

Case study: National Physical Laboratory – Mindfulness Course Outcomes

By Dr Alison Armstrong, June 2015

Background

Two 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction courses have been run at NPL. These were mostly funded by the company, but a small participant contribution was collected. A room was provided on-site. Information about the mindfulness course was provided for staff via posters, the intranet and word of mouth. For confidentiality reasons, applications went directly to Alison. She used information given in the applications to ensure the course was suitable for participants (initiating a phone conversation in some cases to be sure), and to collect the pre-course data. A total of 38 participants applied across the 2 courses.

Pre- and post-course measures were taken and open-ended questions asked, to provide some measure of impact and effectiveness. Measures included: Satisfaction with Life, Satisfaction with Job, Mindfulness, General Health, Mood and Energy, Organisational Commitment, and Fulfilment of Personal Needs at Work. In the results presented here, quotes in italics are directly from the participants.

Motivation to Apply

There were three reasons given for wishing to participate in this course. The first theme was that individuals were looking to improve something in their life that was a problem for them, such as stress, sleep problems, depression, grief, chronic health condition, worry, negative thinking, or anxiety and panic.

The second theme was that individuals were seeking to gain a quality or new skill, such as balance, focus, happiness, creativity, perspective, calm, work-life balance, optimism, and a tool to help cope with everyday living and life.

And the third theme was that there was a curiosity about mindfulness and/or meditation and a desire to try it out.

Course Attendance and Engagement

The courses were very well attended, with an average attendance of 7 out of 8 sessions. The reasons for non-attendance (when known) were either illness, work pressure, business travel or annual leave. One person dropped out of each course due to work pressure.

Engagement can also be assessed from the perspective of commitment to the home practice. Participants completed an average of 2.75 hours home practice.

Post-Course Results

Feedback on the Sessions

There were two main themes regarding what the participants felt had been most useful in the sessions themselves: the guided meditations, and the group discussions.

Views of the Home Practice

"I never regretted doing any home practice, but I did regret not finding the time on a couple of occasions"

"Without doing (the home practice), the course would last 8 weeks instead of potentially a lifetime"

"Absolutely vital, otherwise would not have made a fraction of the benefit"

Benefits from the Course

There are ten (related) themes regarding course benefits:

1. Relating to self: thoughts, emotions and behaviours

"If I acknowledge the horrible feelings I have are just anxiety then they seem to go away rather than me spiralling into the idea that there is something wrong with me"

"I can now be more reflective and hold things in perspective"

"Procrastination seems to be decreasing at home and at work"

2. Pause/stop/calm

"I have taught myself to stop and pause occasionally, at least!"

"I feel very calm and peaceful"

3. Acceptance

Mindfulness *"has taught me how to identify issues ... acknowledge them and move on"*

I've gained *"the acceptance that I can't always do everything and that I don't need to do everything all the time"*

4. Lower stress or increased relaxation (and implications)

"I am much more productive at work, because I am less stressed, and feel more motivated"

"I am more aware of my thought patterns which, despite not stopping me procrastinating or becoming stressed, makes me aware more quickly that I am not focussed on the task in hand"

5. Self-care

I *"realise how important it is to look after myself"*

6. Relating to others

I feel *“warmer towards my colleagues”*

“I feel more aware of taking time before reacting and judging things/people”

“I also feel my family time has improved a lot as when we’re together I can concentrate on being with them (instead of thinking of all the things on my ‘to-do-list’, which I have a tendency to do), and it’s so much better”

7. Empowerment and control

“I feel like I have taken control of my life through the recognition of the choices I have”

“The course has shown me that it is possible to change things if you realise that they exist”

8. Growth/creativity/strength

“I have started to be more creative again”

“My creative side feels like it has been reinvigorated and I am enjoying it rather than beating myself up about not doing it”

“I begin to stop sleepwalking through life”

9. Work-life balance

“I have also found more balance in my life, doing many activities that I enjoy and that are nourishing”

Practicing mindfulness *“made me realise how poor my work life balance had got and gave me the impetus I needed to address it”*

10. Know how to meditate

“I now have a clear idea about what meditation is and how to practice it”

I “have some simple tools that I can use whenever I want to, I can build on these”

Benefits for the Company

Participants were asked their opinion on the benefits for the company of more staff being trained in mindfulness. The responses were threefold:

1. Less stressed and more resilient workforce

“I think it would support people in coping or remaining resilient when faced with high stress environments, and would continually reinforce the emphasis that NPL places on employee well-being”

2. More positive and happier workforce

NPL could gain by having *“a more open, happy workforce – ready to interact with each other”*, which leads to:

3. More productive workforce

A “more balanced, happier and focused staff, which I believe would lead to a productivity increase”

Comments about the Teaching

“I thought Alison had a highly credible and approachable style”

“Exceptional teaching, engaging and factual – not preachy, fluffy or trite”

“The vocal style while leading the meditations was very good”

“Liked the pitch, the interventions, the way she allowed the group to go where it went while still maintaining the feeling of containment and usefulness”

“Compassionate”

The Quantitative Results

Quantitative measures were only taken for the first course. There were 18 respondents which is insufficient for statistical analysis, and therefore these results offer an indication of change rather than being statistically robust.

Variable Measured	Percentage Change
Satisfaction with Life ⁱ	5% increase
Satisfaction with Job	6% increase
Mindfulness ⁱⁱ	17% increase
General Health ⁱⁱⁱ	9% increase
Mood and energy ^{iv}	18% increase
Work attitude: organisational commitment ^v	11% increase
Work attitude: fulfilment of personal needs ^{vi}	1% increase

Summary

The overall sense from the feedback was that people felt very positive about the mindfulness course being offered at NPL, were willing to commit their own time to the practice, and benefitted from the course in a range of ways.

ⁱ Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J. & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 71-75.

ⁱⁱ Feldman, G., Hayes, A., Kumar, S., Greeson, J. & Laurenceau, J.-P. (2007). Mindfulness and Emotion Regulation: The Development and Initial Validation of the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R). *Journal of Psychopathological Behavior Assessment*, 29, 177-190.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.rand.org/health/surveys_tools/mos/mos_core_36item.html

^{iv} http://www.rand.org/health/surveys_tools/mos/mos_core_36item.html

^v Cook, J. & Wall, T. (1980). New work attitude measures of trust, organizational commitment and personal need non-fulfilment. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 53, 39-52.

^{vi} Cook, J. & Wall, T. (1980). New work attitude measures of trust, organizational commitment and personal need non-fulfilment. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 53, 39-52.