

The effects of mindfulness on job stress, job satisfaction, and intention to leave the company of salespeople.

Christophe Czuly
Université de Montpellier
Fanny Poujol
Université Paris-Nanterre

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Abstract

This paper poses and tests a model where mindfulness has an effect on job stress, job satisfaction and intention to leave the company of salespeople. Our results, based on a sample of 233 salespeople, show a negative effect of mindfulness on intention to leave the company. This effect is fully mediated by the combined effects of job stress and job satisfaction. Our research shows the importance of mindfulness to reduce the intention to leave across job stress and job satisfaction among salespeople. Managerial implications concern mainly training development.

Keywords

Salespeople, Mindfulness, Intention to leave.

Track

Sales Management and Personal Selling

With Generation Y, salesperson turnover is more than ever an important issue for managers. Beyond the costs associated with turnover, the intention to leave the company among salespeople also has negative effects on customer satisfaction (Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, and Schlesinger, 1994). In the intention to leave or stay in sales, job stress plays a major role (Fournier, Weeks, Blocker, and Chonko, 2013; Mulki, Jaramillo, Goad, and Pesquera, 2015), as does job satisfaction (Boles *et al.*, 2012; Honeycutt, Hodge, and Killian, 2009).

According to some authors, to better understand the intention to leave of salespeople, the personal characteristics of individuals must be taken into account (Boles *et al.* 2012; Lewin & Sager, 2010; Loveland, Lounsbury, Park, and Jackson, 2015). Salespeople who are more emotionally intelligent and more resilient to stress, for example, are less willing to leave the company (Bande, Fernández-Ferrín, Varela, and Jaramillo, 2015).

Numerous studies have shown the positive effects of mindfulness on emotion management and job stress reduction, job satisfaction, and reduced desire to leave the company (Courtney, 2015; Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, and Lang, 2012; Zivnuska, Kacmar, Ferguson, and Carlson, 2016). To our knowledge, none of these studies has yet empirically dealt with the sales force, even though *turnover* is so problematic in this field. In this research we examine the effects of mindfulness on salespeople's intention to leave and its antecedents.

In the first part, the theoretical framework is developed according to which our research model is established. We then present the study and its principal results.

1. Theoretical Framework And Hypothesis

The most common definition of mindfulness is the one of Kabat-Zinn (2003, 145): "*Mindfulness is a state of awareness that emerges by paying attention, intentionally, to the present moment and in non-judgment*". Mindfulness is a concept often studied and measured as a state or tendency of an individual to be attentive and *aware in* daily life (Grégoire, Lachance, and Richer, 2016). Mindfulness is primarily a strategy of metacognitive thinking (Erisman & Roemer 2012; Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010). "*Metacognitive refers to an individual's awareness of his or her own thoughts and behaviors and affects*" (Tormala & Petty, 2002). As a metacognitive thinking strategy, mindfulness is consistent with the concept of *self* (Frayne & Geringer, 2000), *self-control* theory (Stewart, Courtright, and Manz, 2011) and the self-regulation process model

(Carver & Scheirer, 1981) developed in clinical and sociocognitive psychology. These theories have been mobilized to understand the processes that motivate the individual and emphasize attention control (Carver & Scheirer, 1981) and *awareness* (Tormala & Petty, 2002) in the achievement of goals (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). As Leach, Liu and Johnston (2005) point out, self-regulation is a developing competence. *Mindfulness* is also known as an inverse function to *mindlessness*, characterized by automated routines and behaviors (Langer 1989). Although growing, the literature on mindfulness in management is still modest (Dane & Brummel, 2013). Mindfulness in the workplace is known to have positive effects on stress reduction, job satisfaction, and decreased intention to leave the company (Hülshager et al., 2012; Courtney, 2015; Zivnuska et al., 2016).

“The intention to leave is the immediate precursor of actual leaving” (Futrell & Parasuraman, 1984, 35). Researchers have shown the beneficial effects of mindfulness on intention to leave (Hülshager et al., 2012). Mindfulness reduces the intention to leave the company, which promotes individual and collective success (Zivnuska et al., 2016). We formulate the following hypothesis: **H1: Mindfulness has a negative effect on the intention to leave the company among salespeople.**

“Job satisfaction for salespeople refers to all the characteristics of the job itself and the environment in which the salespeople finds fulfilment, gratification, satisfaction, or frustration and dissatisfaction” (Churchill, Ford, and Walker, 1974, 255). For Walker et al. (1977) satisfaction is a central variable in the salesforce performance model. Salespeople’s job satisfaction is also a major issue for managers seeking to retain their salespeople (Friend et al., 2013). According to Hülshager et al. (2012), mindfulness is positively correlated with global job satisfaction. Mindfulness allows self-regulation of thoughts, emotions and behaviors. It can have a positive relationship with job satisfaction by promoting self-determining behaviors (Glomb et al., 2011). We formulate the following hypothesis: **H2: Mindfulness has a positive effect on the job satisfaction of salespeople.**

When a salesperson wants to leave the company, it is primarily because of job dissatisfaction (Boles et al., 2012; Honeycutt, Hodge, and Killian, 2009; McNeilly & Goldsmith, 1991). Assuming that mindfulness has a positive effect on job satisfaction (Hülshager et al., 2012) and a positive effect on reducing intention to leave (Zivnuska et al., 2016), we formulate

the following hypothesis: **H3: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between mindfulness and intention to leave among salespeople.**

“Stress in sales is the perception of one's hard-pressed resources for a situation with possible negative consequences” (Sager & Wilson, 1995, 59). Conflicting demands from customers and managers, the lack of information to carry out their role (Petitjohn, Schaeffer, and Burnett, 2014), pressure to change (Moncrief, Marshall, and Rudd, 2015), feelings of insecurity, and work-life balance subject salespeople to stress and emotional exhaustion (Darrat, Atinc, and Babin, 2016). Stress is felt and managed differently from one salesperson to another, and those who can manage their emotions better are better able to manage their stress (Mulki *et al.*, 2015). The literature has demonstrated the effects of mindfulness on stress reduction (Brown & Ryan, 2003, 2007; Carmody & Baer, 2007; Hölzel *et al.*, 2011). Focusing on the present moment, mindfulness enables employees to better manage their stress in a timely manner (Courtney, 2015). So we formulate the following hypothesis: **H4: Mindfulness has a negative effect on job stress of salespeople.**

Job stress has adverse consequences for salespeople (Chaker, Schumann, Zablah, and Flint, 2016), and the intensity of the stress experienced is strongly related to the ability of salespeople to manage their emotions (Mulki *et al.*, 2015). Through the better management of emotional reactions, mindfulness develops job satisfaction (Hülshager *et al.*, 2012). We formulate the following hypothesis: **H5: Job stress mediates the relationship between mindfulness and job satisfaction of salespeople.** All of our assumptions are shown in Figure 1 below.

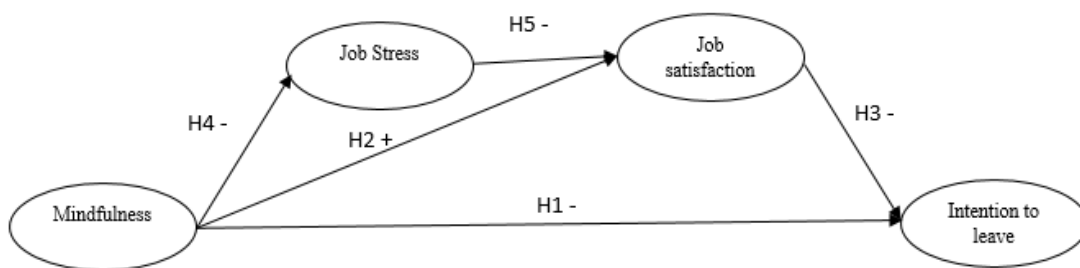


Figure 1: conceptual model

1 Empirical Study

1.1 Sample

The data were collected from a sample of 877 salespeople in major French companies (recently graduated for a Business School). Each person was directly solicited by an email

containing a link to an anonymous online questionnaire, according to a campaign of 4 successive mailings. A total of 233 questionnaires were completed, representing a 26% return rate. The sample was made up of salespeople from sales, strategic and operational marketing functions. The average age of the respondents was 24.5 years. 40% were men, and 60% were women. The average length of experience in a company was 2.5 years.

1.2 Measures and model estimation

To measure mindfulness among salespeople, we use a 5-item scale (6-point Likert scale) inspired by Dane and Brummel (2013) and adapted from the MAAS *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale* (Brown & Ryan 2003) ($\alpha = .83$). Intention to leave is measured with the 3-item scale of Fournier *et al.* (2010), (7-point), ($\alpha = .88$). Job satisfaction is measured with a 3-item scale (7-point) adapted from the scale of Ahearne, Lam, Hayati, and Kraus (2013) ($\alpha = .83$). Job Stress is assessed using the 4-item scale (7-point) of Mulki *et al.* (2015), ($\alpha = .85$).

To estimate and test our model, we used structural equation modeling using the partial least squares (PLS) algorithm, which is well suited to our predictive model (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt 2011; Garson, 2016; Sosik, Kahai, and Piovosio, 2009). We tested the independence of the constructs, the size and importance of the regression coefficients, and the model's ability to predict the model-dependent variables (Sosik *et al.*, 2009). After analysis, all *t*-values are > 1.96 for each indicator representing each latent variable (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The items are well connected to the construct they represent and do not contribute significantly to neighboring constructs. The convergent validity is greater than 0.5 for each construct and greater than its variance shared with other constructs. The discriminatory validity is also acceptable. The R^2 (0.82-0.92), is greater than 0.8 for all constructs and shows very good internal model composition, an adequate model and testifies of a good confirmatory research (Garson, 2016, 63).

2 Results

As shown on the table 1 below, the descriptive statistics show significant correlations. To test hypothesis 1, we performed a simple PLS regression. Mindfulness has a significant negative effect on the intention to leave. The test indicates that $r = -.13$ (*t-value* = 3.2; $p < .05$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

We did the same for hypothesis 2. The test is significant and indicates that $r = 0.22$ (t -value = 3.86; $p < .05$). Thus, hypothesis 2 is accepted, mindfulness has a significant positive effect on job satisfaction.

To test the mediation of hypothesis 3, we proceeded according to the analysis proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Multiple regression analysis indicates that $r = -.03$ ($p < .05$). The strength of the link cancels out. The mediating role of job satisfaction between mindfulness and intention to leave is significant. Thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Table 1: Means, Standard-deviation, Cronbach α , t -values between latent variables

Variables				1.Mindfulness		2.Job stress		3.Job Satisfaction		4.Intention to leave	
	Mean	SD	α	R	t -value	R	t -value	R	t -value	R	t -value
1.Mindfulness	4.03	0.82	.83	1							
2.Job stress	3.64	1.16	.85	-.31	10.32	1					
3.Job Satisfaction	4.59	1.09	.83	.22	3.86	-.17	5.92	1			
4.Intention-to-leave	5.04	1.37	.88	-.13	3.2	.13	3.97	-.51	19.31	1	

($p < .05$)

To test hypothesis 4, we perform a simple regression of mindfulness on salesperson job stress. The test is significant and indicates a negative coefficient, $r = -.31$ (t -value = 10.32; $p < .05$). Thus, hypothesis 4 is accepted. To test the mediating effect of stress in the relationship between mindfulness and job satisfaction, we also use the analysis proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Multiple regression indicates that $r = .10$ (t -value = 1.96; $p < .05$). The strength of the bond remains significant so the hypothesis 5 is accepted. The mediation effect is partial.

Causality model is presented in Figure 2 below.

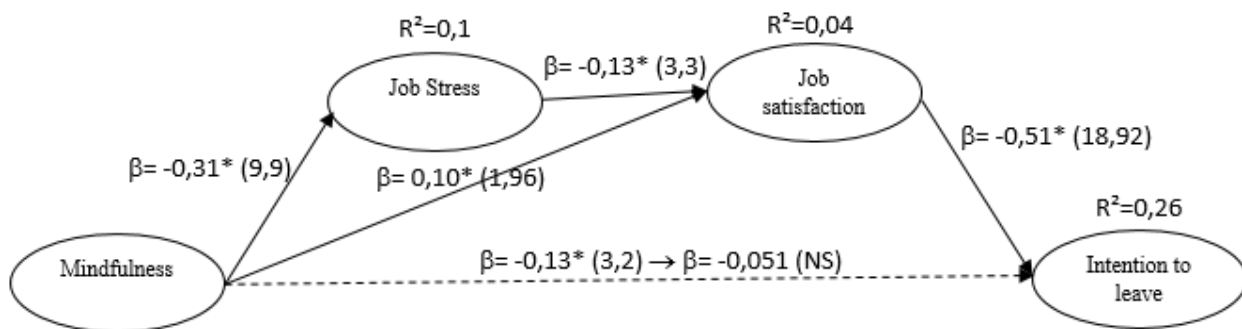


Figure 2: causality model (T -values in parentheses, significance level $*p < 0.05$; Direct effect between Mindfulness and Intention to leave is fully mediated).

3 Discussion

The objective of this study was to examine the effects of mindfulness on the intention to leave the company. Our results show that there is a significant negative effect. The most mindful salespeople are satisfied with their work and have less desire to leave the company. This makes job satisfaction a total mediation. Our study also shows a significant direct negative effect of mindfulness on stress. The result from PLS analysis support prior research and hypothesis, suggesting that employees who demonstrate a higher level of mindfulness are managing better their job stress and are more satisfied at work that implicate a less desire to leave the company. Regarding the hypotheses suggesting the negative role of mindfulness on intention to leave, the analysis indicated that the effect is completely mediated by the combined effect of stress regulation and job satisfaction. However, the main result is the positive effect of mindfulness on global job satisfaction, which in turn reduces the intention to leave. Contrary to what we expected, the impact of mindfulness on job stress is not so high.

4 Research Contributions, limitations and future research

The findings offer contributions to prior research on the benefits of mindfulness in the field of salesperson's management. Despite the necessary need to find solutions against intention to leave by salespeople, there is an obvious lack of empirical studies in this area. Our findings of mindfulness associated with a lower intention to leave provide additional evidence to fill this gap. This research offer an empirical lighting about the mechanism by which mindfulness operate against this intention to leave through the role job satisfaction among salespeople. Our results shows that mindfulness is an important psychological resource for employees to take into account in sales management. Programs for developing mindfulness through meditation for example among salespeople may be an important topic for future research.

A first limitation of our study refers to the PLS method, which does not consider measurement errors (Sosik *et al.*, 2009). Another limitation concerns our sample of young salespeople. It would be interesting to study a sample of more experienced salespeople. It could be also interesting to examine the different dimensions of job satisfaction and their effects. Finally, another avenue of research would be to examine other variables that might be impacted by mindfulness, such as salesperson performance or customer satisfaction. Future research should

also focus on how to integrate mindfulness development programs for salespeople such as mindfulness meditation for example.

5 Conclusion

This research shows that mindfulness among salespeople can be an important managerial lever to increase their job satisfaction and in turn decrease their intention to leave. Job stress, job satisfaction and intention to leave are critical variables for sales managers. Intention to leave is a fundamental indicator for sales managers. Intention to leave is the immediate precursor to the employee's turnover. Turnover implicate free territory for competitors and the recruitment and training for a new seller is expensive. Mindfulness can be a solution and a new management tool for managers. This study shows the interests for companies to develop mindfulness training programs to reduce the intention to leave among salespeople.

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