Lasse Oksanen

Mindfulness and well-being

Mindfulness practice as a personal well-being related resource

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School of Marketing and Communication
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ABSTRACT:

During the last two decades mindfulness has been gaining significant interest in organizational research. Mindfulness-related tools are also being introduced globally by corporate giants such as Google and IBM as a work-related means to enhance productivity and to increase employees' stress-resiliency, an important issue at times of a global pandemic causing notable stress. However, the long-term impacts that practicing mindfulness may have on personal well-being, with an emphasis on two important well-being related components – experienced positive emotions and stress – have not received extensive academic attention.

By reviewing existing literature and analyzing 26 detailed personal narratives which describe individuals' personal journeys into mindfulness that were found online on Quora.com, this study aims to explore and gather evidence on the long-term effects of mindfulness on individual well-being by analyzing how mindfulness affects the personal experience of stress and positive emotions. The chosen methodology was a qualitative thematic analysis of narratives.

This study provides implications that there is likely to be a connection with long-term practice of mindfulness and experiencing positive well-being. This is due to a heightened personal ability to focus on experiencing more frequent positive emotions and having less detrimental stress as one becomes more aware of personal emotions and their causes. Moreover, this elevated personal awareness may lead to finding new ways of relating to difficult situations and other people with indications that relationships may improve as well. Moreover, the data showed that mindfulness practice may be adopted when a person is facing a personal hardship such as declined well-being.

The results support existing literature on mindfulness and contribute to it. They seem to indicate that when tailored to meet individual needs mindfulness can be a viable and functional organizational tool for fostering employees' well-being. The results are however not generalizable due to study limitations and should be regarded as suggestions. Additional long-term research could scrutinize the long-term effects that practicing mindfulness can have by focusing on new technologies such as smartphone applications or mindfulness' effectiveness between different cultures.

TIIVISTELMÄ:

Kiinnostus mindfulnessia (tietoisuustaidot) kohtaan organisaatiotutkimuksessa on kasvanut huomattavasti kahden viime vuosikymmenen aikana. Isot kansainväliset yhtiöt, kuten Google ja IBM, ovat ottaneet käyttöön mindfulnessin sovellutuksia tehostaakseen työtehokkuutta ja parantaakseen työntekijöiden stressinsietokykyä. Tämä on merkittävä asia globaalin pandemian aiheuttaessa lisääntynyttä stressiä. Pitkäkestoisen mindfulness-harjoittelun vaikutuksia henkilökohtaiseen hyvinvointiin ei kuitenkaan ole tutkittu kattavasti, varsinkaan kahden tärkeän hyvinvointiin vaikuttavan perustavanlaatuisen asian, positiivisten tunteiden ja henkilökohtaisen stressikokemuksen, osalta.

Aiempaa kirjallisuutta tarkastelemalla ja analysoimalla Quora.com-sivustolta kerättyjä 26 narratiivia, jotka kuvailevat ihmisten omakohtaisia kokemuksia heidän mindfulness-taipaleeltaan, tämä pro gradu -tutkielma pyrkii tarkastelemaan ja keräämään aineistoa mindfulnessin vaikutuksesta yksilön hyvinvointiin selvittämällä, miten mindfulness vaikuttaa henkilökohtaiseen stressin ja positiivisten tunteiden kokemukseen. Valittu metodologia on laadullinen narratiivien analyysi.

Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat siihen, että pidempiaikaisella mindfulnessin harjoittamisella on yhteys positiivisen hyvinvoinnin kokemukseen. Tämä vaikuttaisi johtuvan harjoituksen myötä vahvistuneesta kyvystä kokea positiivisia tunteita useammin ja haitalliseksi koettua stressiä harvemmin. Tämä johtuu siitä, että mindfulnessin harjoittaja tulee tietoisemmaksi omasta tunne-elämästään ja eri tunteiden syistä. Lisäksi kasvanut tietoisuus omista kokemuksista voi johtaa uusiin tapoihin suhtautua haastaviin tilanteisiin ja toisiin ihmisiin. Tämä voi vaikuttaa myös ihmissuhteisiin positiivisesti. Mindfulness-harjoittelu saatetaan myös aloittaa vaikeassa henkilökohtaisessa tilanteessa, kuten terveysongelmien yhteydessä.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset tukevat olemassa olevaa aihepiiriä käsittelevää kirjallisuutta ja viittaavat siihen, että kun mindfulness-harjoittelu räätälöidään vastaamaan yksilön henkilökohtaisia tarpeita, se voi olla käytännöllinen työhyvinvointia parantava työkalu myös yritysmaailmassa. Tuloksia tulisi kuitenkin pitää suuntaa antavina, eikä niitä tulisi yleistää tämän tutkimuksen rajoitteiden takia. Tulevaisuuden mindfulnessia koskeva tutkimus voisikin tarkastella tarkemmin sen pitkäaikaisia vaikutuksia hyvinvointiin keskittymällä esimerkiksi uusiin teknologioihin, kuten mindfulness-applikaatioihin, tai yleisluontoisten työhön keskittyvien mindfulness-ohjelmien tehokkuuden arviointiin eri kulttuurien välillä.

AVAINSANAT: mindfulness, hyvinvointi, terveys, stressi, positiiviset tunteet, omakohtaiset narratiivit

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1   Introduction

This chapter introduces the main topics of this thesis which are mindfulness, positive emotions, stress, and well-being in the context of the existing literature and other available information and shows the aims of this master's thesis along with the research question. Moreover, the delimitations and practical decisions relevant for this study as well as the key concepts and the overall structure are portrayed.

1.1   Background for the study

The nature of work is changing. Many aspects of work have become increasingly interconnected which has resulted in a larger availability of resources such as digital information. With the large quantity of available information employees' minds can become disorganized. Moreover, at the same time it is expected of employees to be faster. Other changes are related to working locations such as distant work, which result in both more freedom and increased responsibility to the individual. These transformations can lead to employees stressing both psychologically and physically which is associated with reductions in important well-being related attributes, for instance how productive and healthy one is and how meaningful they perceive their life and relationships to be. (Heydenfeldt et al., 2011; Manka & Manka, 2016: 25, 69)

Consequently, both employers and employees are required to be more skillful, for instance, in leading themselves, and tending to one's own well-being has grown in importance. (Heydenfeldt et al., 2011, Manka & Manka, 2016: 73) According to Davis (2019) the concept of well-being has many definitions but it could be generalized to mean an individual's personal perception of "feeling well" and relating positively to their own life, with positive health. Thus, a need has been recognized by businesses to empower employees and improve their well-being (Pradhan et al. 2017). One means for improving workplace well-being and presenting employees with psychological resources is *mindfulness*, an observation practice originating from Buddhism adapted to suit modern needs. (de Bruin et al., 2020, Good et al., 2016). According to Cambridge Dictionary

(2020b) mindfulness is "the practice of being aware of your body, mind, and feelings in the present moment, thought to create a feeling of calm". Mindfulness can also be perceived as a state which can be cultivated through practicing awareness techniques such as mindfulness meditation or other types of mindfulness exercises (Zarbock et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

During the last ten years mindfulness-related advantages such as increased productivity have been widely recognized and the corporate world has seen a new trend: mindfulness programs introduced in companies around the globe. Many multinational companies (MNC) such as Google, IBM, Intel, and Ford Motor have been training their staff in mindfulness at work. Moreover, the concept has been applied in "…in prisons, schools and in private and public-sector organizations all over the world." (de Bruin et al., 2020; Goodman-Bhyat, 2016: 8-10; Purser, 2018) Even military instances, including the US Army, The British Royal Navy, and The New Zealand Defence Force have started training their personnel in mindfulness (Richtel, 2019). In addition, celebrities such as NBA superstar LeBron James have also been endorsing mindfulness (Ogus, 2019).

Popular publication instances such as Forbes (2020) and Harvard Business Review (2020) have multiple published articles on mindfulness. Additionally, mindfulness has grown to be a valuable industry. In the United States alone it is worth over \$1 billion. (Brown University, 2020) This industry encompasses for example training courses and mindfulness applications such as Calm and Headspace which can be downloaded instantaneously, making the practicing tools quickly and widely available. (Business Insider India, 2020). Calm mindfulness application has even been a subject to newer research (Clare & Draper, 2020).

The number of research publications on mindfulness has also increased greatly. For instance journal articles have increased from 10 publications per year in 2000 to over 1200 separate academic contributions in 2019 (AMRA, 2020). This is signaling an upsurge in

the academic interest on the topic. The growth curve of the articles be seen in Figure 1 below.

"MINDFULNESS" JOURNAL ARTICLES PUBLISHED BY YEAR: 1980-2019
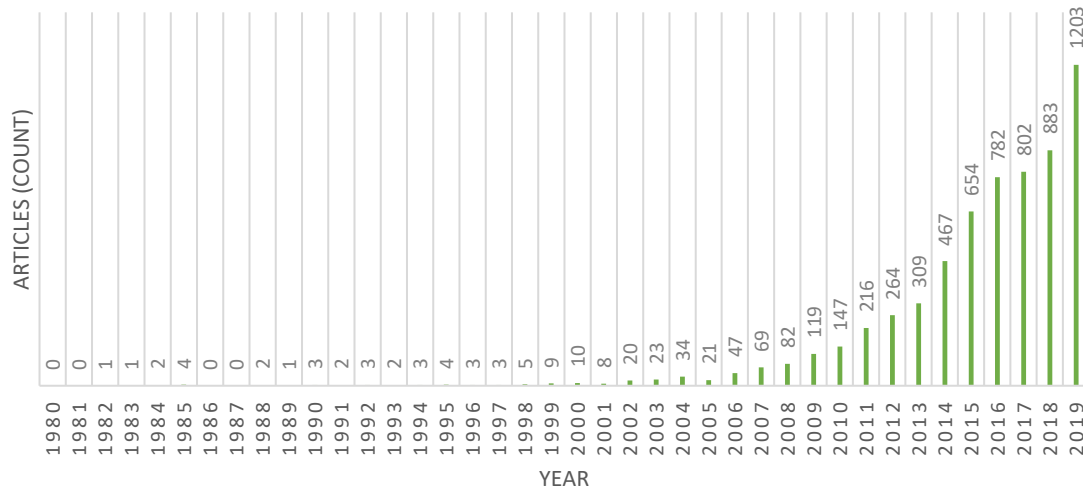
Figure 1 "Mindfulness" journal articles published by year: 1980-2019 (AMRA, 2020)

As can be seen in Figure 1 above mindfulness is still relatively new in the academic context, with the number of journal articles growing substantially only in the last two decades. However, the study on mindfulness is visible in organizational research and has been studied in many different scientific disciplines such as psychology and management. In organizational, corporate, and business contexts mindfulness has been explored by researchers, such as Bahl et al. (2016), Hülsheger et al.(2013), Purser (2018), Vogus and Sutcliffe (2012), Vu and Gill (2018), and Wihuri (2014). Yet, according to Zivnuska et al. (2016) the concept of mindfulness has indeed received the attention of many an academic discipline but its effect on employees requires more investigation.

Mindfulness and well-being are well-connected in academic literature. The research material, academic articles, books and commercial articles on both mindfulness and well-being are plentiful. There are also new meta-analyses (e.g. Eby et al., 2019) which

present a comprehensive basis for the literature review of this master's thesis. In addition, there is even a scientific mindfulness publication solely dedicated to new important findings. The publication features numerous articles assessing and describing the effects of mindfulness on work well-being in various fields of work (e.g. Bailey et al., 2020; Vonderlin et al., 2020). Moreover, studying positive emotions, which is an important part of well-being, has also gained academic interest with the emergence of positive psychology which focuses on positive health, in which positive emotions can be considered as a foundational element and precursor to well-being (Seligman, 2012).

Some benefits that have been found related to mindfulness practice include more satisfied, productive, and focused employees which have increased the popularity of workplace mindfulness. (Goodman-Bhyat, 2016: 10; Hülsheger et al., 2013; Zivnuska et al., 2016). The practice of mindfulness seems to provide a viable approach towards improving well-being by enhancing individual's ability to promote their health by increasing personal awareness of stressors for instance. In addition, mindfulness can act as means for practitioners to be able to use their inner resources such as focus or a feeling of purpose to enjoy their lives more. The feeling of purpose, which is a positive emotion, can provide a sense that the individual is capable of improving their life situation which may provide persons with a sense of control. (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2019). However, mindfulness seems to have different meanings depending on the person (Hülsheger et al., 2013).

While the aims for work-related introductions to mindfulness can be positive: for example to enhance employee resiliency to stress and anxiety, ameliorate well-being, and increase compassion (Goodman-Bhyat, 2016: 10, 15), there are also critics of corporate mindfulness practices. The criticisms include the notions that in some cases mindfulness is introduced at work simply as a means to achieve a state of heightened productivity within the company and to inhibit employees from being vocal about the negative aspects of their work by instigating that they should simply accept the situation they are in. (Kersemaekers et al., 2018)

In this case little attention is centered on what the individual could gain in the process from the viewpoint of their personal well-being and mindfulness may be used as a quick fix for deeper organizational problems. Furthermore, mindfulness ought to be tailored to meet individual needs and not be used as a generalized system to boost efficiency which can lead to great confusion at work. (Vu & Gill, 2018) Additionally, it is possible that in some cases mindfulness can be detrimental. This can happen if the basics are not explained and learned clearly. (Clarke & Draper, 2020) Thus, there are some contradicting opinions about the benefits of mindfulness.

1.2   Purpose of the study

The concrete corporate reasons for implementing mindfulness seem to be ambiguous – is it being used simply to generate faster employees or actually provide them with skills to foster well-being? According to a meta-analysis conducted by Good et al. (2016) mindfulness has notable potential to benefit workplace well-being and can be implemented in a cost-effective way. Roche et al. (2020) argue that while mindfulness is a solution with many benefits it can also be a challenge to include it in organizational cultures.

Clarke and Draper (2020) even claim that practicing mindfulness may cause harm in those with greater levels of well-being because they may not have any need to improve their well-being. The authors state, however, that intermittently practicing may be the best solution with positive outcomes, instead of everyday practicing (Clarke & Draper, 2020). Hence, it is important to study what individual practitioners of mindfulness perceive the outcomes of practicing mindfulness to be.

Mindfulness and its connection and possible mediating effect on employee well-being by decreasing stress and enhancing positive emotions, seem not to have been researched extensively. That is why this study sets out to explore that connection. The existing studies, which analyze positive emotions, mindfulness and well-being and provide a basis for the literature review. For instance, in a study of a large MNC Unilever, de Bruin

et al. (2020) discovered results in favor of mindfulness as it was found to reduce employee stress.

Fredrickson (1998) states that emotions are connected to well-being and positive emotions can be linked to better well-being. However, the scholarly focus on well-being has been aimed towards studying negative emotions, with little emphasis on the positive ones (Smith et al., 2014) which is why the positive emotions could be researched further to understand their functioning and relation to mindfulness and well-being. In addition, according to (Vich, 2015) evaluating the effects that mindfulness has on stress could be studied further. Thus, the purpose of this study is to not only to study how a mindfulness practice may be linked to stress reduction but also how it impacts well-being through experienced stress and positive emotions. In addition, since prolonged stress is a major organizational issue (Shah et al., 2020), and there are indications that stress can be addressed with mindfulness (de Bruin et al., 2020; Roeser et al., 2013), it is important to study this connection further.

Stress is an urgent issue even on a more general level. Since December 2019, there seems to have been an increase in unhealthy stress levels all over the world due to the coronavirus outbreak (Shah et al., 2020) making stress a major work and life related disadvantage. For instance, in a Statista survey, 31% of Peruvian respondents (N=410) claimed to be highly stressed about the virus (Statista, 2020a). Moreover, changes to respond to the circumstances, such as modifications made into traditional working styles (e.g. transferring work online) could mean greater stress levels in the corporate world as well. (Wang et al., 2020; Purser, 2018).

Thus, it could be argued that there is an increasing need for methods to cope with stress globally. Hence, it is important to research the ways in which stress of this magnitude could be addressed. Could people foster well-being with mindfulness and thus alleviate stress to flourish at work? Since an increasing number of global firms are introducing

mindfulness to their workplace (Purser, 2018) it is important to investigate how mindfulness could function as a well-being related personal resource.

1.3   Aim and research question

Much of the academic proof supporting mindfulness has been identified in clinical and work settings mainly using surveys (Baas et al., 2020; Vonderlin et al., 2020). Since surveys have been a significant method in gathering mindfulness-related data, this study will assume a different approach by using personal narratives as data. This is to illuminate the more personal aspects that mindfulness could have for well-being and positive emotions from the unique viewpoint of individuals as told by themselves. This approach allows investigating how people with formal training or self-trained in the practice of mindfulness perceive the outcomes of the practice.

Hence a research gap concerning individual persons such as employees and their personal experiences of mindfulness practices in relation to their experienced stress, and positive emotions as the components of their well-being can be addressed. Thus, it can be investigated what the perceived outcomes of the practice are in cases in which the adoption of a mindfulness practice comes from personal will and not necessarily from a work setting. This appears to be a new viewpoint to the topic which has not been researched before.

To better understand mindfulness practices and the well-being related outcomes, it is essential to present the existing theory of mindfulness and well-being, the latter divided into positive emotions and stress. This means familiarizing the reader with the concepts, techniques, and the current research perspectives. It is also important to examine the ways in which mindfulness relates to work as this study sets out to provide managerial implications for mindfulness practices in relation to fostering well-being and a significant amount of the literature is linked to work (e.g. Roche et al., 2020). Moreover, it seems necessary to study how mindfulness can be practiced in order to understand what it is.

Thus, the research question is:

"How does the practice of mindfulness affect personal well-being by impacting the experience of stress and positive emotions?"

The research question will be answered by using simple objectives related to theory and methodology. These aspects clarify the outline and layout on how the research progresses and how the research question will be answered. That is why the following objectives have been set for this master's thesis:

1. Define mindfulness, and employee well-being. Well-being is divided into stress, and positive emotions. This is to understand the concepts and create a theoretical frame based on relevant theories to understand these three concepts and their relationship to one another.
2. Collect data, analyze it, and reflect it with the theory.
3. Provide managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

1.4 Delimitations and practical decisions

This thesis will focus on individuals and their experience of mindfulness to investigate the personal aspects of how a mindfulness practice can impact well-being. Thus, more insight can be gained on how mindfulness may act as a well-being related personal asset. Moreover, mindfulness' connection to experienced stress, and positive emotions can this way be explored more in depth.

Hence, this paper will not focus on assessing mindful organizations, spiritual features of meditation, mindfulness applications, or mindfulness training. Mindfulness based interventions such as MBSR and MBCT will be used to portray the main features of mindfulness practice from the academic perspective. The theory chosen for this thesis in order to understand how mindfulness practice works is Monitor and Acceptance Theory (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017).

Seligman's (2012) *PERMA theory* and Fredrickson's (1998) *Broaden-and-build model* are among the foundational theories related to positive psychology explaining well-being. Broaden-and-build model has been chosen because it has been developed to understand the theoretical connection between mindfulness and positive emotions (Fredrickson et al., 2008). The main attributes of well-being chosen for the purposes of this research are the concepts of stress and positive emotions. In addition, to understand what well-being can be from a personal perspective, health, often regarded as synonymous to, or a part of well-being, is in this study assessed from the perspectives of mental and physical health. These two seem among the aspects of well-being that mindfulness could influence.

A practical decision was made to refer to the persons whose narratives were used as data by implementing the gender-neutral pronoun "they". This is because the genders of the persons could only be assumed since the data was secondary, and the genders were irrelevant for this study. This decision is visible especially in chapters five and six.

1.5   Key concepts

Emotion is "a conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020). Hence, *positive emotions* are mental reactions and feelings that the individual perceives as positive (Fredrickson, 1998).

Mindfulness is being in the current moment, focusing on acceptance and consciously noticing whatever is happening. It can be either a *trait*, naturally occurring in persons, a *state* in which the present is experienced fully, or a *practice* in which individuals deliberately bring their focus to the present. (Roche et al., 2020)

Positive psychology is "a field of psychological theory and research that focuses on the psychological states (e.g., contentment, joy), individual traits or character strengths (e.g.,

intimacy, integrity, altruism, wisdom), and social institutions that enhance subjective well-being and make life most worth living." (American Psychological Association, 2020a)

Stress can be "a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2021).

Well-being is related to a person being healthy, happy, and prosperous. It could mean a person is being mentally healthy, satisfied with life and sensing there is a purpose for their life. Personal stress management is a part of this well-being. The concept of well-being is understood differently in different fields of research. (Davis, 2019)

1.6   Structure of the study

Chapter 2 starts the first part of the literature review by addressing the theoretical background for *mindfulness*. The reader is offered basic information about the topic and more in-depth ideas about mindfulness' relation to work from previous studies and it is explained what *mindfulness* is as a practice. Monitor and Acceptance theory will be introduced to understand the mechanisms in which mindfulness seems to function.

Chapter 3 continues the literature review and discusses *well-being, stress,* and *positive emotions* and the connections between these concepts. Broaden-and-build model will be discussed along with PERMA theory to understand what constitutes well-being and what the role of positive emotions can be for personal well-being. This chapter concludes in a summary of the theory to connect its implications into a coherent whole.

Chapter 4 clarifies the methodology. Narrative research, data collection, and sample selection will be explained to ensure the study is more traceable and has transparency. Moreover, reliability and validity in the context of this study will be explained. In addition, it will be examined how it is possible to meet relevant ethical standards in this master's thesis.

Chapter 5 delivers and explains empirical findings by describing what the key themes and experiences have been as interpreted from the data with thematic analysis of narratives.

Chapter 6 focuses on analyzing and evaluating the findings and comparing them to the key points of theory on mindfulness and well-being found in chapters 2 and 3. In addition, he cultural implications from the findings of mindfulness in relation to culture will also be discussed.

Chapter 7 displays the conclusions, managerial implications, study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2 Mindfulness

This chapter discusses the theory on mindfulness by explaining how mindfulness can be categorized, shows what mindfulness can mean in the work context and what are some of the documented outcomes for mindfulness found in previous research. Moreover, to provide a comprehensive view on the issue, critique towards work-related mindfulness is provided. The chapter concludes in an explanation of Monitor and Acceptance Theory (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017) which has been developed to comprehend the fundamental mechanics of the practice.

2.1 The origins and definition of mindfulness

In a Harvard Business Review article, *mindfulness* is defined as: "the awareness of events and potentialities within an environment." (Achor & Gielan, 2015) Mindfulness could also be portrayed as a nonjudgmental state of awareness of both negative and positive events that a person experiences. These events can refer to either something internal, for instance thoughts and emotions, or outer experiences, an example of which could be observed laughter at work. (Hülsheger et al., 2013)

Mindfulness has originally been viewed as a contemplative practice with an aim of sensing the interconnectedness of all beings. It is closely related to Buddhism and other Eastern philosophies and religions. In addition, mindfulness is linked to the practice of meditation. This practice could be perceived as an ongoing process extending over long periods of time, sometimes a lifetime. In the process the person practicing becomes conscious of the possibility of observing and altering one's psychical tendencies to react to internal conditions (e.g., emotions) and external conditions (e.g., room temperature). In modern scientific discussion it is often examined how mindfulness meditation may provide a person with a way to realize the connections between personal internal and external conditions, how they normally would react, and release judgement toward these conditions. (Hülsheger et al., 2013; Purser, 2018; Tuleja, 2014).

The founder of the term mindfulness and the person who developed it into a scholarly topic in the extent that it is today, is Jon Kabat-Zinn (1982). Kabat-Zinn, the developer of the first mindfulness intervention program (MBSR) has also provided much of the definitions regarding mindfulness to research in psychology (Goodman-Bhyat, 2016: 9). Kabat-Zinn (1982) states that mindfulness can affect behavior and attitudes. Moreover, based on the findings of his 1982 study, the author also suggests that mindfulness can help individuals be aware of their stress and provides viable methods of coping with that stress. (Kabat-Zinn, 1982)

According to Kabat-Zinn (2013) meditation is an important part of mindfulness, and it can be a source for the individual with which mindfulness can be cultivated long-term. Experiencing the state of mindfulness through exercises is what creates the basis for the practice. Furthermore, Kabat-Zinn (2013) claims that with mindfulness one is able to live a more fulfilling life thus suggesting of a link between mindfulness and well-being. The author compares developing mindfulness to muscular training, but in practicing mindfulness the mind is what is being trained and consistency leads to results. Consequently, the suggestion is that the more one practices the more mindfulness is enhanced as a personal asset and skill. (Kabat-Zinn, 2013)

According to Roche et al. (2020) mindfulness can be taught and trained therefore making it a potential work-related stress management tool. However, it can be a challenge to incorporate it as part of organizational activities. For instance, people might have the tendency not to be in the "here and now" at work or there might be resistance towards the practice. (Roche et al., 2020)

2.2   Categorizing mindfulness

Mindfulness can be understood differently by top management and subordinates (Ray et al., 2011). In addition, Van Dam et al. (2018) state that it is crucial to define what aspect of mindfulness is being investigated in any research. This is due to potential confusion which may arise if mindfulness is used as an "umbrella rubric" instead of thorough

clarification and specification. (Van Dam et al., 2018) In this master's thesis the focus is on the practice of mindfulness. Measuring and perceiving mindfulness can happen at minimum in four ways, as a: (1) "state" which is a personal aspect that may constantly change; (2) "trait", viewed as a rather personal characteristic; (3) practice (e.g. daily sitting meditation or a body scan); and (4) "formalised training intervention" which means introducing mindfulness to the workplace. (Roche et al., 2020) These categorizations and their explanations can be seen in the following Table 1.

(1) A momentary state (differing day to day, and even moment to moment)	(2) A dispositional trait (viewed as a more fixed or stable quality)
(3) A period of practice in daily life (meditation)	(4) A formalised training intervention (the practice is systematically introduced to the workplace)

Table 1 Four different ways of categorizing mindfulness (adapted from Roche et al., 2020; italics added)

In addition, mindfulness practices can be further divided into formal and informal types. When one practices formally, the practice has a certain structure and could happen at a certain moment each day. On the other hand, informal practice is about transferring the learnt techniques of formal practice to other areas of life, for example to daily activities such as dusting one's living premises and paying close attention to the task. (Jazaieri & Shapiro, 2017) Jazaieri and Shapiro (2017) state that both types of practice can be beneficial as they may promote synergy between each other thus strengthening the individual's ability to be mindful.

2.3   Mindfulness at work, techniques, and typical outcomes

Mindfulness and meditation can be brought to the workplace for instance with mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) (Van Dam et al., 2018) or mindfulness-based programs (MBPs) (Vonderlin et al., 2020). These terms seem to be used somewhat interchangeably, though it appears that MBIs can be slightly shorter in their duration whilst MBPs include

more comprehensive training (Roche et al., 2020). Corporate MBPs mean organizations coordinated efforts to facilitate mindfulness at work (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012).

The most researched intervention programs are called "Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)". Especially MBSR and its adaptations have been researched the most of these three in clinical psychology (Roche et al., 2020). It is possible that individuals continue their practice at home after these programs end at work, and some of the exercises are intended to be done in non-working hours (Parsons et al., 2017).

Mindfulness programs and interventions often constitute of specific mindfulness exercises introduced to the workplace in a course-like manner over an extended period of time, for instance eight weeks for MBSR. One common exercise is the sitting meditation which is a formal practice. In this exercise one may sit on a cushion, eyes shut, and spine erect. The practice can start by the practitioner noticing their breath. Observing the breath does not mean controlling it – rather, the one practicing mindfulness this way watches their breathing and as thoughts arise notices them and brings attention back to the sensations of breathing. With time, this way of meditating can have the positive effect of increased attentiveness in other areas of life such as in interpersonal relationships. In addition, the practice can result in personal realizations and skills such as controlling one's thoughts to some extent. (Hafenbrack, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Roche et al., 2020)

Some other basic exercises included in the programs include *body scans,* in which the individual progressively scans different parts of the body. This can help the person in attuning to bodily sensations and emotions or even boost their physical health as it can activate the parasympathetic nervous system as the body relaxes. What is more, as a person becomes more aware of their emotions, they can more easily describe them. This makes it possible to understand how one is feeling and tell others about it. (Ditto et al., 2006; Dreeben et al., 2013)

Another common exercise is called *loving kindness meditation* (LKM) which is about: "a mental state of unconditional kind attitude toward all beings." In the practice, one cultivates positive wishes to others in their mind and body while in meditation similarly to sitting meditation. LKM has been shown to have benefits for mental health. Additionally, LKM may enable its practitioners to experience more positive emotions and improve their mental health also in that way. (Fredrickson et al., 2008; Totzeck et al., 2020: 1624)

According to Hyland, Lee and Mills (2015) and de Bruin et al. (2020) practicing mindfulness can result in psychological and physiological benefits. The practice can decrease stress levels, ameliorate well-being, and the ability to be functional at work. Thus, both individuals and the organization can benefit. (de Bruin et al., 2020; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). Additionally, mindfulness may boost focus, improve productivity and the working atmosphere. The potential for reducing stress is notable as stress is affecting millions of employees around the globe. (Kersemaekers et al., 2018; Purser, 2018).

Tuleja (2014) claims that mindfulness is also important because being mindful is key in developing successful globally operating leaders and employees. From an individual's perspective, related to human interaction, a mindful person may have high motivation to engage in discourse with others, and potentially knows how to evaluate different situations and people's behavior. Thus, the individual may also be able to react in a more preferable way to difficult situations. Moreover, it is also likely that a mindful person is able to be aware of their own emotions, thinking, and reactions. What is more, being mindful also provides the opportunity to stop having a "fixed mindset" meaning the person can find new ways of relating to things and reacting. An example could be interacting more genuinely with people who seem different. (Tuleja, 2014)

Significantly, a mindful person is more able to confront a difficult situation and approach these situations with ease. Mindfulness can also help people focus on one thing at a time, thus improving productivity, and release the striving to multitask, which means simultaneously engaging in multiple tasks at once and can in the long-term increase unhealthy

stress. (Wihuri, 2014: 17, 21). This multitasking is according to Garlough (2018) possible for only 2% percent of people. This indicates that it is possible that people who are attempting to multitask such as responding to e-mail and completing other tasks simultaneously, likely to be a significant number of those in working life today, are causing themselves greater unnecessary stress and even focus problems by doing so. Therefore, being aware of the present and individually focusing on assignments can be beneficial also for the employee's well-being. (Garlough, 2018)

Importantly, mindfulness' effects on well-being can be such that manifest in the long-term. Therefore, all benefits cannot be completely determined after interventions that often last for weeks. Thus, corporate mindfulness ought not to be implemented as a short-term solution to temporally fix more profound problems of the organization such as a toxic work culture. Additionally, it is crucial that mindfulness' implementation is carefully assessed in each work-context before programs or interventions are launched. For instance, there may be little benefit to employee well-being with any mindfulness intervention, if employees already feel burdened with work and/or too much is required of them, and then a mindfulness training is also required. In addition, it is important, that the involved mindfulness instructors are trained in training mindfulness so that their output is as clear as possible. (Roche et al., 2020; Schanche et al., 2020)

Improved well-being can be the outcome of mindfulness when it is practiced by the individual. When well-being is experienced, it may lead to benefits in the long-term such as those of better cognition and positive health (Seligman, 2012). Mellor et al. (2016) found employee well-being to be enhanced after a mindfulness training period, as did Schanche et al. (2020). Since there are indications that mindfulness can enhance how people think, feel and behave, changes in these life aspects can translate into other concrete work-related benefits which have not been researched or identified. Simultaneously there may be less feeling of burnout as a result of mindfulness training. Moreover, work performance, job-related relationships and work engagement can very likely be improved with mindfulness. (Hülsheger et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2019; Roche et al., 2020)

Emotional resources can also be developed with mindfulness. These include for instance higher job satisfaction, which can be connected to the level of commitment to practicing mindfulness, especially with people with emotionally demanding work (Lee et al., 2019; Roche et al., 2020). Some other instigations of the benefits of workplace mindfulness include employees being less emotionally exhausted meaning less symptoms of burning out. (Hülsheger et al., 2013) It also appears to be so, that mindfulness can act as a means for achieving a personal emotional balance and it is possible that with practice, uncontrolled emotional reactions, such as angry bursts toward others, can stop altogether. This could strengthen relationships. Ultimately, all of these favorable changes in personal emotional experiences can contribute to employee well-being. (Good et al., 2016; Hafenbrack, 2017; Uusberg et al., 2016)

So how could mindfulness affect the physical aspects in people? It is possible that practicing mindfulness can alter the brain, changing the ways in which parts of the brain function in unison, thus promoting better cognitive functioning. Moreover, other possible physical benefits include reduced bodily inflammation, and slowed aging. Thus, it is hinted that employees could stay longer in work-life. (Good et al., 2016; Roche et al., 2020) Other physiological benefits are related to responding to stress in new ways. Importantly, the effect that mindfulness can have on the individual is that less stress hormones may be produced by the body when a person is more present. However, different types of meditation appear to have different effects on physical stress-reduction. In general the levels of stress hormones appear to have a tendency to decrease with the practice of meditation. (Pascoe et al., 2017)

Mindfulness practices can also act as a strategy that an individual can use to cope with the feeling of anxiety, often interconnected to stress. As a result, people can be more able and willing to approach situations which they would otherwise avoid. Thus, they may show more acceptance of their personal situation and they may become more eager to deploy necessary measures to improve their situation. Well-being can also be enhanced by identifying less often with negative thoughts which can be causes for stress.

Additionally, by practicing mindfulness uncomfortable body sensations may diminish, and a more general attitude of calm can start to be present in daily life. (Schanche et al., 2020)

2.4   Monitor and Acceptance Theory

The theory seeking to explain how mindfulness works which was chosen for this master's thesis is *Monitor and Acceptance Theory* (MAT) created by Lindsay and Creswell (2017). According to this theory, what happens when practicing mindfulness concerns the individual skill to monitor one's attention and accept that which is happening. This notion of mindfulness' division into two attention and acceptance is similar to the ideas of Kabat-Zinn (1982) and his definition of mindfulness. In that definition, one of the main components of mindfulness is attention and the idea of being "non-judgmental" towards experiences is very similar to what acceptance is described to be in MAT. (Kabat-Zinn, 1982)

MAT indicates that one can either be aware of the moment and/or accept it. In monitoring, personal awareness is on the current sense-related perceptions or whatever it is that is being experienced, such as breathing. This practice alone can have positive outcomes, for instance by experiences becoming livelier as they are experienced more in-depth. In addition, by also accepting experiences as they arise by being open and receptive may result in increased ability to witness more personal positivity. All experiences may be perceived positively, negatively, or neutrally but the key is allowing all experiences as they appear. (Lindsay et al., 2018; Lindsay & Creswell, 2017) If one solely observes, it is possible that they experience more stress, for instance when faced with negative cues such as worrying. This is because they become more aware of a larger number of negative aspects in their experience. (Hoffmann & Geisler, 2020; Lindsay & Creswell, 2017)

Mneimne et al. (2019) have further suggestions to the theory. These include that when one is initially trained in mindfulness and thus able to monitor their focus, mental health can be improved. The reason for this is heightened awareness of personal judgements and negative thoughts. This can mean that the person thinks mostly negative thoughts

and also observes and relates mostly to the negative aspects of their life, and thus reacts in unwanted ways. Thus, it is important to train accepting the negatives as well. Once trained further to accept the situations, problems related to mental health may diminish. This is due to the individual no longer reacting and identifying with the negative experiences and thoughts. Instead by accepting these negative aspects the person can decrease their influence on personal well-being. (Mneimne et al., 2019)

Moreover, MAT denotes that mindfulness practice can have various positive consequences and that the synergy between "monitoring and acceptance" is what delivers positive outcomes. By continuing accepting difficult situations one may be able to assess better whether to react or not, and how to respond most productively, or to respond at all. In addition, the practice of monitoring may evolve personal cognition. For example, one may be more able to focus for longer periods of time and remember more easily. Furthermore, the suggestion is that when one is trained in mindfulness including monitoring and accepting, reacting to stressful events, and also physical well-being can be improved. In addition, one assumption of MAT is that with mindfulness training and practicing one could also be become better at regulating emotions. (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017)

The simplified summary of Monitor and Acceptance theory can be seen in Figure 2 below. The figure shows how a person's monitoring of events may simply result in more monitoring. This can be true whether the monitoring is related to positive or negative stimuli. However, when the experiences are also accepted people can enter the realm of mindfulness and among the benefits are the personal skills of regulating emotions. (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017)
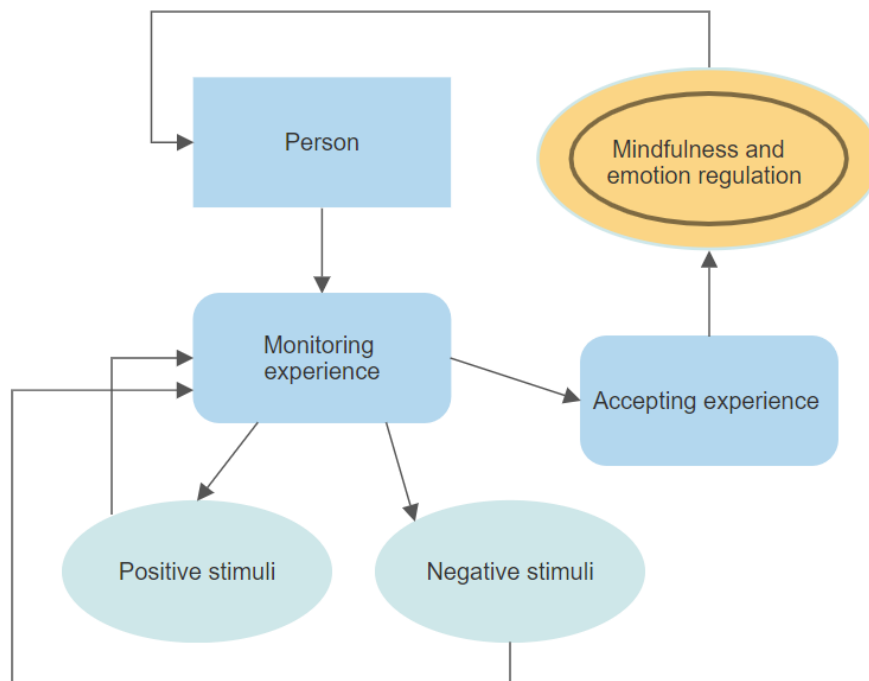
Figure 2 Monitor and acceptance summary (adapted from Lindsay & Creswell, 2017)

2.5 Critique on corporate mindfulness

Whilst there may be multiple benefits for mindfulness practice and workplace interventions, there are also critics of corporate mindfulness. Good et al. (2016) criticize the research on mindfulness for having a focus mostly on the positive outcomes of mindfulness and not paying enough attention on the negatives. For instance, corporate mindfulness could also lead to situations in which the employee can accept unfavorable behavior from others such as mistreatment from supervisors as they are taught to be less judgmental of external events. (Good et al., 2016) Thus, mindfulness training can promote a false sense of accepting everything that happens at work which is not its initial purpose.

In addition, Connolly, Sthulmacher and Cellar (2015) argue that mindfulness is one among many solutions for tackling stress in organizations. Another solution could be allocating the right people to the right jobs more efficiently. Connolly, Sthulmacher and Cellar (2015) even state, consistently with Good et al. (2016), that mindfulness may even have adverse organizational effects such as inconvenience in implementation and

elements that are seen as intrusion. In addition, whilst the original intent of mindfulness programs could be perceived to have been that of reducing work tempo, in some instances it could be seen as a measure to further accelerate the effectiveness of employees. Another argument against the popularization of mindfulness is that it is paradoxical to strive for profit and be mindful simultaneously, thus questioning linking mindfulness with business altogether. (Purser, 2018)

With the emerging trend of mindfulness, it is possible that implementing mindfulness practice at work implies that the individual has to take care of themselves and the corporate responsibility for employee well-being is lessened (Purser, 2018). Hence, the employees have to keep constantly evaluating themselves and are assumed to be more responsible for their own well-being.

Moreover, Vu and Gill (2018) state that mindfulness cannot be implemented in a corporate setting by using any generalized standards. The authors, along with Purser (2018) see mindfulness as a personal practice facilitated by conjoining the practice with ethics such as the ones of Buddhism with an emphasis on personal wisdom and ethical conduct which are stated to provide a wider set of personal life skills. Thus, these scholars argue that mindfulness works best when the individual is also exercising traits such as compassion. It is also important that mindfulness in organizations is made fit to the individual needs since everyone seems to respond slightly differently practicing it. (Vu & Gill, 2018)

3   Employee well-being

This chapter is the second part of the literature review with a focus on employee well-being. It is first defined what well-being is, which is important because it appears to have various meanings which are linked to concepts relevant for this study such as health, mindfulness, positive emotions, and stress. These concepts are discussed with PERMA theory (Seligman, 2012) which seeks to explain well-being. Moreover, the theory on positive emotions' meaning for well-being is examined with broaden-and-build model (Fredrickson, 1998) – a theoretical model which also describes the connection between the practice of mindfulness, positive emotions, and well-being (Fredrickson et al., 2008). The chapter concludes in a brief summary on both theoretical chapters on mindfulness and well-being with the author's interpretation of what the theory seems to be indicating as a whole.

3.1   Well-being as a concept in positive psychology

Well-being, defined in this study as an experience of positive health, has been associated with the research in the field of positive psychology. In research, the two concepts of well-being and health seem to be used interchangeably. (Manka & Manka, 2016: 64; Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 47) The Finnish institute for health and welfare (THL, 2021) states that well-being can be divided into three parts: health, material well-being, and experienced well-being. Therefore, employee well-being is closely linked to experienced health at work (Manka & Manka, 2016: 64; Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 47). It is important to note that the concepts of health and well-being are interconnected and sometimes used to describe the same things and sometimes there are differences. Therefore, this thesis focuses on analyzing well-being with the concepts of health and experienced personal well-being.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) describes health to be "…a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This statement has been criticized as utopistic and a clear consensus is yet to

be reached on what health is (Alahautala & Huhta, 2018: 22). However, health could be seen as the outcome of the three types of well-being. The WHO (2020) statement on health aligns well with Seligman's (2008) propositions on the topic in positive psychology. The author sees well-being, which components are defined as: "positive emotion, engagement, purpose, positive relationships, positive accomplishment", as the best solution for conquering mental illness which makes it an important aspect in fostering well-being. Thus, the concept of well-being is taken even further and defined as thriving (complete health) instead of not being sick. (Seligman, 2012)

One important finding in positive psychology has been the meaningfulness of positive emotions and their capability of developing cognition and attentiveness. Positive emotions are also linked to experienced mindfulness and even sometimes as heightened physical immunity to illness. (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 47, 48) In addition, Seligman (2008) emphasizes aspects such as positive emotions as the basis for creating well-being. Importantly, it is crucial for employees to experience well-being at work since being healthy, hence mentally and physically fit, has a beneficial effect on work-life as well, for instance by positively affecting how satisfied employees are. (Avey et al., 2010)

What is more, work can create either positive or negative pressure on the employee. These both can translate into positive outcomes such as learning opportunities or to the negative such as passivity and illness, or becoming more stressed. (Manka & Manka, 2016: 64-65) Therefore, the role of personal positivity, which is closely linked to the ability to experience positive emotions, becomes more important in the development of individuals' well-being. Personal positivity is a trait with which a person is also able to recover from the stress caused by prolonged negative emotions. (Manka & Manka, 2016: 73)

Additionally, self-talk, the discussion a person is having with themselves in their thoughts is important from a well-being perspective. By having a superior number of positive thoughts compared to the negative ones can increase psychological capital (PsyCap).

(Seligman, 2012) PsyCap is a term coined to describe a concoction of personal psychological resources of handling difficult situations and being able to thrive in various social environments, and it is intimately connected to well-being. (Shahid & Muchiri, 2019) PsyCap, can additionally be described as "an individual's positive psychological state of development". Moreover, PsyCap is a combination of self-confidence, "optimism", goal-oriented perseverance, and being resilient in challenging times. High psychological capital can result in employees feeling well. (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2007: 3)

3.2 Health and stress

Health is a personal attribute that can be constantly changing. It can be divided into mental and physiological health. One of the main concerns in academic research has been stress and its implications on well-being and health. (Manka & Manka, 2016: 64) Alahautala and Huhta (2018: 16) suggest that both psychological and physical personal reactions to internal and external events can have an impact on the individual's health. The authors also suggest that perceived stress is a mixture of psychological and physiological components experienced in the body and on the mind. These components can manifest as health consequences, for instance as mental (e.g. uncontrolled worrying) and physical (e.g. stomach pain) symptoms, or both types of symptoms at the same time. (Alahautala & Huhta, 2018: 18)

Personal experiences, values, and attitudes affect health. From the perspective of work, health can be perceived as the ability to work while feeling well. Furthermore, experienced health is subjective and can be relative to any current situation. For instance, a broken finger can stop a pianist from playing but not a teacher from providing education. (Alahautala & Huhta, 2018: 22) A healthy employee is also more likely to educate themselves further and gain more work experience. Thus, their working ability can be enhanced and there is an incentive to the employer to improve their employees' well-being. (Manka & Manka, 2016: 53)

Cambridge Dictionary (2020a) defines the word *stress* as a feeling of worry or nervousness, or as notable worrying stemming from situations perceived as challenging, or as the reason for feeling that way. Whilst stress, caused by hurry and insecurity, can be beneficial by increasing short-term productivity, heightened stress in the long-term can lead to incapability of working or even burnout. Work itself has become more stressful. One of the reasons for this is the fast pace, rushing, and pressure to meet deadlines. (Manka & Manka, 2016: 27, 32). That is why the question of how well an individual is able to cope with stress is a relevant question when assessing experienced well-being.

Currently one of the main causes of global heightened stress is the global pandemic. For instance, it has been reported that the "coronavirus pandemic is a significant source of stress" for 76% of Americans (American Psychological Association, 2020b). This is important because it is likely to affect mental health and require people to have more tools to increase their resiliency to stress (Vinkers et al., 2020). Moreover, Lomas et al. (2017) state that workers have been becoming considerably more stressed in the UK. Workplace stress and its significance on employee well-being can be seen in the US, as well. The reasons for stress are complex but many of them appear to be associated with work and related expectations. (Lomas et al., 2017)

According to Statista (2019) the major source of stress at work among American employees was workload in 2017. Three other main reasons for stress were "people issues", "juggling work and personal life", and "lack of job security". Only 5% of the employees reported not to be stressed or had some other reason for stress, which is a significantly low number. Being a senior corporate executive was also reported to be among the most stressful working positions in the US in 2019 (Statista, 2020c). In addition, in China, the major leading cause for insomnia in 2018 was work stress. (Statista, 2020b) All of the mentioned causes for stress can cause long-term disbenefits and it is therefore important that these stressors be addressed so that people are more able to work and lead fuller lives (Alahautala & Huhta, 2018: 111).

3.3   Positive emotions as a source for well-being

Seligman (2008) was among the first scientific proponents of positive psychology in the 1990s. His mission was to create a quantifiable positive measurement for mental health instead of a more "traditional" approach of well-being seen as not suffering, for instance with mental illness. One of Seligman's (2012) main ideas connected to well-being is that well-being is based on a personal ability to flourish, which is synonymous to well-being. In addition, Seligman (2012) states that to understand the concept well-being, it should be divided to parts one is able to measure. (Seligman, 2012)

To illustrate the ways in which well-being can be composed of he proposed a well-being theory named PERMA. PERMA is an acronym ("Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievements") and it is intended to explain well-being in a quantifiable way with factors that all foster well-being. The first attribute "Positive emotion", which can be defined by individuals themselves, has been chosen to be the factor that will be addressed in this study as it is in this theory seen as a foundational element for fostering personal well-being. Positive emotions can also be linked to mindfulness which will be discussed further in the next subsection 3.5. (Seligman, 2012)

Importantly, all emotions are subjectively experienced and hence linked to subjective well-being which is a person's perception of how they experience well-being. Some examples of positive emotions that a person may experience include: "pride, gratitude, pleasure, satisfaction, interest, [and/or] hope". (Seligman, 2012) Other researchers, such as Lyubomirsky and Layous (2013) agree that positivity is closely connected to being happy and experiencing happiness which can also be seen as factors connected to personal well-being. This connection to happiness seems similar to what Manka and Manka (2016: 73) have stated about personal positivity as a source for personal well-being and aiding in stress management.

Furthermore, because of the subjectivity of emotions, no-one can be mistaken about their personal perception of positive emotions. Thus, if one's perception is that a certain

emotion is felt, that is true to them. Some other perceived positive emotions could be related for instance to an event that creates feelings that are pleasurable, ecstatic, or comfortable. By knowing or learning how to experience more positive emotions one can develop their ability to live a more fulfilling life and thus be well. Once one is experiencing more positive emotions, they can act as personal assets when faced with difficult situations in the future and enhance PsyCap. That is to say, one may be able to summon a certain positive emotion such as acceptance when faced with an event that they cannot change. In addition, positive emotions can be experienced more frequently when one is doing something that is in alignment with their life goals which is why awareness of personal well-being is important. (Seligman, 2012)

According to Seligman (2012) one major means of assessing personal well-being is the number of positive expressions that are being used in one's communication. In addition, positive emotion as a concept has approximately 80 words it can be described with in English. Furthermore, the meaning of experiencing positive emotions is to understand what having a positive emotion feels like and what the reasons are for this experience. For instance, where in the body these emotions are experienced and what the situations are that cause positive emotions. This instead of relating to all situations positively by imposing fake emotions which can have detrimental effects on health. (Seligman, 2012) At work such an effect could be accepting a toxic culture or even different degrees of abuse (Rutigliano et al., 2016).

To discuss how positive emotions function, the following has been suggested. Firstly, when positive emotions are noticed more frequently, persons can learn to use them to their personal benefit and become more attuned to their emotional lives. Secondly, it can also be learned to expose oneself more to the situations in which positivity is more likely to arise and prolong the time of experienced emotion, which can result in improved well-being. Thirdly, these positive experiences can enable people to contribute more to their communities, for instance if personal positive emotions are connected to helping others in some way. (Seligman, 2012)

Thus, experiencing positive emotions is closely linked to present moment awareness (state mindfulness) and can be a key factor in directing the individual toward well-being. Notably, it appears to be so that many persons are not aware of having a capability to experience more positive emotions – to induce them purposefully with intention. Furthermore, when immersed in positive emotions and being content with life, this positivity can be transmitted to other people which can improve relationships. (Seligman, 2012)

It can also be beneficial to shortly discuss the second component of PERMA theory, "engagement", which is affiliated with positive emotions. "Engagement" is also an element that can foster well-being. From a mindfulness' perspective engagement could mean becoming immersed with body sensations and breathing while practicing mindfulness. In this manner the body may relax, and one can attain a mindful state. Mindful breath awareness may result in individual capabilities of reacting to stimuli more positively than persons without breath awareness. Moreover, people more mindful of their breathing may be more prone to expose themselves to negative circumstances as they are not as easily affected by them. This is because they may not react as strongly to a negative stimulus. (Arch & Craske, 2006) Mindfulness is also a practice that seems to require a certain degree of engagement, especially if most of the well-being-related benefits are connected to long-term practice. This is because it requires self-discipline to practice in a way that is consistent. (Roche et al., 2020)

3.4   Broaden-and-build model

This subsection focuses more in depth on the functioning of positive emotions via mindfulness as a precursor for well-being. Another key researcher on the research of well-being and mindfulness is Fredrickson (1998) who has been active with other researchers in studying mindfulness and positive emotions (e.g. Fredrickson et al., 2008; Garland & Fredrickson, 2019; Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013). Fredrickson (1998) argues, with her *broaden-and-build model,* that positive emotions have strong significance over fostering well-being.

The *broadening* aspect, the first phase of the model suggests that once one is more aware and attentive of what is happening to them, their scope of experience is widened. That is to say, life can be experienced with more ease and more nuances can be observed in daily life situations. For instance, one may become more able to efficiently distinguish between positive and negative emotions. Thus, individuals' psychological resources can be *built,* meaning they can be developed. Building these resources correlate with better chances of managing oneself when in contact with difficult events. This means psychological capital may develop. (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 45, italics added)

Moreover, according to Fredrickson (1998) positive and negative emotions have different roles. While helpful in critical situations requiring fast reaction, negative emotions are mostly related to primitive thoughts and action whilst positive emotions can provide individuals with psychological resources such as possibly with greater creativity. What is more, Fredrickson (2000) suggests positive emotions can aid in recovering from the negative effects caused by negative emotions such as ruminating on topics one cannot change.

Furthermore, it is possible that there is a causality between feeling positively and experiencing more of certain type of thoughts, such as those that are interpreted as positive by the individual. This may result in advantageous ways of thinking. In addition, those experiencing more positive emotions, may be more attentive to others, such as colleagues. Hence, group cohesion can be fostered. (Fredrickson, 2000; Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 47, 51) One of the resources which can be built with positive emotions is increased cognitive capacity which involves present-moment awareness, which can be created with mindfulness. (Fredrickson, 2000; Garland & Fredrickson, 2019)

An example of how the model could function in practice could be the following. If one is admiring another person, this may be because of something that the one someone admires has done (noticing and broadening). The way in which this action has been performed can then be acquired by the person admiring if they are observing closely

(building into personal PsyCap). Moreover, when experiencing joy, one can become more productive because this emotion can broaden the awareness of new opportunities. This is also because joy is often associated with accomplishments which provide trust in one's own abilities, which can be how the building effect of the model manifests in the long-term. (Seligman, 2012)

Moreover, another suggestion associated with the model is that people with positive emotional resources are more apt to respond to difficult-seeming situations in productive ways. (Fredrickson, 2000) This ability can also entail more happiness and better health. Fredrickson et al. (2008) and Garland and Fredrickson (2019) have also further studied mindfulness and its relation to the broaden-and-build model with positive indications about the correlation between mindfulness practice, increased positive emotions, and better well-being. One of them is that people may become more willing to embrace difficulties because they start to perceive them as opportunities to grow psychologically (Garland & Fredrickson, 2019).

According to Vacharkulksemsuk and Fredrickson (2013: 48) the broadening aspect of the model has been backed with more evidence than the one related to building. This is due to the building part taking more time to assess and requiring longitudinal research data – hence providing and analyzing such data is one of the key focal points of this master's thesis. Moreover, doing something physical so portray a positive emotion, such as giving someone a hug, can aid in the broadening of one's experiences. (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 50) The simplified summary of broaden-and-build model by Fredrickson (1998) can be seen in Figure 3 below.
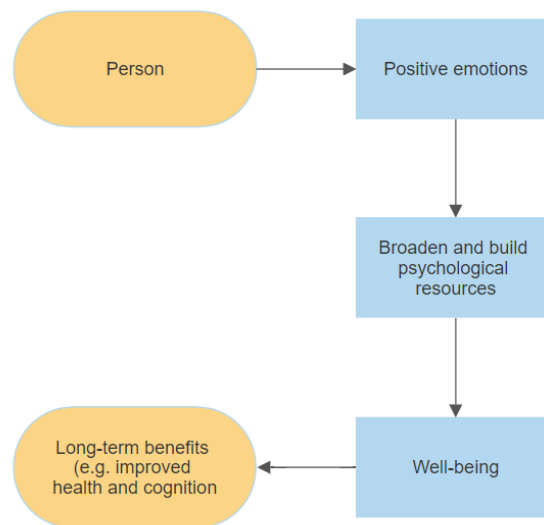
Figure 3 Summary of broaden-and-build model (Adapted from Fredrickson, 1998)

3.5   Summary of theory

This subsection is the author's summary of the theoretical chapters 2 and 3 dedicated to understanding the connection between mindfulness, well-being, health, stress, and positive emotions. This is to provide clarity to the reader of what the most important theoretical implications have been on these topics thus far and how they seem to be related to each other as there are various concepts, definitions, models, and even some controversies connected to these topics. This way theory can also be utilized more efficiently in the following chapters as a base for understanding the data.

Both mindfulness and well-being have various connotations and definitions making it necessary to define what is being investigated in each study. With its origins in Buddhism (Purser, 2018), mindfulness appears to be a personal resource, one categorization for it being an awareness-based practice, with which people are able to foster positive well-being and feel more positive emotions which as concepts are closely interconnected as positive emotions can be seen as the foundation for well-being. This promising nature of mindfulness is noteworthy as it is being reported globally that stress levels are growing which can compromise well-being. For instance, prolonged stress can cause illness. That

is why there is a need for personal methods of tending to one's mental health (Vinkers et al., 2020). Mindfulness seems to be such a method.

The definition for well-being varies in research literature and for the purposes of this study it was decided to use the definition derived from the study of positive psychology. According to authors in this scientific discipline well-being means a sense of being mentally healthy, satisfied with life and sensing there is a purpose in life, which Seligman (2012) calls "thriving" or "flourishing". Seligman (2012) also states that one key element for this well-being is feeling positive emotions.

The methods for practicing mindfulness vary. The most researched method of practice seems to be formal meditation practice in which the person observes a certain aspect of their consciousness such as the flowing of breath, scans their body which can induce relaxation, and loving kindness mediation in which positive emotions are created toward someone or something.

The chosen theory on mindfulness, MAT (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017) is a theory that seeks to explain how mindfulness functions. According to MAT persons can observe their inner and outer reality and accept what is currently happening. With only monitoring one's emotional life and external events, it is possible to become more stressed (Hoffmann & Geisler, 2020). Thus, the authors argue acceptance is important, especially when the intention is stress reduction and promoting health and well-being, to emphasize the importance of accepting because that is how most well-being related benefits can be achieved. (Lindsay & Creswell, 2019). According to MAT by becoming attuned to personal aspects of consciousness, for example to experienced emotions, it is possible to find new ways of reacting to events and increase health both mentally and physically and experience more positivity and less uncontrolled reacting. Furthermore, some people may be able to learn to regulate their emotions. (Lindsay et al., 2018; Mneimne et al., 2019)

This emotion regulation is in alignment with Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build model which claims that as a person practices mindfulness and becomes more aware of the of how their emotions function, they may be more able to focus on improving their positive health and well-being. Moreover, the frequency of positive emotions may increase by guiding oneself towards experiencing the preferred ones. The practice of mindfulness can enable people to find more focus related to situations or tasks. (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson et al., 2008; Seligman, 2012)

It is, however, important that mindfulness is clearly explained to and understood by those who are trained in the practice. In addition, it is possible that there are many other well-being related positive outcomes for the practice of, such as improved memory and some control over one's thoughts (Hafenbrack, 2017) but it seems that these may such that emerge with long-term practice which has not been studied extensively.

4   Methodology

This chapter will describe the research methodology. Methodology means furthering the understanding of phenomena in a well-defined and practical manner. Methodology consists of the methods used for research and "refers to organizing principles, which provide the procedure for guiding the research process and research design." (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) The methods are chosen in accordance to how the researcher believes it is possible to gather more information about the topic (Puusa & Juuti, 2020). In addition, this chapter will explain the research philosophy behind this research, describe narrative research which is the qualitative research method chosen for this thesis, show how data will be collected and analyzed, and justify these methodological choices.

4.1   Research philosophy

This master's thesis will assume a subjective ontological philosophical view of the world, which is also known as "constructionism" which seeks to explain worldly phenomena. From this viewpoint, experience, and perception of anything are assumed to differ among individuals, thus being subjective. Additionally, life itself and its understanding are based on a subjective process which is interlinked to how a person uses cognition and relates to society. Despite this subjective nature of reality, it is possible to share concepts between persons with which life can be comprehended. Thus, interacting with other people can also result in new ways of understanding the aspects of reality and expanding existing knowledge of it. That is also to say that knowledge has more value when there is social interaction with which it can be shared. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015)

Abduction logic will be applied in this master's thesis, because the nature of this study is exploratory, meaning a search for new information, which is often the case with researching newer social matters, such as modern mindfulness and well-being. Abduction logic refers to how the research progresses using both induction and deduction as the basis of reasoning and hopping between these two logical styles. *Deduction* logic, which means finding new knowledge by starting with existing theory, applies in the research

design of this thesis as it begins by examining the existing theory related to mindfulness, well-being, health, stress, and positive emotions building upon what is already known about the topic beforehand. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) However, this study also incorporates elements from *inductive* reasoning which is linked to finding information by starting with observations. This is due to the research method being analysis of narratives which basis is on finding new information. This can be seen in using the narratives as data to gain new knowledge about the research topic instead of only using existing theory, for instance in the form of a meta-analysis which would make the study completely deductive. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015)

This master's thesis is qualitative in its nature. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) *qualitative research* cannot be completely defined as it is differs depending on the case, but one aspect of this type of research is that theory serves as a tool for the various research steps. Thus, every research process is different because the researcher may change, yet it can be seen as a relevant method of producing new knowledge even if it has no quantitative aspects. The counterpart of qualitative research is *quantitative* research which typically seeks to provide numerical or statistical results that are often more generalizable than those produced with qualitative research methods and is sometimes viewed as the opposite of qualitative research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015)

In qualitative research, which is the most flexible approach, the researcher thoroughly studies a phenomenon to comprehensively understand the research topic. This typically involves the researcher trying to understand the subjects from their point of view – people, for example. This close relation to research subjects makes the researcher able to derive better interpretations of the topic and phenomena. (Puusa & Juuti, 2020) In this study the study subjects are the individual practitioners of mindfulness and their stories.

4.2 Narrative research

The idea of narrative research is that narratives are an essential way of communicating and understanding life. (Puusa et al., 2020) According to McAlpine (2016) narratives may

be the most profound way to understanding people's experiences which makes them an interesting appliance for investigating mindfulness related experiences. Furthermore, narrative research is not a unified or exact method with any universal guidelines. (Puusa et al., 2020) Moreover, narratives offer an in-depth view to the research topic and they are a rather new source to be used as methodology. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) In this master's thesis, the reason for choosing narrative research is to explore stories related to mindfulness and find new information and aspects about the topic and its connection to health, stress, positive emotions, and well-being. As defined here this composition appears not to have been present in academic research before. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) Narrative research was also chosen because of the author's personal experience with and interest in stories.

In addition, stories and their understanding can be relevant from a managerial point-of-view since stories are in some instances used as methods for management and they may shape organizational culture. One of the reasons for the use of stories in organizations is managing change. Additionally, due to the personal and experiential nature of narratives they are intimately connected to practical reality. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; McAlpine, 2016; Puusa et al., 2020)

The terms narratives and stories differ from one another but are sometimes used interchangeably. In this thesis the terms are also used interchangeably. A narrative is targeted towards the audience involving contextualization related to time and audience, a speech for example. A story is more of a general shared set of events proceeding in chronology which might not be formatted in writing but rather as an idea that may be known even across cultures. Narratives are often short, and they can be associated with individual experiences of distinct life events, or other specific topics. However, there is not a clear consensus about the exact definitions in academic research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Riessman, 2005)

Anyone is capable of telling stories. To define a story as a story one needs to find the elements that constitute it. A story usually has a beginning, a middle part, and an ending. Moreover, these three events have to be connected with an abstract "path" called the plot. Whatever events occur in a story are often other than neutral – they can be dramatic which can be the reason for why a story is being shared. For instance, a person may want to hear what others think of their story and might therefore narrativize it and share it to their peers. There are usually personal, emotional, and value-related aspects to a story. (Hänninen, 2018)

Importantly, a story in the form of a narrative can be interpreted differently by different people, as time span, emphases, and reasoning of events vary. What is more, the instance in which the narrative may have been published can also affect the way in which the story itself is expressed. In addition, online platforms and social media have provided new means for sharing stories. (Hänninen, 2018) For instance, it was hypothesized for this thesis that a person might share their personal story more authentically online than for instance in another medium, as they have might have more opportunities to choose the platform for their narrative and more time to process their story into text.

4.3   Strategy for thematic analysis of narratives

This research will assume a naturalist stance into narrative research which scrutinizes the contents of stories. This is because there is no single established means of analyzing narratives but multiple derived from various fields of research. That is why it is likely that each analysis of narratives has different characteristics (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2011; (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

When analyzing narratives, the researcher becomes immersed in the story on a general level, in a similar manner in which prose is read. It is not known what will happen next in the story or what the outcomes will be. With the second reading, the researcher being familiar with the story and not surprised by its twists, is able to notice smaller nuances that perhaps have not been registered before. Furthermore, it is possible to detect

oddities not coherent with the rest of the text. (Hänninen, 2018) The meaning of thematic narrative analysis is to define the most relevant parts of the narrative, mindfulness related experiences, and relate these elements to each other to understand how these parts interact and what are the individual meanings of these phenomena. (Kleres, 2011) Any recurring themes in the narratives can be grouped thematically. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Hänninen, 2018)

It was decided not to study thematic analysis of narratives further than to understand the main principles of this research method. This was due to the Heikkinen's (2018) proposal that this way there could be more divergent thinking involved in the analysis process. This divergency in thinking refers to unique and original ways in which a researcher is able to derive meaning from the research material, the data. Its opposite is convergent thinking, which is what is often the result of following existing and possibly rigid methodological guidelines which allow less flexibility. (Heikkinen, 2018)

4.4   Data collection

The assumption for data collection was that online narratives would provide a comprehensive view of how mindfulness and well-being are connected, as experienced by individuals. Additionally, narratives always portray experience in a distinctive knowledge-related way in which the information and distinct meanings can solely be obtained via personal narratives (Kleres, 2011). According to Kleres (2011) narratives have a natural tendency to emerge having emotional structures. Because of the aforementioned, online comments portraying mindfulness related personal stories were chosen as the source of data for this thesis. This data is known as secondary data as it is not collected directly from the person who is the study subject (Hänninen, 2018).

In addition, according to Berger and Buechel (2012: 203) people may be more likely to express their emotional side online and in this way develop their well-being. Thus, the well-being aspects examined in this thesis could also be explicitly included in the narratives. Additionally, there may be more longitude in the time span of the stories as

participants have had more time to reflect and develop their answers than, for instance, with interviews in which the answer often has to be prompt and spontaneous (McAlpine, 2016). This way more nuances and details could be delivered by the narrators (the persons narrating) making the narratives' content more extensive, and rich in detail.

After searching for stories on Google, Facebook and mindfulness related online forums, it was decided to gather the data from Quora.com (Quora), a social media website onto which users can post questions related to topics they are interested in. Other users can answer these questions. (Jiang et al., 2018) Moreover, according to Jiang et al. (2018) Quora is becoming increasingly popular, with high-class content, many of the people providing answers being professionals in their field. The social media aspect comes from the possibility of subscribing to others feeds, and from an upvote system for ranking the answers on the platform (Jiang et al., 2018).

Specifically, a Quora user registers to the site with their whole name and is motivated to also set up a profile picture along with short descriptions of the instances they are affiliated with, and/or personal interests. This is to increase the answers' reliability. (Jiang et al., 2018) To decide which answers to include in the data as narratives, criteria were set.

Since this research paper was written in English, it was decided to include narratives only in that language. Additionally, it was chosen that the writer of the narrative must have experience of a mindfulness practice and their story would have to have personal experiential characteristics such as descriptions of how they practice or personal outcomes. For more clarity, all the narratives ought to display a posting date and not be older than five years to be depictions of current times. In addition, to ensure there would be enough extensive data, it was decided to only include stories which were at least three paragraphs in length so that they would portray enough experiences. Furthermore, only Quora answers with user profile pictures and users' first and last names were included. The criteria can be seen in Table 3 below.

N=	Name of criteria
1	Written online by someone in English
2	The writer has experience of a mindfulness practice
3	The narrative focuses on personal experiences of mindfulness and/or meditation
4	The narrative must have a posting date, and is not older than five years from the moment of data collection
5	The narrative is publicly available with open access
6	The narrative is at least three paragraphs in length
7	The name and profile picture are visible for the person sharing the narrative

Table 2 Criteria for data collection

Data was collected between November 19th, 2020 and January 7th, 2021. The data source was a Quora thread named: "How has meditation changed your life?", which at the date of collection had over 100 answers. Many of these answers were narratives describing a mindfulness practice and personal experiences with details related to the research question of this thesis. (Quora, 2020) The collected answers, 26 in total, had been posted on Quora between December 27th, 2017 and December 13th, 2020. The narratives were anonymized. Additionally, it was chosen to preserve all nuances in language use, spelling, presenting, and punctuating in the narratives when displaying them in the following chapters. There were some spelling errors which can be seen in the next chapter.

The data was compiled in a 76-page Word document. It was read 5 times before coding. All available information about the narrators was collected from Quora into an Excel file. These pieces of information included names, answer dates, professions, academic backgrounds, living locations, and the numbers for answer views, upvotes, shares and comments. The anonymized narratives were named alphabetically (Narrative A, Narrative B, etc.) for clarity to the reader and to the author of this thesis of which story is being discussed and to allow more flowing comparison. After this coding and information

collection notes were taken to spot recurring patterns in the data. The Excel file with participant information was reflected with the actual stories to understand the person's narrative more comprehensively. Moreover, as the key themes were gathered to an Excel-file from each narrative, it became evident that there were recurring themes related to experiences with mindfulness and well-being.

Some of the collected information about the study subjects was relevant to be presented. For instance, the living locations could be collected for most, and they included some variation. The majority of the narrators resided in India (n= 11) or the US (n=6), with two Australian residents, one from Portugal, one from Japan, one from the UAE, and one from Canada. Three had not reported their living location. 18 of 26 persons had attended university, seven of them having academic background in engineering and/or technology.

After a discussion with the supervisor of this thesis, the nationalities for the narrators were also identified to portray what cultures could be present in the data by reflecting their full names, profile photos, and living locations given on Quora with the persons' personal websites, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles and using Familysearch.org to find where a certain last name would most likely originate from. This method is subject to some error as one person was not completely identifiable online because they lacked the necessary information of their living location. Hence, this person's nationality was hypothesized only from their full name. This process resulted in the hypothetically identified nationalities of 13 persons from India, 8 persons from the US, one from Portugal, one from the UK, one from Brazil, one from Australia, and one from Kazakhstan.

Whilst not all of these narrators could be identified as employees in their own words, they could be identified with background either in working life, self-employment, or they were currently studying something. These aspects made them viable prospects to be regarded as likening to employees or persons in who are in life situations in which they could experience for instance prolonged stress and/or health-related issues similarly to an employee.

4.5   Validity and reliability

According to Saunders et al., (2007: 149) to create a more reliable study, fault in the research should be minimized. Thus, the researcher ought to consider how reliable and valid the research is designed to be. For the study to be reliable the same method used for collecting data should provide the same results when conducted by other people. However, as the data in this study is qualitatively interpreted by the researcher using a thematic analysis of narratives, the results will be characterized uniquely by the researcher's own interpretations and would likely be different should a different person be the researcher. However, the reliability of data collection for this study does carry the potential that what has been observed by the researcher in the narratives could be repeated by others. For more reliability, the researcher has strived to be as transparent as possible with the analysis of data and in describing it (Saunders et al., 2007: 149).

One main challenge to reliability is called the "participant error". This essentially means that the timing of data collection highly influences what the participants answer. (Saunders et al., 2007: 149) The data collection for this study has been designed so that there should be no such error as the data is collected from online comments which were not modified in any way ether by the author of this thesis or by the people themselves after their posting. Moreover, the comments have all likely been written in the most suitable times for the participants. Hence they have presumably had all the time they have needed to consider and write their answers involving minimum hurry.

There is also the possibility for "participant bias" which in this study could mean that the narratives could have some instance's interest incorporated in them (Saunders et al., 2007: 149). In this research paper this could mean somebody advocating for a certain type of mindfulness practice and presenting it in a favorable light not mentioning any downsides. This was carefully assessed by the researcher to exclude any such answers that did not seem to be authentic personal experiences of mindfulness. Moreover, many of the narratives also featured negative aspects such as it being hard to meditate

potentially showing narrators' honesty. Some persons were along with sharing their story promoting their own services at the end, some being meditation coaching services which could mean they were partially biased meaning that the results of this study should be regarded as suggestions. Furthermore, participant bias was possibly reduced by excluding any comments that did not feature the participant's name. This way there could be less people simply "trolling" or deliberately sharing disinformation.

There is likely little chance for "observer error", a term which demonstrates variation between multiple observers' results (Saunders et al., 2007: 149), in this study since there was only one person facilitating this research paper. "Observer bias" (Saunders et al., 2007: 150) is also unlikely to be an issue in this study because thematic analysis of narratives is interpretative per se and hence partially biased. However, when working with narratives the researcher should always be especially careful with the interpretations made from the material. This is because narratives may be lengthy and much of the information may not be displayed in the results.

One important aspect of bias in data interpretation was that some of the answers had typos, and incomplete expressions were used in some of the narratives. In these situations, the researcher decided to interpret the answers as such in a way that was most seemed most sensible. Considering biases is important also because the author of this research paper has himself been studying and practicing mindfulness meditation and has noted benefits from it. Thus, to minimize the researcher's personal biased viewpoint in data analysis it was decided to strive for objectivity and neutrality in the analysis by remaining as objective as possible to any experience with mindfulness.

Validity relates to how well the findings depict the actual phenomenon truthfully. (Saunders et al., 2007: 150). To increase validity, it was decided to carefully study potential causal connections between mindfulness and well-being, which appeared in the data. Importantly, Saunders et al. (2007: 150) note that to reduce mere assumptions in the case of found causality, it need be explained in which direction this causality is directed.

For instance, whether mindfulness can result in well-being or vice versa well-being could be something that encourages mindfulness practice. In terms of whether the results are generalizable, which is another aspect of validity, the exploratory nature of this study makes it so that the researcher is not intending to present generalizable results. Instead, the goal of this master's thesis is to explore and explain the ways in which mindfulness practices can be connected to well-being. This is also because the sample size is 26 narratives, likely to provide suggestive and preliminary results. However, it could be argued that all experiences of mindfulness are valid in their own right because of their subjectivity.

4.6 Research ethics

Narrative and qualitative research in general have the positive capacity to assess narratives that portray the real person behind the story. That is also why discussing the ethical aspects of data collection become important. This is because personal stories can be something that people feel vulnerable about and ought not to be used without precaution. Additionally, it is possible that sharing narratives can be perceived as damaging by the persons whose original story is being shared. Moreover, the person can be still be quite recognizable from the story even if they have been anonymized. (Hänninen, 2018)

Ethics are concerned with whatever is the 'right' or 'wrong' choice to do, applying to research as well (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). According to The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2020), research ethics are connected to conducting research responsibly. This means that as the research progresses the researcher applies the basic concepts the scientific community supports. Those are "integrity, meticulousness, and accuracy". The concepts are to be implemented in all stages of research. It is important to deliver the information openly and responsibly, an example of which is to cite source appropriately. Moreover, any conflict of interest ought to be stated. (TENK, 2020)

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) explain that the researcher should never deceive or cause harm to anything or anyone affiliated with the research. Another important aspect is "professional integrity" which means that the researcher invests in making the research paper understandable and coherent, explicitly justifying, and elaborating on the choices that have been made. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) To refrain from plagiarism, the author of this thesis chose to use Mendeley, a citing software that allowed to note where each piece of information was found and automatically manage cited references.

There was no financing involved in this study. Furthermore, in all situations, in which the author of this master's thesis suspected there to be potential for making unethical decisions, the supervisor of this thesis was consulted. This ensured there to be less chance that this thesis would incorporate flawed or harmful elements. Thus, the author of this thesis was able to work more carefully and honestly with the data, which are vital elements of research (University of Vaasa, 2020). The author's home university, University of Vaasa's (2020) guidelines were carefully reviewed so that this thesis would contain the highest possible ethicality.

It was also chosen not to inform the people whose stories were involved in data collection since their stories were publicly available on Quora.com. Consequently, it was assumed that the intention for sharing the narratives about mindfulness practice was to share knowledge with those less experienced. Hence, it was presumed that the content of these personal stories was initially intended to be viewed by anyone. However, as was mentioned before, it was chosen to anonymize the narratives to protect the original narrator identities. Thus, it was decided to only portray extracts of their narratives in this study.

5 Findings

In this chapter the findings from the thematic analysis of the 26 narratives are presented and extracted quotes from the narratives are used to highlight the experiences of the narrators. To show the progress and effects that the narrators had related to their mindfulness practices this chapter firstly scrutinizes how long the narrators had been practicing at the time they wrote their stories. Moreover, their reasons for starting to practice mindfulness are presented. These reasons are discussed because they provide a basis to further evaluate the progression relational to the personal well-being outcomes of the narrators – they show the initial individual life situation. From that point it is possible to assess the effect that a mindfulness practice may or may not have had on their well-being in the next chapter.

Additionally, because the individuals were implementing a formal practice in different ways it is depicted how these people were exactly practicing. The term meditation is used in this chapter as a synonym to mindfulness practice. Lastly it is shown what the personal experiential outcomes related to well-being, positive emotions, health, and stress have been for these persons from their mindfulness practice which were the main aim to be explored in the research question.

5.1 How long the narrators had practiced, and their personal reasons for meditating

The narrators had been practicing meditation for varying longitudes meaning for how long they had had a daily practice as a part of their life. The majority of narrators, 18 of 26 persons had experience of a mindfulness practice from one year to over 30 years. 13 of these people had practiced meditation for 1-10 years. The longest period of practice was for approximately 48 years. Conversely, the shortest shared length of described practice time span was experience from a period of one month. There were also two people who had partaken in a meditation retreat, an intensive meditation course in which the people had been practicing formal meditation for most of their waking hours.

Their stories focused on describing their experiences with meditation during the retreat. In addition, four narratives did not explicitly indicate how long the persons had been practicing. There were also two people who had practiced meditation and stopped for several years but continued the practice later in their lives. The practice longitudes in the data can be viewed in Table 4 below.

Time practiced	Narratives	(N=)
A course of 10 days	E, W	2
1-12 months	A, M	2
1-10 years	B, C, D, H, L, N, Q, R, S, V, X, Y, Z	13
11-29 years	K	1
30 or more years	G, I, T, U	4
Undefined	F, J, O, P	4
	Total	26

Table 3 Practice longitudes in the data

The reasons for practicing which are listed in Table 5 below refer to the characteristics of life situation in which the narrator was at the time when they were first introduced to mindfulness or discovered it by themselves. These are the reasons stated by the person on why mindfulness practice was adopted. The reasons befit categories which can be seen in Table 5 below. These categories are related to personal well-being (difficult emotions, health problems, focus problems, insomnia, addictive behavior), work or study problems, problems with relationships or other reasons such as personal gain. Furthermore, some stories featured multiple reasons for engaging in mindfulness, which results them being involved in multiple categories. Eight narratives listed in the column named Undefined in Table 5 focused mostly on stating the benefits and personal reasons for adopting a mindfulness practice were not explicitly mentioned.

Personal reasons for practicing	Mentioned in narratives	(N=)
Experiencing difficult emotions	A, C, D, F, H, J, O, R, V, Y, Z	11
Physical health problems	A, C, H, L, O, V	6
Focus problems, overactive mind, impatience	F, L, O, Z	4
Insomnia/sleep problems	F, R	2
Addictive behavior	B, Y	2
Work-/study-related problems	H, R	2
Relationship problems	B, O	2
Other reasons	A, I, N, Q, S, U, Y	7
Undefined	E, G, K, M, P, T, W, X	8

Table 4 Personal reasons for practicing

The majority of the reasons for the adoption of meditation were related to personal problems that the narrator was facing. Here are some examples:

> *"My infatuation with mindfulness and meditation started when I was down with Acid reflux about a year ago. Though not a serious illness by any means, I saw a sharp rise in my anxiety levels." Narrative C*

> *"As a result of these things [being controlled by their own mind] and certain failures in life, I started feeling depressed, anxious and the biggest impact it made on my life was insomnia (Lack of sleep) which in turns disturb my whole life cycle pattern.." Narrative F*

There appear to be certain similarities with the initial life situations in many of the stories before the adoption of a meditation practice. The majority of the narrators had experienced some personal adversity that was closely connected to their well-being. Firstly, difficult emotions were experienced by 11 of the narrators. These emotions included fear, anxiety, depression, stress, and panic attacks. In the narratives the persons write about their experience of negative emotions which were often described as severe and hindering the persons from living fully living their lives:

"I was in an 8-year relationship, doing my master's degree in cognitive science and was at the peak of my anxiety. My days were spent in constant inward scanning, feeling my heart with my hands and tongue, waiting for the next palpitation, the next pain, or the last stop. Every week I went to the hospital emergency room, certain that I was about to have a heart attack, and every week I heard that I suffered from generalized anxiety and panic attacks." Narrative A

"My anxiety levels were at peak when I started doing meditation[…]" Narrative D

In these narratives above the persons were feeling notable fear and anxiety. The person in the first Narrative A was afraid of having a heart condition. In this case the narrative progressed by the narrator being introduced to Buddhist meditation by a friend. Experienced anxiety was one of the leading reasons stated for seeking help from meditation in seven of the narratives. What is more, other negative emotions such as stress or fear were among the main reasons for starting to practice. In both Narratives A and D featured above, the persons additionally express their emotions to be closely connected to how their mind was functioning as they were continuously observing their inner state and spotting something negative.

The second column in Table 5 above, featuring physical health problems was also one the most discussed well-being related topics in the data. Six people had experienced problems involving negative physical symptoms in their body such as heart palpitations mentioned above in Narrative A. These symptoms were also highly linked to prolonged stress that the narrators seemed not even be completely aware of before they started meditations and began observing their inner states. Moreover, one person had experienced intense acid reflux, and another claimed their health had degraded both physically and mentally (Narrative H, below).

Here are two examples in which the person was experiencing both negative emotions and physical adversity, the latter had multiple issues in their life and had even tried committing suicide and states some of the reasons for that in the quote below:

"Back in 2014, I made a radical change in my lifestyle. I was overweight, depressed and could barely work at my physically demanding job. I knew I had to make a change but I didn't know how or where to start." Narrative H

"In 2017, I had tried to commit suicide twice due to obvious reasons. I was dealing with my childhood trauma. Antidepressants, sleeping pills and medications were my life back then. I used to shout at everyone on feeble issues. I used to puke blood lumps." Narrative O

The following two quotes are from persons, who had trouble focusing. The narrator in the latter was also experiencing body soreness which they could not fully explain but suggested it may have been connected to their constant engagement in various activities with little rest:

"It was really hard to focus my mind just on one thing (breath)." Narrative D

"I started my meditation journey in my boxing days when I was a teenager. Back then I was not finding a permanent solution to my body sourness because each day such intense training and then studying neither I was able to focus on My boxing nor in my studies because each day weight training and then again touching new limits the body needed the rest." Narrative L

The examples above show how two narrators of four in total, had experienced something negative in relation to their ability to focus and stay focused. These focus difficulties were described to be caused by an overactive mind unable to focus on anything for longer than brief moments. Additionally, one person described their focus problems to be linked to their negative emotions as such that they would get angry easily and engage in fights with others. Moreover, insomnia was described as a detrimental life issue in two narratives as the people simply felt they could not get enough sleep which was related to their overly active mind. An example of these is:

"Insomnia was a normal thing for me because all of my thoughts were relentlessly buzzing in my head and stinging me provoking for new thoughts." Narrative Y

Addictive behavior was also described as life damaging in two cases. Moreover, work and study related problems were likewise mentioned an example of which was that the person felt their work was overwhelming and they perceived themselves to be on the verge of burnout. Relationship problems, such as feeling stuck in an unwanted relationship, were mentioned by two people to be something negative that was happening in their life.

The data also show that some people had their unique other reasons that were not as explicitly connected to well-being as the ones portrayed above. Even if their initial infatuation with mindfulness was not to improve well-being, eventually many of the narrators experienced well-being related outcomes from mediation even if they started practicing for reasons unrelated to it. Thus, reasons listed under "Other reasons" in Table 5 were not necessarily linked to something negative that the person was experiencing, but rather to their own interest in self-improvement. In some cases, meditation practice was adopted because the person was introduced to mindfulness either by a person they trusted, such as an authority (a doctor) or at a yoga hobby they had in which it belonged to the routine. In one narrative, the person chose to adopt the practice again after a break because they felt it could benefit them as it had done in the past as they were now facing negative emotions:

> *"I was never consistent after I quit my yoga classes and the pace of life got faster and faster and I joined my bachelor's and that's when I have realised that I have anxiety. I was anxious and used to overthink a lot even for small things and I decided to meditate again. I tried a lot to regain that consistency and that focus back to meditation and I did. It lowered my anxiety and made me focus more on the present." Narrative N*

Additionally, one person, a student, focused on meditating to enhance how well they could perform in their studies, showing that there were others who were after personal gain from meditation. The person below also received outcomes, such as improved anger management, that they had not expected:

"I have been practicing meditation from that last 10 years. My forced me this as one of my relative suggested that it will improve my academic performance(I am glad she did that). It not improved my academic performance but it brought so many positive changes in my life. […] I had anger issues. I used to fight a lot […] I have conquered this issue now and it has only happened because of meditation." *Narrative S*

What is more in two stories meditation was not stated to be something that the narrators benefitted from and these stories were different in approach toward meditation. In Narrative U below, the narrator claimed to have been "already happy" without any well-being related problems and was introduced to meditation by their partner who was a cult member and highly praised meditation. This person had gorgeous esoteric experiences with meditation but thought they wanted to stop because their experiences started making them less interested in their daily reality. Another person's (Narrative I below) interest in meditation was based on their interest in learning esoteric techniques. One of these techniques was "astral projection" which they described to be a controlled soul travelling outer body experience which could supposedly be achieved with meditation. These people described:

*"In NYC, I'd show up at this cult that focused on meditation (and "soul travel") called **Eckankar.**" Narrative I*

" […] except I felt like a new person after I learned the meditation techniques. I meditated several times a week for months, and the only reason I stopped was because I could see myself becoming like the other cult members—withdrawing from life, and focusing inward because my meditation experiences were so beautiful." Narrative U

5.2   Descriptions of mindfulness practices

This subsection It is dedicated to informing the reader about how the narrators practiced mindfulness. This section was chosen to be included here because it shows the variety and clear differences in practicing methods found in the narratives. The consensus with all but two of the narrators seemed to be that meditation was something that could and

should be practiced consistently for it to have a beneficial effect. In their practices all narrators but one would focus on at least one part of consciousness that could be observed and keep their attention there in a state of observance.

Conversely, the narrator with the longest reported experience of 48 years stated that for them meditation involved: "No concentration upon any object of consciousness." In this case an open awareness method of meditation was being described in which the person was being acceptingly aware of everything that they were experiencing. This method had not been reviewed in the literature and was in. However, the styles and perceptions of how meditation practice was to be precisely executed varied, which can be seen in Table 6 below.

Type of mindfulness practice	Narrative	(N=)
Breath observation	C, D, E, H, I, L, O, R, W, X, Y, Z	12
"Meditation", term not elaborated	A, B, G, M, N, Q, S, U, V	9
Guided meditation	F, J, X	3
Chanting/music meditation	L, O	2
Sleep meditation/relaxation	F, P	2
Loving-kindness meditation (LKM)	K	1
Visualization meditation	P	1
Open awareness	T	1

Table 5 Types of mindfulness practice as stated by narrators

The most popular style of meditation was observing the breath, mentioned by 12 of 26 narrators. The following two narrative quotes are examples of meditating in this manner:

> *"So,One fine day I turned off the lights of my room with windows closed (complete darkness) and I just sit with my spine straight and was taking long deep breaths (for 3 seconds breathe in, hold and 4 seconds breathe out)" Narrative L*

"I sat cross-legged and confidently resumed the intense focus of my breath passing over the upper part of my lip." Narrative W

One of the persons who was meditating on their breath also described their meditation to be done with affirmations, phrases they used repeatedly to focus on the breathing sensations:

"I affirmed with inhaling and exhaling "I'm not the body and I'm not the mind"" *Narrative O*

Nine persons named their practice "meditation" and did not elaborate further details of their practice. Moreover, three people had been implementing guided meditations, one of them using the application Headspace and stating that using the app for meditating had become important for them:

"Shortly after, I started using Headspace, an iPhone app that enables you to easily do 10 minute daily meditations. I've been meditating using Headspace ever since, and it's become a very important practice in my life." Narrative I

Other techniques included Loving-kindness meditation, chanting/music meditation – in which it was described that the persons were listening to music and singing mantra-like repetitive syllables and sleep meditation/relaxation done to induce sleep, such as in the following examples, the first one also featuring an app:

"The first few guided sleep meditation sessions nurtured a calmness in my mind which in turn had a positive impact on the quality of my sleep. This motivated me a lot to try out the other guided meditation sessions available on the app [Insight Timer] and this exploration opened the gates of tranquility for me." Narrative D

"Initially, I started with Guided Sleep meditation and the results,I felt was astounding..I was asleep in a matter of 10 minutes and no useless thoughts were accompanying me during Sleep..I could see its positive results within 2–3 days, so I continued with it.." Narrative F

There was also one person using a visualization meditation which was a method for mentally generating a visual image of a relaxing place and feeling as if the person were there

to help them become calm. This visualization was explained as a tool that could be used when faced with a difficult situation, in the narrative it was a dentist appointment. This person could use a personal strategy to visualize their "happy place". The person was adapting a personal mindfulness practice of body relaxation to find deep calmness in a stressful event. In this case the person appeared to be blocking all external stimuli and was only focusing on their internal visualization as they also described to not being able to hear their dentist's questions. Here is a quote that highlights this style:

> *"I closed my eyes (didn't really want to be looking at all of the equipment going in and out of my mouth). And, I just let my body fall deeply into the chair. Then, I went to my happy place." Narrative P*

Additionally, there were two stories that focused on personal experiences on meditation retreats in which the persons were meditating in silence for most of their waking hours which was describe as rigorous and even intense. These people were taught not to move when they faced any sensations no matter how unpleasant they might be. The next examples illustrate how they meditated:

> *"During the 10-day silent meditation course, there were three one-hour meditation sessions (8 - 9 AM, 2:30 - 3:30 PM, and 6 - 7 PM) designed to build determination and willpower. The teacher asked me to refrain from making any big posture movements. They included the opening of crossed-legs, closed hands, and closed-eyes despite the feelings of discomfort after sitting for a long time." Narrative E*

> *"I sat cross-legged and confidently resumed the intense focus of my breath passing over the upper part of my lip. […] After 30 hours, my body was already experiencing a uniform buzzing sensation that felt like being wrapped in an electrified blanket" Narrative W*

5.3   Well-being related outcomes of mindfulness practices

This subchapter shows the main findings related to the research question on how mindfulness affects well-being. The outcomes are first depicted in Table 7 and discussed further with quotes in the following pages.

All outcomes of mindfulness practices found in the narratives that were linked to well-being were categorized as Table 7 portrays below. The categories are all connected to personal well-being and health and were derived from the previously discussed literature. They could be sorted into four columns: "Mind/thoughts", "Emotions", "Relationships", and "Performance and physical outcomes". Some of the narratives are listed in multiple columns as they showed multiple outcomes that the person had attained. 25 of 26 stories were describing personal results that they had got from practicing mindfulness in their respective ways. These results they had experienced were positive and saw meditation as constructive, albeit there was one person describing they had not been affected by their practice in any way and described it as pointless. This narrative can be seen in the last column "No outcomes".

Well-being related category of outcomes	Mentioned in Narratives	(N=)
Mind/thoughts	A, B, C, D, E, G, H, J, K, L, M,O, Q, R, T, U, V, X, Y, Z	20
Emotions	B, C, D, F, G, H, J, K, N, O, P, Q, R, S, U, V, W, X, Y, Z	20
Relationships	B, G, H, Q, S, Z	6
Performance and physical	C, D, F, L, M, Q, S, W	8
No outcomes	I	1

Table 6 Well-being related outcomes of mindfulness categorized from the data

In total, 25 persons stated outcomes that were in close connection to either their mind, thoughts, or emotions, discussing the very topics that were set to be explored in this master's thesis. Of these 25, six persons had also experienced improvement in their relationships, and eight had developed their performance (e.g., productivity, better sleep) and physical aspects of their health such as improved immune system or a heightened sense of energy. These performance and physical outcomes were combined in one column in Table 7 as they were closely related to each other in the narratives. In the narratives, the explicit and implicit well-being outcomes that were concerned with the mind, thoughts, and emotions appeared interrelated. In addition, these outcomes were overall

perceived to be highly positive by the narrators with few exceptions, and neutral in one narrative listed under "No outcomes".

5.3.1 Personal outcomes related to thoughts, the mind, and interpersonal relationships

Mind-related outcomes and the ability to focus better including a skill of having more clarity in thoughts was mentioned by nine narrators. The data showed that the people attributed their personal growth in focusing and clarity of mind to be greatly enhanced with their mindfulness practice. Moreover, this effect seemed to take effect rather quickly, in some narratives in a matter of weeks and the results becoming more concrete as the narrators remained consistent with the habit of meditation. Thus, as the people were more focused, some had attained a sense of peace and a feeling of purpose in life instead of being resentful towards themselves for being unable to focus. This seemed to be indicating a connection between the ability to focus and the experience of certain emotions. Here are that show how mindfulness had affected concentration and focus:

> *"My concentration levels were at their peak and I would find myself immersed in things at will." Narrative C (after four months of experience)*

> *"Once I really started to deepen my experience in meditation, with concentration becoming more steady, I began to experience a sense of joy, and even bliss." Narrative K*

> *"[...]I continued it and yes thanks to the Meditation I was much more focused then ever before[...]." Narrative L*

> *"[...]these are the chain of thoughts you experience normally, when you meditate regularly, you realise as soon as you loose focus and come back to the original topic immediately, so you improve your attention span by meditating." Narrative M*

Another mind-related outcome that was enhancing well-being was learning a new way to relate to difficult-seeming situations, which was mentioned in eight answers. In these eight narratives it was even mentioned that the people had become more able to

carefully observe their thoughts. In addition, five persons had become able control their thoughts showing an ability to carefully respond in difficult situations instead of uncontrollable reacting such as with emotional outbursts. This meant that the people had developed a new way to relate to what was happening in their mind and their thought activities. In addition, some even called their mind or brain a "monkey" referencing toward the mind being like an unexpectedly behaving animal living a life of its own. With this new relationship with the mind, its various surprising feats could be accepted and understood better because of the skills learned from a mindfulness practice. Furthermore, some had experienced their thoughts stopping and one described this moment to be their "awakening". Here are examples that show new ways of relating to thoughts and how the thoughts could even start changing into more positive ones:

"I began to see my mind firsthand and to realize very clearly how a paranoid (anxiety being a kind of paranoia) mind worked." Narrative A

"It's allowed me to tame my monkey brain and clarify my thoughts." Narrative J

"I learned how to stop my thoughts at will. I learned that the thoughtless state can be easily reached by the awareness of breathing.[…] I stopped thinking. That was an unbelievable insight. I had no thoughts but I still was there. Who was that "I" who was still watching?" Narrative Y

"Also, thanks to the less frequent overthinking loop, now my head has more space to have more optimistic thoughts, new goals and new dreams." Narrative Z

5.3.2   Emotion-related personal outcomes

Outcomes involving emotions were featured in 20 of the 26 stories. Those outcomes were benefits correlating with emotional life such as calmness, positive emotions and experiencing fewer negative emotions. The main outcomes they had were experienced calmness mentioned by 11 narrators, increased positive feelings such as joy and happiness for nine narrators, and simply having less difficult emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety and stress) which was mentioned by ten narrators.

The most mentioned effect that practicing mindfulness had had on the participants emotions was by bringing with it an overall calmness. Some narrators even depicted their life to have slowed down with the practice. This outcome of slower life pace was related to a positive emotion of calm or peace which in turn seemed to be interconnected to both the narrators' mind activity and emotions in a way that for instance calmness could be induced in the mind. Furthermore, some narrators used meditation to handle difficult situations, to achieve a calm and relaxed state whilst in a difficult situation such as at the dentist. Additionally, calmness appeared to be such that differed in its experiential length meaning some persons had started to develop it into a new personal trait whilst others experienced it for shorter periods of time, and it was experienced most often during and directly after the practice. In one narrative experienced calmness was what made the person interested in regular meditating. The following examples show how these calming emotions were experienced and they were connected to practicing mindfulness:

> *"I did find some direct correlation between traits like concentration and calmess and meditating daily." Narrative C*

> *"[…] you feel your sensations and stay calm because of this new habit." Narrative E*

> *"Calmness in the mind is another benefit,which i can't stop raving about.." Narrative F*

> *"[…] even though your world may seem to be spinning out of control there is always peace to be found." Narrative H*

> *"My buddy suggested meditation. I agreed to try it out. He sat me down and guided me through a small breathing exercise. It helped calm me down and opened my eyes to the possibility of beginning to practice meditation regularly." Narrative J*

> *"After that 60 minute session, I experienced a calmness and peace inside my restless mind. It got so attached to the feeling that I wanted more of it." Narrative Q*

> *"Had I not started practising it, I would have never felt the way I feel now. Much calm, composed, focussed and still." Narrative V*

"Meditation gave me a calm, relaxed and stabilised mind which helped me to achieve all that I wanted.." Narrative X

One of the narratives showed the narrators journey toward their final examinations at the age of 16 with one year of background in meditating. They were not aware of their personal calmness until it was communicated by others taking the same exams:

"I did not observe any change that I was aware of, as the whole concept of meditation was unknown to me at that age. Until others told me how calm and de-stressed I was during my final examinations." Narrative N

Another person described their calm emotions in the following way:

*"I sometimes **maintain the meditative state of mind for a whole day** where a sense of calmness is sensed every moment." Narrative V*

In addition, there were also other positive emotions positive emotions such as love, joy, happiness, acceptance, bliss, peace, and gratitude which were something that some narrators were experiencing more frequently than before they had practiced mindfulness. This was connected to perceiving the emotion as something that could be felt regardless of outside events – showing acceptance to what is. This is an example of these positive emotions:

"When you can control the bee of your mind, you discover that love and kindness multiply exponentially, so why spend time being cruel and miserable?" Narrative B

"I have learned that you have to crawl before you walk. You have to experience the bliss of who you are in mediation over time, before it is stabilized enough to be carried out of meditation into your activity, and that when you are experiencing your true nature nothing is more attractive." Narrative G

"After a month or so my daily mood started to improve. The depression that I was experiencing started to lift. I began to love my meditation practice." Narrative H

"Once I really started to deepen my experience in meditation, with concentration becoming more steady, I began to experience a sense of joy, and even bliss. This experience I cannot find anywhere else in this world. It's a being happy for no reason." Narrative K

In narrative B the person had also written about positive emotions that most of the time they were able to feel joy similar to when they had been a child even if they were facing severe hardship in life. They elaborated further to define meditation as "your little boat" sailing in "the great tempest" of life thus describing meditation rather poetically as a personal resource with which adversities could be countered and overcome. Additionally, this person stated:

"[…]meditation is the little boat which will carry you across the stormy seas of human life." Narrative B

Another benefit that was experienced was feeling "a natural state of high in meditation" (Narrative R) which meant they wanted to meditate more because of a positive combination of emotions. The same phenomenon was also described in Narrative C as "a constant uplifted mood throughout the day". Moreover, one person described meditation as:

"I felt like a new person after I learned the meditation techniques. […] I found that meditation was even better than sex." Narrative U

Furthermore, there were other narrators who could summon certain emotions when they wanted to and had additionally acquired a better understanding of their personal emotions. This was attributed to becoming more attuned to their mind and emotions with the help of their meditations. These are stated in the following examples:

"Loving kindness meditation taught me that we have this power to generate any feeling or emotion in our own minds, without depending on any event or person." Narrative K
"I get 1 second more to make the judgement whether to express my anger or just let it go. With long exhalation, I come back to my senses and can release the tension

inside my head and muscles (not claiming that I can do this 100% of the time, but at least 30% of the time I can control my anger)." Narrative Z

Another one of the positive outcomes that was present in the narratives was feeling fewer negative emotions or that the emotions becoming less damaging to the narrator. For example, after four months of practice, the person in Narrative C had experienced their anxiety gradually diminishing to an extent in which they did not care about it any longer. The decrease of negative emotions was gradual. After one month, another person in Narrative H felt their depression starting to fade. After six months this person started feeling depressed again but claimed their new method of mindfulness provided the measures to cope with it. This was even when this person was going through an intense new phase in life of growing their new online business. Here are quotes from these two narratives:

"Any prevous anxiety that i had was completely cured or at least subdued to the point where i actually stopped giving a shit." Narrative C

"Now I'm going through an intense time in my life (building my online business.) Depression has reared its ugly head again. In the past 6 months meditation has helped me immensely. Without it, I would not be making the progress I am." Narrative H

Stress was one of the factors that had been lessened with mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness brought with it a sense that there was less stress, or the persons could cope with it more efficiently. In Narrative V, the person had experienced a change in their anxiousness and stress levels which had dropped in a manner that the person though was notable. In addition, meditation had even led to self-perceived personality changes in which the person had turned from a stressful person into one that was helpful towards others in Narrative Y. Relating to stress in differently had also resulted in more productivity in the case of Narrative Z. Here are examples of those narratives showing these changes:

*"Just after few days of meditation, there was **significant reduction in stress and anxiety levels** and a sense of calmness was felt." Narrative V*

"I had a massive shift in my personality. My temperament changed. All my life I was a turbulent Choleric, now I am an assertive Sanguine. I became much less reactive, more stable, and immune to other people's opinions." Narrative Y

"I struggled badly in my job life, where I had to multitask and sometimes parallelly had to handle two or more "very important tasks". One of my seniors once mocked me saying that the rate at which I was stressed in the beginning days, he was sure that I would become bald (like him) within the next 5 years. Today, I am mentally more stable, can handle stress better than my 3 years old self and can analyse things/people/situations better, all thanks to this one habit." Narrative Z

The fact that some narrators were finding new ways to handle stress was also connected to responding to difficult situations in a manner that was more constructive instead of reacting in detrimental ways such as with anger or hurtful comments which could have cumulating negative outcomes such as worsened relationships. In many of the examples, emotions such as anger were also featured as something that was even causing these persons more stress as they felt they were unable to control over themselves and their reaction. Stress was also an emotion that could be experienced less in everyday situations after the person had adopted meditation. For example, these quotes highlight well what had happened to narrators' stress:

"The activity or the stresses or the things going on around you when you are in that place is not affected by what is going on around you or your activity. Activity does not diminish this cultured place when your nervous system is comfortable being there. Activity that is pleasant or activity that is not pleasant does not diminish this moment. Nothing is more attractive, and from this place of comfort you can act." Narrative G

*"Meditation lowered my **stress** levels." Narrative N*

"I get less stressed about canceled plans, insensitive people, rude customer care executive behavior or any other situation that may have brought a negative response in the past." Narrative Q

Notably, many emotions seemed to be constantly changing and mindfulness could be used as a skill to cope with uncertainty. Moreover, there were some negative experiences that were related to meditation. For instance, in Narrative W the person had experienced

the greatest feeling of happiness of their life while on a meditation retreat and practicing meditation rigorously for hours. This happy feeling, however, changed quickly into anger toward another person who was making distracting noises in front of the narrator. As the person directed their attention to that which was annoying them, that annoyance became their full experience of meditation. Hence, they realized that they could change their emotions depending on what they were focusing and soon found a positive mental and physical state. They also described to be feeling their negative experience as a physical sensation in their body, more specifically as a burning sensation in their lower spine:

> *"I made a peculiar observation. It was an insight that has stayed with me to this day. The anger was clearly concentrated in my back, which still felt hot, particularly the lower part. The more breathes I took, the calmer my mind was and the cooler my back became. But when I let myself slip, noticing the picking of the toenail, the heat returned to my spine. I witnessed my anger, for the first time, as a sensation (that manifested as heat), which I could then separate from my emotions." Narrative W*

This experience of anger in Narrative W was among the few negative experiences which had been encountered during meditation in the narratives. Other negative aspects about meditation that were discussed were related to realizing how bad the person had felt before meditating regularly. This negative aspect of understanding how terrible one was feeling turned to positive as the persons continued practicing. For example, one person discussed this as follows:

> *"Initially, I felt horrible as meditation started revealing how I felt from inside. Had to control a lot to overcome those feelings and continue the practise." Narrative V*

6   Discussion

In this chapter the findings from the previous chapter are discussed and reflected with the theory in respect with all three main theories which were chosen as the theoretical basis for this thesis. Hence, the findings that were related to observing one's thoughts and acceptance in the stories will be compared to Lindsay and Creswell's (2017) MAT will be discussed first. Afterwards, as many narrators had experienced enhanced or in-creased positive emotions, these will be discussed and reflected with Fredrickson's (1998) broaden-and-build model and Seligman's (2012) more general ideas on well-be-ing and health. Additionally, the findings connected to stress and well-being shall be evaluated in the context of the reviewed existing literature. The chapter concludes in a discussion on the cultural implications that the narrator backgrounds could have for their experiences of mindfulness.

6.1   Monitoring and accepting

The elements that the people were describing, such as breath observations, becoming aware of their mind-activity, emotions and stress, and sharing the key nuances that they had incorporated into their practice resembled those defined by Cambridge Dictionary (2020b) and Hafenbrack (2017) as key concepts of mindfulness showing that the narra-tives were feasible for this study because the themes in the data matched those in the data to a great extent. Furthermore, in the data it was described in many occasions that observation of some object of consciousness was the focus for many meditators which was what Lindsay and Creswell (2017) state to be the first phase of practicing mindful-ness, being aware. Practicing mindfulness appeared to have multiple benefits which were first discovered in formal practice and then recognized in daily life. These will be discussed below.

Furthermore, by monitoring and accepting their emotions as described in MAT by Lindsay & Creswell (2017), some narrators appeared to be able to strengthen their expe-rience of mindfulness first by observing what was happening and then cultivating an

accepting attitude towards these phenomena, visible in many of the narratives for instance in the form of relating in new ways to stressful situations, exam stress, or problematic situations in interpersonal relationships. In other words, in the narratives accepting events that were happening to the narrators emerged as the essence of the practice in creating personal well-being in the form of primary mental and but in a few narratives even physical health improvements.

In other narratives, it could be seen that the first concrete outcome from meditating regularly for many narrators was becoming more capable of monitoring their inner state, thoughts and emotions for instance. This and the basic practice of returning to one's chosen anchor of observation such as the breath appeared to result in a higher ability to focus, discussed by Wihuri (2014: 17). Meditating seemed to be potential in inducing mental clarity which was reported by some narrators as a means with which they had become able to control their thoughts to some extent with the skills learned in formal meditation. This notion of controlling thoughts was noted by Hafenbrack (2017) as a possible outcome for mindfulness. This improvement in focus had also created the possibility for the narrators to immerse oneself completely in tasks, resembling the basics of a flow state, and become more productive which could be interpreted as a sign that their working, studying, or life in general had become more meaningful which is one of the foundational aspects of personal well-being (Heydenfeldt et al., 2011; Seligman, 2012).

Similar to focusing better, a more stable attention as an outcome of practicing mindfulness discussed by Good et al. (2016) seemed to be a potential benefit for some narrators. This improvement in attention seemed to have a spillover effect on other areas of life in the answers in that one benefit could result in the next and that one into other beneficials. For example, with careful observations of their mental and emotional states the narrators had acquired new ways of relating to difficult situations. In addition, from that point some had become more willing to face situations that they feared which had in turn presented with the opportunity to have the courage to try something that was

feared before. This could allow the persons to start their own online business or begin taking better care of their physical health which could be interpreted as signs of a certain degree of acceptance that these people had found toward their life situations.

Some narrators had also noticed they were engaging in negative inner dialogue, meaning their thoughts were mostly in a state of negative chatter with themselves. These people could lessen this aspect of their mind and find more positive emotions by focusing on positive and constructive thoughts. This could be understood as being in accordance with Hülsheger et al.'s (2013) suggestions in which they stated that mindfulness is primarily about being less judgmental toward that which is happening in life. Moreover, it was mentioned by some narrators that they had become able to begin thinking differently, more positively, which likened Vacharkulksemsuk and Fredrickson's (2013: 51) proposition of positive thoughts being a predecessor to thinking in more beneficial and creative ways.

In addition, as people had become more aware of their inner states they seemed to have gained a new skill of reassessing and even choosing their personal reactions. Some mentioned, for instance, that they had stopped reacting to other people in an angry manner which had previously caused their relationships harm. This behavior control had led to the improvement of interpersonal relationships for these people which had its own implications on fostering a better sense of well-being as the persons felt more connected to others and perhaps even a bit more empathetic. Thus, in the data there was support for the suggestions of Good et al. (2016) that developing one's attention can be connected to well-being-related benefits in the skills of observing inner events and also personal behavior.

A new ability for the narrators to relate differently to their mind or difficult situations had the likeness of the acceptance aspect of MAT. This new relationship with the mind seemed to be a key feature resulting in heightened well-being also because with mindfulness the person could become able to recognize what the causes of problems were in

each situation they were facing (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, in the narratives accepting appeared to happen as natural consequence of remaining in a relaxed and aware state even after formal practice was over. Thus, the narrators were in their stories providing indications supporting the evidence provided by Jazaieri and Shapiro (2017) who claimed that formal mindfulness practice could pose individuals to be more mindful in other life situations and not just in while in formal practice. In some narratives, acceptance was a positive emotion which was experienced more often because of meditation. Thus, the importance of acceptance in meditation practice gained support.

Lindsay and Creswell's (2017) idea related to MAT that people would react more intensely with higher monitoring but without acceptance of their inner states was seen in one story in which the person had an intense experience of shifting from monitoring their pleasant feelings into significant irritation and anger which they eventually came to accept. This could potentially show that the value of acceptance is great in a mindfulness practice because otherwise the person might simply focus more on for example negative thoughts which could result in a negative thinking loop which was discussed in multiple narratives. Only once the person could realize they had been succumbed to such a loop they could cease it and feel better, it seemed.

However, negative aspects of meditation practice, such as high irritation while practicing, body numbness, and boredom which were mentioned in three narratives were also visible and claimed as challenging. Albeit these experiences were difficult, it seemed that by continuing to practice the persons could start relating differently to them. This is likely because of the growth these people had experienced in acceptance of events they could not change. That is to say some persons had come to the realization that much of the aspects of their life they were perceiving as negative had somehow changed into the positive or they had started valuing their personal characteristics, such as being an emotional person, as assets.

Conversely, there was one person who practiced meditation by having: "No concentration upon any object of consciousness." The 48 years of background with meditation for this person could indicate that they had attained such a state of mindfulness that they had somehow become "super-aware" of their experiences. This is an idea suggesting that instead of needing to be attentive to any single object of consciousness in their practice this person had become extremely adept in simultaneously observing and accepting different aspects of life such as personal difficulties. This could be a sign that this person had acquired a great sense of well-being, one of the reasons being their stated ability to feel deep positive emotions such as joy. Thus, this narrative too supported the existing literature (e.g., Roche et al., 2020) stating that the positive effects of mindfulness could increase with a dedicated long-term meditation practice.

6.2   Broaden-and-build model and positive emotions

Some of the most distinct personal outcomes that could be seen in the narratives were related to emotions, portrayed in 20 of them. In general, practicing meditation seemed to be a gateway into realizing that it was possible to personally change for the better even when facing situations that were perceived as negative or even hopeless. Positive emotions mentioned by Seligman (2012) such as "pride", "gratitude", "pleasure", "satisfaction", "interest", and/or "hope" were all present in the data along with other mentioned emotions, the most significantly present of them was the feeling of calmness. Other positive emotions that the narrators stated they were now beginning to feel more, were for instance love, joy, and peace which in multiple occasions appeared to have resulted in a sense one's life changing completely.

The notion that by monitoring and accepting emotions the frequency of positive emotions can be heightened, and thus it is possible to achieve a higher sense of well-being, that was stated by Fredrickson (1998) and Lindsay and Creswell (2017), appeared to be notably present in the data. For instance, it was reported by many a narrator that they could feel a sense of happiness or joy that was not connected to anything other but to

simply being present, or even a state of natural high which could also be a major reason for them to continue meditating because the sense of well-being was so high.

Furthermore, Seligman's (2012) exemplary positive emotion of pleasure was present in one narrative with the narrator using meditation as a means mainly to their pleasure because it allowed them to experience intoxicating positive emotions. They described meditating to be better than sex, showing their enthusiasm about it. This person had however become vary of meditation because they had encountered the practice while becoming involved with a cult and thus became vary of the practice. This showed that even if there were notable benefits related to well-being the context of the practice could have negative effect on the personal experience. Hence, it seemed favorable that the practice was connected to such a setting that the person felt safe in.

The most featured of positive emotions was calmness. This calm emotional quality even seemed to be a permanent state of being for some, attained after months or years of practice potentially supporting the idea that mindfulness could be most beneficial if practiced consistently in the long-term which was discussed for instance by Roche et al. (2020). Observing and accepting as described in MAT (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017) the various attributes of consciousness such as aches, emotions such as anger, or difficult life situations, seemed to result in a feeling of calmness in the narratives. Notably, the experience of calmness also appeared to be the result of feeling a wider range of positive emotions or being able to focus more on positive emotions such as joy. Additionally, once the majority of the narrators became in tune with their emotional life they could better understand the reasons for their emotions.

The improvement in calmness was reported in one narrative to be such that the person was not as aware of their progress until others told them about it. This could be interpreted as a sign that the outcomes of mindfulness practices can be subtle and gradual in a sense that personal development may emerge without personal awareness of it. Seligman's (2012) idea that with positive experiences people might encourage people in

seeking to find more of these experiences and contribute to their community appeared in one narrative. In that narrative it this contribution to community was the narrator's engagement in pro bono work along with this person's responsibilities as a medical student. They claimed to be doing so because the person felt a heightened feeling of gratitude and felt responsible of helping others.

In addition, it was reported in one narrative that life had begun to "slow down" for the person from their mindfulness practice. This meant there being more time to assess what would be the best decision to make and respond accordingly in daily situations. Mental clarity and awareness were the key components to this beneficial behavior, and they were visible in eight other narratives as well. These improvements in awareness and responsiveness were similar to what Fredrickson (1998) discusses with broaden-and-build model, instigating that with greater awareness of emotions one could use the positive ones as a personal resource in situations in which negative emotions are likely to arise. Furthermore, this could be done instead of negative emotions suppressing the individual ability to respond in ways they would actually want.

Deducing from the narratives, the individuals practicing meditation would likely gain more benefits if they chose to continue the practice further after initial experiments with it. It seemed that personal interest in the practice would grow if the narrator found it somehow beneficial. The opposite of this could be seen in the narratives as there were four people who had started to meditate and stopped when they perceived no gain or saw adverse effects. However, all of these people had returned to practicing after having a break from meditation. Additionally, there were those who benefited faster, in days or months, from practicing such as with increased focus or attuning to their emotional life. This notion that the narrators would take time to find benefit in the practice could support Tuleja's (2014) proposition that it is essential for people to start practicing mindfulness instead of only learning the theory. There was another example of this as one narrator was repeatedly reading about mindfulness but was hesitant to practice and with constancy they started improving their well-being. These aspects could also be linked to

Clarke and Draper's (2020) suggestion that mindfulness needed to be clearly defined for employees for it to have significant effects.

The building aspect of the outcomes of mindfulness practices on positive emotions was discussed by Vacharkulksemsuk and Fredrickson (2013: 48). The authors stated there had been little evidence for the building effect since not many studies had focused on mindfulness' long-term effects. However, this research paper managed to provide some exploratory evidence for that. In the narratives, the effects of mindfulness practice seemed to be something that compounded over time and influenced well-being incrementally, such as with gradually heightened calmness or joy, or as a new relationship to personal health, thoughts or other people. These findings greatly resemble the suggestions of the broaden-and-build model, especially the building aspect which suggests that mindfulness could result in the growth of personal PsyCap (Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013: 45).

Thus, the data seems to be indicating that personal trust in the practice as a process-like phenomenon would result in greater benefits in the long-term even if some such as increased calmness could be noticed after a single session. Moreover, it appeared essential to not stop meditating even if no initial well-being related benefits since for instance a new, more accepting attitude towards negative thoughts could be established by a continuous practice. One person in narrative K even called the sense of well-being they had received from multiple years of meditation and approaching 7000 total hours of meditation to be their "inner freedom", a very high sense of emotional well-being.

6.3   Health and stress

The narratives clearly presented the life situations which were often negative or even desperate in which the narrators had been before their mindfulness practice. The reasons in the narratives for adopting meditation had in common the desire of improving one's life in some way. 15 persons had an explicit focus for their mindfulness on improving their well-being. The reasons included significant life problems, such as physical

illness, for instance in the form of acid reflux or a hurting body, which were deteriorating their physical and/or mental health.

As Manka and Manka (2016: 53) had written about health being a subjective experience to each individual, the narratives also provided an image of the narrators' health as something that they started to perceive differently as they begun relating differently to their personal situation, for instance three persons found that they could form a new relationship with the anxiety they were experiencing. Thus, the anxiety and related physical symptoms such as heart arrhythmia ceased to cause these persons as much stress as they had been before. This could for instance be such that they could not function properly. Moreover, other described reasons for the degradation of personal mental and physical health were increases in the difficulty of the life situation for example as one narrator was approaching their final exams, another battling with their thesis, or another founding a business. It seemed according to the narrators that practicing mindfulness could be a means to gain insight into these situations and relate to them with more ease and less stress which also could have a positive effect on their health.

Furthermore, Lomas et al. (2017) stated that excess stress could jeopardize mental health. This causality was present in the narratives as well. Visible in 21 narratives, as the persons had become more aware of their inner world, such as thoughts and how their mind worked, and as they had learned to relate in a new way to themselves, they reported that their experienced negative experiences had diminished or were less threatening. One of these experiences was stress, which for some had been prolonged – leading to various detrimental outcomes, such as physical illness or mental instability. Examples of these were various sicknesses, severe debilitating anxiety, or even causing physical harm to oneself.

One of the most frequently mentioned negative emotions was anxiety (7 narratives) which was interlinked to stress. Stress seemed to be both a cause of and a result of anxiety in that it could form a negative emotion-thought loop. Hence, anxiety could cause

more stress and the person could stress about their anxiety and the loop would continue until the person became mindful of it and was able to calm themselves. This relationship between anxiety and thinking could manifest as physical symptoms such as heart palpitations. In describing how they meditated these seven narrators claimed to have learned to live with their anxiety and to not identify with any negative experience. However, meditation was not described as a cure for anxiety which would result in the removal of this negative emotion altogether.

This new relationship with stress and negative emotions is important because relating to stress and anxiety could enable individuals to function better in the current difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic (Vinkers et al., 2020) in which stress and uncertainty are very high, along with the heightened stress which is connected to new working methods such as distance work and an overall faster pace of work (Manka & Manka, 2016: 27). In addition, the duration of the pandemic is unknown as is the fact whether there will be more global crises in the future. That is why it is essential that individuals have their own ways of increasing their stress resiliency (Vinkers et al., 2020) as it is possible that the uncertainty seems to grow and the personal ways to influence global events may be scarce. The findings in the narratives seem to indicate that a mindfulness practice could be such a tool with which people from various backgrounds and in different life situations could benefit with relatively little effort such as a daily breathing observation session.

Similarly to what Fredrickson (1998) had proposed with broaden-and-build model, the narrators whose dominant experienced emotions were negative felt they were stuck in life. This seemed to also show that this feeling of being stuck or purposelessness resulted in a narrowed personal scope in that there were little perceived options available to improve one's life for the narrator. Therefore, as these people learned to relate differently to their emotions and acknowledged the possibility of increasing their positive emotional experiences, supporting Fredrickson's (2000) ideas about how emotions can "broaden" and "build", they started tackling the negative effects such as degraded health

that stress had caused them. Other examples of improved health were with two narrators battling insomnia who had found help in sleep meditations so that they could sleep better. After that these narrators had started meditating in the daytime as well and their well-being had increased in a compounding manner that neither one had believed could happen. Additionally, there were six others who claimed their sleep had changed positively with meditation showing a potential connection between meditating regularly and sleeping better.

The idea of psychological capital (Avey et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2007: 3) was also present in the narrative content. As PsyCap refers to the state of individual development psychologically (Shahid & Muchiri, 2019), the narratives were mainly depictions of this very psychological development. It was reported in 24 of the stories that as progress to recognize and question existing personal habits was experienced by the narrators, incremental personal development was witnessed in both the internal and external world. For instance, the well-being related outcomes for a mindfulness practices could center around strengthened relationships and increased self-confidence and trust in personal abilities such as performing academically, or better health.

Even if the narrators were continuously practicing mindfulness their health could still be impacted by new stress or anxiety. It was notable however, that these persons claimed mindfulness to be a positive personal resource that helped them in adverse situations, and it appeared to be so that the majority of the narrators had become more willing to enter phases in their lives they knew would be difficult such as with the person who was starting an online business despite their anxiety. This notion of willingness to enter difficult situations was present in the reviewed literature by Shahid and Muchiri (2019) naming it as an aspect of PsyCap.

6.4 Cultural implications from findings

The nationalities of the narrators were hypothesized from available information as follows: 13 persons from India, eight persons from the US, one from Portugal, one from the

UK, one from Brazil, one from Australia, and one from Kazakhstan. Before analysis it was expected that there would be significant differences between the cultures that the narrators were supposed to be representing and that these differences would also be clearly visible in the narratives, especially between the Indian and American ones as these two nationalities composed the vast majority, 21 of the narratives. This is because these two cultures may differ from one another in that when generalized the American one is more individualistic while the Indian culture portrays a society in which there are both individualistic (e.g., Hinduism and a belief in reincarnation which is by determined how well one lives their life) and collectivistic elements (Hofstede Insights, 2021).

However, there were only minor indications of precise cultural differences between the narrators as their narratives were relatively culturally homogenous in depicting personal journeys into mindfulness. The reasons for this homogeneous nature could be that a mindfulness practice creates similar reactions, such as an increase in personal well-being and stronger relationships with others, despite cultural background.

The concrete cultural characteristics which could be attributed to narrator background of the 13 persons from India and those eight who were American were related to how language was used. Indians used short and Americans longer sentences, potentially showing that English was the first language for the Americans and not the first for many Indians. In addition, national culture could possibly also be connected to the described life situation of the narrators as they started to practice mindfulness. For example, in four of the Indian narratives, meditation had been adopted whilst going through university studies to specifically improve well-being and was a key factor that affected academic achievement positively. This could portray that in the Indian culture academic education is valued and that people may seek solutions such as mindfulness to be implemented during studies to cope with factors such as stress. Yet, the author supposes that the same positive value on academic education applies for the American culture even if it was not explicitly featured in the narratives. This is also likely related to sample size.

Furthermore, 17 of all 26 narrators either had a university degree or were currently study-ing at the university which could indicate that persons with a background in higher ed-ucation and/or Quora users are likely to try mindfulness. Other reasons for this could be for instance related to an eagerness in learning something valuable and a desire in im-proving one's PsyCap or concentration skills. Other reasons for this mindset of personal growth could be a curiosity to explore one's own consciousness by seeking new infor-mation and experiences and wanting to improve personal situation similarly to what one might do in an academic institution.

In addition, four of the American narrators and one from India were also promoting their personal mindfulness related coaching services potentially showing and entrepreneurial attitude that could be culturally connected. This could possibly even indicate that mind-fulness coaching is trending in the US, if not even globally with the emergence of appli-cations such as Insight Timer with which guided meditations provided by teachers from various nationalities can be exercised. This modern aspect of mindfulness could be such that is uniting persons who practice it, hence enhancing its visibility – for instance in mainstream media.

In a unique way mindfulness practice could be a means to relate to life struggles and other people in more meaningful ways which the majority of the narratives portrayed. Thus, learning to meditate could be as if a person acquires skill in a new language and starts to understand the world and different cultures better. Thus this person can be-come more capable to act constructively when in contact with other cultures, which has been discussed by Tuleja (2014). In addition, experienced stress and other difficult neg-ative emotions that were present in the narratives had universal qualities such as how anxiety was hindering people from living the life they wanted. This was potentially show-ing that emotions are experienced and described very similarly despite cultural back-ground.

Conversely, according to Dr Batja Mesquita who has extensively studied cultural psychology, emotions are almost completely a cultural phenomenon. An example of this is how a person from a "Western" culture could view feeling shameful as negative while a person in another culture could see that emotion as positive because it may cause them to right what is wrong in the situation. This can for example strengthen a relationship. Moreover, multiple cultures view emotions as interpersonal and not as an individual feature of a person's inner psychology. (Pogosyan, 2018)

However, mindfulness can be a viable solution for personal emotion management that is not necessarily connected to culture. Additionally, the basics of the practice need to be clearly explained in the language that the mindfulness-learning person understands. There could also be a need to practice in a manner that is adapted to the local culture, for instance by choosing which terms are used when mindfulness is taught. This could be an important cultural aspect that needs to be assessed if mindfulness is adapted to the workplace, especially among MNCs or other global institutions interested in promoting employees' well-being in this manner. For instance, if a person is already practicing meditation according to their religious background, like shown above, they might react negatively to a completely secular mindfulness program which could feel incomplete or unfitting to them.

7   Conclusion

This chapter will conclude the thesis by showing how the research progressed and then summarizing the key findings and discussion from chapters five and six. In addition, it will be discussed what the findings could indicate from a managerial point of view for providing suggestions of how mindfulness practices could be implemented by businesses. In addition, the limitations of this study will be discussed. The chapter will end with suggestions for further research.

7.1   Research progression

This master's thesis commenced by scrutinizing the existing related theory to explain mindfulness, and examined Lindsay and Creswell's (2017) Monitor and Acceptance theory to understand the mechanisms of mindfulness practices and how mindfulness could influence well-being. In addition, the key aspects of positive psychology from Seligman (2012): positive emotions, stress, and health were discussed to understand what well-being is. The concept of well-being itself was found to be infused with many meanings. Hence, there is no clear scientific consensus over a specific definition. Moreover, broaden-and-build model (Fredrickson, 1998) was utilized as a basis for understanding how positive emotions could affect well-being.

Methodology constructed of explanations of the research philosophy, a qualitative narrative research approach, and strategy of a thematic analysis of narratives to examine the data with. Secondary data was collected from Quora.com in the form of 26 personal narratives, and validity, reliability and research ethics were discussed in the methodology chapter. The themes that emerged from the data were first analyzed in the subsequent chapter Findings and then reflected with the literature review in the next chapter to form discussion.

7.2   Summary of key findings

The overall conclusion from the literature review is that mindfulness, well-being, health, stress experience, and positive emotions seem to be highly interconnected. This connection was also present in the data as it provided evidence in regard to the research question that mindfulness could support well-being in multiple ways. In existing literature, mindfulness has been suggested to function in the following way: First by noticing personal internal experiences, a person could identify what is happening to them, as well as their thoughts and reactions. From this awareness the person could then progress to developing acceptance toward their personal difficulties. Some of the components of their experience such as positive emotions could therefore be enhanced, and this could foster mental and physical health. (Lindsay & Creswell, 2017; Seligman, 2012; Vacharkulksemsuk & Fredrickson, 2013)

The methodological decision to focus on the practice of mindfulness in the form of online narratives was successful. This was due to the narratives' longitudinal depictions of meditation practices which provided sufficient, detail-rich, personal, and varied material to assess elements of well-being which correlated with the research question. Focusing on the practice proved to be a sensible choice since the many of the authors in the reviewed existing literature (i.e. Roche et al., 2020; Tuleja, 2014) had an emphasis on mindfulness practices making it possible to reflect the theory with the analyzed themes of the narratives.

Overall, it seemed that many narrators had experienced distinct positive well-being outcomes from their meditation practice such as more calmness or increased feelings of joy. The narratives themselves seemed to be function as a means to define personal core reasons for the practice. In the narratives which time frames were months and years, provided evidence of people receiving health benefits from their practice. Some of the positive outcomes could be experienced already after the first session of observing the breath for ten minutes but could in the long-term result in a lasting positive state of

calmness. Positive emotions were thus a key element in the narratives that could compound over time with which the narrators were able to lead more fulfilling lives.

Another important finding was that a central reason for the majority to start meditating was a personal recognized need to improve one's life. Some narrators were in such a phase of life that they felt their well-being had been severely compromised which manifested in various forms of physical illness. The narrators also seemed to want to practice more consistently once they noted some clear outcomes from meditation, such as increased focus which could result in greater productivity. Moreover, it seemed that positive outcomes related to well-being were likely to emerge with a consistent practice that was incorporated in the daily routine so that it became a habit. Additionally, likely due to the mindfulness-related development in personal PsyCap, some persons had become more willing to enter situations they would have previously avoided which had enriched their life experience.

Another key factor connected to practicing mindfulness which was influencing personal well-being was relating to one's mind and thoughts in a new, more understanding manner in which some narrators realized they could take their thoughts less seriously. Such phenomenon resembled a sign of acceptance similar to what was suggested by Lindsay and Creswell (2017). In the narratives, acceptance of this kind could provide the person with measures to focus better and develop healthier interpersonal relationships. In addition, these relationships are important aspect to improve at work since work relationships can be a significant source of stress – along with the uncertainty of an insecure job (Statista, 2019). Furthermore, it is important to respond to this stress with measures that comprehensively address it because stress is a global issue that is closely linked to the current coronavirus outbreak. This uncertainty that can expand to the future and cause even more unhealthy stress (Vinkers et al., 2020).

Another important finding was that likely not just a mindfulness practice alone seems to result in a multitude of well-being related benefits. Instead, a holistic approach towards

relating to difficult situations, to the mind, addressing stress, and emotions by using a mindfulness practice as a means in the process of understanding oneself was reported to be what increased these aspects of PsyCap. Moreover, some narratives also emphasized a lifestyle that is healthy, enjoyable, and meaningful.

Importantly, the findings showed that even if people practice mindfulness with different techniques, they can nonetheless have positive well-being related outcomes such as a new means to live with anxiety. Conversely, it is also possible that the narrators had found a certain type of practice and followed it simply because that was available to them at the time they needed it. In addition, the data showed that mindfulness practices may also vary in their characteristics. While some narrators chose to observe the breath, for others guided meditations were the preferred meditation style. This finding supported Vu and Gill's (2018) hypothesis that individuals benefit the most if they practice mindfulness in a way that is personally fit for them. In addition, applications, such as Headspace, were visible in the data as a source of information and guidance into how mindfulness could be practiced.

7.3   Managerial implications

Good et al. (2016) state that the main reason why mindfulness has become popular in corporations and as a research topic, is because of willingness from these instances to improve employee well-being. Even if getting involved with mindfulness and the outcomes may be experienced differently, mindfulness practices appear to hold valuable potential in fostering personal well-being and health as mindfulness can help individuals cope with stress and feel more positive emotions as well as relate in constructive manners to adverse situations.

Tuleja (2014) states that mindfulness is a crucial ability for any person in a position of leadership. This is because people with developed mindfulness skills can be more tolerant towards other cultures and therefore able to thrive in an uncertain job position involving where attributes related to culture such as behavior and communication may

differ (Tuleja, 2014). This possibility to cope with uncertainty was visible in the findings as well. With a heightened awareness of their emotions, thoughts, and reactions international employees could also engage in more efficient and focused communication with others. This could result in stronger work relationships as people could be more willing to understand other viewpoints thus potentially also facilitating innovation.

Hede (2010) proposes the idea that it is especially important for managers to be able to control their emotions and that mindfulness can be the tool with which some level of emotional control can be achieved. This proposition seems to be aligned with the findings as meditation enabled many narrators to witness and to some extent control their emotions. Additionally, work stress in times of a global pandemic could perhaps be mitigated by practicing attention and awareness of emotions of fear and anxiety and realizing the connection between thoughts and emotions. This is important, as the length of this global pandemic is unknown and some of the ramifications, such as issues associated with decreased mental health, can have a negative effect on work well-being even after the coronavirus crisis is less acute or when it has been seized under control.

If organizations are interested in implementing mindfulness, it could be recommended for them to introduce a practice that is simple enough so that employees comprehend it and can develop a personal practice. Having designated spaces in which one is able to meditate distraction-free could be beneficial and potentially increase productivity and work relationships, as meditators may become better focused and more attuned to their emotions hence not reacting for instance to setbacks uncontrollably. A type of mindfulness practice that pays attention to emotions and is possibly suited to fostering positive emotions such as loving kindness meditation could be a beneficial exemplary practice which could be taught to employees.

Allowing the employees to begin the practice gradually by providing instructions facilitated by mindfulness professionals, instead of merely lecturing about the topic seems also important from a managerial point of view. One potential way of introducing

mindfulness at work could be beginning or ending meetings with a mindfulness break which could be a short two-minute breath observation. However, it is important to foster open dialogue about how employees feel about workplace mindfulness and not enforcing it. As mindfulness may be difficult to incorporate into daily organizational life (Roche et al., 2020) it could be useful to investigate measures with which employees would willingly start practicing on their own.

With increased distance work, work-related mindfulness sessions could be organized online for broader audiences without location limitations if employees find this convenient and are willing to participate. This is important, because increasing social connectedness is among the means with which those who are lonely and at risk of mental health issues can be connected socially when facing global crises (Vinkers et al., 2020) which could enhance relationships. Additionally, firms could also implement smartphone applications by offering paid premium subscriptions of commercial mindfulness apps to their employees. To the author's knowledge, in some apps, it is even possible to form communities, for example among colleagues, or offer structured mindfulness courses that the participants can complete in their own pace. This kind of voluntary approach seemed to be what caused many of narrators to be interested in meditation.

Moreover, according to Martini (2018) it is important for modern organizations to create an atmosphere that is open-minded in which both the organization itself and employees are less resistant to changing circumstances. These circumstances include new technologies of the digital era (Martini, 2018). This increase in open-mindedness was also visible in the stories, as people started questioning their behavioral manners and reacting to external stimuli and found new ways of behaving that suited them better.

7.4 Limitations

The exploratory nature of this study highlighted the motivations for and the experiences that individuals had with their mindfulness practice. However, the results should be regarded as suggestions as they are derived from a relatively small sampling of people,

which also impacts the results' generalizability. This is true even if using personal stories allowed a deeper inspection of the experiences over a longer period of time. Hence, the findings ought to be regarded as referential evidence to inspire further investigation. Furthermore, a larger sample could have shown more negative and otherwise varied experiences of meditation and thus allowed more diversity in the results.

Since Quora was the only platform for data collection it resulted in the users of that website being featured in this study, which also impacts how much the results can be generalized. Additionally, the thematic analysis of narratives is potential in disregarding some important elements because of human error which is less likely with quantitative methods. By gathering data multi-methodically in the form of surveys and interviews to support the stories could have provided a different view and could have assigned more diversity to the data as it was now heavily focused on Indians and Americans. Thus, cultural attributes behind mindfulness practices and well-being could not be as deeply analyzed as the author would have hoped. Moreover, estimating the nationalities as it was done in this thesis involves the possibility of mistakes in narrators' cultural backgrounds as they could now only be hypothesized with the information that was available.

In addition, Mesquita's (Pogosyan, 2018) ideas that emotions are an interpersonally experienced phenomenon instead of a wholly individual experience were also very different from the approach that was adopted while formulating the research philosophy of this thesis. This shows well, how cultural bias can affect research in that the author of this master's thesis had an approach that was connected to their Finnish cultural background. In addition, as all narratives had been written in English it is possible that not all minor nuances the narrators wanted to say could be delivered as effectively by those who were available not speaking it as their first language. Additionally, since the narratives had been on display on Quora it is possible that some narrators had read each other's stories and their own narratives could have been thus affected by others in unknown ways.

Another limitation was that at least five of stories were written by people who may have shared their narrative because of personal ulterior motives such as finding new clients. For instance, a few had linked their own website or mindfulness training program to the end of their story. This promotion of own services could be done because of a narrator bias to praise mindfulness so that their services would appear more alluring to persons interested in mindfulness.

7.5   Suggestions for further research

The passing of time may have distorted the reported mindfulness experiences of the narrators as they may have not remembered their well-being related outcomes and optimally with all details in their narratives. That is why it could be interesting to investigate how people in a single multinational company (MNC) perceive mindfulness. Their experiences could be assessed regularly, and the persons could journal about their daily experiences. This type of approach to researching mindfulness could extend over multiple years to best study the effects of long-term practice. Furthermore, it could be studied on a larger scale what the motives for individuals in different stages of life are to adopt a mindfulness practice and what role smartphone applications such as Headspace have in this process. Additionally, since informal mindfulness practices have received little attention in academic studies (Jazaieri & Shapiro, 2017) it could interesting topic to study further, one well-being related study topic could be mindful exercising.

Moreover, the cultural aspects of whether one is more prone to adopt a practice because they represent a certain cultural background could be useful for MNC's to investigate as this could enable the optimization of mindfulness trainings and apps. Furthermore, it could clarify the efficiency of mindfulness programs if it were investigated how culturally diverse people react to standardized mindfulness programs. Another aspect of interest for further research could be assessing the reasons why people stop practicing mindfulness. None of the narrators had specifically written about improved memory capacity or retention abilities, a feature of cognition that Lindsay and Creswell (2017) proposed

could be enhanced with mindfulness practices, which could also be studied further in longitudinal studies.

Another aspect that could be more rigorously researched is at-home practices and whether they could be superior in aiding people to cope with notable stress. The reasons for this are likely connected to the fact that globally many people are spending significantly more time at their homes and uncertainty is also high. From the perspective of positive emotions, it could be examined which emotions, such as joy, love, or gratitude, are the most beneficial in fostering well-being or is it necessary to experience all of these emotions to flourish.

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