

How Mindfulness in Business Practices Can Enact Positive Change

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The study of contemplative practices as well as the idea of mindfulness has become increasingly popular in our society in the last few decades. Practices that have originated in Eastern culture (such as yoga and meditation) have become common practices that individuals engage with, often as forms of stress relief. These are popular stress-reducing activities in institutions like corporate offices or universities (Barbezat). The recent discussion of mindfulness in business environments has mainly focused on an individual basis. Classes offered will often seek to engage employees or students in mindfulness in their own lives. It is ironic that practices used to reduce stress are encouraged by institutions that are the main cause of stress for many individuals. In business, mindfulness can go beyond individual practice, and not all forms of mindfulness are stress reducers. B-Corporations have been working to be more mindful of their practices on all levels, as well as the impact they have on people, the economy, and the environment. This form of mindfulness involves observing where improvements can be made to work on a collective action, rather than individual. B-Corporations are committed to bringing positive change around the world. B-Corp-certified companies have been implementing mindfulness in their practices, and mindfulness as a collective action can be used by everyone to enact positive change in communities and the planet.

To understand how mindfulness can be applied in business, we should first understand what exactly mindfulness as a contemplative practice is. Mindfulness is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as, “A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique”. Most often, mindfulness is associated with meditation, with common practices specifically focusing on being aware of yourself in the present moment (Rogers). Mindfulness is a practice on its own, and is the basis of many contemplative practices, as well as being applicable to other practices. Writing, art, and activism are examples of practices that people implement mindfulness in. Such mindfulness activities are useful in developing how one sees the world around them, and their perception of themselves. The utilization of mindfulness in

business is similar: Any action or message driven by a company can be viewed in a more mindful way. I will look at the practice of mindfulness in business, specifically mindfulness used to encourage change in a flawed system.

With politics dividing people more than ever, and concern over the state of our economy and planet, many people have observed that the systems in place in America rarely benefit the average citizen. This era of consumerism has negatively impacted people across the world, the global economy, and the environment. We also see how capitalism will often incentivize the continued exploitation of people and the planet for corporate profits. More recently, we've seen companies become more mindful of their practices, and the impact they have on our lives. These companies have tried to change their ways for the benefit of the planet as a whole. The companies reaching certain standards in these efforts can become certified and recognized for their work in improving different aspects of life on earth.

B-Corporations, also known as B-Corps, are certified businesses that are “meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency on factors from employee benefits and charitable giving to supply chain practices and input materials.” (B Lab Global Site). The certification is run through B Lab, a non-profit with the goal of changing our economy to benefit both people and the environment. The non-profit started in 2006, and established its goal with the mindful observation of where the economy is failing people and the planet. B Lab has not only worked to make a change in individual companies, but the economic system as well. Change is only possible with observations like these, where full thought can be applied to recognize the negative impacts of a whole system, as well as the process to create the change. Companies can achieve the B-Corp certification by meeting specific social and environmental standards. The first certification includes achieving an 80 or above on the B Impact Assessment which observes the social and environmental performance of the company. This assessment's scores are based on the quality of a company's governance as well as its impact on its workers, community, environment, and customers. The company must also commit to enhancing its corporate structure to “be accountable to all stakeholders, not just shareholders.” Lastly,

companies must allow full transparency of all information collected by B Lab regarding its performance, meaning the information will be publicly available online. Currently, there are 6,765 certified B-Corporations worldwide and over 2,000 in the U.S. and Canada. Companies with this certification include almost every industry as well as company size.

One B-Corp can be found right here in New Hampshire. Stonyfield Organic, based in Londonderry, NH, produces organic yogurt and has committed to fostering a positive process at all levels for “healthy food, healthy businesses, and a healthy planet” (Home: Stonyfield). The company has been B-Corp certified since 2016 and has made a commitment to avoid fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics, and drug treatments for their farms and livestock. They also have worked on their own effort of implementing 100% renewable energy at their facility. The company emphasizes the impact that using their collective voice can have on the economy and in turn the planet.

Vermont-based ice cream producer, Ben and Jerry’s, has also been committed to enhancing their business in hopes of advancing “new models of economic justice.” The company has been B-Corp certified since 2012 and was even recognized by B Lab as “Best for the World” in the community impact area for 2022. Ben and Jerry’s specifically has led efforts in amplifying social justice movements, even stating that they are striving to be “a social justice company that makes ice cream”. The company also lists multiple movements that they support on their website with some being racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and climate justice (Home: Ben & Jerry’s). Direct work with such movements is not a requirement for B-Corp certification, but their clear fight for such movements shows the dedication they have to truly be “Best for the World”.

Much of this work is being mindful of the connections that people have with their community as well as the environment, but what establishes the groundwork for people and companies to make this change? As mentioned, mindfulness allows for a deeper connection with the self. Allan Badiner mentions the role Buddhism can have in our response to our current culture. As he says “revisiting our moral and spiritual values” is what can help to give people that sense of

grounding in their beliefs and understand their own impact on the world. Encouraging practices that benefit us in an ethical and sustainable manner starts at an individual manner. In an excerpt from the Journal of Cleaner Production, Rodrigo Sequiera establishes that there has been evidence of a positive impact on one's well-being, self-awareness, attention regulation, creativity, etc. from the engagement of mindfulness and meditation. On top of that, experiments have shown a connection between mindfulness and one's "ethical decision making". Such evidence illustrates the impact mindfulness can have on how one views the world around them and can motivate people to strive for better.

The efforts made by companies and individuals go beyond business, and delve into understanding activism as a contemplative practice. In this sense, we can look at activism as a community practice. Also known as collective mindfulness, this involves mindfulness as we see in an individual practice applied in group settings, becoming aware of connections with people and the world around you. As Richard Badham explains, it is when mindfulness is seen as a "state of collective mind" and how people "make sense of themselves, others, and the world around them." Community activities such as gardens, raising awareness, and cultivating neighborhood relationships have been common practices in a model known as Transition. The model founded by Rob Haskins involves the connection of emotion to a physical practice in a community (Schmid). Green City Growers, a Boston-based B-Corp, works directly with fostering communities with the implementation of community gardens. They manage gardens in commercial and residential areas and provide education and engagement workshops for the surrounding community (Green City Growers). Mindfulness in these activities is dependent on the connection between community members. Specifically, activities that involve a shared effort can create a sense of purpose and commitment that connects one's self directly with the wellness of a community (Badham).

In both corporate and community levels we see how mindfulness is implemented as a form of activism. Smaller communities can create open spaces of engagement that allow people the chance to connect with others and understand their role as an individual in a collective

environment. This also can allow for a sense of the person in individuals and the community as a whole. We also see how some companies have been using their business efforts to foster healthy work environments and work toward a sustainable future. Many, like Ben and Jerry's, have also explicitly been working on social change movements and using the leverage they have to amplify the voices of the movements. Collective work in mindfulness and activism can allow for wider forums of communication regarding bigger issues that affect people and the planet, but it's important to be aware of the benefits individual practices can have. Engagement in these practices allows people the ability to be more aware of themselves on concepts such as their morals and beliefs. With continued practice and understanding, this can then be applied in this collective setting and garner a healthier space for these discussions.

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