Mindfulness and leadership flexibility

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Abstract

Purpose – In a context of great complexity, many authors have focused on the beneficial effects of leadership flexibility (Denison et al., 1995), a capacity theoretically associated with mindfulness. The purpose of this paper is to better understand the relationship between mindfulness and behavioral flexibility in leaders.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from two samples: 100 active leaders from diverse economic sectors and 62 students pursuing an executive MBA degree.

Findings – The results show that mindfulness is positively associated with the overall score for leader flexibility, and with its two dualities: self-assertive and directive vs collaborative and supportive, and long-term strategy vs short-term execution. Specifically, four of the five dimensions of mindfulness (nonreactivity, nonjudging, acting with awareness and describing) were positively correlated with the overall flexibility score.

Practical implications – The results suggest that by developing mindfulness, managers might be better able to adapt their leadership style to the demands of different situations. To that end, interventions based on mindfulness are worthwhile options for use within organizations, particularly in the context of leadership development programs.

Originality/value – While most models of leadership assume a linear relationship between certain leadership behaviors and performance, other voices suggest that effective leaders need to possess great behavioral flexibility so that they can adapt with agility to the multiple needs of the people and situations around them. Few studies have examined the factors that may play a role in leadership flexibility.

Keywords Leadership development, Mindfulness, Leadership flexibility

Paper type Research paper

The last few decades have been characterized by hyper-competition between companies, rapid technological changes and dynamic and turbulent economic contexts. An additional challenge for leaders is the increase in organizational complexity, due in large part to the existence of many contradictory circumstances (Denison et al., 1995). For example, a company that is a competitor in one sphere of activity could conceivably become an ally in another, just as striving to maximize profits today may contradict efforts to invest in the future. While the phenomena affecting decision making are increasingly complex and interconnected, adapting to these apparent contradictions is a major challenge for leaders, who often struggle to maintain the level of acuity and calm needed to fulfill their role (Castelli, 2016; George, 2014).

Several authors have suggested that to keep these workplace tensions in balance, leaders must adapt their leadership style to the demands of particular situations or individuals (Yukl and Mahsud, 2010). Various terms have been used in the literature to describe this type of leadership: reflective, adaptive, agile, versatile and flexible.
This conception of leadership suggests that to deal with the fast pace and diversity of their activities, leaders must have, first, a broad repertoire of behaviors, and second, the ability to switch among those behaviors depending on the situation (Denison et al., 1995).

Although many authors have focused on the beneficial effects of leadership flexibility (Denison et al., 1995, Kaiser and Overfield, 2010), few have studied its determinants. Recently, Castelli (2016), Glomb et al. (2011) and Hayes et al. (2006) have stressed that mindfulness may be connected with leadership flexibility. Bishop et al. (2004, p. 232) defined mindfulness as involving, first, “the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment” and second, “the adoption of a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance.” These capacities may help leaders develop what Brendel et al. (2016) described as a mindful relationship with complexity. The goal of this paper is to examine the links between mindfulness and leader flexibility.

**Literature review**

**Leadership flexibility**

Most contemporary models of leadership assume that a linear relationship exists between specific leadership behaviors and performance (Kaiser and Overfield, 2011). However, recent studies indicate that certain individual characteristics or behaviors (e.g. conscientiousness, emotional stability or assertiveness) have curvilinear relationships with performance (Le et al., 2011); although increasing the frequency of certain behaviors is linked to improved performance, beyond a certain point, performance does not continue to increase and may even decrease. These results echo those indicating that the careers of many managers derail because of too great a propensity to rely on the behaviors that made them successful in their previous positions, despite the new demands that come with a new leadership position (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000).

An alternative to normative conceptions of leadership is offered by the concept of leadership flexibility (Kaiser and Overfield, 2010), inspired by the concept of behavioral complexity (Denison et al., 1995). According to this conception, to deal with the rapid pace and diversity of their activities, leaders must adopt multiple complementary roles, sometimes even antagonistic roles, in response to various contextual demands. This model comprises two dualities – two pairs of opposing dimensions representing the tensions and often-necessary compromises that make effective management a balancing act. The first dimension is the integration of performance goals and human relationships; it is defined as the ability to pursue productivity while building cohesion and employee morale (self-assertive and directive vs collaborative and supportive). The second dimension is the integration of the natural tensions between the tendencies to be directed toward the external context or toward in-house procedures; it is defined as the ability to introduce and adapt to innovations while promoting stability within the organization (long-term strategy vs short-term execution). Several studies have shown that leaders with a balanced behavioral repertoire are seen by their subordinates as more effective and have a greater impact on the company’s performance when compared to those with a poorly balanced behavioral repertoire (Denison et al., 1995; Kaiser and Overfield, 2010, 2011). An imbalanced repertoire reflects over-reliance on the leader’s strengths, i.e. using a behavior to a greater extent than the situation demands or engaging in the behavior in situations where it is not appropriate. Other studies have also indicated that behavioral flexibility in leaders is related to more behaviors that foster innovation from team members and lead to collaborative learning (Bullis, 1992; Delia, 2012).

Considering the beneficial effects of leadership flexibility, some authors have pointed out the importance of exploring its possible determinants and investigating how
flexibility can be developed (Yukl and Mahsud, 2010). It has been proposed that cognitive skills play a role in determining the degree of flexibility shown by leaders. Others suggest that emotional intelligence may be related to behavioral flexibility. Indeed, in their definition of social intelligence, Zaccaro et al. (1991) suggest that emotional intelligence and behavioral flexibility influence each other; leaders must understand the needs of others in order to respond to those needs in a constructive way. Emotional intelligence is therefore essential to the ability of leaders to adjust to what they observe around them. As conceptualized by Cherniss and Goleman (2001), emotional intelligence includes four dimensions: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and relationship management. These authors suggest that the four components are related to leadership. More specifically, studies revealed that people with high self-awareness are better able to adapt to new situations (Gangestad and Snyder, 2000; Zaccaro et al., 1991), and that self-management is linked to the ability to be flexible in the face of change (Cherniss and Goleman, 2001).

More recently, a few authors have argued that mindfulness could be a determinant of leadership flexibility. Marturano (2014) suggested that mindfulness could help leaders respond more judiciously to the demands of their working environment rather than reacting impulsively to distractions or triggers, whether internal (e.g. thoughts, emotions) or external (practical constraints). Since mindfulness enables people to be more aware of the thought mechanisms that take over or interfere with contact with their experiences, it also helps them, first, to recognize when and how these thought patterns influence the experience they create from reality, and second, to respond to that experience in a less automatic, more flexible way (Brown and Ryan, 2003). In a rare empirical study linking mindfulness to leadership, Baron (2016) reported that mindfulness is associated with authentic leadership, a form of leadership characterized by self-awareness (i.e. knowledge of one’s strengths, weaknesses, emotions and impact on others) and balanced information processing (i.e. unbiased openness toward differing perspectives regarding oneself and questioning of one’s positions). These results suggest that mindfulness in leaders is associated with the ability to focus their attention on what they are experiencing in the moment (both within themselves and information from the environment or others) and to integrate this information into action. These findings thus support the anticipated relationship between mindfulness and the flexibility of leaders.

Although several studies have examined the putative links between mindfulness and psychological flexibility (see Levin et al., 2012, for a meta-analysis), the current paper is among the very few to focus on the relationship between mindfulness and behavioral flexibility. From a conceptual point of view, the links between behavioral flexibility of leaders and the concept of psychological flexibility remain undefined. The model of psychological flexibility underpinning acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes et al., 2006) defines psychological flexibility as the ability to become aware of one’s thoughts and feelings in the present moment, without judgment, and to change or persist in behavior when doing so serves valued ends. Psychological flexibility refers to several dynamic processes that unfold over time and appear to be interrelated with mindfulness. This could be reflected by how a person “(1) adapts to fluctuating situational demands, (2) reconfigures mental resources, (3) shifts perspective, and (4) balances competing desires, needs, and life domains” (Kashdan and Rottenberg, 2010). Psychological flexibility thus shares many similarities with leadership flexibility including a focus on adapting to events, balancing various conflicting needs and shifting perspectives. According to Harris (2009), psychological flexibility encompasses behavioral flexibility, which is linked to and in some way dependent on the individual’s ability to exercise mindfulness. The next section further explains the concept of mindfulness, which is a central focus of this study.
Mindfulness
Although the practice of mindfulness meditation and appreciation of its effects are part of a spiritual tradition dating back thousands of years, it is only in the last 25 years that a plethora of researchers have tried to capture and define the nature of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Baer et al., 2008; Brown and Ryan, 2003). As mentioned by Dane (2011), academic and philosophical conceptualizations of mindfulness, although they emerge from different perspectives, tend to be relatively convergent with definitions that are largely cohesive. Dane identified three shared, representative features of the definitions found in the literature: first, mindfulness is a state of consciousness (i.e. an inherent human capacity) that can also be assessed at the trait level (i.e. because of dispositional tendencies, some people may be in a mindful state of consciousness more often than others), second, in which attention is focused on present-moment phenomena and third, occurring both externally (in the environment) and internally (intrapsychic). In the same vein, a meta-analysis of the effects and measures of mindfulness mentioned that classical Buddhist scholarly accounts of mindfulness highlight “a close, clear-minded attention to, or awareness of, what is perceived in the present […] and present-oriented attention or awareness are features highlighted in many accounts and measures of mindfulness” (Quaglia et al., 2016, p. 804).

In the last few years, many have highlighted the benefits of being mindful. Until recently, research was focused primarily on the benefits of mindfulness in clinical settings (see Khoury et al., 2013). Increasingly, however, researchers are also examining the effects of mindfulness in the workplace, suggesting that mindfulness training could be an antidote to stress among workers (Jamieson and Tuckey, 2017), reinforcing their resilience to adversity (Keng et al., 2011). More specifically, Shapiro et al. (2015) reported that mindfulness appears to play a role in optimizing several workplace processes that are vulnerable to the effects of stress, including decision making, problem solving and productivity.

In contrast, the existing research on the potential benefits of mindfulness for leaders is mostly theoretical in nature (Reb et al., 2015), with few empirical results available. For example, some authors confirmed that mindfulness in leaders had beneficial effects on their mental health (Roche et al., 2014), while other authors have found a relationship between leaders’ mindfulness and employee well-being and performance (Reb et al., 2014). However, very few studies have investigated the relationship between leaders’ mindfulness and specific leadership behaviors. Interestingly, two of these rare studies indicate that mindfulness is associated with more effective team management and interpersonal communication (Sadler-Smith and Shefy, 2007; Ucok, 2006).

Recently, Glomb et al. (2011) propose a model in which mindfulness may be related to behavioral flexibility by fostering a distancing from one’s thoughts and feelings. These authors define response flexibility as the ability to pause before taking action. Their exploratory study revealed that decreased use of automatic mental processes is significantly related to increased response flexibility. Indeed, by adopting a nonjudgmental and nonreactive mindset, people who are more mindful have less of a tendency to respond automatically. Their results suggest that recognizing that thoughts and reactions to an event are not objective is associated with situational responses that are less automatic and more aligned with the specific demands of each event. This response flexibility is made possible by evoking alternative solutions to different problems. These results support those of Dane (2011) and Thomas (2006), which indicates that mindfulness promotes cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness and response flexibility.

While there are many conceptualizations of mindfulness, that of Baer et al. (2008) was selected for this study because its dimensions appear to be related to behavioral flexibility, while not directly referring to meditation practice. This model, derived from a factor analysis of five questionnaires of dispositional mindfulness, indicates that the various items could be grouped under five factors: observing, describing, nonjudging of inner experience,
nonreactivity to inner experience and acting with awareness. Observing refers to paying attention to internal and external experiences such as sensations, cognitions, emotions, sights, sounds and smells. Describing refers to the ability to label experiences with words, while nonjudging of internal experiences involves having a nonevaluative attitude toward our thoughts and feelings. Finally, nonreactivity to inner experience is the ability to accept our thoughts and feelings, without getting caught up in them, while acting with awareness means attending to one’s activities of the moment, in contrast to behaving mechanically while attention is focused elsewhere. Analysis of the factor structure of this conceptualization of mindfulness confirms the existence of a primary factor (mindfulness) and of five secondary factors (dimensions).

In line with this model, we hypothesize that the overall construct of mindfulness is positively associated with overall leader flexibility and with its two dualities. According to Kaiser and Overfield (2010), the first duality, directive vs collaborative, represents how the leader exerts influence (i.e. top-down vs inclusive), while the second duality, execution vs strategy, represents what organizational needs leaders focus on (i.e. produce results in the near term vs positioning the organization for the long run). We postulate that the capacity of leaders to reflect on the demands of their working environment—whether the organizational needs (the what) or the persons involved (the how)—and to act accordingly rather than out of habit is associated with their mindfulness. Considering the dearth of studies linking mindfulness and leadership flexibility, for purposes of this study, no hypotheses were formulated in advance regarding the dimensions of mindfulness. Rather, an exploratory follow-up will be conducted.

Methods
Participants
Data were collected from two samples. First, an invitation to complete an online questionnaire was sent to managers at various private and public companies. Their e-mail addresses were obtained by human resource officers in the authors’ network of contacts. A total of 100 questionnaires were completed. The questionnaire was also completed in class by 62 managers enrolled in the executive MBA program at a large North American university. The response rate of the MBA students was 63 percent (62/98). Of them, 12 questionnaires had to be excluded due to missing data. The final sample thus consisted of 150 participants (93 men and 57 women). The average age was 41 years, and 63 percent of the participants were in front-line management positions, 16 percent were in middle management and 21 percent were in senior management positions. The participants worked in diverse sectors of activity: financial sector (44 percent), engineering (22 percent), hospitality (15 percent), sales (7 percent) and other miscellaneous sectors (12 percent).

Measurements
Leadership flexibility. Leadership flexibility was measured using the Leadership Versatility Index—Self-report (LVI) developed by Kaplan and Kaiser (2003). It consists of 48 statements representing two complementary pairs (dualities) of leadership dimensions (self-assertive and directive vs collaborative and supportive; long-term strategy vs short-term execution). The first two scales measure the first duality and are labeled Forceful (e.g. “I assume my authority. I show that I am the one who runs things.”) and Enabling (e.g. “I am participatory. I include others in decision-making.”), while the last two scales measure the second duality and are labeled Strategic (e.g. “I anticipate the need to change direction. I look ahead to the future.”) and Operational (e.g. “I handle the daily problems.”). The respondent must indicate how often each behavior is used, on a scale from −4 (much too little) to +4 (much too much), where the ideal score is 0. To evaluate the balanced use of behaviors
(i.e. flexibility), items related to one dimension are paired with those of the complementary dimension. A flexibility score for each duality, expressed as a percentage, is calculated. High scores on opposing dimensions indicate a balanced leadership style, while low scores indicate an imbalance or a disengaged style. The $\alpha$ coefficients for the four dimensions range between 0.82 and 0.89.

While some authors argue that self-ratings are often biased and lack validity in terms of their relationship to objective performance indicators or even coworker ratings on the same variables (Morgeson et al., 2007), others suggest that self- and observer ratings capture unique information about individuals, and should predict unique variance in work-related outcomes. Indeed, according to socioanalytic theory, self-ratings of personality or behavior assess an individual’s identity, whereas observer ratings of personality capture reputation, both of which are valid perspectives (Colbert et al., 2012). Also, a study by Kaiser and Overfield (2011) showed highly significant correlations between self-reports and ratings by others on the LVI, with coefficients varying between 0.46 and 0.66. These values are much higher than meta-analytic estimates of between-source correlations for ratings of managerial performance, and offer good support for the use of self-reports in the present context (Conway and Lance, 2010).

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness was measured using the short version of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-SF; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011). This questionnaire was chosen because it has shown good validity and good reliability with a population that does not practice meditation and was thus suitable for our sample. The questionnaire includes 24 items rated using a five-point Likert scale, and measures five dimensions: observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonreactivity to inner experience and nonjudging of inner experience. The higher the scores for each dimension on the FFMQ, the higher the respondent’s level of mindfulness. The $\alpha$ coefficient was 0.80 for the global score, and between 0.71 and 0.81 for the five dimensions.

**Data collection procedure**
A cross-sectional correlational design and a nonprobability sampling method were selected to meet the research goals. Considering the characteristics of the leadership flexibility measure, only one measurement timepoint was used, as this approach appears far less prone to common methods bias. Additionally, the consistency motif – the propensity for respondents to try to maintain consistency in their responses to questions (Podsakoff et al., 2003) – should play a minimal role for two reasons. First, the two questionnaires measuring leadership flexibility and mindfulness use completely different scales: the LVI uses a scale ranging from −4 (much too little) to +4 (much too much), whereas the Mindfulness questionnaire use a five-point frequency Likert scale, putting the participants in a different mindset. Second, flexibility scores are second-order variables – created by juxtaposing two variables reflecting complementary or even antagonistic roles – which are less likely to generate common method bias.

**Results**

**Preliminary analyses**
A factor analysis was carried out to confirm the factor structure for the leadership flexibility and mindfulness variables, as the various factors are essential to the interpretation of the results. Because the sample size was inappropriate for confirmatory factor analysis, we used exploratory factor analysis (EFA). We opted to conduct principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The first EFA, conducted on the flexible leadership measure, confirmed the four-factor structure, although the four factors did not all stand out clearly. The four factors of leadership flexibility had factor loadings above 0.30 for all items associated with them, as
recommended by Nunally and Bernstein (1994), suggesting that the construct validity is satisfactory with respect to the convergent validity criterion. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient, which assesses the proportion of common variance in a variable (i.e., commonality), was 0.76, indicating very low diffusion in the pattern of correlations. A second EFA was conducted to determine the factor structure for the mindfulness measure, using principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The five factors of the model developed by Baer et al. (2008) were confirmed (α coefficients between 0.71 and 0.81), and the KMO coefficient was 0.77, indicating that the factors are distinct and reliable.

**Descriptive analyses**

Table I presents descriptive data for the study variables and their underlying dimensions. As shown in Table II, the overall mindfulness score was positively correlated with leadership flexibility ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) and with each of the dualities. Table II also indicate that of the four dimensions of mindfulness, only the dimension observing was not associated with the overall leadership flexibility scores. The dimensions nonjudging and nonreactivity were the only two dimensions of mindfulness significantly associated with the overall leadership flexibility scores and with the subscores for each duality. Also, the dimension acting with awareness does not show separate associations with either of the two dualities, and the ability to describe inner experience shows an association only with the strategic/operational duality.

Three different linear regression analyses were then conducted using dimensions of mindfulness to simultaneously predict overall leadership flexibility, forcing/enabling flexibility, and strategic/operational flexibility. First, an analysis of the correlation coefficients between the demographic variables and leadership flexibility showed that none were significant, so those variables were not included in the hierarchical analysis. We therefore performed linear regression analyses to evaluate whether the dimensions of mindfulness that showed significant correlations contributed uniquely to the prediction of leadership flexibility (see Table III). The results show mitigated relationship between the variables. While the overall mindfulness score explains 9.6 percent of the variation in leadership flexibility, the exploratory regressions revealed that only the nonreactivity dimension significantly predicted overall flexibility ($β = 0.174$, $p < 0.05$), and strategic/operational flexibility ($β = 0.177$, $p < 0.01$). The use of the mindfulness dimensions in the regression analysis did not add additional variance to the model.

**Discussion**

This exploratory study embraced the challenge of addressing two emerging concepts – behavioral flexibility and mindfulness – and trying to refine our understanding of their relationships in a leadership context, a question no other study has focused on to date.
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Leadership flexibility</th>
<th>Forcing/enabling</th>
<th>Strategic/operational</th>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Nonreactivity</th>
<th>Acting with awareness</th>
<th>Observing</th>
<th>Describing</th>
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<td>Forcing/enabling</td>
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<td>0.22**</td>
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<td>Acting with awareness</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
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<td>0.16*</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
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Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01
Our hypotheses concerning the relationships between mindfulness, behavioral flexibility and its two dualities are empirically supported. The results show a positive and significant correlation between the overall mindfulness score as measured by the short version of the FFMQ and leader flexibility. These findings suggest that the more mindful leaders are, the more they are able to exercise a flexible leadership style. Although the observed correlations indicate weak linear relationships, this study constitutes a first step in research on the phenomenon, and presents interesting findings that are worthy of further investigation.

A more detailed examination of the dimensions of mindfulness correlated with leadership flexibility reveals that four of the five dimensions are significantly related to leadership flexibility, whereas only the nonjudging and nonreactivity dimensions were also related to the two dualities. First, the ability to accept our thoughts and feelings, without getting caught up in them (nonreactivity), may partly explain the link between mindfulness and behavioral flexibility. The regression analysis revealed that this dimension had the strongest correlations with overall leadership flexibility and its two dualities. Being less reactive could allow leaders to reduce the use of automatic mental processes, extend their response times, and thus react with greater flexibility (Glomb et al., 2011).

Second, overall flexibility is significantly related to nonjudging and the ability to describe inner experiences. It is possible that not judging, but simply describing their inner experiences allows leaders to be more open to those experiences and understand them better. Indeed, the leader could recognize the subjectivity of their thoughts and take a step back from their reactions to events. This may foster reflection and a response more in line with prioritized needs and goals, which falls under the dimension acting with awareness, also correlated with overall flexibility (Glomb et al., 2011). This last dimension, acting with awareness – which refers to the ability to attend to one’s activities of the moment, in contrast to behaving mechanically while attention is focused elsewhere – does not appear, however, to be related to the two dualities (forcing/enabling and strategic/operational) of leadership flexibility. In this regard, some authors have recently suggested that despite

<table>
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**Notes:** *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$**

Table III. Regression of leadership flexibility and its two dualities
the many benefits associated with being more aware, mindfulness could also be associated with certain potentially negative effects, as yet largely unexamined in the literature (Reb et al., 2015). These authors suggest that being present in the moment could lead to a depletion of self-regulatory resources. The effort required for an individual to remain fully attuned to external and internal phenomena could result in certain resources not being available for other tasks. On the other hand, performing certain routine tasks automatically, on “auto-pilot,” could conserve cognitive resources for more complex tasks. In line with this, Dane (2013) found that automatic rule-following by trial lawyers enhances rather than limits their attentional breadth, which goes counter to the assumption that automatic rule-following would narrow attentional breadth. Instead, these results indicate that trial lawyers “tend to focus the attention freed via rule-following automaticity to the myriad courtroom events surrounding them, as opposed to mentally withdraw[ing] from the situation” (p. 71).

Finally, the last dimension, observing, does not appear to be correlated with leadership flexibility, a result that might be associated with the population studied. Baer et al. (2008) and Gu et al. (2016) made similar observations, according to which the observing dimension of mindfulness is particularly influenced by meditation practices. Gu et al. (2016) underline that “for nonmeditators, observing items (e.g. ‘When I’m walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving’) may be equally likely to reflect neutral attention, or even maladaptive, biased, and pathological forms of attention (e.g. anxious monitoring, hypervigilance to threat), rather than attention characterized by the curious, accepting, and purposeful quality cultivated through mindfulness meditation practice” (p. 793). Therefore, the way in which people with no meditation experience notice their experience may not be related to mindful qualities assessed by the other dimensions. As the study sample did not include a population of meditators, this may explain why no significant link was found between leadership flexibility and the observing dimension. Gu et al. (2016) even proposed a four-factor hierarchical solution, excluding observation, for populations of nonmeditators.

Further studies are needed to explore the relationships between these dimensions and the behavioral flexibility of leaders. In this regard, in the validation study by Baer et al. (2008), all of the dimensions of mindfulness were strongly correlated with each other. As mentioned above, the results of the current study reveal similar correlations. It is thus possible that individual analysis of the dimensions is distorted because the items describing them are not sufficiently discriminant.

Study limitations and future research
This study had certain methodological limitations, chief among which is the use of self-assessment questionnaires. In a future study, it would be important to collect data not only from the participating managers but also from their coworkers, in order to provide more objective measures of their leadership and ensure that the current findings can be generalized. This study represents the first effort to link mindfulness to leadership flexibility. Additional research will be needed to determine whether these relationships affect organizational functioning and performance. Second, our sampling method limits the ability to generalize our findings to a wider population. Use of a probability sampling method in future research would help to confirm the relationships revealed in this paper. In addition, due to the correlational nature of this study, causal relationships among the variables cannot be inferred. It would thus be pertinent to evaluate the same variables using a pre-post design with a control group to determine whether any causal relationships exist. Finally, our results might have been affected by common method bias, although the measure for leadership flexibility does not appear prone to this methodological limitation. Separate measurements for the two variables might help avoid this possible bias.
Practical implications
Despite some limitations, this study has several practical implications. First, our results suggest that by developing mindfulness, managers will be better able to adapt their leadership style to the demands of different situations. To that end, interventions based on mindfulness are worthwhile options for use within organizations, particularly in the context of leadership development programs. Increasingly popular over the last ten years (Marturano, 2014), programs intended to foster the development of mindfulness in the workplace use training and coaching to develop specific skills (e.g. attention, clarity, empathy) and mindful leadership. On the other hand, programs intended specifically for managers have been the subject of very few studies, so our scientific understanding of them is still quite limited. Such programs remain an interesting avenue for future research, to ensure the quality of the proposed interventions and document their effects.

References
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**Further reading**


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