Mindfulness and Interpersonal Communication

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Many social problems can be traced to interpersonal communication difficulties, just as many proposed interventions to solve social ills also depend on effective interpersonal communication. This article examines three potential relationships between states of mind and social interaction followed by illustrations from research related to five exemplar social issues—developing effective programs for solving workplace communication problems, training the public to detect scams and hoaxes, reducing stereotyping and cross-cultural misunderstanding, managing interpersonal conflict, and constructing effective public health campaigns. We conclude by considering the likely inhibiting and facilitating effects of mindfulness-mindlessness on socially relevant transactions.

That seemingly "mindless" communication occurs frequently comes as no surprise to even the casual observer of human interaction. Illustrative of a remarkable capacity for humans to dissociate thought and talk are these nuggets mined from the world of work:

> "We know that communication is a problem, but the company is not going to discuss it with the employees." (from a major provider of communications services)

> "As of tomorrow, employees will only be able to access the building using individual security cards. Pictures will be taken next Wednesday and employees will receive their cards in two weeks." (from a computer software corporation)

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"What I need is a list of specific unknown problems we will encounter." (from a shipping company)

One can easily imagine the adverse repercussions of such communication, especially if less trivial examples, such as communication between air traffic controllers and pilots, were substituted for these humorous ones. Although much has been written about the consequences of mindless communication (see, e.g., J. K. Burgoon & Langer, 1995; Hample, 1992; Langer, 1992), it may prove more enlightening when considering social problems to focus on the mindful end of the mindless-mindful continuum. We will therefore address how greater mindfulness can be elicited in and strategically managed through interpersonal communication, with an eye toward how such behavior can ameliorate various social ills and accrue other social benefits. Preliminary to that analysis, we first clarify our conceptualization of mindfulness within the interpersonal interaction context. We then examine the role of mindfulness with respect to social interactions organized around such practical communication goals as detecting deception in work and public contexts, avoiding stereotyping and other biased social information, reducing conflict and intercultural misunderstandings, and creating effective public health campaigns for AIDS prevention.

Mindfulness in the Interpersonal Communication Domain

As individuals engage in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication channels afford them a wealth of potential information. The content, structure, and sequencing of verbal messages, as well as the paralinguistic cues, gestures, facial expressions, body movements and cues provided by the physical environment that accompany verbal messages, all afford considerable grist for social actors' comprehension and interpretative mills. It is within this highly complex interpersonal communication matrix, one in which streams of social action and individual cognitive processes intertwine and run off rapidly, that we examine mindfulness-mindlessness.

Although mindfulness is often equated with actors producing, comprehending, and interpreting verbal and nonverbal messages in a deliberate, rational fashion that reflects not only forethought but also ongoing monitoring of the discursive stream, it would be a misconstrual of the concept to equate mindfulness with conscious, planful, or strategic communication and mindlessness with thoughtless or habituated activity. Langer (1989) makes clear that mindfulness refers to active and fluid information processing, sensitivity to context and multiple perspectives, and ability to draw novel distinctions. This state of mind may be operative even as habituated communication subroutines are "run off" automatically. In fact, the very capacity to engage in the kinds of semiautomatic conduct that characterizes many routine aspects of interpersonal interaction may free the cognitive resources necessary to make the dynamic, contingent, and novel mental discriminations Langer envisions.

What, then, is the relationship between people's state of mind and their social interaction? Three different relationships are possible, which we illustrate with sample social issues. First, verbal and nonverbal communication patterns may signal how mindful message senders or recipients are at any given point in time. Message form or content may indicate the presence or absence of flexible, conditional, cognitively complex, and creative thought processes on the part of message producer or message recipient. In the realm of physician-patient interaction, this might be manifested in the case of the physician who prescribed suppositories for a patient who proceeded to take them orally. This exchange might be taken as evidence of the physician's mindlessness, because she failed to anticipate the various ways patients use medications and thus neglected to instruct the patient in their proper use, or it could be viewed as the patient's mindlessness, because she failed to consider the range of alternative ways in which medications might be taken, or both. In general, following routine scripts for prescribing and taking medicines easily leads to inadequate specificity and mindless responding. Asking less educated patients to paraphrase their understanding of a course of treatment could constitute an opposite case of communication-as-sign-of-mindfulness.

Second, communication itself may be the object of thought processes both on the encoding (message creation) and decoding (message interpretation) side of an interpersonal exchange. The demand-withdraw pattern in marital interaction, in which spouses (usually wives) fall into habitual ways of expressing disgruntlement with their partner's detachment and their partners (usually husbands) respond with chronic stonewalling and withdrawal, creates persistent and pernicious cycles that can be characterized as mindless because interactants fail to entertain alternative ways of resolving their grievances. They stand in contrast to mindful approaches in which couples, attuned to how dysfunctional such communication practices are, resort to new and more constructive ways of dealing with dissatisfaction. Other repetitive messages, such as media campaigns that endlessly reiterate the same stock appeals to promote sun awareness and cancer prevention, without entertaining alternative ways to deliver their message, similarly qualify as mindless encoding, in contrast to advertisements that incorporate novel formats and arguments. On the decoding side, automatic and instantaneous reactions—as in the case of political conservatives automatically interpreting the phrase "affirmative action" as code words for minority quotas and political liberals regarding the same phrase as code words for rectifying past inequities—reflect mindless message processing, in contrast to explicitly discussing alternative meanings and attributions for what others say and do. Such cases fall into the category of communication-as-subject-of-mindfulness.

Third, communication may catalyze mindful or mindless states. That is, features of social interaction may intentionally or incidentally alter the level of mindfulness with which information is processed. This is evident, for instance, in deception detection, during which certain message cues prompt recipients to

reevaluate their assumptions regarding the truthfulness of message senders. A variety of communication features discussed shortly have the potential to elevate the level of mindfulness or conversely, to lull people into mindless responding. By virtue of their role as an antecedent of mindful or mindless states, then, communication practices may also be construed as part and parcel of the mindfulness construct. In this category fall instances of communication-as-cause-of-mindfulness.

Some Fundamental Postulates of Interpersonal Communication

Thus far we have outlined in general terms the multiple roles mindfulness may play during face-to-face interaction episodes. We next explicate a functional view of interpersonal communication, which lays the foundation for considering more precise features of interpersonal communication that elicit mindfulness and some of the ways in which mindfulness is managed in the context of communication praxis.

According to functional or goal-oriented perspectives (e.g., Berger, 1995, 1997; J. K. Burgoon, 1994; Dillard, 1997; Kellermann, 1992; Tracy & Coupland, 1990), virtually all social interaction episodes can be characterized as purposive and goal-directed. Although communication may be used to attain various instrumental goals that are themselves not inherently social (e.g., acquiring material goods and services), many goals entail considerable social interaction for their attainment (e.g., persuading an adolescent to refrain from smoking) or are themselves inherently social (e.g., establishing a long-term business relationship). Goal-directed communication is a complicated process because typically, multiple goals are in play that must be juggled and monitored simultaneously. For example, during a conflict mediation session, a disputant's primary goal may be to seek concessions from her adversary. But secondary goals also must be accomplished, goals such as monitoring and interpreting others' feedback accurately, maintaining a smooth-flowing conversation, attending to personal identity and image needs, and managing her emotional states.

These goals, and the plans to achieve them, are embedded within even larger hierarchical structures that are represented within the long-term memories of individuals (Berger, 1995, 1997; De Lisi, 1987; Hammond, 1989; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1987; Lichtenstein & Brewer, 1980; G. A. Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960; Read & Miller, 1989; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Wilensky, 1983). Superordinate goals that are not consciously in play during a given social encounter may nevertheless exert influence on local goals that are being pursued consciously by interaction participants, and vice versa. For example, persuading a pregnant heroin addict to give up drugs for the sake of the baby may also promote greater altruistic motivations or feelings of self-worth.

Even though goal hierarchies serve to organize individual and social action and can be observed in ongoing behavior (Barker, 1963; Newtson, 1973, 1976; Vallacher & Wegner, 1985), portions of them may operate at a fairly subterranean level. Moreover, just as language users routinely create grammatical sentences without being able to articulate the rules of grammar, interactants may be relatively unaware of the specific communication tactics they deploy in service of their goals (Norman, 1981; Palmer & Simmons, 1995; Reason, 1990). Therefore, communicators may interact in a fairly mindful (creative, flexible, contingent) manner, guided by goals and plans, and yet do so without interactants' continuous and full cognitive involvement in goal-setting, planning, and conversational monitoring processes. This is what Bargh (1989) calls goal-directed automaticity and Kellermann (1992) describes as automatic communication, that is, communication that is, "voluntary, controllable, directioned, chosen, and purposeful" (p. 292) but operating outside of conscious awareness. Although conversations need not always entail deliberate, highly engaged mental processes, there is considerable evidence that conversational planning can be and frequently is mindful and is carried out as conversations progress (Waldron 1990, 1997; Waldron & Applegate, 1994; Waldron, Caughlin, & Jackson, 1995; Waldron, Cegala, Sharkey, & Teboul, 1990). Moreover, it is likely that mindful processes, like planning, discriminate between effective and ineffective communicators in many contexts (Waldron, 1997).

It is at this intersection of unconscious goals or plans and habituated responding that the interplay of mindfulness is illuminated. If particular plans and schemata are activated in an overlearned and automated fashion, it is possible for them to become so routinized that they escape periodic reevaluation of their effectiveness and so become mindless response patterns. By contrast, if automatic judgments, activated by nonverbal visual and vocal cues, free cognitive resources to process complex verbal messages (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Patterson, 1998), such automaticity may enable greater attentiveness and mindfulness to matters of consequence. Moreover, undue attentiveness to scripted or automated communicative actions ironically may undermine effectiveness (Motley, 1992; Patterson, 1998) in part because self-regulation utilizes more cognitive resources (Gilbert, Krull, & Pelham, 1988). Too much attention to them may actually interfere with their smooth functioning. Thus, a distinction must be made between mindless enactment of scripts or schemata that may have detrimental results versus low levels of automaticity that may be beneficial for effective cognitive functioning. Although persistent routinization of responses may eventuate in uncritical, rigidified thought and behavior, communication routines running off at low consciousness levels need not be mindless and in fact may enable greater mindfulness to other matters.

Features of Communication That Elicit Mindfulness

The preponderance of communication literature related to mindfulness fits into the category of communication-as-cause-of-mindfulness. In considering the role of mindfulness in addressing social issues, then, we need to specify which features of the communication situation, the communicators themselves, or their messages may naturally prompt greater mindfulness. Langer's early work (1978) and subsequent analyses by others (e.g., J. K. Burgoon & Langer, 1995; Hewes, 1995; Hewes & Graham, 1989; Motley, 1992; Schul & Burnstein, 1998) have identified the following as prompting people to become more thoughtful: (1) novel situations (i.e., those that have no script) or ones in which engaging in scripted behavior becomes effortful (perhaps because of new and greater situational demands), (2) novel communication formats (e.g., computer-mediated communication or human-computer interaction), (3) uninvolving situations, (4) interruptions by external factors that interfere with completion of a script, (5) conflict, competition, or confusion arising among two or more message goals and/or the means of achieving them, (6) anticipating negative consequences of a message yet to be transmitted, (7) nonroutine time delay or processing difficulty intervening between message formulation and actual transmission, (8) discrepant, asynchronous, or suspicion-arousing features of the modality, message, source, or situation (such as expecting invalid information, interacting with a reputedly untrustworthy source, or recognizing implausibilities in a message), and (9) experiencing a positive or negative consequence that is highly discrepant from previous consequences (e.g., experiencing a positive or negative violation of expectations or failing to achieve one's goals and plans).

Waldron (1997) reported that some of these mindfulness prompts were manifested in the conversations he studied. After finishing videotaped conversations, participants completed a cued-recall procedure in which they rated the importance of their goals during each 30-s segment of conversation and wrote interpretations of what had transpired during the segment. Participants rated five types of interpersonal goals (Dillard, 1990): arousal management, relational, self-identity, other-identity, and information seeking. Segments that included statistically significant shifts in goal priority were located, and the conversational events that prompted participants to rethink their goals were described.

The conversations were punctuated frequently by potential mindfulness prompts. Roughly 30% of the 30-s intervals involved a substantive reconfiguring of conversational objectives. Participants' self-reports and observational data indicated that mindfulness was encouraged by several factors consistent with the list provided above. Planning confusions and uncertainties about which actions to deploy in future conversational turns induced interactants to rethink their objectives. When plans were thwarted by the partner's lack of cooperation a similar

effect occurred. Partner rule violations, including perceived invasions of privacy and excessive verbosity, elicited a mindful response, as did behavior that prompted suspicions about the partner's motives (e.g., perceived insincerity). Conversational intervals characterized by these apparently mindful reactions were associated with behavioral patterns, such as increased questioning, longer conversational turns, requests for evidence, and interruptions of the partner, all of which suggest an active effort to assert control of the conversational situation.

Close examination reveals that many of the features listed above relate to expectations and their violations: expectations regarding the constituent features of messages and communicative situations; expectations about own and others' goals and plans; expectations about own and others' actions, the timing and sequencing of such actions, or both; and expectations about likely consequences of various anticipated actions. The remainder involve some kind of anticipated or actual failure—of goals, plans, or the implementations of plans, including mustering the effort to accomplish them—that in itself may also constitute a form of violated expectations. This warrants closer consideration of how expectancy violations and goal failures relate to mindfulness.

When individuals pursue their goals in social situations, fellow interactants expect them to speak and act in certain ways and not others. Of course, in none but the most formal and ritualistic social contexts do strict interaction protocols require the enactment of a singular action plan, for example, bowing in the presence of royalty. Even so, most social interaction situations entail a finite range of anticipated and socially appropriate conduct attached to them (Berger & Kellermann, 1994). Encountering an unfamiliar setting or routine, failing to bring about desired goals and subgoals, having completion of a planned course of action thwarted, or projecting that one's intended actions may have adverse effects—all of these circumstances should make interactants more mindful about their own and others' behavior.

Considerable evidence supports this conjecture. Interviewers encountering job applicants who display hyper- or hypo-involvement find such behavior unexpected, as do patients interacting with physicians who use very aggressive language (J. K. Burgoon, 1994; M. Burgoon & J. K. Burgoon, 1990). Whether the source of expectation violations is located in goal failure (Srull & Wyer, 1986), plan failure (Berger, 1995, 1997; Berger, Knowlton, & Abrahams, 1996), or deviations from situationally determined behavioral norms (J. K. Burgoon, 1978; J. K. Burgoon, Buller et al., 1995; Cappella & Greene, 1982), these violations lead to more careful monitoring of the behavioral stream (Newtson, 1973, 1976). Consequently, people tend to become more mindful of the details of action sequences when such violations occur (J. K. Burgoon & Walther, 1990; Langer, 1978, 1989; Vallacher & Wegner, 1985).

However, the arousal and affective reactions experienced as a result of these expectancy violations may themselves become the focus of the interaction, and

their management may become the object of considerable goal-directed action by participants, with concomitant reductions in attentiveness to other matters. For example, socially anxious individuals may become so self-conscious of their own inadequacies during a job interview that they are unable to marshal the cognitive resources to recover from a first probing question by an interviewer. Furthermore, when message plans fail to bring about desired goal states, individuals show a propensity to alter lower level, less abstract plan elements rather than more global plan units (Berger, 1997; Berger et al., 1996). As an illustration, if passersby are asked to provide geographic directions to someone who then says he or she doesn't understand the first rendition of the directions, rarely do the direction givers alter the proposed route during the second rendition. Instead, they repeat the same directions but say them more slowly and louder (Berger, 1997; Berger & diBattista, 1993). Furthermore, when teaching English as a second language, even experienced teachers, who should know better, tend to talk louder when their students fail to understand them. This potentially dysfunctional response is most likely due to the fact that it would be more cognitively demanding to alter message structure and content than to change vocal amplitude and speech rate (Berger, 1995, 1997; Berger et al., 1996).

In addition to mindfulness growing out of naturally arising features of interaction, verbal and nonverbal message elements can be manipulated intentionally to elicit more thoughtful, creative, and flexible states of mind. In fact, most experimental inductions designed to instigate greater mindfulness rely on variants on these kinds of message manipulations and so could be reexamined from the perspective of the communication features that made the mindfulness induction successful. Additionally, communication research has examined social-cognitive phenomena closely related to mindfulness-mindlessness. Communication that is planful, effortfully processed, creative, strategic, flexible, and/or reason-based (as opposed to emotion-based) would seem to qualify as mindful, whereas communication that is reactive, superficially processed, routine, rigid, and emotional would fall toward the mindless end of the continuum. Moreover, principles of mindfulness are centrally implicated in research on message production and message reception. Such research reveals that extensive planning, heightened attention, greater effort, and the like do not automatically translate into more efficacious behavior. Rather, the complexity (number of planned actions and contingencies), specificity, and quality or sophistication of such thoughts, plans, and goals are key (Berger et al., 1996; Waldron et al., 1995). Interactants who can think of only abstract courses of action ("argue the point" "be friendly") may be stymied by the need to produce specific responses during conversational situations. Those who have ineffective plans for making friends or requesting dates may experience loneliness (Berger, 1988; Berger & Bell, 1988). Interventions that offer both specific responses and alternatives when initial tactics fail represent the kind of mindful communication that may enable more effective functioning.

Mindfulness can have negative consequences on some objective measures while simultaneously producing positive consequences on others. For example, studies of plans for direction giving, persuasive interactions, and requesting dates (Berger, 1988; Berger, Karol, & Jordan, 1989; Berger et al., 1996; Knowlton & Berger, 1997) have shown that plan complexity can have a detrimental effect on verbal fluency. Yet the complexity of "imagined interactions" (defined in a manner similar to plans) predicted competent performance in another study (Edwards, Honeycutt, & Zagacki, 1988). And complexity at the tactical level appears to facilitate the production of effective information-seeking and verbal disagreement tactics (Waldron & Applegate, 1994, 1998). Thus, although mental search processes may interfere with the production of fluent speech (Berger, 1995, 1997), they may produce more desirable courses of action.

In sum, even when interaction features possess the potential to elevate mindfulness, thoughts may be drawn to more concrete and trivial features of the interaction rather than to more consequential ones. In other words, there is no assurance that interaction features instigating greater mindfulness will yield more flexible, creative, or adaptive thought processes and responses. Nevertheless, because action schemata and other behavioral adjustments typically operate semiautomatically and have fewer cognitive resources devoted to their surveillance (J. K. Burgoon, Stern et al., 1995; Patterson, 1998), novel and unexpected elements of social episodes at least increase the odds that more mindful processing of relevant and important information will occur.

Interpersonal Communication Praxis and the Management of Mindfulness

In the remainder of this article, we present a cursory but illustrative sampling of real-world applications in which communication is used to manage mindfulness. A notable feature of this applied research is its focus on communication competence and the role of mindfulness in facilitating (or inhibiting) desirable personal or relational outcomes. A question summarizes one overriding concern of this research: Does mindfulness facilitate communication success? A previous review examined the intersection of communication and mindlessness at the molecular level of language and speech behavior (J. K. Burgoon & Langer, 1995). Here we review selected applied studies that examine communication at more molar and tactical levels.

Detecting Scams, Hoaxes, and Other Deceits

Deceit, as a pervasive feature of the contemporary social landscape, has become a recognized social problem that penetrates all aspects of public and private life but is especially troublesome for subpopulations like the elderly, who are easy prey for scam artists and investment hoaxes. For a law enforcement officer

interrogating a suspect, a citizen judging a politician's sincerity, or a widower assessing whether televised products and offers are legitimate, the question becomes one of whether heightened suspiciousness and attention to particular sets of cues improve one's accuracy in distinguishing truths from lies, evasions, strategic omissions, and the like. By contrast, for those intending to perpetrate deceit—such as physicians shielding patients from too much bad news or military personnel protecting national security by withholding top secret information—the issue becomes one of whether rehearsal or planning leads to more creative and believable messages, that is, ones that evade detection of deceptive intent.

Extensive research examining this issue offers useful insights into how deceptive messages are encoded, either intentionally or unintentionally, by sources, and how message recipients attempt to detect deception (for summaries, see Buller & Burgoon, 1994, 1996; J. K. Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996; Zuckerman & Driver, 1985). On the decoding side, mindless acceptance of messages at face value can lead to deleterious consequences. Despite the relatively high frequency of deceit in day-to-day conversation, people exhibit strong biases toward assuming others are truthful (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; McCornack & Parks, 1986; Schul & Burnstein, 1998; Turner, Edgley, & Olmstead, 1975). Rumors, unwarranted boasts, insincere flattery, equivocations, unrealistic advertisement claims, and "special deals" are among the many message forms that require mindful analysis by the message recipient.

One way this can be accomplished is to prepare for potentially invalid information by entertaining multiple interpretations of it (Schul, Burnstein, & Bardi, 1996). In this case, forewarned is forearmed. A second way is to adopt a more wary stance. Being alerted that sources are of questionable character or messages are of dubious truth value can prompt greater surveillance, second-guessing, and consideration of alternate explanations that seem more plausible than the one implied by the speaker (Hewes, 1995; Hewes & Graham, 1989). Yet heightened suspicion can also backfire, especially if it is chronic, by leading message recipients to misjudge truthful information as deceptive (J. K. Burgoon, Buller, Ebesu, & Rockwell, 1994; McCornack & Levine, 1990). A third approach to achieving mindful processing of deceit is tuning into nonverbal and verbal cues of deceit. Unfortunately, not only are there few reliable indicators, but message recipients also tend to focus on nondiagnostic information such as nervousness or eye contact, which message senders are more likely to control successfully, rather than more revealing vocal and verbal information. Questioning strategies that force respondents to answer spontaneously and to repeat earlier information that can be checked for consistency, or that require coordinating current answers with previous ones, may enable recipients to uncover inconsistencies. Thus, mindful detection of deceit is better served by attention to the plausibility and consistency of verbal content and to congruence between verbal and nonverbal channels than by attempting to spot specific telltale signs. Other tactics that have proven useful include focusing on expectancy

violations and attending to vocal changes, which can betray liars (Buller, Burgoon, Buslig, & Roiger, 1996; DePaulo, Lanier, & Davis, 1983; Feeley & deTurck, 1995; Fiedler & Walka, 1993; Hocking & Leathers, 1980). Overall, selective mindfulness, in terms of both the frequency with which one becomes suspicious and the communication signals that receive close scrutiny, is most likely to lead to improved deception detection, along with maintaining the flexible, tentative stance toward the veracity and validity of information that is the hallmark of mindfulness.

On the encoding (sending) side, as with planning in general, results are mixed as to the advantages of mindfulness because too much forethought can lead to nonfluencies and overcontrolled presentations (Berger, 1997; Berger et al., 1989; Berger et al., 1996; Knowlton & Berger, 1997). However, it can also result in more rapid responses and more believable verbal messages (Buller et al., in press; DePaulo & Kirkendol, 1989; Greene, O'Hair, Cody, & Yen, 1985). Mindfulness in the form of rehearsal and planning can thus facilitate deceit at the verbal level but undermine it at the nonverbal level.

Overall, a more mindful stance should benefit both sender and receiver during deceptive transactions as long it is not accompanied in the latter case by undue skepticism; in other words, maintaining tentativeness is preferable.

Training Employees and Solving Workplace Communication Programs

How to move uneducated, untrained, or unmotivated people into the workforce and retain them has been a perennial issue for government officials and employers. Mindful communication may garner benefits at several stages of the process.

First is the job interview itself. Applicants are often expected to "think on their feet" in response to challenging questions, to construct answers in response to hypothetical scenarios, and to provide concrete rather than abstract descriptions of their qualifications (Ugbah & Majors, 1992). Waldron, Lavitt, and McConnaughy (1998) conducted an evaluation of a job training program serving largely indigent clients in which they compared those who were successful to those who were unsuccessful in obtaining employment after training. Their analysis revealed that although socioeconomic, education, and family background were also important correlates of success, successful program participants were able to articulate more complex, flexible, and sophisticated plans for job interviews. In mock interviews conducted immediately prior to leaving the training program, successful candidates were better able to adapt the descriptions of their qualifications to the job they were seeking. When the interviewer expressed reservations, successful participants offered responses that were more creative and convincing than those of the unsuccessful students. The latter offered only abstract descriptions of their qualifications ("I like to work with people") and were stymied when the interviewer expressed reservations, typically offering only a repetition of earlier arguments with little elaboration.

Importantly, the study demonstrated that mindful approaches to interviewing can be acquired through training. Part of a training regimen included lectures, role-playing exercises, and case studies designed to help participants develop more detailed, flexible, and convincing interview strategies. Significant improvements from pre- to posttest were found on measures of communication competence, confidence, and quality of interview plans, and those who improved the most were most successful in obtaining jobs. These findings demonstrate that teaching clients to be mindful while developing and implementing their message plans is a potentially important part of job training and "welfare-to-work" programs.

A second area where mindfulness is relevant is the entering expectations of new employees. Often these are unrealistically positive because recruiters provide distorted information in selection interviews and interviewees fail to question the information's veracity (Jablin, 1982). Work dissatisfaction, negative surprises, and eventual turnover are the likely results. Applicants who are encouraged to ask more pointed questions during interviews and seek additional sources of information about work conditions are more likely to develop realistic work expectations (see Jablin & Krone, 1994, for a review). Moreover, it appears that once on the job, employees must use similar information-seeking tactics to gain insight into the allegiances and motives of coworkers and detect differences between the espoused and actual values of the organization (V. D. Miller & Jablin, 1991).

Performance feedback is a third area in which mindfulness can influence employee success and retention. Studies have shown that both supervisors and their employees tend to process negative performance feedback only superficially during performance evaluation interviews, and supervisors routinely downplay negative information in such settings, due to a largely subconscious fear of negative relational consequences (Larson, 1989). Employees typically process positive feedback more deeply than negative feedback, apparently as a kind of ego protection mechanism. Through their own feedback-seeking behavior, employees subtly influence managers to focus on positive information, often without realizing it (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). Larson argues that the failure of each party to consider fully the nature and consequences of poor performance eventually leads to negative surprises for employees and discourages performance improvement. Feedback behavior that encourages employees to think more deeply about the causes and remedies for poor performance is obviously preferable in such situations.

A final area of relevance is workplace persuasion. Drake and Moberg (1986) argue that some persuasive tactics can have "sedating" effects, by directing the recipients' attention away from social exchange calculations. For example, how a powerful person words a request can be intrinsically rewarding by creating the impression of a "special" relationship between source and recipient. The department head who says in confidence to a subordinate, "What are we going to do about John's sloppy workmanship?" is inviting the hapless listener to feel part of the

management team and to voluntarily help fix the problem. Such requests are "palliative" because they discourage the recipient from considering external rewards (e.g., overtime pay) as compensation for compliance. Arguably, by changing relational definitions (e.g., from coworkers to confidants; supervisor/subordinate to colleagues) the request fosters relatively mindless compliance with relational obligations and discourages reasoned considerations of costs and benefits other than the feelings of acceptance and status that the language of "we" is intended to convey. In such cases, mindless responding may prove beneficial for the message sender but not the message recipient, implying that people in one-down positions (those of low power and status) would profit from more mindful attention to the implications of such requests.

Reducing Stereotyping and Debiasing Social Information

In routine interaction, social actors must reduce uncertainty about the intentions of speakers and the meanings of messages if they are to limit misunderstanding and produce messages that are appropriate to the social situation (Berger, 1997). But the least effortful route to doing so may often be mindless stereotyping on the basis of limited social cues.

Counteracting such stereotyping requires both acquiring accurate information and correcting for potential biases and distortions, a goal that, like deception detection, can be facilitated by a mindful approach. Discussions about personal topics (e.g., a couple's discussion of safe sex; a parent-adolescent talk about the child's choice of friends), prohibited topics (e.g., discussion of employee compensation in organizations), or potentially threatening topics (e.g., reasons for one's poor work performance, alcohol and drug use/abuse) often require tactful encouragement of the partner to disclose, while at the same time avoiding the appearance of coercion. Clumsy or pressuring tactics can result in the target "clamming up" or distorting information as a means of managing threat to one's identity (for reviews, see Berger & Kellermann, 1983, 1994; Kellermann & Berger, 1984; Waldron, 1990).

Studies by Waldron and colleagues (Waldron, 1990; Waldron et al., 1998) explored how to obtain sensitive information from reluctant partners in a manner that minimizes social discomfort. Competent interactants were found to use more extensive and creative planning processes as they contemplated conversational moves. They looked farther into the conversational future, developed more alternatives in anticipation of partner responses, and were more responsive to the immediate context as they constructed conversational plans. They integrated information obtained from the partner in earlier conversational turns into their plans for future turns. This proactive and flexible approach, which epitomizes mindfulness, was contrasted with the use of "stock" small talk and repetitive questioning by less-skilled information seekers. Competent interactants also were more cognitively engaged and thus more able to manage the interaction and put their

partners at ease. Partners of the most skilled information seekers often willingly volunteered previously private information without realizing it was being sought. In contrast, less planful interactants proceeded with blunt requests and inappropriately intimate self-disclosures. Their partners volunteered less information and reported higher levels of discomfort. Thus, planfulness is akin to mindfulness about communication, and mindfulness facilitates the achievement of information-seeking goals. Apparently, planning increases speakers' ability to progress beyond simple questioning strategies to more complex and effective conversational management.

Creating Effective AIDS Prevention Campaigns

Studies of communication in AIDS prevention have adduced results with implications for mindfulness, both for those initiating AIDS prevention campaigns and for their targets. Waldron et al. (1995) and Waldron and Miller (1998) examined the cognitive and communicative approaches peer discussion leaders used in AIDS prevention programs. The research in this area suggests that with young adults, peer-led discussion groups are sometimes, but not always, effective in increasing the degree to which participants perceive the relevance of AIDS to their own sexual behavior and thus take appropriate precautions. Waldron et al. (1995) reasoned that peer leaders who were more planful in their approach would develop discussion strategies that were better adapted to the peer audience, more credible, and more effective in overcoming the reluctance of peers to discuss AIDS in personal terms. In fact, discussion leaders who reported using more frequent and specific communication plans in their discussions with peers were more effective. They produced a greater variety of behavioral tactics designed to overcome the mindless "it won't happen to me" reaction typical of this age group. Self-disclosure, the introduction of hypothetical scenarios ("What would you do in this situation?"), and the use of fear and other emotional appeals were among the tactics used by planful leaders to overcome this reaction. Equally important, these leaders prompted mindfulness in discussion participants, as evidenced in more personalized and concrete thinking about AIDS prevention. In contrast, discussions led by less planful leaders were characterized by short question-and-answer sequences in which respondents exhibited in a "rote" manner their AIDS-related knowledge. The leader and respondent appeared to adopt a scripted form of interaction typically associated with formal medical interviews. Not surprisingly, participants in these interactions persisted in a tendency to depersonalize AIDS risks.

Paradoxically, the mere act of communicating may *discourage* mindfulness in the context of safe-sex discussions. Early AIDS prevention advice from the Surgeon General encouraged partners to talk about their sexual histories as a first step in the prevention process (Snyder, 1991). Presumably, honest talk would encourage condom use and other prevention measures. Unfortunately, it appears that safe-sex talk can create a potentially dangerous and false sense of security among

partners. Safe-sex talk may actually discourage partners from thinking carefully about the risks of unprotected sex (Cline, Johnson, & Freeman, 1992). The sense of trust that develops from intimate revelations apparently discourages questioning of the partner's accounts and fully considering the risks that accompany unprotected sex, even with a trusted partner. The overconfidence stemming from intimate talk may encourage partners to ignore cues to deception, which is quite common. Partners routinely lie about their sexual past, yet people are most likely to assume they can tell when a familiar partner is lying and to believe that the partner is being truthful (Cochran & Mays, 1990; Swann, Silvera, & Proske, 1995). Thus, prompting mindfulness should be an important goal in AIDS prevention programs.

Resolving Conflict and Intercultural Misunderstandings

The extensive literature on conflict management makes clear that dysfunctional conflict is often characterized by relatively mindless cycles of blaming. During these cycles, each party focuses on the faults of the other, listens ineffectively to the partner, and overlooks his or her own contributions to the problem (for a review, see Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). Establishment or retaking of relational control is often an underlying motive of conflict, one that is exacerbated by relational messages, which tend to be nonverbal and not fully under the conscious control of the sender. Competent conflict management tactics appear to be those that increase the mindfulness of conflict behavior by bringing unstated assumptions under scrutiny, more clearly articulating the positions of self and other, and developing arguments that are adapted to the partner's. In this respect, Waldron and Applegate (1994, 1998) examined the conflict management tactics of persons who were both well liked by their partners and more successful in changing their partners' point of view. These individuals devoted a greater proportion of their cognitive effort and more of their conversational time exploring their partners' previous arguments, comparing and contrasting them with their own arguments, and creating novel plans of action that integrated the objectives of the partners when possible. They also "edited" their own behavior more frequently and articulated more "fallback" positions in anticipation of partner resistance. Thus, strategies that enable adversaries or parties to a conflict to articulate their assumptions and to focus explicitly on each other's arguments may foster more creative problem solving.

A typical prescription for resolving conflict is to find common ground— similarities in values, experiences, objectives, and so forth that can become the basis for mutually acceptable solutions. Ironically, however, this strategy could prove counterproductive if a focus on similarities causes people to overlook or disregard very real differences between them; that is, too much emphasis on what they hold in common may mislead people into thinking they are more alike than they really are. This presumption of commonality in fact may be an unrecognized contributor to many intercultural communication difficulties. For example, only when

message receivers indicated in a very heavy foreign accent that they could not understand English were direction givers likely to adapt their direction giving by speaking more slowly (Berger & diBattista, 1993). Articulating differences rather than similarities may make interactants more aware of conflicting needs, preferences, and agendas that must be accommodated. This notion is consistent with speech accommodation work showing that interlocutors are more likely to accommodate their speech style to another when they believe that fellow interactants do *not* share the same cultural or linguistic background (e.g., Chen & Cegala, 1994; Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995). It is possible that when cultural differences are visibly apparent or made explicit, people will be more mindful about their interactions and more accommodating of one another. "[T]hose in intercultural interactions may be even more motivated than those in intra-cultural ones to achieve a pleasant and smooth interchange and to minimize unflattering, stereotypic images like that of the 'Ugly American'" (J. K. Burgoon et al., 1998, p. 213).

Some Concluding Thoughts About Mindfulness and Communication Effectiveness

It has been our contention that greater mindfulness prior to and during communication can accrue substantial benefits in a variety of important practical communication contexts. That said, mindfulness is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for success in communicating. This relationship is a tenuous one that depends fundamentally on the correct implementation of mindfulness strategies on the part of both message creators and message recipients.

Nowhere is this more evident perhaps than the circumstance of unmet expectations about achieving one's goals. Such a state of affairs, which may necessitate altering or possibly even abandoning one's goals and plans (Alterman, 1988), may at once generate both negative affect and mindfulness, raising the possibility that potential knowledge gained by increased monitoring of the details of own and others' actions may be partially nullified by negative affect generated by such violations. That is, even though expectation violations indeed may direct attention toward the details of the communication process, concomitantly generated negative affect may disrupt the processing of this more detailed information (Easterbrook, 1959; Eysenck, 1982; MacLeod, 1996; Sarason, 1988). Here, as with other cases of heightened attention to the communication process, any potential benefits that might accrue to communicators through increased mindfulness and attention to details could be offset by the debilitating effects of negative affect on the processing of these details.

Given the monitoring tasks adumbrated above and their complexity, it seems apparent that mindfulness must be channeled appropriately, something that may not be as easily accomplished as it may seem. A case in point is message producers who are told why their messages were not understood and still fail to adapt them to

make them more comprehensible unless told explicitly to provide a different walk route (Berger, 1997; Berger et al., 1996.). In other words, without the requisite communication skills to monitor their actions and adapt their messages, without the breadth of repertoire that enables flexible, novel thought processes to translate into creative action, a more mindful state may not lead to more successful communication.

This possibility was explicitly acknowledged in early discussions of the concept (Langer, 1978), but it bears repeating in the present context. As individuals interact with others, unexpected situational exigencies may arise that require rapid and unhesitating responses, lest an excessively awkward situation be created with resulting negative personal impressions. Dealing quickly and successfully with various faux pas might require such rapid responses. More serious and potentially life-threatening situations frequently call for such responses, for example, providing CPR to a heart attack victim or removing a child from the path of an oncoming vehicle. Performance in these threatening situations could be debilitated considerably by mindfulness. By its very nature, novel, creative, flexible, and contingent thought requires consideration of alternatives. In many emergency situations, there is simply not sufficient time to develop and weigh alternatives. By the time alternatives are generated, the damage may already be done. Moreover, the performance of individuals who have highly practiced routines available to them, for example, extensive CPR training, would very likely be adversely affected by undue cognitive awareness that occurs during the performance of the routine. Consequently, although mindfulness may indeed promote adaptive action under some conditions, there can be clear downside risks to performance when individuals become mindful.

The broader problem of generating messages that produce desired effects in social interactions is clearly one that involves configurations of verbal and nonverbal message attributes rather than single variables or a few variables taken at a time. As we have suggested, the task of monitoring simultaneously all of the attributes relevant to producing effective configurations of speech and action is simply beyond the capacity of communicators. The anatomy of human sense organs alone precludes the visual monitoring of many important communication channels. For instance, during the course of most conversations, individuals cannot visually monitor their own facial expressions. Consequently, in order to transcend these limitations, there are probably default values of some variables that individuals can invoke to enable them to attend to other attributes. At cocktail parties we expect individuals to smile frequently, whereas at funerals we expect individuals to look somber. By invoking these default values in these contexts, message producers can concentrate on other aspects of their performances and exert conscious control over them. Of course, these defaults must be acquired mindfully. However, once learned, they may be activated automatically (Bargh, 1997).

The critical point is this: Social interaction effectiveness implies the ability to produce some attributes of message configurations mindlessly and others mindfully. As Levelt (1989) has suggested, message producers can bring almost any aspect of speech production under conscious control, if they so desire. The trick is in knowing when to bring which attributes under such control, how to alter them when one is mindful of them, and when to set them at a default value and allow them to run off mindlessly. Obviously, we have a long way to go before we understand how message plans and the complex configurations of speech and action used to implement them can be mindfully monitored and controlled in ways that promote communication effectiveness.

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