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**WORKPLACE MINDFULNESS TRAINING WITH STUDENTS
AT MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY: EVALUATION REPORT 2019**

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With support from Memorial University’s Student Services Fee funding, a team led by Principal Investigator Janna Rosales, PhD (Visiting Assistant Professor, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science), conducted two 10-week Workplace Mindfulness training programs in the Winter and Fall of 2019: “Workplace Mindfulness to Support Professional Development and Well-Being of Engineering Students and Other Work Placement Students.”

Ten undergraduate and graduate students (mostly graduate, and mostly international) completed both pre and post evaluations at the beginning and end of the program in the Winter and Fall of 2019. An additional four students completed the post evaluation.

The project team included Dr. Rosales; Vashti Campbell (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Medicine); Renato Rodrigues (PhD Candidate, Faculty of Humanities), and Andrew Safer (mindfulness instructor, trainer, and workshop facilitator) who developed and presented the Workplace Mindfulness program. Dr. Rosales and Mr. Rodriguez facilitated self-reflective freewriting exercises during the sessions.

Participants provided written consent, allowing their evaluation responses to be included anonymously in a report and in materials promoting the Workplace Mindfulness training program. Andrew Safer administered a pre evaluation during the first session of each workshop series and a post evaluation during the last session (see pages 8 and 9). This report is focused on student responses to these evaluation questions. The Memorial University research team conducted additional research using a separate set of measures.

Program

The Workplace Mindfulness program consists of nine 1.5-hour weekly sessions and a 2-hour final session, which include various mindfulness practices and Q&A, presentations, and discussion in pairs and in the group. Readings on the weekly topics were provided online. The themes of the ten sessions included:

1. The Business Case for Mindfulness
2. Core Mindfulness Practices
3. Attention in the Age of Digital Distraction
4. The Power of Pausing

5. Seeing the Big Picture Beyond the Details
6. Responding Instead of Reacting
7. Building Respectful Relationships
8. Navigating Stress and Uncertainty
9. Joining Vision and Practicality
10. Tying It All Together

Quantitative Evaluation

Participants indicated their agreement / disagreement with 16 statements based on a five-point Likert scale. Megan Walsh, PhD (Assistant Professor, Edwards School of Business, University of Saskatchewan) calculated the mean for each evaluation statement, pre and post, and the percentage change for each question.

The means for pre and post indicated an overall score change of **25.86%** for all evaluation statements.

Pre and post evaluations were paired for 10 participants:

Statement	Means (pre training)	Means (post training)	Percentage Change
Mindfulness helps get rid of disturbing thoughts and emotions	1	2	100%
I have problems dealing with stressful situations	2	3.3	65.00%
When my thoughts overtake me and I feel worried, I don't know how to pause or interrupt this pattern.	2.2	3.6	63.64%
When I do something that doesn't meet my expectations, I give myself a hard time.	1.7	2.6	52.94%
I am easily distracted.	2.1	2.9	38.10%
I am unaware of the ways that I am impulsive.	2.5	3.3	32.00%
I am often preoccupied, and miss what is going on	2.3	3	30.43%

around me.			
I am keen on multitasking as it allows me to accomplish a lot of tasks.	3.2	4.1	28.13%
When I'm working on something, it's difficult to differentiate between priorities and tasks that could be done later.	2.4	2.9	20.83%
I tend to have a lot of ideas that never get implemented, and I don't know what to do about this.	2.4	2.9	20.83%
I can't imagine getting through a day without my cellphone.	2.5	3	20.00%
When someone is talking, I have trouble putting my own thoughts aside and paying attention fully.	3.3	3.8	15.15%
After I send an important email or text, I often regret what I wrote.	3.4	3.8	11.76%
I find that I am uncomfortable being around people who need help.	3.9	4.2	7.69%
When I have difficult thoughts or feelings, I tend to avoid facing them for as long as I can.	3.1	3.2	3.23%
When I'm concerned about something, it doesn't occur to me that my thoughts might not be true.	2.6	2.5	-3.85%

Qualitative Evaluation

Fourteen participants' responses are included in the tables below. (This includes four participants for whom only the post evaluation was available.)

1. *What are some of the main points about mindfulness that resonate for you and your everyday life?*

The most common responses are listed below.

Categories	Number of Participants
Being in the moment, awareness of everything around me; active listening	6
Responding not reacting Probably most important for me in everyday life	5
Limiting digital distractions, multitasking / Breaking away from distractions, giving myself space	3
Showing compassion / Kindness to others	2
Seeing bigger picture	2
Controlling mind from wandering	1
Nonjudgment: a major help, supplements Counselling Centre	1
Not becoming obsessed with details	1
Recognizing thoughts as thoughts; don't need to get rid of them, have better relationship with them	1
After coming back from lecture, helps me feel happier, stress-free	1
Letting go	1
Control stress	1

"Thoughts are thoughts. You don't need to get rid of thoughts, rather have a better relationship with them."

2. *Which mindfulness practices are you finding helpful, and in what way?*

Below are the practices that were listed—in some cases, two or three categories per person.

Categories	Number of Participants
Sitting practice / Break from thoughts to better respond later / To help deal with stress / positive change to brain: control emotion better / Believe stress is released during sitting practice	10

Mindfulness in everyday life / While showering, brushing teeth / Reminds me how awesome simple things can be / Helps me find solutions to challenges at work / Helps bring positivity out of things I take for granted	6
Walking practice: Allows taking break without sitting still	5
Head and shoulders/ Refocuses what I'm doing / When overwhelmed: recalibrate	5
Mindful listening: Listen to others better	1
Calms my mind / go at slower pace	1

3. *How helpful has this workshop series been for you? (0 = not helpful; 10 = extremely helpful)*

Ranges / categories	Number of Participants
0-4 (not helpful) =	0
5-7 (somewhat helpful) =	3
8-9 (very helpful) =	7
10 (extremely helpful) =	4

Average: 8.4

4. *Specifically, how does your study and practice of mindfulness help during the workday?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Focus: On important tasks / More focused, less irritable / Helps with studies problem, concentrate more / Helps refresh / Clearing thoughts, refocus on most important things / Helps with how I'm thinking and dealing with my task / Helps stop and think of things with new perspective	7
Problem Solving: Clear the mind, come back with fresh perspective / Leaves me more room to think / solve problem, instead of worrying	2
Empathy: Understanding others' points of view	1
Creativity: Don't fear trying new things	1

Productivity: Getting things done in better fashion, with better results. Study experience greatly improved; grades quite exciting	1
Sharing: Have some things to talk about with people	1
Stress: Control stress / Much less stressed during workday	1
Practice sessions help me build habit so can do on my own	1

“I am able to, through Mindfulness, get things done in better fashion, getting better results. My study experience has greatly improved, and my grades are, in fact, quite exciting.”

5. *Have you been able to do some mindfulness practice at home? If yes, how many times a week? Usually for how long?*

Frequency of meditation practice at home

Length of time per practice session

Times / Week	Number of Participants		Length of session	Number of Participants
1-2	1		1-5 min.	0
3-4	5		5-15 min.	8
5-7	8		> 15 min.	5
			No answer	1

6. *Do you think your colleagues could benefit from learning about workplace mindfulness?*

Categories	Number of Participants
Yes	12
Absolutely	1
Depends on the person	1
No	0

Instructor's Summary

Students highlighted a range of benefits from workplace mindfulness. Six out of 10 said it helps them with focus / concentration: engaging in the most important tasks, and their studies. They also cited improved problem solving through gaining a fresh perspective, creativity due to not fearing new endeavours, empathizing and understanding another's point of view, and controlling stress.

Their responses to the quantitative evaluation indicate which areas resonated the most. Agreement with “I have problems dealing with stressful situations” saw a 65% change from pre-program to completion. A number of elements in the program contribute to dealing with stress: grounding which helps to synchronize body and mind, recognizing thoughts as thoughts and coming back to the here and now, acknowledging feelings, emotions, and impulses without getting

carried away by them, developing an appreciation for space—awareness—as opposed to busyness, and making friends with oneself, to name a few.

“When my thoughts overtake me and I feel worried, I don’t know how to pause or interrupt this pattern” showed the next highest percentage change (63.64%), indicating that students are finding mindfulness helpful for dealing with worry and anxiety. Once again, exploring a new relationship to thoughts, feelings and emotions is key, as is the present-moment orientation that is fundamental to mindfulness practice. An improvement in self-criticism and self-judgment was evidenced by a 52.94 % change in “When I do something that doesn’t meet my expectations, I give myself a hard time.” Making friends with oneself, and cultivating loving-kindness—first towards oneself, and then towards others—can begin to turn around the destructive habit of self-loathing. “I am easily distracted” was one of the statements with the highest change (38.10%), which is noteworthy in light of students’ comments about focus. Experiencing the distracted mind in mindfulness practice, and returning one’s attention, time and again, to the present moment via the breath, is ongoing training for working with distractedness.

A significant change in “I am unaware of the ways that I am impulsive” (32.00%) highlights a key element of mindfulness: pausing, which builds capacity for experiencing strong emotions and impulses without finding the need to act. “I am often preoccupied, and miss what is going on around me”, which showed a 30.43% improvement, reflects getting caught up in events and losing perspective. The practice of mindfulness shows us how much of our time we are preoccupied—on automatic pilot. It provides the tools to strengthen our present-moment orientation. “I am keen on multitasking, as it allows me to accomplish a lot of tasks” (28.13%) reflects a popular misconception in our culture. Abandoning the constant search for entertainment, mindfulness emphasizes paying attention right here, right now—the flip side of the coin. In workplace mindfulness training, students learn that multitasking takes longer to complete tasks, there is a higher probability of errors, and the act of juggling tasks can cause stress.

Considering the importance of prioritizing tasks in the workplace, it is significant that there was a 20.83% change with regard to this statement: “When I’m working on something, it’s difficult to differentiate between priorities and tasks that could be done later.” The basic training in the sitting practice is to prioritize the here and now via the breath while acknowledging and letting go of concepts, plans, and projects that occur in the mind. There was a 20.83% change with regard to: “I tend to have a lot of ideas that never get implemented, and I don’t know what to do about this.” This suggests both greater discernment and greater effectiveness in putting ideas into practice. Finally, the focus on Attention in the Age of Digital Distraction challenged students to become aware of their cell phone use and experiment with reducing it. Accordingly, there was a 20% change regarding: “I can’t imagine getting through a day without my cell phone.”

Participants were asked how helpful the Workplace Mindfulness Training Program was (1=not helpful; 10=extremely helpful). The average rating was 8.4. Thirteen out of fourteen were practicing mindfulness at least three times per week, indicating ongoing engagement. All respondents said they felt that their colleagues would benefit by learning about mindfulness, with one student adding the qualifier: it depends on the person.

These two groups of university students demonstrated that mindfulness training for the workplace is both relevant and practical. Finding a new way to deal with stress was particularly useful. Some of the students who started the program did not stay until the end, for various reasons: 1) timing in relation to their classes and other commitments; 2) travel related to their studies; and 3) lack of interest and engagement.

Those who stayed confirmed learning a range of workplace competencies ranging from greater focus and less distractedness, to improved problem solving and increased empathy.

Personal code: _____

Workplace Mindfulness Evaluation Form

(pre-post intervention)

Please write down in the box on the left the number that best fits how you feel with regard to the statement:

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Neither Agree, nor Disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly Disagree 0=Don't Know

- Mindfulness helps get rid of disturbing thoughts and emotions.
- I am keen on multitasking as it allows me to accomplish a lot of tasks.
- I am unaware of the ways that I am impulsive.
- When I do something that doesn't meet my expectations, I give myself a hard time.
- I am easily distracted.
- I have problems dealing with stressful situations.
- I find that I am uncomfortable being around people who need help.
- When someone is talking, I have trouble putting my own thoughts aside and paying attention fully.
- When I'm concerned about something, it doesn't occur to me that my thoughts might not be true.
- I am often preoccupied, and miss what is going on around me.
- When my thoughts overtake me and I feel worried, I don't know how to pause or interrupt this pattern.
- I can't imagine getting through a day without my cell phone.
- After I "send" an important e-mail or text, I often regret what I wrote.

- When I have difficult thoughts or feelings, I tend to avoid facing them for as long as I can.
- When I'm working on something, it's difficult to differentiate between priorities and tasks that could be done later...
- I tend to have a lot of ideas that never get implemented, and I don't know what to do about this.

(Post-intervention only):

1. What are some of the main points about “mindfulness” that resonate for you and your everyday life? _____

2. Which mindfulness practices are you finding helpful, and in what way?

3. How helpful has this workshop series been for you? (0 = not helpful; 10 = extremely helpful) _____
 Specifically, how does your study and practice of mindfulness help during the workday?

4. Have you been able to do some meditation practice at home? _____
 If yes, about how many times a week? _____ Usually for how long? _____
5. Do you think your colleagues could benefit from learning about Workplace Mindfulness? _____
6. Do you have any suggestions on how this workshop series can be improved? _____

Thank you!

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