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An Analysis of a Case Integrating Mindfulness in MBA Program for Management Education and Transformational Learning

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Abstract

The majority of management classes are taught using modified classical methods, where the focus is mostly on learning knowledge and rote abilities. Traditional educational approaches, however, fall short when the goal is to change students' worldviews and behaviours rather than simply imparting knowledge about a subject. Some of the subjects where worldview development is essential but traditional, knowledge-inculcating pedagogies fall short include leadership, ethics, strategic management, and communications. Transformational learning is the process of rewiring the brain that is necessary for truly grasping these topics. In the instructional innovation described in this article, mindfulness training is incorporated into an MBA course to promote transformative learning. In particular, we propose that mindfulness reduces resistance to novel ways of perceiving and doing things and raises learners' awareness of their own and others' views. This raises the possibility of transformational learning taking place. We assess how well mindfulness practise contributes to transformational learning during the course.

Key words: Transformational Learning (TL), Mindfulness, Meditation, Strategic management, Learning Theories

Introduction

The efficacy of today's business education is called into doubt by recent company scandals and failures. Many critical thinkers criticised business schools for teaching the incorrect material and for too narrowly and analytically orienting future managers who will need to lead in a complex, socially and ecologically fraught (Waddock & Lozano, 2013). The standard MBA curriculum places an excessive emphasis on technical abilities in comparison to human capital competencies (also known as "soft skills") including leadership, ethics, and communication (Klimoski & Amos, 2012; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2011). Several scholars have also questioned the transferability of the knowledge learned in management programmes. These concerns, which come from both academics and industry, represent a "problem work order" that needs to be addressed. But what exactly needs to be corrected, and how? According to Petriglieri, Wood, and Petriglieri (2011), we propose that the desired cognitive restructuring could be accomplished through the use of a course design based on transformational learning (TL) theory, a branch of experiential learning theory that focuses on altering problematic behaviours. A "deep and pervasive shift in a person's viewpoint and understanding" is the outcome of participating with and studying practise and experience as they happen in TL (Kayes, 2002; Raelin, 2016). However, no

standardised, reproducible method for inducing TL has been identified. In this paper, we present a method for boosting TL by the inclusion of a mindfulness component in the course design. Evaluation of the course reveals that it is effective in eliciting TL, establishing a foundation for business courses that may more effectively instil the human capital competencies that management scholars and practitioners are increasingly requesting. Then, we compare conventional and transformational learning theories and examine the pertinent TL literature. Then, we outline and discuss a mindfulness idea geared toward business. Third, we give a critical course idea that suggests the impact of mindfulness practise on TL. Fourth, we outline and describe the course structure before providing an evaluation of its efficacy. In our final section, we go at how other management educators may use mindfulness-based TL in their classes.

Theoretical Framework Learning that is transformational versus conventional Conceptual frameworks that describe how learning happens are known as "learning theories." Traditional instructional models assume the student's unquestioning cooperation with the teacher's instructions and place the learner in a submissive/receptive role as opposed to an active learning stance (Tomei, 2010). According to most studies (Bazerman & Moore, 2009; Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Datar et al., 2010; Ghoshal, 2005; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Waddock & Lozano, 2013), the acquisition of knowledge and skills is the main focus of management classes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For many analytical topics like accounting, microeconomics, or logistics, these modified classical procedures perform admirably (e.g., analyse a balance sheet or compute an optimum reorder quantity for inventory). Traditional lecture sessions frequently include role acting, discussion, and simulations; yet, as shown by their learning assessments, the objective of most MBA courses continues to be the acquisition of knowledge and rote abilities.

For many analytical topics like accounting, microeconomics, or logistics, these modified classical procedures perform admirably (e.g., analyse a balance sheet or compute an optimum reorder quantity for inventory). Traditional pedagogies, however, fall short when the goal is to change worldviews and behaviours rather than simply impart knowledge about a subject (Petriglieri et al., 2011; Portnow et al., 1998). For some areas, such as leadership, ethics, strategic management, and communications, it is essential to be open to changing one's point of view, and conventional educational methods fall short in this regard (Kayes, 2002; Raelin, 2007). According to the experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005), exposing students to controlled real-world experiences boosts their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991), which raises the likelihood that they will use the behavioural options they have been exposed to in controlled settings outside of the classroom (Raelin, 2016). However, business courses that emphasised the development of "soft skills" have not been successful, despite the inclusion of experiential learning components. The TL theory is an unconventional hypothesis that emphasises the individual learner and describes learning that alters one's perspective of the world totally.

Mezirow (2000) suggests a metaprocess for TL that includes the following four steps: 1. Recognizing limitations in one's viewpoint. 2. Reflecting on oneself and challenging viewpoints and their sources. 3. Trying out various viewpoints. 4. Including fresh viewpoints in daily activities and actions.

The following is a succinct definition of transformational learning: A learning experience that alters a learner more profoundly than typical content-based education, especially those that transform them, cause a paradigm shift, and have an impact on their later experiences (M. Clark, 1993). In TL, the learner's preexisting mental models are tested and altered, exposing events to fresh interpretations and, ultimately, resulting in altered actions (Johnson, 2008). The research is scant, and TL's value in management education has only recently been recognised. Studies have begun to emerge in fields where profound learning and perspective shifting are essential, though. In order to encourage TL in a training programme for women only, Debebe (2011) used the construction of a safe learning environment. The qualitative research that came after her training significantly supported the idea that there had been TL of leadership principles from a women's perspective. In particular, the safe learning environment offered the protected setting that encourages self-reflection and the openness to be open to innovative ideas, both of which are essential for TL to occur. According to Closs and Antonello (2011), TL could successfully fill the socially grounded viewpoints that are lacking in standard (instrumental) management education because of its emphasis on critical reflection. They further assert that this method of management education would facilitate the adoption of more cooperative, accountable, and ethical practises. Another recent study proposes TL as a part of ethics instruction for business schools using a similar justification (Tello, Swanson, Floyd, & Caldwell, 2013).

A key element of TL is critical reflection, which is integrated into ethics education and has a variety of effects on ethical judgement. The ability and desire to consider the "big picture" as well as awareness and openness to various options are all promoted by critical reflection, which is crucial to making ethical decisions. Although the aforementioned instances demonstrate its value, there is no set method for inducing TL. In fact, there is disagreement in the research regarding the relative weight given to intuition and emotion vs logical analysis of beliefs in the process of transformation (Mezirow, 2000; Baumgartner, 2001). The literature does concur that TL is challenging to introduce using current pedagogies. Reviewing the TL metaprocess's phases explains why: Change in beliefs and even deeply ingrained values is necessary for TL. Most people find this kind of transition challenging (Meyer & Land, 2005; Schwartzman, 2007, 2010). Additionally, before students' beliefs may be altered, they must first be made aware of them. Self-awareness and reflection can help with this, but studies of management education and higher education in general have found that these skills are notably lacking (Benjamin & O'Reilly, 2011; Crilly, Schneider, & Zollo, 2008; Klimoski & Amos, 2012; Petriglieri et al., 2011; Waddock & Lozano, 2013). (Lampe, 2012; Newmark, Krahnke, & Seaton, 2013).

Transformational Learning through Mindfulness Intervention

Both theoretical perspectives and empirical data have made a compelling case for the viability of using mindfulness to facilitate TL.(Carroll, 2010; Mezirow, 2000; Barner & Barner, 2011). Mezirow (2006), citing BennettGoleman (2001), contends that mindfulness enables the separation of a particular event from the mental and emotional response to it. It then offers the chance to assess whether one has false beliefs, erroneous assumptions, or misguided perceptions. This insight makes way for fresh perspectives and TL.

Carroll talks about the significance of mindfulness in TL in relation to supervisory abilities (2010). From a therapeutic standpoint, mindfulness presents a method for building TL through raising a person's awareness of and openness to experience, according to Barner and Barner (2011). They discuss how mindfulness helps people overcome barriers to being open to experience, including remaining engaged in difficult life experiences, lowering self-defensiveness toward new information, maintaining better emotional control during stressful situations, and disengaging from negative thoughts and emotions.

A key component of TL, perspective transformation, can only take place if the learner is receptive to and accepting of the change. According to Boyd and Myers (1988), openness and realisation that an established pattern of meaning is no longer tenable or viable for future practise are crucial stages in the transformation process. This process may be "troublesome" and encounter resistance, which can lead to conflict between the learner's protective, emotive response and the reflective component necessary for TL. The learner is reoriented in the world and organises the same collection of experiences along various principles as a result of TL after a new "meaning frame" has been reflectively considered and accepted. According to our research, mindfulness instruction helps students absorb novel viewpoints and is especially beneficial when those viewpoints reveal students' unproductive habits and attitudes.

Integrating mindfulness training into MBA programme

We considered an MBA leadership study with a mindfulness practise component to be a suitable venue to investigate the impact of mindfulness practise on TL.

A 300-student of St. Albert's College in Kerala, India was selected for this study. The study was held in the same classrooms where the students took their other MBA classes during a standard semester. Among the total student, 174 female and 126 male. The median age was 21 years old, with ages ranging from 20 to 23. 30 percent or so of the kids mentioned having some experience with meditation and/or mindfulness previous to participating in this course, but none had a structured, ongoing practise at that time.

Transformational Learning

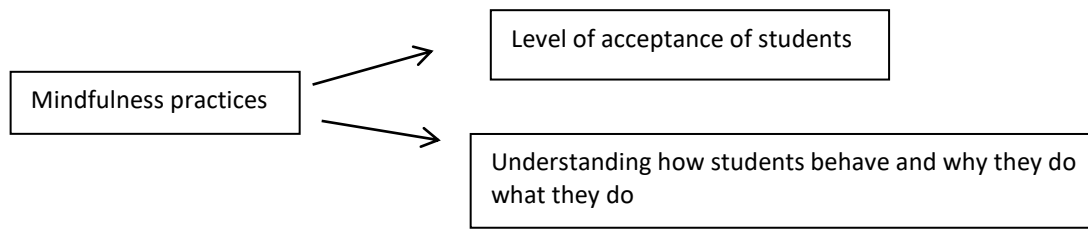


Figure 1.

Important Pedagogical Ideas for the study

Increased mindfulness has been linked to improvements in self-awareness and social awareness (Sedlmeier et al., 2012; Vago & David, 2012). Thus, mindfulness promotes contemplation and fosters acceptance, regardless of negative elements of oneself and the environment, two key components of TL. The concept directing the development of our course combines mindfulness and TL and is directly derived from their definitions. The model is depicted in Figure 1, and the connections between the various ideas are based on earlier empirical studies, as will be discussed below. It demonstrates the theoretical connections between TL, improved self-awareness, other awareness, and mindfulness practise, as well as the learner's level of acceptance of both innovative viewpoints and negative experience. Two fundamental prerequisites for TL are, in essence, (a) the learner must notice faults in attitudes and behaviours (become conscious of) and (b) the learner must consider these flaws, challenging their viewpoints, and the sources of their viewpoints (Mezirow, 1981). But both self-awareness and It is challenging for people to consider and reflect on negative attitudes and behaviours. (Bochman, Kroth, and Young, 2010; Barner & Barner, 2013). Students will frequently "cling obstinately to their beliefs, values, and viewpoints (Mezirow, 2000; Poutiatine, 2009). Thus, as a mechanism (mindfulness) for increasing self-awareness and decreasing resistance to the reshaping of perspectives is depicted in our model (Figure 1) (by reflection) will increase the possibility of TL.

Designing study with Mindfulness in Mind

The goal of the study is to provide students with a solid practical understanding of the advantages of mindfulness practise as it improves leadership abilities by situating the class as TL by providing new viewpoints while modifying old ones. We made sure to emphasise to the students how immediately useful the skills they learnt in this study were.

The study met for two hours on from Monday to Friday for the students pertaining MBA programme (from 9:00 a.m. to 11 a.m.). Two professors collaborated to teach the course, of which one was well-versed in the pertinent management literature and the other was a professor with a 25 year experienced in conducting mindfulness lessons. Both lecturers lectured a portion of every class in endurance. Traditional lectures, readings, in-class

discussions and presentations, videos, cases, experiential exercises, projects, meditation practise, and journaling were just a few of the many instructional techniques we used.

Meditation techniques

Beginning in the first hour of each session, there were twenty- to thirty-minute guided meditations. The student sits comfortably and upright throughout meditation sessions, usually with their eyes closed. The sensations of breathing are the main object of attention. Because the brain's natural habit is to constantly search the environment for threats, this is much harder than it may seem (Berkovitch-Ohana, Glicksohn, & Goldstein, 2014). There after each class was extended with 20-minute mindful hatha yoga sessions. One of the main learning objectives of the practicum was to develop the concept that body reactions might operate as early warning signs of concealed and occasionally dysfunctional emotional states. These sessions were crucial to establishing this understanding. We recommended that each student practise 20 minutes of meditation as their assignment, at least three times per week. Students are encouraged to look for instances of thoughtful leadership and for situations where a more thoughtful approach could have been beneficial. The homework meditation sessions were to be adhered to a journaling session. We recommended that the journals be flow-of-consciousness reflections on the meditation practise itself as well as any potential changes in the student's behaviour and worldview. Every lesson after the first one started with a discussion among the students about their observations and thoughts on the practise. The students registered for a specific class to share their reflections at the first class session. We made an effort to make the classroom a "safe zone" where kids could express themselves freely without fear of ridicule or invasion of privacy.

Learning evaluations

Four tests were given throughout the course: assessments in the form of tests, reflective journals, a personal research paper, and students reviews. Throughout the study, three tests were given to gauge comprehension of academic lecture notes on leadership and mindfulness. Four to five integrative essay questions made up each quiz. We didn't score the journals based on their subjective content, but rather on how much perceived commitment and involvement of students. The level of analysis and comprehension of the topics covered in each research article was assessed using a rubric. Last but not least, students review—provide instructors with a useful indicator of how the student perceives the value of the mindfulness.

Assessment and Implications on Learner Performance

Induction of TL of leadership through the introduction of mindfulness techniques was the main goal of our study. Assessment was made through seeking answer to these questions. (a) Had your awareness improved

throughout the lesson? (b) Had TL taken place during class? (c) Had mindfulness training made TL easier? To address those questions, we decided to use a mixed-methods approach.

Measures.

We used a short version of the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS) to measure five different aspects of mindfulness in order to provide a quantitative assessment of mindfulness (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004). All students received the KIMS before mindfulness intervention classes, and once more to the leadership class participants after the class ended. We decided to use qualitative measures, looking at three different sources of qualitative data: student journals, which were discussed in Assessments, written course evaluations, which were also discussed in Assessments, and an online survey with open-ended questions that was conducted after the class. Since there isn't a proven tool for measuring TL, it was evaluated qualitatively using descriptions of TL indicator behaviours in transcripts of student notebooks. Our TL metrics demonstrate the four TL metaprocess activities.

1. Recognizing flaws in one's viewpoints.
2. Reflecting on oneself and challenging viewpoints and their sources.
3. Trying out various viewpoints.
4. Including new viewpoints in daily activities and actions

Results

Question 1. Has mindfulness strengthened during the class?

Both the KIMS total score and three of its factor scores had increased significantly. Evidence from the content analysis of the textual material, which shows that 97% of the class actively examined mindful performance of work and life tasks numerous times throughout the class, supports these quantitative results. Here's an illustration of a text answer to the survey that was counted as a mindfulness incident:

Even if I dislikes the educator, consideration of suggestions and ideas I incorporate into the class session, I even noticed my knee jerk through self-awareness for non-attentive behaviour.

Question 2. Did the course involve any transformational learning?

Our qualitative review of student journals and other student-generated course text provides evidence for TL in the course. More than 82% of pupils produced text that was coded for TL. Below are some examples of text that has been TL-supported. These instances provide as proof for Question 2 and/or Question 3, as indicated by a code of either 2 or 3.

During some class hours, my behaviour intended to be negative in some context as I make some inappropriate comments and also, I am aware about my outlook which is acquired from practicing mindfulness. (Question 2 & 3)

I perceive the realization that I am imitating the leadership attitude of the tutor which is reflecting in my personality I tried to change this to go the way out of it. (Question 2 & 3)

I am beginning to notice progress in the interpersonal aspects of my leadership abilities, such as emotional regulation, listening to others' opinions without passing judgement, and not worrying excessively about pointless, repeating ideas. (Question 3)

Question 3. Did Mindfulness practices help TL?

Figure 1 suggests that the same text portions that provide TL support (examples are shown above) were also coded for mindfulness-based influences. More than 70% of the students demonstrated mindfulness-enabled TL by being conscious of their own and other people's leadership behaviours. Examples of the text that has been so coded are shown in the paragraph above with the number three.

Table representing results of mindfulness respondents

Questions	Results of mindfulness enabled TL in %
Has mindfulness strengthened during the class?	87
Did the course involve any transformational learning?	82
Did Mindfulness practices help TL?	70

Discussion

This article discusses a method of TL induction that involves including a mindfulness practise into a leadership MBA course. The evaluation of the training offers early evidence that the mindfulness component can boost TL by fostering a higher degree of acceptance and awareness. Although TL is valued in a variety of contexts, business education has been especially urged to embrace TL and the accompanying shifts in perspective (Navarro, 2008; Petriglieri et al., 2011; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004; Waddock & Lozano, 2013).By analysing a novel approach to resolving the numerous criticisms of facts-based traditional pedagogies for management classes that have a large human relations component, the invention contributes to the body of literature on management education.

According to evaluations of student notebooks and the KIMS, adding a mindfulness practise component to an MBA course produced significant increases in mindfulness. Additionally, a substantial amount of transfer of learning (TL) of the class's primary topic, leadership, took place in class, with mindfulness practise serving as a key facilitator of TL via the modalities

predicted by our theoretical model: increased awareness of one's own and other people's perspectives and increased acceptance of novel perspectives.

Prospects and Impediments in Management Education

The identical factual materials and texts that were used in the course outlined in the study were also used by the authors to teach conventional leadership courses. According to student papers and test results, the modified class's factual learning was completely comparable to that of traditional classes, but it also provided significantly more time for reflection on and practical application of the theoretical subject. We must emphasise that numerous studies and the authors' own experiences indicate that teaching mindfulness by people who do not regularly practise mindfulness is not possible (Epstein, 1999; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), as students quickly lose interest in practise in the absence of well-founded responses to their questions.

In this instance, we propose that the educator and a specialist in community mindfulness education might form an alliance. One or more seasoned mindfulness instructors are typically present on most campuses and/or college communities, and these people are frequently open to introducing business school students to formal practise. Additionally, mindfulness programmes can be found on many campuses, for instance, in psychology departments, medical schools, or student counselling services, with chances for collaboration. A management educator who has never practised mindfulness should still be able to grade the class reflection assignments with knowledge if they follow the same instructions they offer their students.

We have learned from student journals that even those students who entered our structured classroom knowing what to anticipate occasionally find the atypical material and teaching strategies we employ to be unexpected and at first uncomfortable. We hypothesized that a clique of students would form if the course were made a requirement for the MBA curriculum, voicing loud, coordinated opposition similar to that described by Sinclair (2007). Given the general attitude of society against meditation and mindfulness, this resistance can be lessened by front-loading the course with scientific evidence of the neurobiological validity of mindfulness, as we do in our classroom study. However, it is unlikely to be completely erased. We are excited to try out the mindful pedagogy while introducing various subject areas because we think it can considerably lessen resistance to TL in a higher education atmosphere. Since the subject of our course is leadership, we would anticipate a "backfire effect" to take the shape of a strong backlash against newly provided, contrary to student beliefs, leadership-related material in the classroom. We find no indication of a "backfire effect" after reviewing the qualitative database (student journals, surveys, and evaluations; see evaluation section above) that was utilized to verify our course. We suggest that the following three main reasons account for the lack of resistance to new information:

First, the examination of leadership theories covered in the course was introduced as a historical development in the field that led to a deeper comprehension. Each theory was given as a building block for the others rather than as being in conflict with one another, and none of them was deemed to be incorrect or out of date.

Secondly, the bulk of our students were not seasoned corporate veterans who felt psychologically obligated to defend a leadership style they had practiced for a lifetime, but rather early-30-somethings eagerly seeking out new information on leadership. The student demonstrated an openness to new material in addition to their self-selection for the course. Third, the knowledge that the majority of students found for themselves through the practice of mindful observation of their work surroundings was the knowledge that had the most potential to change preconceived notions. There isn't a fundamentally different viewpoint or point of view in this nondirective experiential learning setting, unlike every other study we have reviewed that has discovered a "backfire effect."

All we asked was that students take a look at the world using their newfound mindful observational stance and record what they saw.

Finally, we propose that the "backfire effect" can be significantly mitigated by the mindful pedagogy discussed in this paper. According to studies on this conduct, people reject information that contradicts their beliefs because it challenges their worldview. Threats is the essential term. This article's pedagogy reduces threat-to-self in a number of ways:

- It delivers theoretical content without a clear agenda;
- It establishes a safe container (the classroom atmosphere) in which beliefs can be expressed openly, even if they conflict with the opinions of the majority.
- Mindfulness practice itself increases resilience to cognitive dissonance.
- Rather of taking a highly prescriptive posture, it facilitates inquiry and insight learning.

We think the mindful pedagogy described above can greatly lessen resistance to TL in a higher education setting, even though it's not a magic bullet for preventing the "backfire effect." We look forward to experimenting with the technique when presenting other topic areas which was the limitation of our study.

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