




COMMENTARY

Bringing our humanness to the workplace: Fostering reflection and reflexivity via mindful relating

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Hyland (2023) raises important points regarding the need for the field of I-O psychology to advance by becoming more reflective and reflexive. In particular, he asks, how can we better “account for our humanness” as we practice our profession? (p. 107). We suggest that one important means by which we can do this—and by which we can encourage our clients to do this—is by way of mindful relating.

Mindful relating (Reina et al., 2022) is characterized by “interacting with another person with high levels of attention and decentering” (p. 107), with *attention* to be understood as representing relating partners’ full attentional presence in the interaction (Brown & Ryan, 2003), and *decentering* ensuring that the interaction is not clouded by self-centeredness or judgmental interpretations of one’s relating partner (Bernstein et al., 2015). As such, mindful relating inextricably aligns with the characterization of *reflection* as “a metacognitive process that reveals the assumptions, worldviews, and perspectives that influence the way we think, learn, and act” (Hyland, 2023; p. 107), as well as *reflexivity*, which reminds us that our past experiences inform how and why we show up the way we do, which has important implications for how our experiences in the present moment then unfold. The moment-by-moment processing inherent in mindfulness more broadly likewise aligns with Schon’s (1983) reflection-in-action, and, like reflection, mindfulness has enjoyed increasing recognition and exposure in educational and professional realms alike (Hyland et al., 2015). *Mindful relating* goes a step further, elevating mindfulness to the relational level, thereby offering an important dyadic lens through which we can better infuse our “humanness” into our interactions and relationships with others. When individuals’ interactions are characterized by high levels of both attention and decentering, deep mindful relating ensues, and such interactions are more likely to be of high quality, which in turn may reinforce and improve relationship quality over time (Reina et al., 2022).

The mechanisms by which mindful relating improves relationship quality can occur through both reflection and reflexivity. Mindfully relating can help us *reflect* on ourselves and our relationship with our work and with others with whom we interact at work (Good et al., 2016; Hyland et al., 2015)—or, in the case of the academic–practitioner divide, others with whom we *should* interact more frequently and more mindfully. As such, mindful relating can serve to reinforce self-inquiry to improve professional development. Further, mindful relating also reinforces reflexivity such that it requires individuals to engage in self-inquiry that can lead to improvements in our science through reducing our subjective lens. Envision a discussion between an academic and a practitioner regarding an organizational dilemma, wherein each individual’s approach to the interactions is characterized by their reflecting on their own perspectives, engaging with reflexivity of one’s own self-interests, and then pursuantly using this self-derived knowledge to shape how they intentionally interact with their relating partner via focused

attention and with less ego wrapped up in being “right.” Such an approach from both parties could serve as an important foundation facilitating mutual understanding. In turn, when such an approach is used consistently over time, it can be key in cyclically generating future positive interactions and relationship building, as well as bringing about opportunities to help individuals achieve tangible positive impact solving real organizational problems.

We suggest that when mindful relating is embraced on a large scale, it can help further integrate the wisdom and knowledge held by both I-O practitioners and scholars so as to accomplish the dual goals of improved professional development as well as elevating the quality of our science. That is, mindfully relating with others in our profession, as well as with our clients in practice, is one way we can work toward rectifying the field’s “identity crisis” (Hyland, p. 107) by generating genuine and meaningful dialogue and deeply authentic relationships. In particular, mindfully relating as an intentional practice across research and practice can serve as a bridge between these two oft-divorced domains (Rynes, 2012). Practically, this may happen during conversations at conferences that integrate both scholars and practitioners. Regardless of whether we work in academia or industry (or both), our work is inherently tied to others, and influences them either directly or indirectly (e.g., interventions). Thus, taking stock of how we think about, relate to, and integrate the perspectives of relevant others in our professional sphere is important insofar as ensuring that we are remaining true to our espoused relational values when we practice our science. As Hyland so aptly emphasizes, “the values that inform our work matter” (p. 107).

Moreover, accounting for the nature of our relational interactions within our work (and research) can also help ensure that we avoid the risk of becoming overly reductionistic in our research and/or practice, as Hyland rightly cautions (re: Epistemological Question 1). Indeed, scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of relationality in research (Bartunek, 2007), and thus should consider not only whether they engage in thoughtful relational practices, but also how they do so. Likewise, a mindful relating lens also serves to offer further insight into several of the complementary questions posed in the focal article (p. 107), including: reflecting on our own worldview and values in relation to those of others, as well as in relation to our own work, and the interactive nature of those perspectives and positions (re: Personal Question 1); evaluating our personal and professional place within a field that has inevitably been shaped by sociohistorical forces that have inherently involved, compromised, and challenged the nature of interpersonal relations (re: Disciplinary Question 1); and our ethical responsibility to consider who it is we serve via our work, how, and in what moral capacity (re: Disciplinary Question 2).

To that end, not only does mindful relating require genuine reflection on the self through self-examination, but it also capitalizes on the extent to which we exhibit flexibility in how we respond to the opinions, ideas, and behaviors of others. In this way, it makes for a natural marriage with the “generative dialogues” and “reflective conversations” that Hyland suggests are central in yielding valuable developmental insights for the profession (p. 107). Indeed, we suggest, it is the relationships and dialogues characterized by deep mindful relating, as opposed to nonmindful relating (relating with low attention and low decentering) or surface mindful relating (relating with high attention but low decentering; Reina et al., 2022), that will draw on sufficient *attention* and *decentering* alike from *both* relating partners so as to “tap into the collective wisdom of our field” (Hyland, p. 107) and shift the needle toward more deeply authentic and transformational conversations and relationships. As such, it is these relationships and dialogues that hold the most potential to critically evaluate and, ultimately, advance the state of our field in the years to come. Further, these relationships contribute meaningfully to the conversation on responsible management, which seeks to transcend the purely economic narrative to embrace a more humanistic one which reinforces human connection, dignity, wisdom, and belonging (Pirson, 2020).

Specifically in regard to reflexivity, mindful relating is reflected in Wilkinson’s (1988) characterizations of personal and disciplinary reflexivity, such that it is inextricably reciprocal and represents a largely iterative and ongoing process that requires continuous analysis of one’s self and one’s values in relation to the surrounding context, events, and people with whom one is faced

(personal reflexivity). Likewise, the extent to which power dynamics such as hierarchical organizational structures are inherently relevant to mindful relating (Reina et al., 2022) aligns with Wilkinson's disciplinary reflexivity such that it calls for a critically reflective consideration of how power and privilege interact with our "humanness" to inform our experiences, motives, and actions as I-O psychologists not only at the individual level, but also at the dyadic level and within the field as a whole. Tactically, reflection and reflexivity can help individuals better understand and process the nuances of their own perspective with the larger set of power dynamics during an interpersonal interaction - and, through mindful relating, can assist in more productively managing such dynamics to help engender more humanism within and across domains. Our field is, as many fields are, steeped in power dynamics—which are in turn also steeped in deeply entrenched sources of societal and demographic privilege—and any evaluation of the field failing to account for such systemic issues would be painting an incomplete picture.

Conclusion

We build on Hyland's contention that reflection and reflexivity are central avenues by which we can effectively evaluate and advance the field of I-O psychology. We move beyond the focal article to put forth *mindful relating* as a particularly effective means to further both reflection and reflexivity. In particular, mindful relating can help to build, reinforce, and extend bridges between research and practice by generating more genuine relationships and dialogues characterized by high levels of attentiveness and presence, as well as lower levels of self-serving bias and judgment, thereby facilitating advancement of the field.

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