = 72%) with eigenvalues under 1.0 were extracted, and the first factor (13% explained variance) did not consume more variance than the rest of the factors. Thus, CMV was not a significant issue.

Associations Between Self-Leadership and Mindfulness

Correlation analysis results showed significantly positive relationships between self-leadership ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.47$, $\alpha = .86$); mindfulness ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.40$, $\alpha = .86$), $r = .21$, $p < .01$; observe ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.59$, $\alpha = .81$), $r = .41$, $p < .001$; and describe ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.70$, $\alpha = .89$), $r = .18$, $p < .05$. No significant relationships were found for either act with awareness ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.49$, $\alpha = .73$), $r = .07$, $p > .05$; or accept without judgment ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.77$, $\alpha = .88$), $r = -.07$, $p > .05$. Additionally, we were interested in which mindfulness facets were the strongest predictors of self-leadership; thus, we conducted a hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis with the four mindfulness facets as predictors and self-leadership as the criterion variable. The results showed that mindfulness predicted a significant portion of the variance (adj. $R^2 = .18$, $F(4, 169) = 10.76$, $p < .001$). Standardized beta results were as follows: .37 for observe ($p < .001$), .12 for describe ($p > .05$), .07 for act with awareness ($p > .05$), and -.20 for accept without judgment ($p < .01$). There was no multicollinearity found among the variables. The variance inflation factor ranged from 1.08 to 1.26; values below 5.00 (Menard, 1995) do not represent a substantial problem with regard to multicollinearity.

Discussion

Results from the correlation and regression analyses show that observe had the strongest positive relationship with self-leadership. This confirms our hypothesis that self-leadership would show a positive association with the observe facet of mindfulness. However, the accept without judgment facet exhibited a negative association with self-leadership.

Among the Big Five personality traits of extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, the agentic personality dimension of openness to experience has been found to have the strongest positive association with both self-leadership and mindfulness, whereas it does not have a significant relationship with a nonjudgmental attitude to an actual experience (accept without judgment; Baer et al., 2004; Furtner & Rauthmann, 2010; Stroehle et al., 2010). Individuals with high openness to experience are imaginative, intelligent, original, curious, and open to new activities (John, 1990). Acceptance without judgment represents holding a composed attitude toward present experiences; thus, a strongly negative relationship with the

dimension of neuroticism has been observed (Baer et al., 2004; Stroehle et al., 2010). Extraversion is part of an agentic personality, which can be attributed to a higher-order factor beta. The second higher-order factor alpha is focused on *communion* (i.e., the condition of being part of a larger social or spiritual entity), including agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (Digman, 1997). The beta value is connected to agency, self-actualization, and personal growth (Digman, 1997), characteristics that are important for both self-leadership and mindfulness (Brown et al., 2007; Manz, 2015). A mindful self-leader is agentic in nature (Furtner, Baldegger, & Rauthmann, 2013; Furtner & Rauthmann, 2010; Furtner, Rauthmann, & Sachse, 2011) and should continually observe all internal (e.g., thoughts, emotions) and external (e.g., social interactions) stimuli in order to effectively control self-influencing processes and increase personal effectiveness. Thus, the observing facet of mindfulness could enhance the use of self-leadership strategies.

Our results should be regarded from different perspectives. While certain core features of mindfulness (self-regulation of attention, curiosity, and openness to experience) could enhance self-leadership, acceptance without judgment may have a negative effect on self-leadership. Self-regulation of attention is an important key feature of self-leadership (Furtner et al., 2015). Individuals use self-influencing processes (e.g., self-goal setting, self-observation, self-talk, evaluating beliefs and assumptions) to influence their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in a desirable and positive direction. For this purpose, a certain degree of self-control is necessary (Furtner et al., 2015), and the observing component of mindfulness could support this process by ensuring continuous control over internal and external processes.

Our findings are of theoretical and practical relevance. Mindfulness may have a positive influence on both self-regulation and self-leadership (Bishop et al., 2004). Both self-leadership and mindfulness promote a self-regulatory focus and can be learned and developed (Canby et al., 2015; Furtner, Sachse, & Exenberger, 2012; Lucke & Furtner, 2015; Phang et al., 2015); thus, self-leadership intervention programs should include both self-leadership and mindfulness elements. First, a specific focus could be placed on the observing component of mindfulness. Second, self-leadership skills can be taught and practiced. As a result, stress-related conditions can be reduced, whereas mental health, personal effectivity, and performance can be increased (Brown et al., 2007; Lucke & Furtner, 2015). However, future researchers should examine whether an intervention program that combines self-leadership and mindfulness elements is more effective than conventional self-leadership or mindfulness training.

A central limitation of our study is that we used a self-report, cross-sectional design; thus, no claim for causality can be made. Future researchers should focus on mindfulness and its influence on self-leadership in the context of experimental

studies or controlled self-leadership interventions. Additionally, objective criteria (e.g., stress reduction, performance) should be incorporated. Future researchers should also consider possible moderating or mediating variables in regard to the examined relationships, such as self-efficacy and personality.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that the relationship between self-leadership and mindfulness has been examined, and we found that the observing facet of mindfulness may have the strongest influence on self-leadership. Mindful self-leaders are acutely aware of themselves (internal phenomena) as well as their environment (external phenomena), and undertake ongoing observations to effectively achieve personal and organizational goals.

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