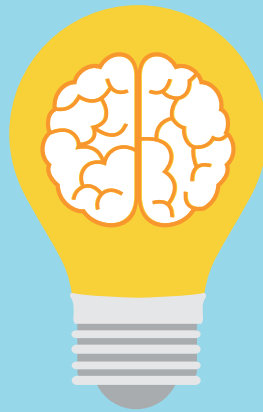


Cameron Aggs

# White Paper

Impacts of a Mindfulness & EQ (MEQ)  
Training Program on Mental Health,  
On-Task Attention  
and Communication Capability



# Introduction

---

It is the goal of every organisation to support high performing teams and individuals. High performing teams are innovative, collaborative, customer focused, and typically high in morale. In a similar way, high performing individuals are self-motivated, innovative, and demonstrate behaviours which align well with an organisation’s culture and values. Few things can derail these high performing teams or individuals like unresolved conflict and mental health issues. The negative impacts of untreated mental health issues are both significant and quantifiable. Global accounting firm PwC estimates the costs of mental health on increased absenteeism and reduced productivity to Australian business at \$11B annually.

This document summarises the effectiveness of a Mindfulness and Enhancing EQ (MEQ) Program commissioned by a regional Australian University, and run in late 2016. The results discussed here are consistent with our earlier published research and addition to findings that mindfulness training is effective in reducing mental health issues as well as fostering on-task attention and social skills.

# Index

---

Highlights .....	2
Key Recommendations .....	3
About Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence .....	4
Program Description .....	5
Assessment Measures .....	6
Results and Discussion .....	7
Additional Analysis I .....	12
Additional Analysis II .....	14
Return on Investment (ROI) Analysis .....	15
Summary .....	17
We Can Partner with You .....	18
About the Authors .....	21
References .....	22

# Highlights

---

As can be seen below, this Program has been successful in reducing mental health issues and on enhancing work-related concentration and communication skills.

40%

Reduced  
Depression

38%

Less  
Anxiety

34%

Decreased  
Stress

16%

Improved  
on-task attention

ROI of

291%



Enhanced  
work-specific  
psychological  
flexibility



Higher  
participant-rated  
conflict  
management skills



Very high  
levels of  
participant  
satisfaction

”

---

*Absolutely fantastic program. The skills and techniques that I have learnt in this program have not only helped me in the workplace, but also in my personal life. Can't wait to learn more!*

# Key Recommendations

---

1. Invest in multi-day training wherever possible. The Gold-Standard interventions for mental health issues are typically 16-20 session formats, and even this is considered 'short term'. With competing demands on time and budgets it can be tempting to use shorter time-frames. Yet doing so is analogous to building a house on sand, at least as far as reducing symptom impact on productivity and performance is concerned.

2. Consider an online component to your programs. This can reduce costs associated with having to use in-person formats for the full-delivery of content. In addition, weekly engagement with online content is invaluable for promoting engagement, consolidating new learning and for facilitating behaviour change. Our participant feedback shows that the online component of the program was a significant reason for its overall success.

3. Work with a specialist: There are now a high number of agencies offering training in mindfulness. It is not easy to teach mindfulness in a way that leads to sustainable behaviour change. Ensure that your business is working with trainers who have a substantial personal practice, several years of training, and who model mindfulness in their interactions with others.

# About Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence

---

The term 'mindfulness' refers to the ability to be present to immediate experience, without the distorting effects of emotional reactivity. Mindfulness training has been shown to increase focus, reduce defensiveness, to improve mental health, and to enhance interpersonal empathy; all of which creates measurable benefits associated with decision-making and people skills.

According to Mayer (p.3), "Emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately perceive your own and others' emotions; to understand the signals that emotions send about relationships; and to manage your own and others' emotions." There is a strong theoretical and practical relationship between mindfulness and enhanced EQ. According to research conducted by Kiel (2015), the impacts of better CEO EQ on Balance Sheet performance is striking. In his research with 121 companies, the Return on Assets (ROA) for CEO's scoring at the top of his EQ measure was nearly 5 times that compared to those at the bottom.

”

---

*This program should be completed by all staff and students at the University. Academic staff should be encouraged to attend to assist with managing workload.*

# Program Description

---

The 'MEQ' Program was delivered over eight weeks. It focused on individual mindfulness (Day One) and interpersonal mindfulness (EQ: Day Two). The aims for the program were to bolster resilience and mental health among participants, and to improve their social awareness regarding conflict and communication styles. The program was delivered over four sessions: Two full-day skills training sessions, and two part-day coaching and completion sessions of 1.5 - 2.5 hours each.

In addition to the in-person component of training, participants had access to an eight-module online learning platform. New modules were made available in each consecutive week of the Program. Typically, the online program featured a 'recap video', a 'four-breaths' lesson and practice video, in addition to a mindfulness-in-life section, a new guided meditation, and self-reflection exercise downloads. A further feature of the Program was its use of a buddy system and weekly journal activities to scaffold learning of core concepts. Participants also received weekly emails with course updates and reminders.

# Assessment Measures

---

The following assessment inventories were administered to training participants before and after the Program.

**DASS**

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale is a 21-item inventory that measures three domains of mental health

**WAAQ**

The Work-related Acceptance and Action Questionnaire assesses work-related psychological flexibility in the workplace.

**HPQ**

The Health and Work Performance Questionnaire measures presenteeism and absenteeism produced in conjunction with the World Health Organisation.

**FFMQ**

The Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire uses 39-items to assess five components of mindfulness.

**UWES**

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale measures work engagement as a unique positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption.

”

*Excellent program with significant benefits for work and beyond.*

# Results and Discussion

## *WAAQ (Work-related Acceptance and Action Questionnaire)*

Analysis of results relating to the WAAQ showed that the Program was associated with a significant improvement in work-related psychological flexibility. The term psychological flexibility refers to the ability to focus on “the current situation..... and to take appropriate action towards achieving goals and values, even in the presence of challenging or unwanted psychological events” (Bond, Lloyd & Guenole p.4). Research conducted on the psychometric properties of the WAAQ has demonstrated the inventory to predict an array of important variables including job satisfaction, work engagement, on-task performance, and to be negatively correlated with the number of occasions people are absent from work.



Psychological flexibility (as measured by the WAAQ) is measuring the ability to effectively pursue goal directed behaviour, despite the impact of potentially derailing psychological events associated with doing so. Our positive results suggest that participants acquired skills that have likely promoted their capacity to be productive and psychological well in their work. In understanding what this might look like, Bond and colleagues (2012) cite the example of a ‘psychologically flexible’ leader, who will take action on a difficult task, in order to pursue a values-based outcome, even if doing so is anxiety provoking. In another situation, this leader might refrain from taking action (e.g., not speaking harshly with a colleague) even if she feels like doing so, in order to pursue her goal of being an effective leader. A graphical representation of potential pathway to better decision making as a result of psychological flexibility is provided above.

# Results and Discussion

---

## *FFMQ (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire)*

Whilst analysis of full scale FFMQ pre-post scores approached significance ( $p < .1$ ), it did not reach the ( $p < .05$ ) benchmark usually required to declare with confidence that change has taken place. The average scores on all five subscales were higher at post-administration than prior to training, though none of these differences were statistically significant. This is in contrast to results from the University Program evaluation conducted post intervention, in which 100% of respondents agreed with the statement “My understanding of mindfulness improved during the course of this program,” and with the 94% of respondents ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly agreeing’ with the statement: “I am more mindful in my life now, compared to when I started this course.” Taken together, and in the context of a small sample size, we believe it likely that a larger sample size will produce significant pre-post results on the full-scale measure in future administrations of the program.

”

---

*I feel so much better in myself, I have never purposely spoken to myself in a positive manner before, or checked in with myself to determine what are my feelings, do I need to be gentle with myself or am I able to do more? I am taking care of myself, exercising and eating better. By mindfully listening to people I am able to communicate more effectively and help others. Overall I feel the program has helped my personal self-esteem and I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend. Thank you.*

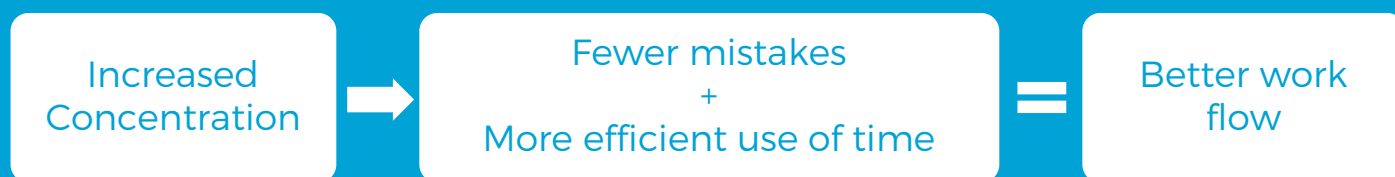
# Results and Discussion

---

## *HPQ (Health and Work Performance Questionnaire)*

Analysis of the HPQ revealed a significant boost for on-task attention on post-training scores compared to scores prior to the commencement at training. This finding is not surprising given that training in mindfulness is in significant part a training of the faculty of attention.

The fact that the Program is associated with increased concentration is a very pleasing result. Increased on-task attention is likely to enhance workflow through decreasing errors and improving efficient use of time. A graphical representation of this potential pathway is reproduced below.



No differences were found on full-scale results for either presenteeism or absenteeism, with the exception that the post-training group had taken more leave than the pre-group. This finding is likely an artefact of the post-group having had significantly greater exposure to school holidays than the pre-group in the month prior.

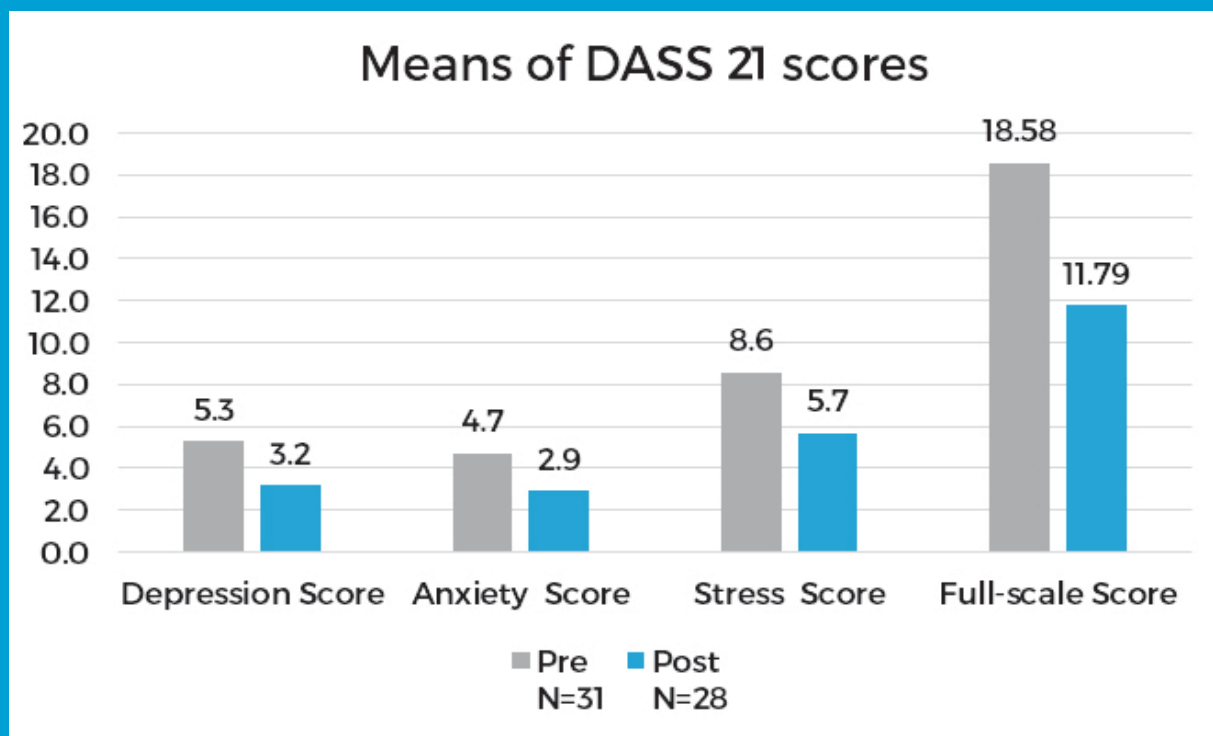
'Ceiling effects' may have also played an important part in the null-result for presenteeism. Over 95% of participants rated themselves as either 'average' or 'more effective' in their roles compared to 'the average person' prior to the commencement of training. Very high pre-training scores meant that participants' experience was difficult to improve upon. Also playing a role in null-results may have been 'time-effects'. The training and assessment period was 8-weeks only. This may not have been a sufficient period to see the impacts of enhanced psychological flexibility and emotional well-being skills on presenteeism, as measured on this index.

# Results and Discussion

## *The DASS 21 (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale)*

Analysis of the DASS 21 revealed significant pre-post results on each subscale, in addition to the full-scale score. Comparison of means revealed a 40% reduction in depression, a 38% reduction in anxiety and a 34% reduction in stress over the course of the training period. The full-scale score evidenced an improvement on psychological well-being of 37%.

These ratings are consistent with results from the Program evaluation in which 100% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that: “The workshop enabled me to focus on practical steps to achieve well-being in the present moment,” and that “This workshop enabled me to better understand how applying mindfulness can foster individual resiliency and peace of mind.”



# Results and Discussion

---

## *UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale)*

UWES scores were again higher at post-administration on all subscales and on the full-scale score when compared to scores prior to the commencement of training. This difference did not reach the threshold for statistical significance. Only 21 participants handed back their UWES scores at post-review. A larger sample in the future may demonstrate a significant result on this inventory. This contention is supported by significant results found on the WAAQ, which is positively correlated to the dimensions assessed by the UWES in previous research (e.g Bond et al., 2012).

”

---

*I found Mindfulness and EQ hugely valuable in giving me skills to manage my own emotions. The structure, with face to face classes reinforced through online materials, 'homework' practice/buddy system and workbook, really helped me embed the learning and make the practices part of daily life.*

# Additional Analysis I

## *Communication Effectiveness*

Eighteen participants completed an additional survey after Day Two and at the end of the Program. A number of the characteristics of mindful communication were assessed including the perceived ability to manage conflict, listening skills, and relationship-management capacity. Results are presented below.

Statement	Response (agree - strongly agree)
The Day 2 workshop will improve my capacity to manage difficulties in interpersonal relationships at work	83%
This workshop enabled me to improve my mindful listening skills	100%
This workshop enabled me to understand the theory and practice of interpersonal mindfulness	94%
This workshop helped me to understand how to mindfully manage conflict and how to use mindfulness as a process for promoting more attuned relationships	88%

# Additional Analysis I

---

## *Communication Effectiveness*

This program was associated increased perceived ability to manage conflict and interpersonal difficulties. This is a very positive result. Interpersonal conflict is known to predict an array of problematic work outcomes including job stress and turnover intentions. If self-rated increases in ability to manage conflict is a reliable marker of skill acquisition, it may be possible to assert a likely positive impact of the Program on staff turnover intentions. Further assessment in a follow-up program would make this potential relationship more clear.

A simple and potential ROI pathway would look like this:



# Additional Analysis II

---

## *Wellbeing Survey Results*

### *Areas of Highest Endorsement:*

'Quality of facilitators' received the highest level of satisfaction of any variable associated with this program. Ratings of facilitators ranged on five items between 4.76 - 4.88 (five-point scale). Another component of training that was very highly endorsed was the online portal. Ratings of the online content ranged from 4.47 - 4.53 on a 5-point scale.

In terms of content areas, the 4-Breaths technique received a particularly high level of endorsement from participants. A demonstration of the 4-Breaths technique can be found on [www.bemindful.lawyer/resources](http://www.bemindful.lawyer/resources). A reason for the popularity of this technique may be due to ease with which it can be practiced and its broad applications.

### *Suggestions for Improvement:*

More time on mindful communication appeared to receive a noticeable degree of endorsement. There was also feedback that either more time for training or fewer topics would be an improvement on the existing format. These observations are congruent with the opinion of the authors.

# Return on Investment (ROI) Analysis

It is well known that mental health issues act as cost burdens to business. As cited in the Introduction, PwC estimated this burden at \$11B annually, as it relates to increased absenteeism, presenteeism and increased worker compensation premiums. For the present analysis we examine (a) absenteeism and (b) presenteeism only over a 12-month period.

We assumed a salary figure supplied by University HR. We used this figure to calculate an hourly rate based on a 36 hour working week for 48 weeks per year. We then calculated lost revenue to USQ associated with mild levels of depression, anxiety and stress based on figures yielded in the meta-reviewed conducted by Hoffman, Dukes & Wittchen (2008) and tabled by PwC below.

Table 1. Estimated loss of hours at work associated with mental health issues (over a 12 month period)

Severity of mental health condition	Absenteeism	Presenteeism
None	Assumes no additional absenteeism or presenteeism above workplace average due to mental health condition	
Mild	9	30
Moderate	45	150
Severe	300	378

PwC, Creating a mentally healthy workplace Return on investment analysis, March 2014

**ROI = 291%**

# Return on Investment (ROI) Analysis

---

Our calculation suggests that the savings from fewer lost days / hours associated with poor mental health over the 12 months from the commencement of training will be in the magnitude of \$2.91 for every \$1 spent on the training. This exceeds the ROI expectations for effective workplace programs, which according to PwC are typically in the vicinity of 2.30.

The ROI figure has been calculated on the completion of the program of 39 staff. Whilst training included 41 beginning participants, 2 staff members only completed one full-day of training, which has been treated as the loss of one person from training. Another staff member participant finished his tenure at the University during the training period, and his benefit has been subtracted from analysis. ROI figure does not include the lost staff hours associated with participants attending the training itself. Lost hours to attend training has been offset by the likely reductions in turnover intentions across the training group associated with increased stress-management and conflict reduction capacity. The addition to the flow-on benefit that University has received via sharing of the online portal to members of the wider University staffing community not involved in training by training participants has likewise not been included in ROI analysis.

# Summary

---

The eight-week Mindfulness and Enhancing EQ Program has been shown to predict strong improvements in mental health and communication skills. Prior to the Program, the average participant was mildly stressed, mildly anxious and mildly depressed. Subsequent to training, the average participant was in the normal ranges in all of these areas. This is an excellent result, and one that is consistent with the literature on effective mindfulness interventions for clinical populations.

The fact that the Program has been associated with increased psychological flexibility and on-task attention is also a very pleasing finding. The mechanisms of enhanced psychological flexibility and concentration have been discussed. Further research would no doubt clarify the nature of some of these relationships, particularly as they relate to key outcome variables of interest (eg. turnover intentions).

# About the Authors

---



## Cameron Aggs

Director, Mindfulness Training Australia

Cameron is one of Australia's foremost mindfulness training specialists. He has facilitated more than 200 professional mindfulness training programs in Australia and internationally. Cameron is best known in the design and delivery of programs which reduce the negative impacts of mental health and communication issues on profitability and performance. Cameron has a strong grounding in human behaviour as a Clinical Psychologist. He is an internationally published author on Mindfulness with Taylor & Francis (U.K). His commentary and online resources have been featured on ABC radio, MMM, Blackmores and HUFFPOST. His training resources include the CD Meditations for a Busy World and the online program 4-Breaths to Less Stress.

# About MTA

---

Mindfulness Training Australia is known for increasing the profitability and performance of large professional service organisations through mindfulness-based training for executives and their teams.



Founded in  
2009



Over 200  
training events



Over 5000  
1:1 client sessions



Integrated  
technology  
solutions

# References

---

- Aggs, C., & Bambling, M. (2010). Teaching mindfulness to psychotherapists in clinical practice: The mindful therapy programme. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research*, 10(4), 278-286.
- Aviva Berkovich-Ohana and colleagues. Mindfulness-induced changes in gamma band activity – Implications for the default mode network, self-reference and attention. *Clinical Neurophysiology*. 123(4), 700-710
- Bond, F. W., Lloyd, J., & Guenole, N. (2012). The work-related acceptance and action questionnaire (WAAQ): Initial psychometric findings and their implications for measuring psychological flexibility in specific contexts. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. 1-25.
- Brefczynski-Lewis J.A., Lutz A., Schaefer H.S., Levinson D.B. & Davidson R.J. (2007). "Neural correlates of attentional expertise in long-term meditation practitioners". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 104, 11483-11488.
- Dane, E. (2011). Paying attention to mindfulness and its effects on task performance in the workplace. *Journal of Management*. 37(4), 997-1018.
- Dekeyser, M., Raes, F., Leijssen, M., Leysen, S., Dewulf, D. (2008). Mindfulness skills and interpersonal behaviour. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 44(5), 1235-1245.
- Dess, G. D. & Shaw, J. D. (2001). Voluntary turnover, social capital and organizational performance. *Academy of Management Review*. 26(3), 466-454.
- Hoffman, D.L. Dukes, E.M., Wittchen, H.U. (2008). Human and economic burden of generalized anxiety disorder "", *Depress Anxiety*. 25(1), 72-90.
- Hölzel B.K.; Ott U.; Hempel H.; Hackl A.; Wolf K.; Stark R.; Vaitl D. (2007). Differential engagement of anterior cingulate cortex and adjacent medial frontal cortex in adept meditators and nonmeditators. *Neuroscience Letters*. 421, 16-21.
- Kiel, F. (2015). *Return on character: The real reason leaders and their companies win*. Harvard University Press. Massachusetts.
- Jamal, M. (2007). Burnout and self-employment: a cross-cultural empirical study. *Stress and Health*. 23(4), 249-256.
- Jamal, M.P (2011). Job stress, job performance and organizational commitment in a multinational company: An empirical study in two countries. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*. 2(20) 20-29.
- Khoury B, Lecomte T, Fortin G, Masse M, Therien P, Bouchard V, et al. (2013). Mindfulness-based therapy: A comprehensive meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 33, 763-771.
- Krasner, M., Epstein, R, M., Beckman, H. et al. (2009). Association of an educational program in mindful communication with burnout, empathy, and attitudes among primary care physicians. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 302(12), 1284-1293.
- Lakey, Chad E., Michael H. Kernis, Whitney L. Heppner, and Charles E. Lance. 2008. Individual differences in authenticity and mindfulness as predictors of verbal defensiveness. *Journal of Research in Personality* 42, (1) (02): 230-8.
- Mayer, D. (2004) *Leading By Feel*. Harvard University Press. Massachusetts.
- PwC & Beyond Blue. (2014). *Creating a mentally healthy workplace—Return on investment analysis*. The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance.



Emotional Wellness Programs for  
Increased Profitability and Performance

Enquires about this White Paper can be  
directed to the Cameron Aggs:

[cam@bemindful.com.au](mailto:cam@bemindful.com.au)  
+61 405 091 882