

The Negative Impact of Mindfulness on Creativity: An Experimental Test

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Abstract : Defined as receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience, mindfulness has grown in popularity over the past 30 years to become a trendy buzzword in business media, which regularly reports on its organizational benefits. Mindfulness would enhance or impede creative thinking depending on the type of meditation. Specifically, focused-attention meditation (focusing attention on one object instead of being open to perceive and observe any sensation or thought) would not be or negatively correlated to creativity. This research explores whether mood, in its two dimensions (i.e., hedonic tone, activation level), could mediate this potentially negative effect. The rationale is that focused-attention meditation is likely to improve hedonic tone but, in the meantime, damage activation level, resulting in opposite effects on creativity through the mediation effect of creative self-efficacy, i.e., the belief that one can perform successfully in an ideation setting. To test this conceptual model, a survey was administered to 97 subjects (53% women, mean age: 25 years), randomly assigned to three conditions (a 10-minute focused-attention meditation session vs. a 10-minute psychometric tests session vs. a control condition) and asked to participate in the egg creative task. Creativity was measured in terms of fluency, expansivity, and originality, the other variables using existing scales: hedonic tone (e.g., joyful, happy), activation level (e.g., passive, sluggish), creative self-efficacy (e.g., 'I felt confident in my ability to do the task effectively') and self-perceived creativity (e.g., 'I have lots of original ideas'). The chains of mediation were tested using PROCESS macro (model 6) and controlled for subjects' gender, age, and self-perceived creativity. Comparing the mindfulness and the control conditions, no difference appeared in terms of creativity, nor any mediation chain by hedonic tone. However, subjects who participated in the meditation session felt less active than those in the control condition, which decreased their creative self-efficacy, and creativity (whatever the indicator considered). Comparing the mindfulness and the psychometric tests conditions, analyses showed that creativity was higher in the psychometric tests condition. As previously, no mediation chain appeared by hedonic tone. However, subjects who participated in the meditation session felt less active than those in the psychometric tests condition, which decreased their creative self-efficacy, and creativity. These findings confirm that focused-attention meditation does not enhance creativity. They demonstrate an emotional underlying mechanism based on activation level and suggest that both positive and active mood states have the potential to enhance creativity through creative self-efficacy. In the end, they should discourage organizations from trying to nudge creativity using mindfulness ad hoc devices.

Keywords : creativity, mindfulness, creative self-efficacy, experiment

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