

Treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere?

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Abstract

One of the biggest challenges that organisations face today are of creating positive work environments for its employees so that they feel motivated, stay efficient, feel secure, have good relations with co-workers and stay productive in the workplace. Meditation is known to have positive effects on the work atmosphere, improving employee motivation, efficiency, and productivity. However, meditation comes with the connotation of being a religious or spiritual activity which may hinder people from adopting it to gain its benefits. Hence, this paper was aimed at exploring if the daily practice of meditation by employees of a team can naturally help create a positive work atmosphere without the need for external sources and whether it is necessary to categorise meditation as a spiritual or religious exercise to reap its benefits. A qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyse the results of the participant data. The results of the study indicated that daily practice of meditation by the employees of a team may create a positive work atmosphere with or without it being considered as a spiritual or religious practice.

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Treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere?

1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explore the impact of daily meditation of employees on the work atmosphere. However, meditation comes with the connotation of being a religious or spiritual activity which may hinder people from adopting it to gain its benefits. Hence, this paper also explores whether it is truly necessary to categorise meditation as a spiritual or religious practice to successfully practice it. In order to do this, the paper performed a literature review to collate the existing research available on the topic, identified the gaps in the literature and proposed a question which was then researched and studied to broaden the understanding on the topic.

1.1 Relevance of the topic to the area of study

The area of study that this paper wishes to explore is that of the corporate work environment or the work atmosphere and if there are ways to create and maintain a positive work environment. The way through which this paper wishes to explore this area of study is through understanding the impact the life force of a workplace, that is its employees, have on the atmosphere in the workplace, without the interference of the company's management. One of the biggest challenges that companies are facing today is to create a great work atmosphere so that employees that are so carefully handpicked by companies for the job don't feel disheartened by the work and instead feel motivated, stay efficient, feel secure, have good relations with co-workers and stay productive in the workplace (Ashraf, 2019). Organisations that ignore the quality of the work atmosphere in their company often find that there are negative effects on the productivity of their employees (Shu et al., 2018). Companies also usually undermine the impact effective communication can have on the productivity of employees and the overall work atmosphere in the workplace (Davidson, 2018). There are substantial studies out there to tell us that there are direct benefits to an organisation when employees experience all the things stated above such as feeling motivated, secure, efficient, and having positive

relations with their co-workers with respect to their job. Employees get their best selves to work and hence contribute in a more meaningful and cooperative way in the workplace. Hence, companies, across the corporate landscape, might find that there is value in understanding how a positive work atmosphere can be created naturally so that employees feel more satisfied and they can reap the mutual benefits of a happy and satisfied workforce.

1.2 Why is the study needed and why is it important

As work complexity and job pressures increase, it is becoming increasingly important to create positive work atmospheres in the workplace (Ashraf, 2019). Work atmosphere is not just created by corporate policies but also by the very life force of the organisation, its employees (Fox et al., 2018). Hence if the employees can create a positive atmosphere in the workplace, then organisations will become self-healing, harmonious and a place where people can work productively, coherently, and satisfactorily. This research could be the building block for organisations to take the first step in exploring new avenues in Human Resource Management such as incorporating daily meditation programs for its people to create a better workplace. The research will come with its set of limitations in terms of the limited data set being considered and relying on interpretations of qualitative answers by participants. However, this study can be of great value to organisations and people alike and is worthy of study.

The human senses act as a sponge with respect to data being recorded from external stimuli, as the brain learns the neuronal activity that occurs as the senses are exposed to external stimuli (Queensland Brain Institute, 2018). This data that is recorded, may manifest in various ways in people's lives through their actions thereby affecting their environment. By helping the mind "defragment" through the process of meditation, it may help the mind to organise this information, or rather, focus on more relevant aspects of their lives. However, the negative effects of practicing mindfulness could be for people with PTSD or psychosis as they might experience adverse psychological effects (Chang and Stone, 2019). Therefore, it is important to mention that the person engaging in the practice of mindfulness is conscious of any medical implications that might hinder them from benefitting directly from their practice.

However, the point of focus is that meditation can help in the process of creating a more positive work environment by bringing psychological stability among employees and hence help create more relaxed surroundings (Tuckey et al., 2018). Hence it is important that a study is conducted to understand the effects of daily meditation on the work environment of employees and whether it can help create a more positive work environment thereby mutually helping both employees and organisations, in that employees may show more work satisfaction, engagement and psychological well being thereby creating a better environment around them and organisations may benefit from these attributes being exhibited by their employees. Companies can add daily meditation programs for its employees to their health programs or general employee programs to reap the benefits. Since companies have limited time, energy, and resources to create better work environments for its employees, a more concerted effort in the right direction might help them get more effective results, which is what this paper wishes to achieve through the course of conducting the research. If not then they can continue to put efforts in improving its work environment through other means.

1.3 Evidence to date and rationale for the study

As discussed in the literature review, there are several pieces of information on the topic that can be of interest when knitted together and which also present the gaps in the available knowledge on the subject. This section will look at both the information available and the gaps present in the information that might require further research.

The evidence to date suggests that companies have a need to improve the work environment and employee engagement (Ashraf, 2019). It also suggests that mindfulness has been used as a tool to assist in improving the work environment and employee engagement and has generally shown positive outcomes. Meditation has been observed as a major aspect of mindfulness and as a significant way of increasing mindfulness (Arpa, 2013). The daily practice of mindfulness improves the psychological well being of an employee and helps them create a more relaxed environment both at home and in the workplace.

However, there are some gaps present in the literature reviewed. For example, some studies have restricted their participants to managers and not all employees of a company.

Also, many studies do not explicitly use meditation as their tool for mindfulness or have considered meditation as a spiritual or religious practice (Fox et al., 2018) (Afsar and Badir, 2017) (Gupta et al., 2014). Hence it will be of interest to explore if meditation as a form of mindfulness can have a similar impact when treated as a non-spiritual or non-religious exercise.

So, studies do indicate that meditation can help to improve the work environment for employees, and it does help in employee efficiency, satisfaction, productivity and co-worker inclusiveness. However, the gap is that is that does meditation still work when treated as a non-religious and non-spiritual practice. Another gap is that can meditation be used as a tool or exercise to create a positive work atmosphere in a natural and self-regulating way without external interference. Also, does daily meditation help in this regard. Given the research conducted on the subject to date and the gaps present in the available knowledge it is of interest of explore further into the impact of daily meditation by employees on the work atmosphere. Considering the gaps in the literature review, the following research question emerged “treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere?”.

1.4 Methodology overview

Since this paper deals with human psychology through meditation and the nuanced aspects of the interaction between people and their surroundings, it was more appropriate to explore the research question through a qualitative means rather than a quantitative means. The research conducted by Razafsha et al. (2012) supports this as it states that qualitative methods can help explain human experiences and interactions in a broader sense and give a deeper reasoning behind the inter-relations of certain events especially relating to psychology where quantitative methods are useful specifically in measuring the frequency of events. A qualitative approach may attempt to reach an understanding of a certain phenomenon with respect to the perspective of the person experiencing it (Vaismoradi, 2013). Hence, for the purpose of this study a qualitative approach would provide the adequate freedom for exploration and understanding the experiences of the participants. It will consider the participant’s experiences and interactions with their surroundings in depth and try to delve into the reasons behind their experiences.

To systematically study the nature of the psychological aspects and experiential impacts that this paper is attempting to explore relating to meditation, the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) is recommended by this paper. A major advantage of the thematic analysis over other forms of analysis (discussed in section 3.1) is that it is flexible in the way in which it allows the researcher to determine the themes. This is particularly useful as the importance of the theme can be defined by its relevance to the research question rather than its frequency of occurrence in the data set. This was an important tool to have for the purpose of this study as, for example, it would allow the paper to define the theme based on the effects of meditation on work atmosphere rather than the specifics of an employee's job at a company.

The participants recruited for the study were required to be presently working in a corporate company, or a self-owned business. They were required to be practising meditation daily as a form of mindfulness at least over a 30 day period, preferably in the last 30 days before the day of the interview for the study. A total of N=5 participants took part in the study of whom 3 worked in the corporate sector, 1 in the education sector and 1 had their own business that they were operating. In the 5 participants that took part in the study 2 of them were women and 3 were men.

1.5 Brief explanation of the proposed research question

Before this study dives into exploring the research question, it will be of value to understand and define the different components of the question that the paper wishes to explore. This is in order to focus the study and reduce ambiguity in meaning. There are three aspects to the research question. The first is "treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise". The second is "daily practice of meditation by employees of a team". And the third is "a positive work atmosphere". This section briefly explains these three aspects.

To understand the first aspect of the research question "treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise", the following explanation is used as the fundamental understanding of the aspect for the purpose of this study. Fox et al. (2018) correlated employee performance with spiritual activities and took meditation as a form of spiritual activity. In reference to the literature review performed, this proposal suggests that meditation be looked at as a physical "exercise" for the human system like "jogging" without any religious or spiritual

overtone as otherwise it may affect the perception of the person about meditation or mindfulness.

The second aspect “daily practice of meditation by employees of a team”, in the context of this study, is explained as the practice of meditation as a form of mindfulness on a daily basis by some or all employees of a team in or at a place of work. Mindfulness is defined as “the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (Brown and Ryan, 2003, pp. 822). In her book “Mindfulness at Work”, Arpa (2013) states that meditation is a significant aspect of mindfulness, aiding in the process of becoming aware of the one’s present state of being. She describes meditation as focusing on the process of breathing and consciously trying to slow it down. Hence, the meditation of the breath brings about mindfulness, and that is what we need to consider for the purpose of the research. For the purpose of this study, a participant is considered to be practicing meditation daily if he/she has engaged in the activity consecutively for 30 days for at least 12 to 15 minutes. Though according to the study by Basso et al. (2018), 8 weeks was considered as the standard period, this study considered 30 consecutive days of meditation to be “daily”. However, it must be noted that all participants who participated in this study had been practicing meditation for over 8 weeks.

The third aspect of the research question “a positive work atmosphere” will also be of interest to define in the context of this study. Ramesh and Vasuki (2013) broadly define “a positive work atmosphere” as a space that encourages good energy and positive behaviour among those present, lifting spirits and creating a higher level of satisfaction among people. This means that people will (a) respond rather than react to their surroundings thereby improving productivity, (b) create a calmer atmosphere allowing co-workers to work optimally and (c) would naturally want to retain in that energy space for longer. All these aspects are highly desirable from the standpoint of organisations and individuals alike. They noted that absenteeism, stress, and retention issues are all indicators of an underperforming staff, and there is a substantial cost associated to an underperforming staff with respect to both the organisation and the employee. Mindfulness at work creates a less conflicted and content environment in which harmony and clarity are central (Arpa, 2013). Hence mindfulness can be correlated as having a positive impact on the work environment. As seen in the literature review, the value of mindfulness at work has shown a

positive impact and needs deeper attention. It can be viewed as a potentially powerful tool which can help create a positive work atmosphere.

2. Literature Review

This section looks at the literature already available on the subject and attempts to synthesize the information collected from the literature to identify the gap in the available literature and develop the foundational question for study. The literature review is broken down into three aspects, which are a) effects of daily practice of meditation on employee productivity and wellbeing; b) meditation as a form of mindfulness treated as a non-spiritual practice; and c) the impact mindfulness has on the environment of employees and whether it works well in creating more positive work environments and satisfied employees. The literature review starts by looking at the need for a positive work environment in companies and whether mindfulness can be used as a tool to achieve it. It then looks at the impact of mindfulness on employees of an organisation and the role of meditation as a way of practising mindfulness. It considers the frequency of meditation and its effects on employee productivity and wellbeing. It also examines the role of spirituality and religion in meditation and is it necessary to categorise meditation a spiritual or religious activity to gain its benefits. The reason the paper reviews this aspect of meditation is to see if it has any significance to meditation being practiced by all employees of a company who may have different beliefs and come from various walks of life. Later the literature review looks at the impact that meditation and mindfulness have on an employees' work environment. The literature review then concludes combining all of these aspects and identifying the gap in the literature and developing the question necessary of study.

2.1 Daily practice of meditation

According to Tuckey et al. (2018), the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions suggests that positive emotional experiences help constructively influence the physical and psychological well-being of an individual through the day. They further suggest that mindfulness broadens the perspective of individuals thereby enabling people to view new inter-connections within situations, and if done before the start of the day, it can provide a positive work engagement and broader perspective throughout the day. Hence, this indicates that a daily practice of mindfulness in the morning can be of significant help in

creating positive emotional experiences, psychological well-being, and broader perspective for employees every day. Since, these are similar to the impact seen in meditating individuals, there is merit in exploring the impact daily practice of meditation can have on the atmosphere in the workplace. The study by Reb et al. (2020) states that that mindfulness can be a tool to reduce the stress in employees and help create a more flourishing workplace.

On the subject of the frequency of meditation and specifically daily mediation, the study by Basso et al. (2019) suggests that daily meditation of 13 minutes for 8 weeks can cause improved cognitive ability, improved emotional stability, enhanced attention, and improved working memory. Daily meditation is also an inexpensive and self-monitoring approach to better physical and mental health for employees (Cheng, 2016). It is also interesting to note that according to a study by Haun et al. (2018) which was based on the stressor-detachment model, employees who are mindful daily at work and at home show a psychological detachment from high demanding jobs when they were at home creating a more relaxed environment in both places, the home and the office. Their study gives a direct insight into the effects of daily practice of mindfulness on the work and home environment. Though the practice of mindfulness in the study is not related to meditation specifically, this nonetheless suggests that a daily practice of mindfulness can create a certain psychological ease within a person allowing them to create a more relaxed environment in their home and at their place of work. Mindfulness and meditation also give people a sense of inner wellbeing and satisfaction without requiring support for those things from the outside (Sadri, 2020). This was also revealed by some of the participants during the interviews for the research that was conducted by this paper. In the context of this paper, mindfulness will be achieved through meditation, as stated by Arpa (2013) that meditation is a significant form of mindfulness, that can create awareness of a person's present state of being. Hence, it will be of interest to explore if through daily meditation, as a form of mindfulness, a positive environment can be created in the place of work. Interestingly, there is also a reverse effect of need-satisfying work climates and its positive effect on state mindfulness of an individual (Olafsen, 2017). So, if a group of individuals can create a positive work atmosphere where their needs are being satisfied, it will in turn create a positive effect on their mindfulness thereby enhancing the overall work environment therefore creating a

cyclic effect of sorts. This is particularly interesting because it may make the practice of meditation and its effect of the work environment self-sustaining and self-growing.

This section of the literature review, therefore found that there is evidence to indicate that daily meditation helps create positive psychological states for people enabling them to have a broader perspective throughout the day especially when practiced at the start of the day. It also promotes employees to be psychologically detached from their jobs thereby enabling them to not overthink about what happened at their place of work and as a result helps them be more psychologically at ease, practical and calm resulting in creating a more relaxed work atmosphere around them. Meditation can be considered as a form of mindfulness and hence basically has a similar effect. Lastly, climates that are satisfying to people create a state of mindfulness in them, this means that if through meditation a satisfying and positive work atmosphere can be created, the work atmosphere will then work towards enhancing the person's state of mindfulness as well, therefore making it naturally self-sustaining.

2.2 Meditation as a non-spiritual and non-religious exercise

In the previous section, the literature review explored the impact of daily meditation on employees and the positive impact it has had on their work and well-being. However, this section of the literature review will explore the connection of meditation or mindfulness with spirituality and whether it is necessary to identify meditation or mindfulness to spirituality to receive its benefits and improve the work environment of a company.

Afsar and Badir (2017) noted that workplace spirituality helps managers in maintaining a positive environment in the workplace and have perceivable spiritual values for example, open mindedness. This means that there is a correlation between spiritual practices and a positive environment. The spiritual practices referred to in the study are not religious in nature. They are mostly centred towards the connectivity of the three entities: oneself, co-workers, and the organisation, in terms of their belief systems, values and purpose. There is a positive correlation between spirituality in the workplace and job satisfaction (Gupta et al., 2014). Spirituality and mindfulness have been linked on several occasions not just in history but also in modern day research, for example in the study by Liu et al. (2020). Hence, the benefits that are seen through spiritual practices in the workplace may also be reflected

through mindfulness practices to some extent. This paper will try to explore whether mindfulness, when practiced without having a spiritual or religious overtone, can create similar effects in employees of an organisation. Fox et al. (2018) had published about the interrelation between spirituality and employee performance in their study. They remarked that employees' work outcomes can be improved through meditation and to encourage employees to partake in spiritual activities such as meditation. However, they take spirituality as a broad concept and include meditation as one of the aspects of it. They also do not explore the frequency of performing meditation. They include meditation as a spiritual practice border lining with a religious overtone, rather than treating meditation as a physical exercise for the human system. Hence, in order to have more practical applications, it may be of interest to explore the impact that meditation alone can have on employees, their work outcomes, and their work atmosphere without considering it a religious or spiritual activity. Since if it can be used to improve employee productivity and the overall work atmosphere in the workplace, then for it to be available to all employees and be practiced by all employees from all walks of life without hesitation, it might be beneficial to view it as a physical exercise rather than a spiritual or religious exercise.

2.3 The impact of employee mindfulness on work atmosphere

Research based evidence shows that mindfulness in workers that is personal, and secular has the potential to improve work outcomes by reducing stress at work and increasing the level of wellness and attention of workers (Chang and Stone, 2019). It is also well established that cognitive intelligence is associated with improved job performance (Shiba et al., 2015). Hence just the way companies such as General Electric, Google and Facebook invest in health initiatives for employees for better physical health, it might be worthwhile for such companies to see if they can invest in meditation programs for not only better employee mental health in terms of reduced stress and better attention, but also to help create a positive work atmosphere. Since mindfulness is correlated to creating a calmer and more harmonious environment among people (Arpa, 2013), there may be a positive relationship between employees of a company that meditate and the work atmosphere that they create as a consequence.

Though there is a dearth of academic studies on non-managerial employees of a firm who meditate and the impact they have on their work atmosphere as a result, there is some legwork that has been done in the area involving individuals in management and leadership positions of firms. On exploring the link between meditation and effective leadership there is a strong correlation between task performance of employees and positive leadership keeping meditation as the central tool for enhancing decision making capabilities of managers (Barua et al., 2019). However, the fundamental limitation of the Barua et al. (2019) study is that they have considered meditation as a tool for promoting positive leadership and have restricted their study to managers. They propose that future scope could include exploring the development of meditation programs in companies to support managers, the different techniques, and durations of meditation, how the effectiveness should be evaluated more accurately, and whether it should be extended to non-managerial employees. In another study by Liu et al. (2020), which was more employee centric, the correlation of the mindfulness of 311 employees from 83 teams and their corresponding work engagement was measured. Their study does not explicitly consider meditation as the form of mindfulness used by employees. The results predominantly showed a positive relationship between employee mindfulness and work engagement. It also showed that employees that practice mindfulness showed faster recovery from work stress. The results of the Liu et al. (2020) study are therefore in line with the two, earlier disjointed, speculations discussed previously in this study that employees that practice mindfulness show reduced stress and higher productivity. Hence, a company whose employees practice mindfulness might be less stressed, more engaged and will have an overall better performance due to better leadership, which may give rise to a better and more positive work atmosphere.

There are also interconnections that are observed among the various company challenges discussed earlier in the study. For example, as discussed in the study by Bayer et al. (2020), there is a correlation between workplace conflicts and employee retention. They discuss that conflicts can emerge from “organisational cynicism” or what can be understood as employees generally responding “negatively” to company rules. If left unresolved, this can also become a cause of employee stress and dissatisfaction. Hence, as mentioned above regarding the effects of mindfulness on work environment, there is reason to believe that a

positive work atmosphere may result in a less conflicted environment where employee relations are maintained, and employees feel less stressed and more satisfied. The study also stated that almost 50% of respondents were willing to switch their jobs at the same level of pay if they were offered a job at a company with a better organisational culture. Therefore, there is a possibility that a company that exudes a positive culture will have a higher chance of having loyal employees who are willing to stay for longer in the organisation. Similarly, there may be other correlations that exist in terms of the challenges that organisations face in relation to their work environment, work culture, employee satisfaction and retention, which may be addressed to some extent through a positive work atmosphere.

The literature under this section therefore indicates that mindfulness has shown to have positive effects on employee productivity, satisfaction, and the overall work atmosphere. It also indicates that a positive work atmosphere is also helpful in creating a less stressful environment in the workplace and a better more inclusive work culture. It also suggests that mindfulness can create a positive work atmosphere when practiced by managers and employees alike.

2.4 Conclusion of the Literature Review

The literature review reveals several factors that contribute to the understanding of the three fundamental pillars of this study. These are a) meditation as a form of mindfulness that is treated as a non-spiritual practice; b) effects of daily practice of meditation on employee productivity and wellbeing; and c) the impact mindfulness has on the environment of people. The study is informed about the positive effects of meditation and mindfulness on people's psychological wellbeing, relationship with others, and overall satisfaction (Tuckey et al., 2018). The study is also informed about meditation being a significant form of mindfulness (Arpa, 2013). So there is reason for this paper to believe that the positive effects that are seen from mindfulness in various studies, where no particular practice of mindfulness is mentioned or where meditation is mentioned as a part of it, might also be seen with meditation as a form of mindfulness. This paper is also informed about the daily practice of mindfulness and how it benefits people in creating positive work as well as domestic environments (Haun et al., 2018). The benefits that people see when they practice

it at the start of the day and the interconnections they form whilst navigating daily situations (Tuckey et al., 2018). Lastly, the evidence from the literature review does indicate towards the fact that there is a correlation between employees who practice mindfulness and the subsequent positive work atmosphere that they create (Afsar and Badir, 2017) (Haun et al., 2018). People who are involved in mindfulness in some capacity show that there is an interrelation between mindfulness and a positive environment. Additionally, the literature review also revealed that there is some merit in believing that people who are satisfied with the work climate will also experience a positive effect on their state mindfulness (Olafsen, 2017).

So, there is some interesting and extremely relevant information that has surfaced from the literature review and there are parts that need to be connected together to understand the topic of daily meditation and its subsequent effect on the work atmosphere better. All the evidence gathered through the literature review indicates that exclusive of each other, the three concepts of a) meditation as a form of mindfulness that is treated as a non-spiritual practice; b) effects of daily practice of meditation on employee productivity and wellbeing; and c) the impact mindfulness has on the environment of people; work well in creating more positive work environments and satisfied employees. One aspect that remains to be investigated, which is the gap identified by this literature review is, do these three concepts work together as a combination and whether meditation can be used as the primary tool for mindfulness. Given the literature already available on the topic, and by investigating further by combining people's daily exercise of meditation as a non-spiritual and non-religious practice, and the effect that it has on their work environment, a more solid foundation can be created on the topic.

Summary of facts revealed by the literature review –

- Companies spend a lot of time and effort to hire good employees and create great work environments.
- The lack of a positive work environment gives rise to an underperforming workforce.
- When managers involve themselves in spiritual practices in the workplace like meditation, it results in them creating a positive environment for the employees.

- Mindfulness when practiced as part of workplace spirituality among managers has shown to create a positive work environment, keeping meditation as the central tool for enhancing mindfulness.
- Meditation among managerial employees has shown better employee relations and better decision making.
- Mindfulness creates a more engaged, less conflicted, less stressed, and more satisfied employees.
- Meditation is a form a mindfulness that can be practiced physically.
- Positive emotions and work environments help increase cognitive intelligence and psychological well-being of individuals, especially when mindfulness is practiced at the start of the day.
- Mindful employees demonstrate a certain psychological ease and can detach home and work-related matters more effectively.
- Positive work climates create positive effects on a person’s mindfulness and vice versa, thereby creating a cyclic effect.

The following questions are derived from the literature review -

- Given that mindfulness helps create a positive work atmosphere, using meditation as a tool for mindfulness among all employees of a team, can work environment be made better naturally?
- Does daily meditation make the impact of mindfulness better?
- Does meditation have to be treated as a spiritual or religious act to gain its benefits?
- Can meditation then be a self-regulating way to create a positive work atmosphere?

Hence, from the questions derived out of the literature review, the proposed research question is “Treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere?”

3. Methodology

This section discusses the methodology used to conduct the research and analyse the data from the participant interviews. This section discusses the method of analysis used by the paper called known as thematic analysis in psychology as suggested by Braun and Clarke

(2006), the number of participants and their general information and the procedure followed to conduct the study including information about questions asked,

3.1 Research Method

In this section the paper discusses the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach and also explains the reasons for selecting thematic analysis as the means to analyse the qualitative data that was gathered during the participant interviews. This section also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using the thematic analysis approach.

Since the nature of the research question is such that it deals with human psychology through meditation and nuanced aspects of the interaction between people and their surroundings, it is more appropriate to explore the research question through a qualitative means rather than a quantitative means. This is supported by the research conducted by Razafsha et al. (2012) where they state that qualitative methods can help explain human experiences and interactions in a broader sense and give a deeper reasoning behind the inter-relations of certain events especially relating to psychology where quantitative methods are useful specifically in measuring the frequency of events. They also indicate that qualitative methods are more useful in studies that want to assess the practicality of a certain process from a psychological standpoint and specially for studies that wish to explore certain attitudes and beliefs. There is also a dearth of quantitative ways to measure the impact of practices concerned with human psychology such as meditation on an individual. It is worthy to note that qualitative approaches aim to share the goal in that they attempt to reach an understanding of a certain phenomenon with respect to the perspective of the person experiencing it (Vaismoradi, 2013). For the purpose of this study a qualitative approach will provide the adequate freedom for both expression by the participants and exploration by the study to investigate the effects of daily meditation on work atmosphere. It will consider the participant's experiences and interactions with their surroundings in depth and try to delve into the reasons behind their experiences, something that the quantitative approach will fall short in.

To systematically study the nature of the psychological aspects and experiential impacts that this paper is attempting to explore relating to meditation, the thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke (2006) is recommended by this paper. There are several

reasons that this paper is giving preference to a thematic qualitative study as opposed to some of the other qualitative approaches that were considered by this paper. The other qualitative analysis methods considered by this paper were qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014) and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

All the three qualitative methodologies considered were related to the study of qualitative data sets. However, thematic analysis was chosen for the purpose of this study for various reasons and through the process of elimination. The reason content analysis was rejected was because of the vague and weak epistemological foundation of its procedures to understand, interpret and measure reality as qualitative content analysis is largely criticised for being ambiguous in its conclusions and lacks the necessary transparency in the analytical procedure that it employs thereby lowering the reliability of its findings (Devi Prasad, 2019). The reason grounded theory was rejected was because even though it is a constructional theory that aims to find patterns in data to decipher deeper meanings of qualitative data, unlike thematic analysis it is hard bound by its procedural need to collect qualitative data upfront and then arrive at a theory instead of starting with the already available literature on the subject (Sutcliffe, 2016). Since there were already sufficient studies available to conduct a substantial literature review on the subject it was unnecessary to employ the grounded theory approach, thereby leaving thematic analysis as a suitable option for taking the research forward.

One advantage of the thematic method is that it can be used as a realist method thereby allowing the fundamental meaning of the participant's experience to come forward (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is also the fundamental assumption on the nature of the data, which was collected by this paper, that the true and 'real' experiences of the participants are being collected and must be analysed as such. Another advantage of the thematic analysis is that it is flexible in the way in which it allows the researcher to determine the themes. This is particularly useful as the importance of the theme can be defined by its relevance to the research question rather than its frequency of occurrence in the data set. This was an important tool to have for the purpose of this study as, for example, it would allow the paper to define the theme based on the effects of meditation on work atmosphere rather than the specifics of an employee's job at a company. However, one disadvantage of the thematic analysis is that since this approach depends on creating themes across the entirety

of the data set, it is possible to miss out on potential contradictions within the data set by an individual account and these may have been revealing (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore, in order to reduce the impact of such a miss, this study will describe such individual contradictions and briefly attempt to discuss the impact of the contradiction.

3.2 Participants

Since the study was to explore the question of “treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere”, there were certain criteria that had to be met by the participant to successfully participate in the study. The participants recruited for the study were required to be presently working in a corporate company or a self-owned business. They were required to be practising meditation daily as a form of mindfulness at least over a 30 day period, preferably in the last 30 days before the day of the interview for the study. They received no remuneration for their participation in the study. A total of N=5 participants took part in the study of whom 3 worked in the corporate sector, 1 in the education sector and 1 had their own business that they were operating. In the 5 participants that took part in the study 2 of them were women and 3 were men. They also fulfilled the criteria of practising meditation daily over a 30 day period. Four of the participants had been practising meditation for more than the last 30 days leading up to the interview and one of the participants had practiced meditation daily for over a year but had a very slightly irregular practice (by a day) leading immediately up to the interview. However, since this study is more interested in studying the continued effects of meditation on the work atmosphere, given the long term practice of this participant, it was considered acceptable for the purpose of this study.

The participants selected for the study were all working in different industries and in different companies which adds to the generalisation of the study. The study was not aimed at recruiting participants from a specific industry or sector to allow for a generalised applicability of the findings. The participants were also distributed among various stages in their career. This means that they were at different positions of responsibilities in their respective places of work. Participant 1 was a young professional who was early in her career and in a people centric role as an individual contributor. Participant 2 was mid-level

professional who was working in an administrative role in her company. Participant 3 was working as researcher in an educational institution and participant 4 was a mid-level professional working in a mildly influential role in his company but at an individual contributor level. Lastly, participant 5 was running his own business and was working in both a management as well as an individual contributor role.

3.3 Procedure

As the participants were approached to participate in the study they were given consent forms to fill out so that they were aware of the content of the study and how their data will be used and stored. After the participants had returned the consent form, there was a short call scheduled with them to give them a short overview of the study so that they are comfortable with the topic and can better answer the questions during the interview. As a description of the short overview, the participants were broadly informed about the research question and its three main aspects which are a) effects of daily practice of meditation on employees; b) meditation as a form of mindfulness; and c) the impact mindfulness has on the work environment of employees.

After the short introductory call, a formal interview was scheduled with the participants based on their convenience. The interview was scheduled for 30 minutes and consisted of 11 questions. The questions were framed in an open ended way to encourage the participant to describe their answer at length rather than giving a short an undescriptive answer. Every question asked was either to explore the research question or to create a connection between the knowledge derived from the literature review and the research question that this paper is trying to explore.

3.4 Interview questions for data collection and approach

Some of the initial questions asked were very straightforward with the intent to make the participant comfortable and to understand about their meditation practice. Those questions were i) Do you meditate daily, ii) Have you been meditating daily for the past 30 days and iii) how many people in your team practice meditation. The intent of question (ii) was to create a benchmark for the minimum length of 30 days of daily meditation practice. Question (iii)

was aimed more to understand if other members of the participants' team in the workplace meditate to derive any relevant correlation to the participants' work environment if needed.

The next set of questions were designed to be answered more descriptively and aimed more to understand the perception of the participant towards their work environment in the office and towards their job. These series of questions were inspired by the literature review and how the knowledge derived from the existing literature correlates to the research question that this paper wishes to explore. Those questions were iv) Can you describe how the environment at your place of work impacts you, v) Does the work atmosphere in your place of work affect your perspective about your job? If so, how, vi) What role would you say the company's management plays in creating the work atmosphere versus the employees of your team, vii) What is your perspective on the team dynamics in your team with respect to your job satisfaction, viii) As an active meditator, how would you say has meditation affected your security at work, relations with people, conflict management, motivation, and efficiency.

The purpose of question (iv) was to understand the perception of the participant towards their present work environment and how they feel it impacts them at a general level. The objective was to understand how the participant understands their work environment and how they express that it impacts them. The objective was not to understand a very specific aspect about how the work environment impacts the participant but for them to generally talk about it and to start opening up to the dialogue and expressing what they feel about the question. Question (v) was more specific in its ask from the participant and was aimed at understanding the impact that the work environment has on the perception that the participant had about their job. This was in extension to the study by Shiba et al. (2015) where the job perception and performance was related to meditation. This was to understand whether individuals who practised meditation showed a positive or negative perception towards their job. This was important to understand because it would give a deeper insight into the association of meditation with job perception. The aim of question (vi) was to get an understanding of the correlation of the impact that the management of the company creates on the work environment through their guidelines, policies and employee programs versus the work environment that is created by the daily interactions of team members in the workplace. This was important to understand so as to learn about the

influence of the company's management on the work environment and the daily interaction among employees. This question received an interesting set of answers leading to insightful interpretations which is discussed later in this paper under chapter 4. Question (vii) was designed at exploring more about the participant's perception on their daily team interactions and their thoughts on the overall dynamics with their team and how that impacted their job satisfaction. The idea was to get an insight into the participant's mental correlation of their job satisfaction to their dynamics and quality of interactions with their team members. This would build on the works of Tuckey et al. (2018) and Olafsen (2017) described in the literature review in that they described that mindfulness broadens the perspective of individuals thereby enabling people to view new inter-connections within situations with their team members as well as that the people who meditate will be ultimately benefited by a positive work atmosphere where their needs are being satisfied and due to the reverse effect of need-satisfying work climates and its positive effect on state mindfulness of an individual will in turn feel more mindful and satisfied. The purpose of question (viii) was to finally connect important aspects of an individual's job, as explored in the literature review section of this paper, together in one comprehensive question. By tying together aspects of security at work, relations with people, conflict management, motivation, and efficiency through meditation the question was attempting to club the facets of an employee's sustainability and efficiency in the organisation. This was an important point to understand to take the study forward and to look at the aspects that are important to a company with respect to their employees and how meditation can be a tool to drive those aspects.

The last set of questions were designed to directly address the fundamental aspects of the research question. They were ix) what has been your experience with meditation as a general practice. It is necessary to categorise it as a spiritual or religious exercise, x) in your experience as an active meditator, what kind of a work atmosphere do you think daily meditation creates, and xi) if all people on your team were practising meditation, in your opinion, how would it impact the atmosphere in the workplace. Given that the research question that this paper is trying to explore is fundamentally divided into whether daily meditation creates a positive work atmosphere and whether it is necessary to categorise it as a spiritual or religious practice to obtain its benefits, questions (ix) and (x) immediately

address those aspects from a first person perspective. The objective of question (ix) was to understand what the participants experience of meditation has been in general and did they necessarily categorise it as a spiritual or religious practice to gain its benefits if any. The understanding obtained from this question would directly address the “treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise” part of the research question. The reason this aspect needs to be discussed is because in the studies by Afsar and Badir (2017) and Fox et al. (2018), as discussed during the literature review section of the paper, they relate positive work environment creation and improved employee productivity in the workplace with meditation treating meditation as a spiritual or religious activity. Hence the uniqueness of this study is in finding out if meditation can still have similar effects without it being treated or perceived as a spiritual or religious practice. Question (x) is designed straight towards answering the crux of the research question which is to understand if daily meditation creates a positive work atmosphere. Whereas question (xi), the final question of the interview, is a more forward looking question. The aim of designing this question was to understand the participants’ perspective on the possibility that if more people started practising meditation would it improve the work atmosphere. This was to take first-hand impressions of participants (who already practice meditation) on whether they feel that the work atmosphere would improve by more people in their team practising meditation. If the responses to this question indicated that the work atmosphere would improve then it would open up several avenues in terms of the applicability of these findings within organisation and how both organisations and employees can collectively benefit from it.

4. Analysis and Result

This section focuses on implementing the thematic analysis on the data set gathered via participant interviews through the established six step process (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and discussing the themes that are derived based on the answers given by participants during interviews. The paper also discusses the results that are derived as part of the analysis. The results indicated that daily practice of meditation by employees of a team may create a positive work atmosphere, when treated as a non-spiritual and non-religious exercise.

4.1 Analysis

To conduct the thematic analysis the six step process provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) is employed. This six stage process is broken down by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) as becoming familiar with the data, codifying the data, searching for themes within the data, reviewing the themes, defining the themes, and performing the write up.

The data was gathered through questions that were asked to the participants during the interviews and then transcribed into text. This text data was carefully read and the answers of the 5 different participants to each of the 11 questions were grouped together into 11 question buckets with 5 answers each and studied for familiarization. By separating out the answers of the 5 participants for the 11 questions into 11 buckets of 5 answers each, it also enabled for better codification of the data. In order to codify the data, the data had to be viewed and broken down into small and meaningful chunks. Since the first 3 questions were aimed more towards understanding the eligibility of the participant for the study and not towards answering the research question, they were not considered for the process of creating codes. The remaining 8 questions presented certain themes that emerged out of them and were also key in terms of answering the research question.

In the context of this study a theme is defined by two purposes. Firstly, its significance to the research question at hand and secondly, if several data codes collectively support a theme that is significant to the research question. There was a total of five themes that were identified through the coding of the data. These themes are stated here in no particular order. The first theme was “Daily meditation in a team” and how meditation may increase inclusiveness in a team environment. The second theme was “Effects of meditation on employee’s mind at work” and how meditation may create a focussed, efficient, clear, and objective mind. The third theme was “Meditation as a religious or spiritual practice” and that it is not necessary to categorise it as a religious or spiritual practice to enjoy its benefits. The fourth one was “The role of management” and that the company’s management does play a role in defining the work environment. Finally, the fifth one was “Impact of meditation on work atmosphere” and how it can bring peace, joy, and openness in the work environment. To review these themes, the data codes were looked at again to verify if the data did really support these themes. After cross-verifying these themes with the codified

data, it was confirmed that these were indeed the five main themes that were both critical to answering the research question and were supported by the data collected. The definitions of the themes are as shown in Table 1.

S.No.	Theme	Definition
1.	Daily meditation in a team	The impact if every member of the team meditates daily
2.	Effects of meditation on employee's mind at work	The effects of meditation on the mental faculties of employees and their subsequent impact in the workplace
3.	Meditation as a religious or spiritual practice	The classification of meditation as a religious or spiritual practice
4.	The role of management	The contribution of the company's management to the work atmosphere including its policies, leadership, and infrastructure
5.	Impact of meditation on work atmosphere	The effects of daily meditation on creating or changing the environment of the workplace

Table 1

4.2 Results

This section elaborates on the five themes identified during the analysis section of this paper and how the data relates to the conclusions drawn from it. The results of the study indicate that there is evidence which suggests that daily meditation might help create a more positive work environment in various ways such as creating a more inclusive, accepting, and open atmosphere among colleagues. It also suggests that in order to reap the benefits of meditation it is not necessary that it is categorised as a religious or spiritual practice hence opening up the possibility for it to be practised by employees of all faiths and walks of life. Another aspect that was revealed as part of the results was that even though the company's management doesn't play a huge role in creating the work atmosphere, they may play a roughly 25% role, which is significant enough to create an impact on employees, their work culture and their day to day workings. Finally, and most importantly, it indicates

that daily practice of meditation in employees can bring peace, joy, and openness in the work environment.

4.2.1 Daily meditation may increase inclusiveness in a team

A common theme that was recurring among all the interviews at some point or the other was the fact that daily meditation may make employees of a team more inclusive and caring towards each other. When asked what they think would happen if everyone their team started practicing meditation daily, all of the participants showed a commonality in the way they answered the question in that it would make the work atmosphere more positive. For example, one of the participants said, *“We can all be calm and share each other’s burdens”*. Another one said, *“People would be more accommodating towards each other. It would result in a more cooperative atmosphere for sure”*. One of them mentioned *“Definitely a more cooperative environment. People will smile more. People will understand each other’s emotions. They will help each other.”* This also suggests that inclusiveness not only means that people will cooperate better and accept each other but they will also simply be a better “team”. *“It will bring in a sense of responsibility and it will change their perspective towards situations and acceptance will increase”*, one particular answer mentioned. Another mentioned *“It would seriously help... If everyone starts meditating, people will agree more than they disagree because their paths will converge. People will become more inclusive.”* Answers from participants also indicated that daily meditation makes them more accommodating of people around them. They are more aware of themselves, how they are talking, in terms of their choice of words, to fellow colleagues and customers and their general interactions with people.

The results also showed that employees will also be able to empathise more with fellow colleagues regarding their situations and points of views. For example, one of the participants explicitly mentioned *“People would be able to put themselves in other people’s shoes more often”*. Another interesting aspect of empathy and team building that was touched upon during one of the answers was the role of dependability on your fellow colleague. A few of the important snippets from the answer were *“Instead of rubbing each person’s shortcomings to their face they will help them get over it. Dependability and trust will be 100%. You know if something is given it will be done. Dependability will be key when*

getting big things done. This is because people will be aligned towards a common goal. Overall team efficiencies will increase, and people will be able to handle sudden surprises better. People won't panic when unseen situations arise."

Hence, this suggests that daily meditation among employees of a team may increase their inclusiveness, which means that it may make them more accepting towards each other's points of views, share each other's burdens, and help each other. This will all constitute towards creating a more cooperative environment in the workplace. Moreover, daily practice of meditation by the employees of a team may also make them more dependable as they will contribute to a shared sense of responsibility towards a common goal and this will result in strong teamwork and a more efficient team. This will also help towards creating a more harmonious atmosphere in the workplace. Hence, daily meditation by employees of a team may result in a more cooperative and harmonious work atmosphere.

4.2.2 Meditation may help create a focussed, efficient, clear, and objective mind

According to most of the participants, when asked about the impact of meditation on their perspective about their job security, interpersonal relations, motivation, and efficiency, there was a common theme that emerged. In relation to their job, all of them had a perspective that was either neutral or positive. They are either happy or have no specifically strong feelings towards the job. They feel satisfied about their job because they feel that they are doing their duty to their fullest capacity. The expression used to describe stress was not "pressure" or "stress" but simply that they are "busy" and things "need to be done" so they have to focus on that, but not in a stressful way. What is most interesting to note here is that when some of the participants described their perspective towards their job as neutral, they did not mean that they were not interested or not secure about their job. What they meant was that they were not troubled by it, and that they were not affected mentally by the events of what happened at their place of work. This is also in line with the study by Haun et al. (2018) as discussed during the literature review which was based on the stressor-detachment model, which stated that employees who are mindful daily at work show a psychological detachment from high demanding jobs creating a more relaxed environment. Participants also noted that they were "Mostly focused on getting things done". One of the participants described her mindset after daily morning meditation as "At

9AM, as soon as I enter my office building, I leave everything that happened before 9AM behind and get into work mode, and start getting work done". This further suggests that they are able to disengage with what happened before they entered work and go about the day normally and in a determined yet calm way.

Participants also noted that daily meditation helps them go in to work with a clearer mind. Another aspect that was noticed consistently among all the answers by the participants was that their perspective towards their job was highly objective. One of them noted "*Work is work*" and emphasised that daily meditation helps them look at work issues clearly without mixing them into personal life. They also remarked that they were satisfied within themselves and were not looking for external sources of satisfaction. Even if it were a promotion at a job or pay raise, they treated it with a certain sense of calmness and non-greediness which was suggested by the statement "*If it comes my way then good, but I'm not bothered by it. There are no judgements*". They showed that were not bothered by problems or challenges in their work as well. One participant said, "*challenges are challenges, but I am satisfied*". Meditation was also attributed to giving them a sense of satisfaction and determination which helped them achieve a common vision thereby affecting their motivation.

For most of them meditation changed the focus from the future or past to the present. This helped them bring a sense of awareness of the present. For some, it was described as a there being a clear sense of imagination versus reality. They were not bothered by thoughts and that the thought process is not always on. They were able to observe their actions and hence became more conscious of their actions because of which they were able to focus on their work better and drive for more efficiency and optimisation. It also caused their anxiety levels to reduce drastically. They also claimed that they do the best that they can and hence are naturally happy with whatever they do so they are not bothered by other people's expectations.

Hence, daily meditation may help promote focus, efficiency, clarity, and objectivity among employees along with a sense of job security and a mind that is concentrated yet at ease. This means that employees who meditate daily may show more motivation towards their job and easily share a common vision. It also suggests that employees may show increased

efficiency and objectivity towards their task at hand. They are not bothered by the situations in the workplace and are largely unaffected by it. They show a sense of clarity and objectivity in their way of assessing situations. Most importantly, they are focussed on getting the task done in the best possible way.

4.2.3 Not necessary to categorise meditation as a religious or spiritual practise to reap its benefits

When asked about the participants thoughts on meditation and whether it is necessary to categorise it as a religious or spiritual practice to reap its benefits the answer was absolutely uniform. All of them said that it was not necessary to categorise it as a spiritual or religious exercise. In fact, some of them even contended if the practice can be called religious at all. One of the participants defined it as *"It is like breathing... or drinking water"* another one as *"Need not be a spiritual exercise at all"*. The overarching theme was that it is not a religious exercise and can simply be done as a physical exercise like going for a jog. However, it must be noted that though the participants collectively echoed that it is not necessary to categorise it as a spiritual practice, it was possible that it could be a spiritual experience for some people. However, that would require us to explore the realms of spirituality which would be outside the scope of this study. Interestingly, one of the participants described meditation as a tool. He said *"it is simply a tool. A tool to enhance our way of being. It is a tool, like a screwdriver, regardless of how we categorise the screwdriver, it will still do the same job"*. This was an interesting analogy when looked at literally. The job of a screwdriver is to screw a bolt, regardless of what you call it. Even if you call it a wrench that will not make it a wrench, or if you call it a pipe, it will not start working like a pipe. It will still do the job that it is designed to do, which is to screw a bolt. In that way, meditation was perceived by the participant as a tool which is designed to improve the wellbeing of a human being. Regardless of what one thinks it is or what one says it is will not change what it is. Another participant described his experience along similar lines, *"People think it is religious, which is not a helpful notion as it is misplaced. It is a science, and it needs to be conducted like that. It promotes wellbeing. Method is more important than vocabulary"*.

Therefore, based on the evidence gathered by the participants, the common notion was that it may not be necessary to categorise meditation as a religious or spiritual practise to

reap its benefits. According to the data gathered, meditation is most simply described as a process aimed at improving the wellbeing of a human being. It may be treated as a secular practice and is not necessary to relate it to being a religious or a spiritual exercise, since its benefits were observed by participants without the need to classify it as a spiritual or religious exercise. All the participants practiced meditation as a natural or a general exercise and were sharing their experiences based on that.

4.2.4 Company's management may play a role in shaping the work environment

It was important for this paper to know if the company's management has an impact in shaping the work environment from an applicability standpoint of the study. As discussed in the literature review, one of the biggest challenges that companies are facing today is to create a great work atmosphere so that employees don't feel disheartened by the work and instead feel motivated, stay efficient, feel secure, have good relations with co-workers and stay productive in the workplace (Ashraf, 2019). Hence it was important to understand if the company's management has a role in shaping the atmosphere at work.

When participants were asked what role they think their company's management played in creating the work atmosphere, the response although varied in terms of degree, coincided in terms of direction. The answers of the participants were generally directed towards the fact that a company's management does have an impact on the work atmosphere. This was described in several ways. First way in which the company was described as having an impact was that the actions of senior management were observed and noted by employees, which in turn had an effect on how they perceived certain things in the work place contributing to the work culture of the place. Almost as if the actions of the leadership defined culture, what is okay to do and what is not. Another aspect that was mentioned was the policies of the company and how that has an impact on employee psychology. This again relates to work culture and the helps define the overall pace and environment of the workplace. One of the participants said, *"Company plays a huge role, because the culture defines a lot of the atmosphere"*.

However, some of the other participants felt less strongly about the role that the company or the company's management played in creating the work atmosphere. One of the participants shared here experience as *"Company only gives the job; it is we who create the*

environment. They give the tools to create the environment, but the environment is created by us". Another participant attributed the role of the company to be 25%. He recently experienced a change in the company's management and described that *"Corporate is just a flow down of instructions. That way companies play a big role. I am seeing that the behaviour of the same people is changing as the entity (company's management) changed"*. In the same breath the participant also explained how a team member can help influence the work culture of a team. This means that individual team members or individual teams themselves can form work cultures within themselves at a small scale or what can be termed as "micro work cultures" within teams. The participant also remarked, *"When there is a sense of freedom there is satisfaction"*, indicating that if a team has freedom, then these small micro work cultures can be born creating a sense of satisfaction for all employees of the team.

4.2.5 Meditation may bring peace, joy, and openness in the work environment

One of the most prominent themes that came up while conducting the analysis of the participant data was on peace, joy and openness being major outcomes when one does a daily practice of meditation. Participants claimed a number of such pleasant and socially positive effects as a result of meditation. They also claimed that as a result of daily practice of meditation, people become happier from within, *"People will seek happiness within instead of looking at external sources"*. Participants also concurred that patience increases because of meditation. Openness in the atmosphere promotes people to talk about how to improve each other's work without taking it personally.

In terms of openness, meditation may help one become more socially approachable as other people trust you more with their problems. To explain this one participant remarked *"Meditation helps. When people see that you are calm, they come to you to share their problems, if you already look stressed, they will not come to you to add to your stress"*. One participant reported that the approach that fellow colleagues had towards her changed, since they considered her to be easily approachable.

Meditation was also attributed to helping disengage with unnecessary interactions in that it helps a person not to engage with things that bother them. They also don't obsess about thoughts and comments from other people giving them a sense of peace. Participants

reported that they did not feel distracted, which changed their interactions with their colleagues. They also said that instead of blaming others for mistakes they take the onus on themselves and try to see what they could have done better. This non-judgemental way of being made them happy.

Another aspect was the impact this has on their atmosphere. Participants reported that the way they conduct themselves after meditation makes them calm and composed to tackle the different situations of the day and this rubs off on other members of the team as well, *“One happy person can make another happy”*. The sense of collectiveness and inclusiveness increases. Participants at a general level described that after they started practicing meditation, their experience of life has been more peaceful and joyful, which has also reflected in the workplace. They also described that they experienced a deeper sense of openness and care for each other and that their sense of responsibility towards their work and towards their co-workers increased enabling them to resolve conflicts proactively.

5. Discussion

This section of the paper mainly expounds on the three discussions necessary to understand this study. First, it discusses the main findings of the study and how it relates to the literature that is available on the subject, and what it all means together. Second, it discusses possible implications and practical applications of this study, which is mainly around the encouragement of creating meditation programs in the corporate sector. Lastly, it talks about the limitations of the study in terms of the specificity of the form of meditation considered in the study, the participants, and the overall qualitative approach.

5.1 Main findings of the study, its relation to the available literature and what it all means

The research question that the study was trying to explore was “Treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere?” and the study found that even if meditation is not categorised as a spiritual or religious practice, daily practice of meditation by employees of a team may indeed help create a positive work atmosphere. A positive work atmosphere may get created as a consequence of the effects of meditation that are seen in people. A positive atmosphere may include attributes like being more inclusive, less conflicted, accepting, sociable, focussed, clear-minded, motivated, and efficient. It may also mean that the general energy in the environment

may be calm, peaceful, and joyful. Daily practice of meditation may help employees create a positive atmosphere in the workplace, which may help organisations to become self-healing, harmonious and a place where employees can work productively, coherently, and satisfactorily.

As discussed in the literature, the fundamental understanding was that one of the biggest challenges that companies face today is to create a good work environment that employees can prosper in (Ashraf, 2019), and that companies that ignore the quality of the work environment often experience negative effects on the productivity of their employees (Shu et al., 2018). Interestingly, it was noted by Fox et al. (2018) that the work atmosphere is not just created by corporate policies but also by the very life force of the organisation, which are its employees. This study also had similar findings. The results showed that even though the company does play a role in creating the work environment, they merely provide the tools and conditions for employees to exist in. The role that the daily interactions between people, their attitude towards their work and fellow workers may determine a much larger portion of the work environment.

One of the primary objectives of this study was to explore if there are natural, self-monitoring ways to create better work environments. Based on the literature available on the subject, meditation and mindfulness were selected to be studied as tools to help create better work environments. The study by Tuckey et al. (2018) showed that meditation can help bring psychological stability among employees and hence create more relaxed surroundings. This was also one of the results of this study that meditation showed more psychological balance and objectivity among employees. Arpa (2013) stated that meditation is a form of mindfulness and Brown and Ryan (2003) stated that mindfulness is being more aware of the present. The results of this study also demonstrate similar findings. All participants described that the practice of meditation helped them increase their awareness of the present. An interesting aspect which can be of benefit when viewed in tandem with the findings of this study is the one mentioned by Olafsen (2017), that if a group of individuals can create a positive work atmosphere where their needs are being satisfied, it will in turn create a positive effect on their mindfulness thereby enhancing the overall work environment therefore creating a cyclic effect of sorts.

One important aspect that this study wanted to explore was that of the notions behind meditation as being a spiritual or religious practice. Even though the studies by Fox et al. (2018), Afsar and Badir (2017) and Gupta et al. (2014) showed that daily practice of meditation helped

create a more positive work environment and increase employee productivity, they did not explicitly use meditation as their tool for mindfulness or considered meditation as a spiritual or religious practice. Hence, it was of interest to explore if meditation as a form of mindfulness could have a similar impact when treated as a non-spiritual or non-religious exercise. The results of this study indicate that meditation can have similar effects on the work atmosphere even when it is treated as a non-spiritual or non-religious exercise. It may most simply be described as a tool to enhance the wellbeing of a human being and may not have any religious or spiritual overtone associated to it. This is important because it may encourage companies and people from all religious and spiritual backgrounds to reap the benefits of meditation and create a more positive work atmosphere.

Therefore, what this all means is that there may be merit to the argument that the daily practice of meditation may help create a better work atmosphere. Companies have a role to play in helping create more positive work environments. By enabling employees to meditate either in the workplace or before they enter their place of work, companies can help create a better work atmosphere. Since it is not necessary to view meditation as a spiritual or religious exercise therefore people from all walks of life may find it comfortable to practice meditation and reap its many benefits. Companies provide the tools and policies to create the work atmosphere and a large part of the work environment is created by the employees. If the employees are happy, joyful, peaceful, calm, focussed, clear-minded, sociable, inclusive, efficient, motivated, and satisfied, that is the atmosphere that they may create around themselves as well. Employees may help each other out and work better as a team. All of these attributes may be highly desirable for organisations and employees alike. Hence, organisations as well as employees may benefit from the positive effects of meditation and the positive work environment that might help them create.

5.2 Suggested practical applications

Given the results of this study, the suggested practical application of this study would be for organisations and employees to benefit from the positive effects of meditation. For organisations this would mean that instead of spending money on several programs a year to keep the work environment upbeat and employees engaged, they may opt for having meditation programs for their employees which would directly benefit not just the employees but also the organisation as it may help create a positive work environment. The positive work environment thus created would result in more motivated, efficient, less conflicted, inclusive,

and more satisfied workforce. It may also help teams perform better as teams by caring for each other, lifting each other up, sharing the load, and cheering them on when required all of which may help the organisation achieve its organisational goals better. Not just that, due to the need-satisfying theory by Olafsen (2017), a positive work atmosphere where people are feeling satisfied will in turn create an effect of state-mindfulness thereby reinforcing the effect. This may mean that it may become a self-regulating way to heal an organisation from the inside. Also this may further mean that the money spent on implementing these meditation programs may pay for more than its worth over time as it will not just result in more efficient, well lubricated and motivated teams causing the organisation to financially benefit from it, but also reduce the expenditure on other programs aimed towards achieving similar goals saving money in the long run. However, that remains to be seen and is beyond the scope of this study.

The employees may benefit through this daily practice of meditation as it may make them more joyful, peaceful, and relaxed in the workplace. They may be also be enabled to tackle daily challenges better and not get stressed by day to day pressures of their work. It may also help them detach from their work related thoughts when they return home enabling them to focus more on their household activities which may make them happier not just for the moment but also in the long run. The corollary may also be true, and that they may also not bring household worries into the workplace which may help them to become more efficient and more focused on their work.

The application of this study is also not limited to any particular type of employee, it may be applied to both managers as well as employees. As the combination of this study and the one conducted by Afsar and Badir (2017), suggest that meditation may help create a more productive work environment and can be applied to both managers as well as employees. This paper also suggests that corporate workplaces may not be the only places where this study might find relevance. Other places of work such as educational institutions, hospitals, government offices, and all other workplaces may also opt for meditation programs and reap the benefits of a meditating workforce as discussed in this study.

5.3 Limitations

This section describes the three limitations of this study. The first limitation that this section explains is the fact that this study does not take into account the method of meditation that should be used for optimum impact. The second limitation is of the point that meditation

may not be the 100% solution to creating a positive work atmosphere, and there might be a need to combine it with other methods for a more optimal effect. Lastly, the third limitation that this section explains is that of the total number of participants selected, which was N=5, for this study. Though the study maintains that this number was good enough to conduct the study and that a satisfactory level of data saturation was reached in the aspects that this study was trying to explore.

Regarding the first limitation, from the data that was collected one of the participants was noted as saying *“It is not just about meditating but meditating right”*. It was suggested that meditation be conducted the right way and through proper instruction to gain the full benefits of the activity. However, this is a limitation of this study. This study did not consider or explain what is considered the right way of doing meditation as it was not part of the scope of the study. This is something that may also impact the effectiveness of meditation in creating a positive work atmosphere. Though it must be noted that the 5 participants who participated in the study were using three different styles of meditation and they did report similar experiences.

The second limitation is that this study only considers meditation as the central tool for creating a positive work atmosphere. Since the ultimate goal of the study was to find if there is a self-sustaining and natural way to improve the work atmosphere of a workplace, the most important thing then is to check if the work atmosphere ultimately becomes great. It is to verify if there is only one such tool or is there a combination of tools that might be helpful in this regard. One of the participants noted that *“Meditation helps me feel more at ease for a few hours at least after I complete my practice, even if not for the entire day”*. This suggests that meditation for some people may not be the 100% solution in creating a positive work atmosphere. This is another limitation of this study. Though this study suggests that daily meditation by employees of a team may help create a positive work environment, and that meditation itself is a very strong tool in that regard, it does not mean that it creates the most optimal work environment. There may be a combination of such tools needed to create an even more optimal solution to create a positive work environment which was not considered by this study as it would be considered out of scope.

Lastly, on the fact that the number of participants who partook in this study were N=5, this study maintains that this number was good enough to conduct the study and that a satisfactory level of data saturation was reached in the question that this study wished to explore. The limitation that this caused was that the participants were from different teams and organisations which even though increased the applicability of the findings of this study drastically also limited the study in that it was unable to formulate a true one to one quantitative comparison of a team that practiced daily meditation and a team that did not. This kind of information would have gone a long way to showcase exactly how impactful the daily practice of meditation can be and help statistically identify what organisations and employees might be missing out on.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research question that this study was designed to explore was “Treating meditation as a non-spiritual exercise, does daily practice of meditation by employees of a team create a positive work atmosphere?”. This study concludes that daily practice of meditation by the employees of a team may create a positive work atmosphere with or without considering it as a spiritual or religious practice. They can treat it as a physical exercise for the mind just like jogging is for the body. It is not necessary for employees to categorise meditation as a spiritual or religious practice in order to reap its benefits. This may encourage organisations to adopt meditation programs in order to create a positive work atmosphere which may get created as a consequence of the effects of meditation. A positive atmosphere may include attributes like employees being more inclusive, less conflicted, accepting, sociable, focussed, clear-minded, motivated, and efficient. It may also mean that the general energy in the environment may be calm, peaceful, and joyful. Daily practice of meditation may help employees create a positive atmosphere in the workplace, which may help organisations to become self-healing, harmonious and a place where employees can work productively, coherently, and satisfactorily.

A few areas of further research that this study recommends in order to have better clarity on the subject and maybe even study further benefits of meditation are firstly, understanding if meditation may help in creating better friendships at work which might lead to more job fulfilment, secondly, conducting a one to one quantitative comparison of a team that practices daily meditation and a team that does not to study the difference in the

performance, satisfaction and general sustainability and productivity of the team, and lastly as an extension to this study, exploring the optimal combination of tools in addition to meditation that organisations can adopt to further optimise and transform work atmosphere in the workplace.

The study hopes to be useful for organisations and employees alike. It wishes that through its findings, it will be able to encourage organisations to adopt meditation programs to reap its many benefits that it may have on the productivity and sustainability of organisations. It also wishes that if religious or spiritual connotations regarding meditation had been holding them back then through the findings of this study, both organisations and employees feel confident about practicing meditation without any concern. It wishes that in addition to corporate workplaces, it finds application in all other types of workplaces. Finally, this study hopes that in the long run it is able to influence a change that helps the world to produce joyful workforces and sustainable organisations.

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