Mindfulness and meditation in the workplace:

An acceptance and commitment therapy approach

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There is a wide-range and growing body of evidence that mental health and behavioural effectiveness are influenced more by how people interact with their thoughts and feelings than by their form (e.g., how negative they are) or frequency. Research has demonstrated this key finding in a wide-range of areas. For example, in chronic pain, psychosocial disability is predicted more by the experiential avoidance of pain than by the degree of pain (McCracken, 1998). A number of therapeutic approaches have been developed that share this key insight: distress tolerance (e.g., Brown, Lejuez, Kahler, & Strong, 2002; Schmidt, Richey, Cromer, & Buckner, 2007), thought suppression (e.g., Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000), and mindfulness (Baer, 2003). It is also central to a number of the newer contextual cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) approaches to treatment, such as mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2001), dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993), metacognitive therapy (Wells, 2000), and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999).

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how ACT conceptualises mindfulness and tries to enhance it in the pursuit of promoting mental health and behavioural effectiveness (e.g., productivity at work). To this end, we discuss ACT's key construct of psychological flexibility, which involves mindfulness, and how it has led to a somewhat different approach not only to conceptualising mindfulness, but also how we try to enhance it in the workplace. In so doing, we hope to show that whilst formal meditation practice is valued in ACT, it is only one strategy that is used to promote mindfulness, as well as psychological flexibility more generally.

ACT hypothesises that psychological flexibility[1] is a primary determinant of mental health and behavioural effectiveness. It refers to the ability to fully contact the present moment and the thoughts, feelings, memories and physiological sensations it contains without needless defence or avoidance, and, depending upon what the situation affords, persisting or changing in behaviour in the pursuit of goals and values (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda & Lillis, 2006).

A key implication of this concept—and hence its name—is that, in any given situation, people need to be flexible as to the extent to which they base their actions on their internal events (e.g., thoughts, feelings, memories, and physiological sensations) or the contingencies of reinforcement (or punishment) that are present in that situation. ACT maintains, and research suggests, that people are more psychologically healthy and perform more effectively when they base their actions on their own values and goals (Bond, Hayes, Baer, Carpenter, Guenole, Orcutt, Waltz & Zettle, 2011). Thus, if a person values being a caring friend, she may broach a difficult topic, even if doing so is anxiety provoking; in another situation, however, she might refrain from mentioning something, even if she strongly feels like doing so, in order to pursue her personally meaningful goal of being a caring friend. In short, when people are psychologically flexible, they base their behaviour, in any given situation, more on their values and goals and less on their ever-changeable internal events or current situational contingencies (Bond et al., 2011).

An implication of acting flexibly is that people will experience, at times, unwanted psychological events (e.g., anxiety), whilst pursuing their values-based goals. Thus, a great deal of ACT theory and practice emphasises the use of *mindfulness* strategies for experiencing these events, so that they have less of a negative impact on individuals'

[1] For historical reasons, psychological flexibility has also been referred to as psychological acceptance, and psychological inflexibility has been referred to as experiential avoidance. Bond, Hayes, Baer, Carpenter, Guenole, Orcutt, Waltz & Zettle (2011) discuss these reasons.

psychological health and their ability to pursue their values-based goals. When people are mindful of their psychological events, they deliberately observe them on a moment-to-moment basis, in a non-elaborative, open, curious, and non-judgemental manner (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Linehan, 1993; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999). Thus, psychological flexibility emphasises both committed action towards meaningful goals and mindfulness. It is this combination of mutually enhancing processes that is likely to account for the many mental health and performance benefits associated with this individual characteristic (see Bond et al., 2011; 2013; in prep. & Hayes et al., 2006 for reviews).

Psychological flexibility and ACT at work

Psychological flexibility, and its promotion through ACT, has been primarily discussed in terms of mental health (see Hayes & Strosahl, 2004; Hayes et al., 2006); however, the implication that flexibility may help people be sensitive to, and contact, contingencies of reinforcement that bear on chosen values makes its usefulness to the work setting clear. If people value doing well at work (even if it is just to get paid), greater psychological flexibility increases their sensitivity to performance-related contingencies of reinforcement in their work environment (Bond, Hayes, & Barnes-Holmes, 2006). This is because people who are more flexible are more mindful and, as a result, are not expending their limited attentional resources trying to change, control, or otherwise avoid their internal events; as a result, they are better able to notice and respond effectively to those performance-related contingencies that exist in their current environment. Put more succinctly, this context sensitivity hypothesis states that, in the context of work, flexibility allows people to learn how to do their job more successfully and to have better mental health (in particular, through greater and more mindful contact with values-centred contingencies of positive reinforcement) (Bond et al., 2006).

In the workplace, research has shown that higher levels of psychological flexibility correlate with, and longitudinally predict, multiple work-related outcomes, including better mental health, better job performance, and an increased capacity to learn skills at work (Bond & Bunce, 2003; Bond & Flaxman, 2006; Bond, Lloyd & Flaxman, in prep., Hayes et al., 2006). In some instances, these effects have been found even after controlling for other widely-researched, work-relevant, individual characteristics, such as negative affectivity and locus of control (Bond & Bunce, 2003), emotional intelligence (Donaldson & Bond, 2004), and the Big Five personality traits (Bond, Lloyd, & Guenole, 2013).

Research has also indicated that people with greater levels of psychological flexibility better utilise beneficial resources within their work environments. Bond, Flaxman and Bunce (2008) found, using mediated moderation analyses, that higher levels of psychological flexibility enhanced the beneficial impact of a work reorganisation intervention designed to improve job control. Specifically, people with higher levels of flexibility perceived that they had greater levels of job control as a result of the intervention, and this perception of higher levels of control allowed these people to experience greater improvements in mental health and absence levels (as recorded by the company's Human Resources department). Consistent with the goal-related context-sensitivity hypothesis, the authors suggested that psychological flexibility helped people in the intervention group to better notice where, when and the degree to which they had increased levels of control; they also maintained that it helped participants to better recognise goal-related opportunities for putting that control to effective use (Bond et al., 2008).

Importantly, research shows that psychological flexibility not only predicts a wide-range of outcomes, it also demonstrates that interventions can enhance it to promote emotional health and productivity in the work environment. As noted, psychological flexibility is at the core of ACT's model of mental health and behavioral effectiveness (Hayes

et al., 1999). ACT hypothesises that an increase in psychological flexibility constitutes the mechanism, or mediator, by which this intervention enhances mental health and performance (Hayes et al., 1999). Results from randomised controlled intervention trials have supported this mediation hypothesis in relation to ACT's ability to: improve employee mental health (Bond & Bunce, 2000; Flaxman & Bond, 2010; Lloyd, Bond, & Flaxman, 2013), enhance employees' ability to be innovative (Bond & Bunce, 2000), reduce emotional burnout, and increase helpful attitudes towards client groups (Hayes et al., 2004; Lloyd, et al., 2013). In sum, research shows that psychological flexibility is an important variable for predicting people's mental health and behavioral effectiveness in the workplace; furthermore, ACT training can enhance this characteristic and, as a result, produce emotional and behavioral benefits to workers and their organisations.

The hexagon: The six characteristics that promote psychological flexibility

As we now discuss, ACT postulates six core processes that, together, promote psychological flexibility; and, as we discuss below, ACT, including when used in the workplace, attempts to enhance these processes. The hexagon (colloquially referred to as the hexaflex; see Figure 1) is a graphic representation of the six, core psychological processes that constitute psychological flexibility (and we can influence those processes through various ACT techniques) (Hayes et al., 2006). The processes on the left of the hexaflex (acceptance and defusion) constitute the mindfulness processes, whilst those on the right (values and committed action) promote commitment to values-based action processes. The two at the centre of the hexaflex (present moment and self-as-context) facilitate both types of processes. As we will discuss, though, and as the connecting lines amongst the processes suggest, this distinction between the mindfulness and values-based action processes is not so clear-cut, and one set can help to facilitate the other.

Values

For individuals, *values* refer to a direction of travel that people choose to take in their lives, and that give their lives meaning. People need to work constantly towards their values, as they can never be forever (if ever) achieved, or sustained (Hayes et al., 2012); for example, a person has to work constantly on being a loving partner: it cannot be achieved in perpetuity without consistently taking action. Indeed, values drive people's goals and day-to-day actions.

Committed action

C*ommitted action* involves the specification of actions, or goals, that individuals pledge to take, in order to move towards their values (Hayes et al., 2012). Taking committed action will likely involve creating an (albeit perhaps informal) action plan that specifies: the goal, how it will be achieved, psychological and external barriers that may get in the way of achieving the goal, and perhaps even a timeframe in which sub-goals and the goal, itself, will be met (Bond, Hayes, & Barnes-Holmes, 2006). Importantly, the concept of committed action implies strongly that problems are an inevitable part of working towards goals, and they should be expected and addressed (Hayes et al., 2011). Psychological 'problems' such as anxiety, and other unwanted internal events, are considered 'normal' and not something that needs to be changed or gotten rid of, in order to achieve one's goals: people need only approach them from a mindful perspective.

Self-as-context

S*elf-as-context (SAC)* is a complex process that has a wide-range of psychological implications, for matters ranging from mental health and autistic spectrum disorder to cognitive ability (Hayes et al., 2012). One key function of SAC is that it creates a psychological space from which people can mindfully observe their self-conceptualisations (e.g., 'I am a shy person', 'I am a good partner'), without having such conceptualisations

overly determine their actions (Hayes et al., 2012). Instead, from a perspective of SAC, and the mindfulness it promotes, people are better able to take actions, in a given context, that are more consistent with their values (e.g., intimacy) than their thoughts as to whom they are (e.g., an unlovable person) and whom they are not (confident). As we discuss, below, SAC also constitutes a more stable perspective *from where people can observe their internal events* as part of themselves but not wholly themselves: they are more than the constantly fluctuating private experiences that they experience. As research shows, when people view their thoughts, feelings, and memories from the perspective of SAC, then these internal events tend to exert a less problematic or emotional impact (Foody, Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes & Luciano, 2013).

Defusion

Mindfulness is further promoted through the process of cognitive *defusion*. When defused, people notice their internal events—thoughts, feelings, physiological sensations, memories—as they occur, in the moment. Their focus is on the events, themselves (e.g., 'I am having a thought'), rather than on the meaning or content of those events (e.g., 'I am a hopeless person'). In this way, people do not get entangled in their internal events and are better able to let them come and go. From an ACT perspective, defusion alters the undesirable functions of internal events (especially thoughts), without changing their form, frequency, or situational sensitivity (Hayes et al., 2012). Put another way, defusion involves changing the way that people interact with their private experiences, so, whilst they still may be present, they no longer have detrimental psychological/behavioural effects on them.

Acceptance

Defusion, SAC, and, hence, mindfulness, are facilitated when people are willing to experience, be open to, or *accept*, unwanted or difficult internal events. If, instead, people attempt to avoid those unwanted experiences, such avoidance diverts their responding away

from the present moment and towards getting rid of, changing, or minimising those unwanted internal events. Such inflexible responding to these types of experiences is unlikely to promote people's values, because they are guided by trying to avoid unwanted internal states, rather than by seeing how they can best work toward their values and goals in the present situation.

Present moment

SAC, defusion, and acceptance are the tools that allow people to be in the *present moment* and be aware of, and open to, the (even difficult) internal and external events that they are currently experiencing. In so doing, people can better attend to broad or narrow ranges of the current moment, as the context demands. At times, it will be beneficial for people to attend to a broad range of the present moment (e.g., when driving a car through a busy intersection); at other times, it is more useful for people to focus on a narrow range of a particular situation (e.g., when having an uncomfortable conversation with one's partner). Being in the present moment helps people to establish which degree of focus is most advantageous to them (in relation to their values and goals) in a given situation; and, the other three mindfulness processes—SAC, defusion, and acceptance—give them the ability to realise that advantage (for example by listening to criticism from one's partner in order to promote intimacy), despite any emotional difficulties experienced in that situation.

As may be seen, ACT largely conceptualises mindfulness as a means to an end: living a valued, or meaningful, life. It is the tool that allows people to overcome the internal events that can prevent one from doing so. As noted above, the connecting lines inside the hexagon in Figure 1 indicate that mindfulness not only promotes valued living, but identifying one's values and committing to values-based goals give people the impetus to engage in the (at times effortful) processes that, for ACT, constitute mindfulness. Thus, the mindfulness and values-based action skills come together in ACT to produce a mutually beneficial and

virtuous cycle that can promote a meaningful life.

ACT and mindfulness

As mindfulness is a core aspect of psychological flexibility, it is understandable that ACT interventions include many techniques that attempt to enhance mindfulness. Interestingly, though, ACT tends to use mindfulness techniques that are shorter, less formal, and more varied than those used by other psychological approaches to mindfulness; for example, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) advocates meditating 45 minutes per day, with people directing their attention to the ever-changing physiological and psychological processes occurring in their bodies. In contrast, ACT tends to use mindfulness techniques that are rarely more than 15-20 minutes and are more often done during the normal course of people's day (e.g., taking a shower or walking to work mindfully, or through mindful engagement in value-guided actions). When we apply ACT to the workplace (Bond & Hayes, 2002; Flaxman, Bond & Livheim, 2013), we use many mindfulness meditation exercises that can be shorter still: approximately 10 minutes. In so doing, we are attempting to teach workers with very busy days both formal and informal (i.e., non-sitting) meditation techniques that they may actually use on a regular basis.

More substantively, though, ACT uses shorter mindfulness meditation techniques, because, as noted, the goal of ACT is to get people to take actions that will help them to construct more meaningful lives; mindfulness is viewed primarily as a strategy that will help them to take that action in the presence of difficult or challenging internal events. This is in contrast to some other psychology-focused uses of mindfulness, such as MBSR, whose primary therapeutic goal is largely to promote mindfulness, in-and-of-itself. That said, ACT does recognise, and advocates, the psychological and physiological benefits of mindfulness, in-and-of-themselves (Creswell, Irwin, Burklund, Lieberman, Arevalo et al., 2012). For

example, research indicates that even one 15-20 meditation session can have beneficial physiological effects, including on temporal gene expression that is associated with a range of physiological functioning, including inflammatory responses, insulin secretion, and even telomere maintenance. These beneficial changes were seen for novice meditators and even more strongly for long-term practitioners (Bhasin, Dusek, Chang, Joseph, Denninger et al., 2013). Briefly discussing these benefits in training sessions can often serve to enhance the face validity of a skill that some workers may see as less important than ones surrounding, for example, cardiovascular types of exercise.

ACT techniques for promoting mindfulness in the workplace

In order to see more clearly the way that we foster mindfulness using ACT in the workplace, we will describe a number of brief and varied techniques that we use in our empirically validated training programme (Flaxman et al., 2013). Each one is normally more closely associated with one process on the hexagon, described above. It may be useful to note several points when we describe these techniques, or skills:

1. Each one, alone, is useful for encouraging mindfulness, even if it does not resemble formal meditation.
2. Consistent with the psychological flexibility model, each process on the hexagon, and its associated technique or skill, helps to develop skills associated with all of the other process on the hexagon; thus, many different types of skills (e.g., clarifying one's values) can work together to promote mindfulness, not just those that 'look like' meditation or mindfulness.
3. None takes more than approximately 15-20 minutes to complete during one's day and so are useful to busy workers.

In short, the hexagon and its associated skills help to show, from an ACT perspective, the different processes from which mindfulness emerges, is encouraged, and is maintained, in the service of a meaningful life.

Present moment

The following extract is from our empirically validated ACT at work training manual. It is, perhaps, the ACT at work exercise that is closest to a formal, sitting meditation; it is also significantly shorter than formal meditation exercises, advocated by other interventions (e.g., Segal et al., 2002).

'First, we encourage participants to adopt an upright posture, with the back straight and dignified but not too rigid, and spine infused with energy. We say that by doing this we are "doing what the meditators do." We invite participants either to close their eyes or allow the gaze to become unfocused and directed downward.

We then invite participants to pay mindful attention to current sensations in their feet and toes, perhaps noticing any tingling or throbbing in feet or toes; noticing whether different parts of the feet feel warmer or colder than other parts; noticing the sensations of their feet encased within their shoes; and exploring any areas of pressure in the soles of the feet where they contact the floor. After a few moments, we invite participants to shift the "spotlight of their attention" to current sensations in the hands and fingers—just noticing, without judgment, whatever sensations are there in this moment to be noticed; exploring with gentle curiosity and interest any tingling or throbbing in the hands and fingers; noticing the position and temperature of their hands and fingers. While focusing on hands and fingers, we encourage participants to notice how easy it is to drift away into thoughts and lose awareness of current physical sensations. Each time participants notice they have drifted away into thought, they are asked to return attention once again to sensations in the body. We then

invite participants to shift their attention to the abdomen for a minute or so, noticing the sensations and movement in the tummy with each breath. Finally, we end this brief exercise by inviting participants to expand their awareness from the abdomen to notice sensations throughout the entire body—to gradually develop a "strong sense of the entire body" sitting here in this chair, in the here and now. We then ask participants to open their eyes and return to the room' (Flaxman et al., 2013, 82-83).

This exercise helps people to develop the flexibility to attend both to narrow and broader aspects of the present moment (e.g., the abdomen and the entire body, respectively, in this present moment exercise). This skill, in itself, is useful in the work environment, as it helps people to concentrate on a particular task; in addition, it can help people to notice quickly, because they are in the present moment, when they might react avoidantly to an internal event (e.g., anxiety). It can, thus, function as an early warning indicator that it would be useful for them to accept such an internal event, instead of avoiding it.

Acceptance

To the extent that people can be in the present moment, the better they will be able to notice and respond flexibly to their internal and external events. Such present moment attention can be very painful for people, unless they are willing to experience, or accept internal events that they do not like (Hayes, Barnes-Holmes & Roche, 2001). To develop people's ability to respond with acceptance, we normally use a 'physicalising' exercise (Hayes et al., 1999) that can help people to be willing to experience their difficult internal events.

In this exercise, we ask participants to think of a current or recent situation (or person) that they have found difficult. This does not have to be a major life issue, just an experience that they have found moderately uncomfortable. As participants think about the situation or person, we ask them to notice any sensations or feelings that arise, and we ask them to note

whereabouts in the body it is the strongest (e.g., the chest or stomach). We ask various questions that draw mindful attention to the underlying physical sensations – such as whether a noticed feeling or sensation that arises feels sharp or dull, warm or cold, static or pulsating, and whether the feeling is on the surface of the body or deep down inside (or both). In the next part of this practice, we ask our participants to imagine that the feeling or sensation is a physical object that they can reach in to their body, pull out, and sit it down next to them. We then get them to really experience the 'object', by asking them a series of questions about it, such as, 'What is the shape of the object?, 'What colour is the object', 'What is its texture like? We also ask about its size, weight, density and any other physical attributes.

The aim here is to cultivate some healthy psychological distance between the *feeler* (i.e., the person) and the *feeling*, and also to provide a way of practising simply 'being with' what may be a somewhat difficult feeling or somatic sensation. At the end of this exercise, participants are asked to welcome the object back inside the skin, from where they first removed it; and, they are asked to notice whether or not it has changed. We emphasise that the goal of the exercise is not to reduce or change unpleasant feelings or sensations, but to take a psychological step back and to observe the feeling/sensation for what it actually is and not what it may represent or imply. The ultimate aim is to reduce the unhelpful influence that (typically undesirable) emotions can exert over our ability to pursue personally valued actions and goals.

Defusion

In our ACT at work protocol (see Flaxman et al., 2013), one of the well-known ACT defusion techniques we have used is the *Milk, Milk, Milk* exercise, originally devised by Titchener in 1916 (as described by Hayes et al., 1999, pp. 154-156). In it, participants are first asked for any thoughts that come to their minds in relation to the word 'Milk', and they tend to come-up with ones, such as, "it's white and tastes disgusting"; "cows"; "feeding my

baby"; "it goes in my tea". Participants and the trainer then continually repeat the word 'Milk' for approximately 45 seconds. During this time, the trainer occasionally encourages participants to speed up, slow down, say the word louder, and to really experience the word. At the end of the 45 seconds, the trainer asks whether the participants noticed anything while performing this rather strange exercise. More often than not, participants notice that the meaning of the word (e.g., white stuff, cows, feeding babies, etc.) disappears as they begin to experience the word 'Milk' simply as a word or sound. Immediately following the exercise, we write the word 'Milk' on a flip chart or whiteboard, alongside some words that summarise various negative self-conceptualisations. (e.g., "I'm weak", or "I'm stupid"). We then offer the following observation: *At the level of literal meaning*, 'Milk' and 'Stupid' are very different; however, on another level, *the level of word and sound*, 'Milk' and 'Stupid' are *not* fundamentally different – they are, after all, both just words/sounds. We go on to discuss that it is not necessary to suspend literal meaning in this way for very long. Rather, the Milk exercise is simply designed to provide a glimpse of the 'illusion' that is naturally woven by taking thoughts and language as if they were the actual event that they represented. Nonetheless, an occasional glimpse of this process is often all it takes to reduce thought believability and undermine the context of cognitive fusion (cf. Masuda, Hayes, Sackett, & Twohig, 2004).

Another defusion strategy that is facilitated by, and facilitates, present moment awareness and acceptance involves how we label our experience of internal events; in particular, it involves, for example, substituting the label "I *am* anxious" or "I *am* stressed", to the more accurate, and more defused statement: "I am *having the feeling of* anxiety*"*; or "I am *having the thought that* I'm stressed" (Hayes et al., 1999). Participants often instantly recognise how such labelling offers a more defused and descriptive (i.e., less evaluative) way of relating to private events. This technique has additional benefits: it can help participants to

practise labelling internal events as they unfold in present moment awareness (e.g., now I'm having this thought; now I'm having this memory; now I'm having this feeling; now I'm having this bodily sensation); it also highlights the fundamental (yet often overlooked) distinction that exists between difficult private events, and the person who is having those experiences (Hayes et al., 2004); this is a distinction that experiments show reduces emotional distress (e.g., Foody et al., 2013).

As can be seen, people can use these two defusion techniques—and especially the second one—in order to promote mindfulness quickly, in any situation, and even when experiencing difficult or unwanted internal events. No formal meditation is required in order to use them effectively. As the hexagon implies, present moment awareness and acceptance can facilitate the efficacy of these two techniques, just as defusion can promote people's willingness to be present with and experience difficult private experiences: these are all mutually beneficial processes and skills.

Self-as-context

One of the core aims of ACT is to help people contact a stable sense of self that is distinct from (and therefore not threatened by) negative thoughts, memories, emotions, sensations and other internal events. In ACT, this somewhat transcendent sense of self is often referred to as self-as-context (SAC), or the 'observing self'; and, it is accessed through various defusion and mindfulness exercises, such as the mindfulness meditation described, above, as well as the physicalising exercise (also see Hayes et al., 2012). Furthermore, we use metaphors in order make the observation that there are essentially two processes operating during mindfulness practice – first there is 'The Mind', constantly doing what minds are designed to do (i.e., chattering, predicting, imagining, planning, worrying, comparing, judging, criticizing, and so on); and then there is 'The Observer' (or Awareness): this is the

SAC perspective; the unchanging part of us that has always observed ourselves—our beliefs, thinking, emotions and memories. It is the part of us that knows we have changed, in physical appearance, beliefs and feelings, because *it* has always been there, observing these changes. To emphasise this point, we use a cloud and sky metaphor (from Hayes et al., 1999, p.187), in which clouds and weather are the 'verbal chatter' of the mind, behind which lies blue sky; we do not have to remove the clouds to know that there is blue sky; whenever we look we will see that it is there.

We would typically guide participants through a brief observer experiential exercise, to encourage experiential contact with SAC (see Harris, 2008, pp.176-177)). The exercise asks us to notice thoughts, emotions, and sensations as they unfold in the here and now, and become aware that part of us is able to stand back and to *observe* these internal events. Participants are encouraged to experience their thoughts, feelings, and sensations as constantly changing, while the observing self is a constant—always there, noticing these changes. As can be seen, when using more formal mindfulness meditation to promote SAC, ACT tweaks the practice so that it is more guided in nature, helping people to see their experiences from their observing self. As with the other mindfulness processes discussed above, SAC facilitates, and is facilitated by, the others.

Clarifying Values

One of the primary reasons for promoting mindfulness skills in ACT is that they can help to ensure that people do not aimlessly go about their life, failing to pursue a direction that is meaningful to them. As noted, in ACT, a value is a chosen life direction that is never achieved, or at least achieved indefinitely; for example, one must work constantly at being a caring partner: even if one is caring today, further caring actions need to be undertaken tomorrow in order to remain caring. In contrast, goals are specific and have discrete

outcomes that constitute observable steps in the direction of one's values; actively listening to one's partner instead of watching the television could be a goal that is in the service of the value of being a caring partner.

Mindfulness is useful in clarifying values in at least two ways. Firstly, it facilitates the 'accuracy' of a values assessment exercise that we use in our workplace ACT training programme. In this exercise, participants are presented with ten core areas of life (e.g., family relations, work/career, recreation/leisure, physical health, and so on) (adapted from Hayes, et al., 1999, pp. 224-225). Participants are asked to write down their 'chosen life directions' (i.e., values) in each area of life that they rate as personally important. To facilitate this process, the trainer introduces various questions, such as "Imagine you are now 80 years old and looking back, what footprints would you like to see behind you in this area of life"; "What do you want to *be about* in this area of your life"; and, "If you have goals in this area of your life, in which direction are they taking you?" These questions, themselves, can help to increase mindfulness by promoting defusion and the perspective taking that can enhance SAC. According to ACT theory, though, people who approach this exercise from a mindful perspective to start with are likely better to contact the values that are truly meaningful to them, as against what is meaningful to others or what they feel is expected of them.

Mindfulness is further helpful in values clarification in that it helps people honestly to identify 'internal barriers' (e.g., difficult or unhelpful thoughts, memories, moods, or emotions) that have the potential to interfere with clarifying and pursuing their valued directions (e.g., fear of rejection). These barriers often provide the richest material around which to practise and develop mindfulness and acceptance skills, as they are the internal events that can most effectively block people from living a life that is meaningful to them.

Finally, mindfulness can help people to distinguish between internal barriers to living a valued life (e.g., anxiety) and external barriers (e.g., lack of relevant skills). It is not unusual

for these two types of barriers to interact, so that people fail to address an external barrier, because they do not recognise or acknowledge the internal one. Thus, the reason given for not pursuing one's values is the external barrier when, in fact, it could be overcome if only a person were willing to address the internal one.

Unsurprisingly, reflecting on one's values in a considered and methodical manner can be powerful, and participants occasionally become upset while completing such exercises, especially if they realise that they have been mindlessly pursuing life directions that they would not ultimately choose for themselves. Here, mindfulness skills help people to make room for that upset so that they are freer to identify, accept, and move in directions that are meaningful to them. Finally, and reflected in the hexagon, clarifying values and identifying internal barriers to pursuing them can serve as an impetus to practise the mindfulness exercises that will help them to create their meaningful life; a point that we often make in our training sessions.

Increasing commitment to values-based goals and actions

In our ACT at work protocol (Flaxman et al., 2013), we use a number of strategies that encourage participants to generate concrete goals and action plans that are based upon the values that they have identified. For example, after every session in our ACT training, participants are invited to choose three relatively small value-guided actions that they would be willing to perform over the next week. Our participants are encouraged to engage in these actions *mindfully* – that is by noticing what happens before, during, and after the action, and also by noticing any thoughts and feelings that arise and have the potential to function as 'internal barriers' to the pursuit of these actions. We also ask if they will commit to achieving four values-consistent goals between the second and third sessions, and we distribute diaries and rating forms that are designed to encourage participants to self-monitor their progress

towards achieving those goals. These materials also help participants more generally to monitor their values-based behaviour on a weekly basis; such goal-identification, commitment making, and careful monitoring, in themselves, can promote the defusion, perspective taking, and acceptance that encourages mindfulness. We also clearly show how the mindfulness techniques that they are learning will serve them well in moving through the difficult psychological content that they will experience when taking action to achieve their life-enhancing goals.

ACT: A multi-method approach to mindfulness

As can be seen, our workplace ACT protocol, like most other ACT guides, do not focus heavily on formal meditation practice (Hayes et al., 2012), but it does include guided experiential exercises, metaphors and other interventions that promote mindfulness. From a training and therapeutic perspective, we believe that this diverse range of mindfulness exercises is a strength; in that, if one type does not work for a person, perhaps another one will. From a theoretical perspective, it is reassuring that, despite the eclectic range of ACT techniques, as contrasted to formal meditation only, research is very consistent in showing that these various techniques appear to work by impacting the same psychological mechanism: psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2006; Bond et al., in prep.). Knowing this is not just a theoretical nicety; it also allows people to expand and develop ACT to include additional, and perhaps more effective, mindfulness interventions that can target this mechanism and, thus, help people to lead vital and meaningful lives. The increasing acceptance of, and research literature supporting, contextual CBTs augurs well for this expansion, and we look forward to seeing how it develops.

Frank Bond's personal meditation journey

I do not think that I really understand the distinctions and overlaps between meditation and mindfulness. I have examined the relevant literature to try to identify established and agreed upon definitions for both terms, but I have not been able to do so for 'meditation'; although, I have found agreed upon definitions for 'mindfulness'. Perhaps this should not be surprising, as operational definitions are crucial in science, but they are less important in the realm of religion, from which meditation originally emerges. Psychology has largely adopted the term mindfulness, so it is not surprising that there are agreed upon definitions for this word. Further complicating the definitional quandary is that 'mindfulness meditation' is used freely in the literature, which could imply that this is different than mere 'meditation' or 'mindfulness'. I mention this definitional issue only because I do not know whether what I personally practise is meditation or mindfulness, but here is my personal account of my experience with what I shall term, mindfulness.

As an undergraduate, I would lay on my floor with headphones on and really concentrate on listening to modern composers, particularly Luciano Berio. I found that trying to pick-out the different instruments, and the different ranges and tempos at which they played, incredibly enjoyable. It was effortful to do this, but I found that I got more accustomed to doing it, over time. It was many years later that I heard the term mindfulness, and its definition of deliberately observing one's psychological and physiological events on a moment-to-moment basis, in a non-elaborative, open, curious, and non-judgemental manner. I then realised that I had been doing this, with regards to music, for many years and so I decided to try to extend mindfulness to other areas of my life, from walking to work to speaking with a friend. I found this very satisfying and meaningful: engaging in the here-and-now was far more calming and enjoyable than being wrapped-up in my own thoughts.

When I discovered ACT, with its emphasis on mindfulness and its roots in science, I knew that I had found a psychological theory of human cognition and behaviour that resonated with me, both as a scientist and as a person. As we note in this chapter, ACT uses brief and/or guided mindfulness techniques that are largely integrated into one's daily life (e.g., listening to music or talking with a friend). This is how I had been using mindfulness for many years, and ACT showed me how I could extend this practice into my life in a way that could make it more vital and meaningful.

About 10 years after stumbling upon ACT, I signed-up for the traditional eight-week MBSR training, in which we were asked to practise what I consider to be 'formal' meditation approximately 45 minutes everyday. This largely involved paying non-judgemental attention to your body, breath, and thoughts on a moment-to-moment basis. I was a good student and most every day practised my mindfulness meditation. I found it very revealing in that I was able to sit with my thoughts, boredom and discomfort for quite some time, and that it got easier to do so the more that I practised.

After the course ended, I soon stopped 'sitting', but the 'boot camp' experience of the MBSR training did increase my use of, and facility with, the going-mindfully-about-your-day techniques that ACT teaches. Occasionally, when I cannot sleep, I will do a meditation exercise that I learnt in MBSR classes, so I am very glad that I had that training; however, I find trying to go mindfully about my daily life, choosing what actions to take that are consistent with my values, is very useful to me in creating a meaningful life. (This is not to say, however, that formal meditation does not serve the same function for many people.) Thus, with my psychotherapy and coaching clients, I try a range of mindfulness techniques, including formal meditation, hoping that they will respond favourably to one of them. This, I think, from my own experience, is the key point: the technique (e.g., meditation) is not the issue; it is living mindfully, however one gets there. So, in my own mind and life, I think that

I have addressed the quandary that I posed at the beginning of this piece: meditation and mindfulness are distinct, with the former one means of achieving the latter.

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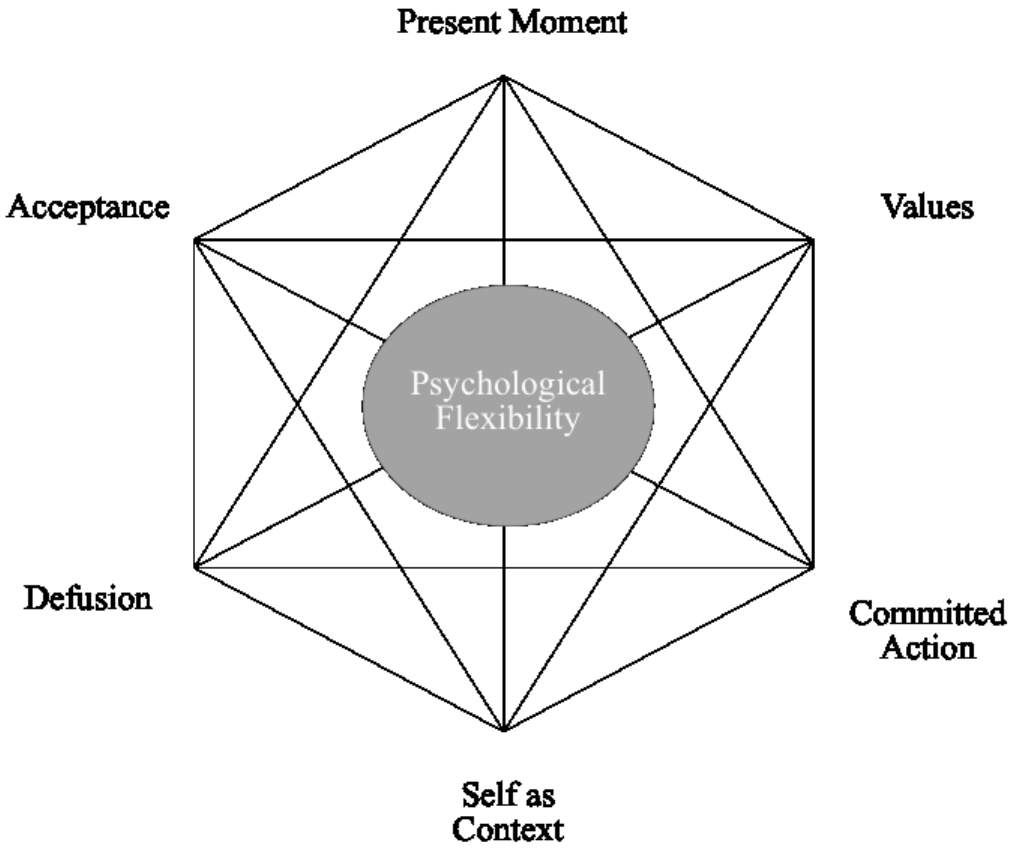
Figure 1: ACT's psychological flexibility model


Present Moment
Acceptance
Values
Psychological Flexibility
Defusion
Committed Action
Self as Context