

**Mindful Embodied Leadership:  
Mindfulness-in-Action as a Catalyst for Leadership Performance**

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## **Abstract**

### **Rodney King. Mindful Embodied Leadership: Mindfulness-in-Action as a Catalyst for Leadership Performance**

The aim of this research is to explore mindfulness-in-action in moments of leadership performance and the degree to which it may enhance leadership excellence. To this end, this research answers two interrelated research questions.

Firstly, what are the embodied experiences described by leaders that arise in the present moment of leadership and which they feel may hinder their ability to lead successfully? This question is explored through the analysis of a series of interviews with research participants.

As an extension to my first research question, a group of leaders from various organisations were then taught mindfulness in an action-oriented way by means of a bespoke workshop that focused on utilising martial arts-based movements to teach the concept of mindfulness.

My second research question explores to what extent mindfulness taught in an experiential, action-oriented way aids leaders in managing their leadership difficulties. Here the focus shifts to the leadership difficulties my research participants had previously described (i.e. in Research Question 1), as well as how, as leaders, they defined leadership before and after mindfulness-in-action training. The outcome of the research, via the analysis of interviews, was bolstered further by exploring participants' trait or dispositional mindfulness through applying the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale both before and at two additional time points after the training.

Overall, the analysis and findings of this research show that it is indeed possible to design and implement a training approach to mindfulness that is both experientially and action oriented, and which in turn has positive effects on moments of leadership performance. This research thus adds valuable insight in understanding leadership, learning and mindfulness, explored through moments of leadership performance.

## Acknowledgements

As I write this, I am moving into my seventh year of the PhD process. It has been extremely challenging at times. The experience has been compounded by trying to juggle 'school work' with simultaneously heading two global brands and an intense international seminar schedule, as well as meeting my family commitments as a father and husband. On reflection, I would do it all over again. It has possibly been the most rewarding experience of my life.

I would like to thank both my supervisors, Professor Jo Brewis and Dr Richard Godfrey, for their tireless mentorship throughout this process. I would never have made it this far without their consistent support and priceless feedback. I want to further thank Professor Brewis for initially encouraging me to write a research proposal and to submit it to the University of Leicester. Without her encouragement, none of this might have happened.

I would like to especially thank my family, my wife Louise, and my two boys Egan and Tobynn, who gave me constant support throughout this journey. They believed I could achieve the goal of completing my thesis, even when I was struggling to believe it myself.

Finally, I would like to offer a personal reflection on the importance of my PhD journey. I was a child who grew up poor in government housing on the south side of Johannesburg, South Africa (similar to 'the projects' in the United States). I endured physical abuse from the bullies in my neighbourhood and at the hands of my alcoholic mother. At the age of 17, my mother kicked me out of the house. At this tender age, I found myself sleeping on a park bench and unable to finish high school. I vowed on that very day to work hard, to turn my life around and not to become another statistic. In the years that followed, I went back to school, paying for all my studies out of my own pocket and never taking a single bank loan, including for my doctoral adventure. To be here now, nearing the end of my PhD journey, means more to me than words can express. I am eternally grateful,

not to mention blessed, considering that so many of those I grew up with having fallen by the wayside, or finding themselves in prison. I managed in the end not to become yet another failed statistic of bad parenting and impoverished neighbourhoods.

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## List of abbreviations

ACT	– Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
EA	– Embodied Anchor
EI	– Emotional Intelligence
ELT	– Experiential Learning Theory
IGAMER	– Impermanence, Grounded Thinking, Attitude Embodied, Mindfulness-in-Action, Exhale, Resilience
MAAS	– Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale
MBCT	– Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy
MBSR	– Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
MIA	– Mindfulness in Action
PNS	– Parasympathetic Nervous System
RFT	– Refocus Thoughts
SNS	– Sympathetic Nervous System
WBL	– Work Based Learning

## 1 Introduction to the Thesis

In the introduction I establish the terrain for my research. This section acknowledges my initial inspiration for undertaking my research and highlights the broad conceptual framework that enabled the successful implementation and completion of my research. This chapter concludes with brief summaries of all the chapters in this thesis and in doing so sets the stage for Chapters 2, 3 and 4, which present the literature review.

### 1.1 Establishing the Terrain: Ladkin as Inspiration

Much of the leadership canon attends to behavioural aspects of leading...Rather less appears about how leaders actually enact these behaviours – the embodied way in which they attempt to motivate, direct, or transform (Ladkin, 2008, p. 31).

My inspiration for this research came from reading a paper by Donna Ladkin, entitled 'Leading Beautifully: How Mastery, Congruence, and Purpose Create the Aesthetic of Embodied Leadership Practice'. In that paper, Ladkin (2008) argues that much of the literature that has been written about the practice of leadership has focused on the behaviour of leaders, but not on how those behaviours are enacted (i.e., how they come into being). In that same paper, Ladkin goes on to highlight that *leading beautifully*, as she defines it, is largely predicated on what leaders do on the inside in moments of leading itself. Here, I infer from her paper that *behaviour* means the measurable and quantifiable outward contributions of a leader's actions, whereas *enaction* refers to the embodied knowledge involved in bringing a leader's observable, quantifiable actions to light.

What caught my attention in Ladkin's paper was one of several questions she posed as potential directions for future research. Most notably, she suggested that:

If a leader aspires to leading beautifully, what must he or she pay attention to? Is leading beautifully something that can be developed or does every leader need to find and express his or her own aesthetic in order to be authentically perceived? (2008, p. 40).

Unknowingly, while exploring the personal experiences she presents throughout her paper, she may already have hinted at one possible answer to this question.

Ladkin's (2008) paper was centred on a case study describing her experience attending a performance by the American jazz vocalist and conductor Bobby McFerrin in 2005 at the Royal Albert Hall in London. While there, Ladkin observed that McFerrin's embodiment of leading, as she described it, "contrasts sharply with so much of the leadership literature which emphasises the leader's ability to envision the 'future.'" Instead, she continues, McFerrin brought her "full attention to the possibilities and potentialities of the present moment" (p. 33). Further, and in the same paragraph, she highlights that "throughout the concert McFerrin seemed very present to the moment at hand" (p. 33).

My own personal experience in leading a global organisation, along with my role in coaching leaders from various organisations, has shown that being fully present may be important in leadership success. Clearly, to Ladkin (2008), the embodiment of the *present moment* was key to both the success of McFerrin's leadership performance, and how she in turn experienced it. Taking Ladkin's argument seriously, that an excellent leadership performance is indeed how a leader embodies his or her presence in any given situation in the present moment, and positing that this may be a potential crucial ingredient in his or her success, how might one research this? As I reflected on this question, it became clear to me that to adequately research this phenomenon, one would need to understand a leader's performance as not "purged of corporeality, so only his or her mind remains" (Sinclair, 2012, p. 3), but rather, as Ladkin suggests in her paper, as embodied.

As such, in the next section, I reflect on my initial understanding of the embodiment of leadership performance and how this, in turn, later influenced and informed the method design for my research.

## 1.2 The Embodiment of Leadership Performance

Applying the above observations in respect to leadership, it has been argued that not everyone who appears to have the qualities to lead does or even chooses to do so (Heifetz, 1994). While it is important to acknowledge a leader's knowledge or expertise in his or her particular organisational domain, according to Ladkin (2008) (as well as Sinclair, 2005), how a leader embodies his or her presence in any given situation may be the crucial ingredient to his or her success. Here, I infer *presence* to suggest not only as experienced in the present moment, but, in addition, the subsequent leadership performance arising out of personal awareness in action, or what can be thought of collectively as an embodied performance. Therefore, what can be viewed as the embodied performance of a leader implies "the moment to moment process by which human beings allow awareness to enhance the flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and energies through [their] bodily selves" (Aposhyan, 2004, p. 52). Aposhyan (2004) further notes that "embodiment, then, is a grounding and flowing relationship between ourselves and the rest of the world" (p. 53).

As such, for a leader, understanding and experiencing what is required from an embodied perspective in moments of leading may offer the opportunity for leading *beautifully* to take place, as Ladkin (2008) has suggested. From this perspective, what may be important to understand in respect to a beautiful (or what may be described more generally as an excellent) leadership performance is what a person is *being on the inside* in those moments. In other words, how a leader is able to enhance and/or manage their emotional content, feelings, sensations and thought processes during leading may well be the distinguishing mark of the beautiful leadership performance to which both Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005) allude.

Therefore, from this perspective, a leadership performance involves both interior qualities and exterior behaviours – with the interior aspect (i.e., the state of embodied intelligence of the leader) being primary and decisive. This ‘interior aspect’ can therefore be thought of as an intelligence that arises from a person’s cognitive, motor, and perceptual systems. This further includes bodily interactions with the environment (often referred to as situatedness), including the leader’s assumptions about the world, all being built into the structure of the organism (i.e., the human body). In other words, the entire human body is responsible for the intelligence of a person (Varela et al., 1991; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Therefore, the observable exterior aspect of performance, or how the leader’s interior world is outwardly expressed, becomes secondary but is nonetheless important (de Quincey, 2005). This is especially true in regards to how that performance is, in turn, perceived by those to whom it is directed, for example, in the case of Ladkin’s (2008) personal description of McFerrin’s leadership performance. As such, the underlying premise of this thesis is that a potentially deeper understanding of the embodied nature of leadership may be required to better understand Ladkin’s *beautiful leadership* performance. As Ladkin herself notes: “The concept of ‘leading beautifully’ brings our attention to that often unarticulated, but nonetheless powerful aspect of how leaders embody their role” (p. 40).

This embodying of role, according to Overton et al. (2012), implies that a leader’s behaviour arises from an embodied person actively engaged in the world. As such, Overton et al. (2012) suggest that embodiment is the integration of perception, thinking, feelings and desires expressed through a leader’s active engagement and agency (also see Taylor, 2005). This implies that the behaviours of leaders, and the way they lead, may be directly related to the level of their embodied awareness and subsequently their ability to manage what is happening within their mind-body in the moment that the act of leadership is performed. In this regard, one promising line of enquiry is that of mindfulness. Emerging research suggests that mindfulness may be one way of improving a person’s embodied awareness of self (Vago and Silbersweig, 2012; Cebolla et al., 2016).

If this is true, mindfulness may be a catalyst for an excellent leadership performance to take shape more frequently.

In the next section, I outline how mindfulness may aid both leaders (and myself as researcher) in understanding more clearly the *present embodied moment* of leadership performance described by Ladkin (2008).

### **1.3 The Emergence of Mindfulness as a Pop(ular) Management Topic**

Mindfulness is said to be an *embodied* practice that is able to enhance a state of being attentive to, and aware of, what is taking place in the present moment (Brown and Ryan, 2003). As a leader, martial artist and long-time practitioner of mindfulness myself, I recognise within Ladkin's narrative what could be understood as a description of mindful experience, although she personally does not describe it as such. Ladkin's experience of McFerrin's ability "to work with the present in such a way that [she] experienced now as rich ground, pregnant with potential for something new and creative to happen" (p. 33) is suggestive of what is often noted as some of the benefits of being fully present, or mindful, in experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). As such, this has not gone unnoticed in management and organisation studies.

There is rising recognition within management and organisation studies of the importance of being mindful of the present moment in achieving organisational success (Reb and Atkins, 2015). However, to date, less research has focused on the role of leadership and mindfulness specifically (see, for example, Bryant and Wildi, 2008; Reb et al., 2014; Sinclair, 2016). With that noted, much of the experience surrounding mindfulness has tended to draw on practices that could be considered as living outside organisational life and leadership as action. For example, the most common form of mindfulness practice is seated meditation, which is mostly drawn from Eastern contemplative traditions. Meditation is typically practised in a quiet, candle-lit room, an environment which is arguably a

far cry from the relentless chaos and unpredictability of organisational life.

In this respect, my personal experience with mindfulness practices such as meditation echoes the sentiments of Tony Schwartz (2014) and Deepak Sethi (2009), both active CEOs and leaders of organisations and long-time meditators. Both have argued that what is of utmost importance is not what a leader can do with their eyes closed (i.e., during the seated meditation traditionally used to teach and practise mindfulness) but, rather, the extent to which the activation of mindfulness impacts the moment-to-moment performance of a leader at work. Specifically, Schwartz (2014) applies the term *mindfulness-in-action* (MIA) to highlight this distinction.

Echoing these sentiments, Ladkin (2008) acknowledges that her experience of McFerrin's leadership performance happened in the very moment of execution and, in doing so, invoked the aesthetic of that unfolding experience equally within her in that very moment. In other words, both the act of leading on McFerrin's part and Ladkin's reception of that experience were encapsulated in the present moment, not in the past and not in the future. This further acknowledges Ladkin's (2008) observation of McFerrin's overall embodiment of leading as contrasting sharply with the leadership literature, which often tends to emphasise a leader's ability to envision the future. Instead, and as she has suggested, Ladkin's experience brought her "full attention to the possibilities and potentialities of the present moment" (p. 33).

If the present moment is indeed important to leadership success, how would one research this? In the next section I outline my research questions, which allowed for the present moment of leadership success to be explored.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

Acknowledging what I have outlined thus far, I am reminded of the sculptor and artist Auguste Rodin, known for one of the world's most famous artistic creations,

“The Thinker”. Rodin notes:

What makes my Thinker think, is that he thinks not only with his brain, with his knitted brow, his distended nostrils, and compressed lips, but with every muscle of his arms, back and legs, with his clenched fist and gripping toes (Cited in Caso et al., 1977, p. 133).

Rodin recognised that a beautiful sculpture had to be made from the inside out and, in the same light, a beautiful (or excellent) leadership performance needs, perhaps, to be understood by a leader from an inside-out perspective. In doing so, a leader may be able to bring his or her entire self to lead beautifully in the very moment it is needed.

As such, reading Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005) allowed me to envision a way to bring leadership, mindfulness and action together (i.e., MIA). At the heart of this research, then, is the exploration of embodied experiences of a leader’s present performance and how, in turn, the purposeful application of mindfulness in those moments may impact that performance. Here, ‘the present moment’ refers to those moments in which the leader is required to make decisions whilst simultaneously having to deal with their own and other people’s emotions and cognitive states (Ashford and DeRue, 2012). To this end, this research is guided by two interrelated research questions:

**Research Question 1:** What are the embodied experiences described by leaders that arise in the present moment of leadership and which they feel may hinder their ability to lead successfully?

**Research Question 2:** Following on from Research Question 1, to what extent can mindfulness, as taught in an experiential, action-oriented way, aid leaders in managing the leadership difficulties they described in moments of leading?

In the next section I outline the conceptual framework that informed the workshop I designed to achieve my research goals (i.e., allowing for the answering of my research questions). This is specifically relevant in exploring my second research question.

## **1.5 The Underpinning of this Research**

There are of course countless ways in which leadership research can be undertaken. As noted above, one way that shows promise in aiding a leader's performance in the present moment is the practice of mindfulness. Key to the success of my research, however, and with due consideration to the comments of Schwartz (2014) and Sethi (2009), was finding an appropriate way to teach mindfulness in action (MIA) rather than through the more passive forms of practice, such as seated meditation, as described above.

To this end, I decided to immerse my participants in an action-oriented embodied experience while teaching them mindfulness. This would allow me to simulate real-world decision-making processes and would, in turn, enable individuals to access and embody a way of being (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2017) that would orient them towards the potential benefits of being mindful in those moments.

As scholars such as Brendel and Bennett (2016) have argued, due to the “unpredictable nature of organisational life, leadership development programs that rely primarily on cognitive processing and critical reflection are no longer sufficient” (p. 409). As such, I hoped that teaching MIA would orient my participants to align their presence with purpose. In other words, it was hoped that applying an embodied action-oriented approach to experiencing mindfulness would allow my participant-leaders the ability to later expand their embodied understanding of mindfulness as first experienced in the workshop to their work environment within their roles as leaders. To this end, I developed an experiential

workshop in which the participants in my study were taught mindfulness, but specifically in action.

This workshop combined what I believed to be those components which are most widely acknowledged to be successful in mindfulness practice but which were built upon, and delivered from, an experiential martial arts movement base. This gave the experience of mindfulness an action-oriented, aesthetic feel and approach that I felt was needed in order for my research to be successful. As far as I am aware, this is the first time this approach has been applied to teaching mindfulness to leaders.

In the next section I outline my contribution to current research in the field of leadership and, more generally, learning and organisation studies.

## **1.6 Contribution to Research**

In this thesis I provide a deeper understanding of leadership, learning and mindfulness, explored through lens of leadership performance. As few studies have focused on the role of mindfulness to leadership performance specifically, a mindful leadership model is introduced in this thesis that may aid leaders to be more mindfully present in their professional roles.

This mindful leadership model, driven by the literature review and my own personal experience in teaching mindfulness, employed four interrelated conceptions of embodied mindful action. This model explores, mindful self-awareness, mindful self-regulation, mindful presence, and mindful communication. These concepts were equally integrated into the MIA workshop itself.

The successful implementation of this model was achieved through a purposefully designed workshop, entitled the Mindfulness-In-Action (MIA)

workshop. To date, I am unaware of a similar workshop being presented to teach leaders how to be mindful in action. In this workshop, research participants were taught and exposed to MIA. This is in contrast to the more prevalent and passive forms in which mindfulness is often taught through seated meditation.

Crucially, a further contribution of my research is understanding the experience of mindfulness as fully embodied. In other words, while mindfulness shows promise in helping people approach the way they think with more clarity, it also offers the opportunity to experience all of oneself (i.e., thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensations). This attunement to one's embodied experience in the present moment, without judgement, offers greater insight into a leader as a whole. As such, the ideal of an embodied mindful leader is addressed.

As such, the primary contribution to current research is an embodied understanding of mindfulness as experienced by leaders in the crucible of their professional lives. Therefore, this thesis, and my subsequent research, addresses how mindfulness may be applied in the action of leadership. In doing so, it shows how overall leadership performance can be enhanced through an embodied experience of mindfulness. Further, this research illuminates how this approach may be successful in aiding leaders to lead more in line with their own expectations, those of the team they lead, and those of the organisation they work for. As such, the outcome of this thesis adds to an increasing body of knowledge on the topic of mindfulness in organisations, but specifically how it may inform leadership performance in the moment of leading.

## **1.7 Thesis Overview**

In order to arrive at answers to the research questions outlined earlier, the thesis is split into several different chapters, overviews of which are presented below.

In Chapter 2, 3, and 4, the relevant literature is reviewed. In Chapter 2, I begin by tracing the evolving trajectory of leadership theory. I show that leadership theory

was driven by an understanding of people's innate traits, or qualities, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This changed to a more relational understanding of leadership in the later part of that century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, studies began to shift to the dramaturgical (Goffman and Berger, 1986), aesthetic (Hansen et al., 2007; Ladkin, 2008), emotional (Bono and Ilies, 2006; Goleman, 2006; Naidoo et al., 2010) and embodied (Sinclair, 2005; Ladkin, 2008) aspects of leadership.

These developments in leadership theory encouraged consideration of what may be termed the embodiment of leadership; the notion of embodied leadership is therefore introduced and discussed. Here, while acknowledging that leadership models are useful, it is noted that a leader's embodiment is not so much the antecedent to their behaviour but, rather, that a leader is always in their body as they navigate the world.

If, as the literature indicates, a leader's moment-to-moment embodiment shapes their leadership practice and thus impacts their performance, what is available to aid leaders in learning to manage those moments more skilfully? In Chapter 3 these questions are discussed, with the focus shifting to certain key areas of learning that may inform how a person leads now, as well as how those learning models could enhance their leadership practice in the future.

In Chapter 4, I turn my attention to mindfulness. In this section, I look at how mindfulness has been defined, summarising current research in the field, and I outline how both the practice and experience of mindfulness may be revealed in a leadership setting. In the final section of the literature review I offer a synthesis of the three main strands of my literature (i.e., leadership, learning and mindfulness) and how they may inform each other.

In Chapter 5, I shift focus to the methodological process applied in my research. I discuss my research position, laying out my ontological and epistemological positions, and highlight why I chose an interpretivist lens for my research. Next, I

discuss my research design, illustrating that my project was predominantly a case study, which is understood as a design that combines different research methods to understand a phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2017). This is followed by a description of my approach to data analysis. In this section, I outline my reasons for following a descriptive and inferential analysis to determine the outcome of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), followed by why I employed a thematic analysis approach for the interviews. In addition, I outline the ethical considerations of my research. In this section, I discuss concerns around injury and psychological harm, as well as my role as both a researcher and a trainer-consultant in my research project.

In Chapter 6, I shift focus to the workshop I designed as part of my research study. At the heart of this research is MIA. As established in the literature review, mindfulness is an embodied skill that requires both training and practice. After surveying countless studies and approaches to teaching mindfulness, I was unsuccessful in finding an approach to teaching MIA that would meet the aforementioned requirements. Therefore, drawing on my experience as a martial artist and coach over the past three decades, along with my personal mindfulness practice for the past several years, and including my personal study of Buddhist psychology, I developed a workshop specifically for this research project.

In Chapter 7, I address the analysis and findings emerging as a result of this study. Section 7.2 focuses on the analysis and findings of the MAAS. This begins by looking at the findings in respect to the overall improvement in mindfulness of leaders over the eight weeks of the study. This is followed by an analysis of the improvement in mindfulness on an individual basis. Then, I analyse the findings from MAAS for each of the 15 questions and as they relate to the research participants in this study.

In Section 7.3. I then shift focus to the findings from the interviews. This begins with an analysis of the pre-workshop findings drawn from the interviews. These interviews were conducted before participants participated in the MIA workshop.

This is followed by the findings from the post-workshop interviews that took place no less than five days after the MIA workshop was presented (Section 7.4). Finally, in Section 7.5, the findings from interviews conducted eight weeks after the workshop had taken place are addressed. Two main findings stand out, first, the importance of mindful communication to leadership success. Secondly, the need to apply daily positive strategies in order to include mindfulness into their roles as leaders to achieve long term success.

In Chapter 8, I reflect on the thesis as a whole. In my conclusion, I reflect on comments by Ladkin (2008) and other researchers who have considered the embodied aspect to leadership performance (e.g., Sinclair, 2005; 2016). This is especially relevant in light of addressing the answers to my research questions. As mindfulness was presented in the literature review as an approach that would arguably allow a leader to attend to the present moment in a leadership performance, this is further discussed. Chapter 8 also includes reflections on the MIA workshop, where, taking Sethi's (2009) and Schwartz's (2014) arguments seriously, mindfulness was taught in an action-oriented, experiential way. This allows for further reflection on the research process itself, with questions such as "What went well, what would I do differently, and what surprised me?" being discussed.

I then consider the contributions of this thesis to leadership, learning and organisation studies. This research was unique in that it attempted to simulate the real-world experiences leaders may face in their work environment through an accessible, action-oriented, experiential workshop that, in turn, sought to teach the concept of mindfulness through action. This is important as it was this approach that allowed the research questions to be comprehensively answered.

Finally, I consider the potential future for research in this area and how I envision others building on this project. It is in this section that I highlight aspects of my study that may need further research, but which, due to the nature of my research questions, time constraints and the specificity of my thesis overall, I was unable

to explore further. For example, it was very clear from the interviews that learning mindfulness had an unintended consequence for many of the leaders in my study. Not only did mindfulness help them in their roles at work, but it equally improved their relationship with their children and spouses/partners. Understanding the role of mindfulness in work/life balance and its subsequent impact on leadership performance would be an interesting line of enquiry for future research. The thesis concludes with a biographical reflection in which I look back on the research as a whole and my experience of it.

## 2 The theory of Leadership

### 2.1 Introduction

A coherent definition of leadership has eluded western researchers for decades (Stogdill, 1974; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Pardey, 2016). In the 1970s, Stogdill wrote: “There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (1974, p. 259). More recently, in ‘Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, Joseph (1993) analysed writings on leadership between 1900 and 1990, finding more than 200 different definitions of the term. Therefore, talking about leadership or what it takes to be a leader can cause confusion as no single definition of the concept exists. However, it has been suggested that leading seeks to establish direction and align people while motivating and inspiring them towards an end goal (Jacobs and Jaques, 1990; Zaccaro, 2001; Northouse, 2018).

While there may be many perspectives on leadership and subsequent theory that have developed in the past decades, it may be more practical to think of leadership as an ongoing interaction of leader, team members, and the situation they find themselves in (Spillane, 2005). Here, leadership can be viewed as practice, rather than leadership roles or responsibilities (Harris, 2014). As such, to view the outcome of leadership as the sole domain of the leader is inadequate. The practice of leadership often involves more than one leader, some in formal, whilst others in informal leadership roles. Further, leadership is not something that is done to team members, but rather team members themselves are an integral component of leadership practice itself (Spillane, 2005).

Extending this further, as Spillane notes, “it is not the actions of individuals, but the interactions among them, that are critical in leadership practice” (p. 145). Taking this into account a single specific definition of leadership is not offered. Rather, the following literature invokes a range of themes in regards to leadership theory, all of which could be considered an evolving understanding of leadership interaction over time, team members, and the situation they find themselves in

(Spillane, 2005). More generally then, leadership can be understood as a process, contingent on time (i.e. the moment it is taking place), the environment in which it is invoked and within the framework of the change required in order for that leadership action to be successful (Rowe, 2006).

Taking the above view of leadership into account the following literature on leadership itself need not offer a comprehensive history of consideration of the concept. Rather, the literature review on leadership highlights the ways in which space has actively opened over the concept of leadership development for more explicit consideration of notions such as embodiment, aesthetics and mindfulness (explored later in the literature review). As will be seen, the formative literature on leadership took the position that leadership was a top down process. However, subsequent challenges and advances to leadership theory over the past few decades have continued to move leadership theory in a direction where leaders become accountable for their own leadership actions through a deeper understanding of their embodiment (Sinclair, 2005; Ladkin, 2008), aesthetics (Hansen et al., 2007; Ladkin, 2008), and mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Langer, 2016). This takes place whilst simultaneously acknowledging both the environment and team members roles as an integral part of a leaders' success (Hargreaves, Harris & Boyle, 2014).

This chapter therefore begins by tracing the evolution of the study of leadership approaches in management and organisation studies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While there may be no universally accepted definition of leadership, this section discusses important developments, key concepts and dominant perspectives as they relate to the development of the field. The chapter continues with an exploration of how the study of leadership has shifted focus, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when it turned to what can be referred to as the *embodied* nature of leadership. This exploration highlights how the understanding of the nature of leadership has changed within the literature over time.

## 2.2 Leadership Theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Between the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, four major approaches to leadership dominated the Western literature: trait, behavioural, contingency and relational. In the 1930s and 1940s, leadership theories focused on the innate traits, or qualities, of a person. This focus on traits represents an extension of the 'Great Man Theory' originally posited by Scottish writer and historian Thomas Carlyle in the mid-1800s (Carlyle and Sorensen, 2013). The trait approach to leadership asserts that leaders achieve success through the control and influence they exercise over team members through their innate or inherited attributes. This approach thus regards leaders as being born, rather than made (Galton, 1892).

However, as Stogdill (1948) argues, leadership arises in social settings, meaning that it is also situationally contingent. Given this, while an individual may be successful in a leadership role in one situation, they may not be in another. Stogdill's (1948) critique directly throws the validity of trait leadership theory into question. Specifically, trait leadership theory supposes that a leader's personal characteristics are applicable to all environments where leadership is required. Stogdill's (1948) position, along with that of other researchers, for example Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) and Hughes et al. (2012), seems to imply the end of the trait approach to leadership. However, Zaccaro (2007) suggests that even though Stogdill (1948) presents evidence against taking the trait approach to leadership exclusively, conclusions within that evidence still suggest that individual differences do, to some extent, remain predictors of successful leadership. For example, in the 1980s, charismatic and transformational leadership models rose to prominence, suggesting that the extraordinary qualities of some individuals may determine their excellence as leaders (House, 1971; 1988). These claims were, nonetheless, subsequently critiqued and rebutted by post-heroic, post-transformational perspectives. (See, for example: Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, 1988; Brown et al., 2002; Kouzes and Posner, 2002; Pearce and Manz, 2005; Crevani et al., 2007; Pearce, 2008).

The behavioural school of leadership, which emerged in the 1940s-1950s, moved away from asking what leaders are (defining their traits) to how they behave. The behavioural approach evaluates the behaviours of successful leaders and, in so doing, seeks to identify a set of behaviours that can be codified into a taxonomy which would articulate broad leadership styles (Spillane et al., 2004). Crucial to the behavioural approach are the actions of leaders towards team members in various contexts, a focus which addresses one of the key failings of the trait approach, as identified above.

The behavioural approach argues that a leader's actions towards team members occur on both a task and a relationship level and that, in some situations, one focus is required more than the other (Northouse, 2018). For example, some team members may require more direction (task focus), whilst others require more support (relationship focus). In order to simplify the scope of behavioural research, researchers have put forward a basic taxonomy of leadership styles. Usually, four broad styles can be identified (Manning and Curtis, 2014):

1. Autocratic: A leader takes the role of sole decision maker.
2. Democratic: A leader coaches, nurtures and offers feedback to team members, while valuing their input and involving them in the decision-making process.
3. Laissez-faire: The leader prefers to take a step back, allowing team members to make decisions for themselves, only helping when asked.
4. Paternalistic: A leader is the authority figure and knows what is best for the organisation. Although employees are listened to, the leader always makes the final decision.

Arguably, one of the main strengths of the behavioural approach is its emphasis on leaders assessing their own behaviours. In this respect, the approach both enable leaders to assess how they come across to team members and to adjust these behaviours in order to be more effective in specific situations (Morgeson et al., 2010). However, as Yukl (1994) notes, the behavioural approach to

leadership has not adequately illustrated the extent to which a leader's behaviour is associated with performance outcomes. In addition, whilst a universal behaviour taxonomy has been sought, researchers have been unable to conclusively identify common behaviours that are applicable to leadership in general (Northouse, 2018).

Building on the behavioural school of leadership, in the 1960s, the contingency approach advanced the idea that successful leadership is based on both personal and situational factors (Gibb, 1958). The contingency approach acknowledges a leader's ability to recognise the situation and adopt appropriate behaviours to moderate the relationship between their leadership style or traits and the organisation's performance criteria (Fiedler, 1967; Mintzberg, 1997). As such, with respect to leadership, it is suggested that any one situation in which a leader finds themselves may require a particular approach to achieve success (Hersey, 2004). At the heart of the contingency approach is the claim that there is no single best practice of leadership. Contingency theories, however, have failed to explain why certain leadership styles are effective in some situations, but not in others. Additionally, these theories do not adequately explain what should be done where there is a mismatch between the leader's preferred style and a particular situation (Northouse, 2018).

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century literature on leadership began to shift from a purely leader-centric approach to one focused on the follower-leader dynamic (i.e., a relational approach). This was largely due to James MacGregor Burns' seminal book, originally published in 1978, entitled 'Leadership' (Burns, 2012). As Komives et al. (2011) note, while MacGregor Burns' work was still leader-centric in many ways, it opened the door for an alternative, follower-/team member-centric development of leadership theories. One prominent form of follower-centric leadership approaches which emerged during this time was transformational leadership theory.

While it has been argued that transformational leadership theory was nothing new (Humphreys and Einstein, 2003), Currie and Lockett (2007) have suggested that the continued interest in transformational leadership is likely due to ongoing global challenges in leadership itself. In defining transformational leadership, Burns (1979) notes:

[It] occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality...Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose...transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both (p. 20).

It has been suggested that the transformational leadership approach is made up of four components (Bass, 1985; Currie and Lockett, 2007):

1. Charisma: Instilled through providing a vision, a sense of mission and pride in the group (Humphreys and Einstein, 2003).
2. Inspiration: Considered a companion of charisma, inspiration is applied through the communication of high expectations, driven by the use of symbols to focus teammates to achieve extraordinary results (Humphreys and Einstein, 2003).
3. Intellectual stimulation: Here the leader promotes individual rationality, logical thinking and careful problem solving, with an emphasis on looking at old problems in a new way and searching for sensible solutions (Avolio et al., 1988).
4. Individualised consideration: Here the leader pays close attention to the individual differences among team members, with a focus on coaching, mentoring and individual attention to those team members (Humphreys and Einstein, 2003).

Transformational leadership theory thus posits the need for leaders and team members to work cooperatively to define needed change, based on the leader's inspirational vision, commitment from all stakeholders, and with the goal of creating a higher organisational purpose (Burns, 1979). However, applying such an approach may be motivated by normative pressures. In other words, transformational leadership engenders social influence on a group or the organisation as a whole, where team members are encouraged to contribute to the organisations goals and not vice versa, which may lead to conformity (Currie and Lockett, 2007). Further, Yukl (2011) has noted that transformational leadership lacks specific criteria that identify how the theory impacts situational and context variables in practice, which, in turn, lead to excellent leadership.

Whilst transformational leadership was popular in the 1980s, by the end of the century, a reaction against this perspective was underway. In this period, Robert Greenleaf's (1977) work, which put forward the idea of a servant leadership approach, became more popular. Although originally proposed in 1977, Greenleaf's conceptual framework laid the ground for this later surge in interest, arguing for the role of the leader as someone who firstly serves and secondly aspires to lead through conscious choice (Greenleaf, 1991). Ultimately, servant leadership seeks to develop both leaders and team members who are motivated by creating a better organisational tomorrow (Parris and Peachey, 2012). While it has been noted that servant leadership remains understudied, its message has resonated with scholars and practitioners who seek to overcome both organisational and leadership challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Spears, 2004).

This approach sees the foregrounding of a moral authority following a common, agreed-upon vision, sharing values and growing in trust of one another. While this is noble in theory, Collinson et al. (2017) point out that it may, in fact, inadvertently create a sense of timeless, rather mystical ethics, which are possessed only by certain privileged leaders (i.e. a full circle back to trait theory). As Ford and Harding (2015) note, Greenleaf attempts to overturn the all-pervading authority which is often attributed exclusively to the leader by applying

“the common-sense understanding of the word [servant], as someone who works in a menial position keeping the home of someone else clean, tidy and well-functioning” (p. 19).

However, instead of achieving this, the servants in Greenleaf’s theory are unlike what we typically understand them to be. Rather, servants here are people who appear to be “superior, [an] exalted few from which those who serve (what is argued to be) the common good are drawn” (p. 19). While servant leadership may have been an attempt to create distance from the heroic nature ascribed to leadership by previous theory and practice, paradoxically “Greenleaf’s servant leader is beyond human achievement and therefore impossible for mere mortals to attain” (Ford and Harding, 2015, p. 14). Most notably, the characteristics of servant leadership have grown exponentially. Spears (1995) originally noted that there were ten major characteristics of servant leadership. This number had grown to 44 in a recent review in 2010 (van Dierendonck, 2010). As Collinson and Tourish (2015) note: “This clearly poses implementation challenges. Attending to forty-four characteristics in one’s daily leadership practice would require levels of sagacity rarely found outside Mount Olympus” (p. 579).

Nonetheless, as a natural consequence of the distancing from the traditional view of leadership as being imposed on followers, the 1990s also saw the emergence of the ‘post-heroic’, ‘post-transformational’ or ‘distributed’ leadership approaches (Pearce, 2008). Here, the ideal of leadership shifted to one in which responsibilities are seen as shared and a sense of ownership is encouraged among all team members within an organisation (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). As such, leadership practice can be viewed as a distributed network throughout organisations, rather than something in the hands of a select few who are seen as having the necessary personal characteristics and attributes to lead (Pearce, 2008).

In one respect, the post-heroic approach to leadership stems from the changing landscape of organisations. The modern organisation is both a complex and a

dynamic environment, requiring agility and responsiveness from team members and leaders alike (Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, 1988; Breu et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2002). For this reason, the old paradigm of decisions beginning and ending with the leader is argued to be no longer seen as valid and largely outmoded (Pearce and Manz, 2005).

It has been noted that indecision, infighting due to seeking the leader's favour, bureaucracy and silo working are often indicative of a top-down approach of leadership. The post-heroic approach to leadership, on the other hand, is one of shared leadership, so that no single decision is the responsibility of a single person. As Crevani et al. (2007) note: "This is not to say that hierarchies should not exist; rather, hierarchies should be seen as systems of relations that are open for construction and reconstruction by all of their members" (p. 63). As such, leadership theories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to focus on relational aspects. This is further discussed in the next section.

### **2.3 Leadership Theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Leadership theories emerging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have continued to focus on the relationship between the leader and team members, in particular giving attention to the motivation and performance of those being led (Borkowski, 2009). As Haslam (2001) has noted:

[Leadership] is about the creation, coordination and control of a shared sense of 'us'. Within this relationship, neither the individual nor the group is static. What 'us' means is negotiable and so too is the contribution that leaders and followers make to any particular definition of 'us-ness' (p. 85).

In other words, the leader is not independent of his/her team members but, rather, interdependent with them, meaning that leaders and team members actively rely on each other, creating the necessary conditions for influence to take place (Reicher et al., 2005).

That said, the recognition of the importance of *followership* in organisational success is not new. In 1949, Mary Parker Follett, an American social worker, management consultant and philosopher, asserted that followership is “of the utmost importance” yet “has been far too little considered” (cited in Graham et al., 2003, p. 178). There has additionally been a stigma associated with the term ‘followership’. For some, it seems to have demeaning connotations, such as being weak, passive and conforming (Bjugstad et al., 2006). As such, and taking this into account, throughout this thesis, ‘followers’ are referred to as team members instead, although the term ‘followership’ is retained when referring to the literature.

The lack of followership research is likely due to leadership being considered far more important (Bjugstad, et al., 2006). Beyond the lack of research, it is also difficult to find models for applying followership to real organisational life. While Bjugstad et al. (2006) note that having an integrated model of leadership and followership styles makes “intuitive sense”, there is little evidence to support it. This may be owing to the fact that team members and leaders tend to have a preferred style, yet may not always use that style in every situation. Furthermore, matching leaders and team members with similar styles may not lead to their working more comfortably together (Chatman, 1991). As such, the use of different or similar styles by leaders and team members has not yet been connected to consistent effects on work-based performance (Lau and Murnighan, 1998).

However, the recognition of followership has, in turn, been used to attempt to satisfy the personal needs of the individual follower (Howell and Costley, 2006). As such, followers are no longer seen as mere cogs in a vast organisational machinery, told by leaders what to do and simply following orders but, rather, they are seen as key to the embodied, emotional and aesthetic practice necessary for creative transformation in organisations (Kuepers, 2011). Therefore, as obvious as it sounds, without followers there is no need for leaders.

In the next section, the focus shifts to the aesthetic, emotional, dramaturgical and embodied aspects of leadership.

## 2.4 Aesthetic, Emotional, Dramaturgical and Embodied Leadership Research

Since the 1990s, an alternative approach to understanding leadership has emerged within the academic literature, with increased attention being paid to the aesthetic (Hansen et al., 2007; Ladkin, 2008), emotional (Goleman, 2006; Bono and Ilies, 2006; Naidoo et al., 2010), dramaturgical (Goffman and Berger, 1986; Gardner, 1992) and embodied (Sinclair, 2005; Ladkin, 2008) aspects of leadership. These approaches suggest that leadership first arises in the world through leaders' perceiving and sensing bodies (Dewey, 1934; Gagliardi, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 2014).

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Donna Ladkin (2008) argues that much of the literature on the practice of leadership has focused on the behaviour of leaders but not the enactment of those behaviours (i.e., how they come into being). As such, Ladkin's reference to behaviour is taken to mean the observable actions of a leader, while enaction includes embodied knowledge as a precursor to observable behaviour (Stewart et al., 2014).

In other words, whilst observable behaviour refers to a third-person perspective, enaction has a first-person experiential embodied component. The third-person aspect refers to an audience, whose own embodiment might well condition how they respond to an unfolding leadership performance. To highlight this point, Ladkin (2008) describes her experience watching the jazz vocalist and conductor Bobby McFerrin perform, as previously described. Ladkin (2008) further argues that "the quality of a leader's performance can be judged according to its *aesthetic* dimension, as well as the more commonly recognised operational, symbolic, political, or moral ones" (p. 31). The etymological origin of the word *aesthetic* is the Ancient Greek *aisthetikos*, meaning 'feeling'. Having an aesthetic capacity

means having a capacity to feel. The antonym *anaesthetic* means to suppress or eliminate feeling. Thus, *aesthetic enaction* refers to a capacity for action guided by embodied knowledge to bring about what Ladkin describes as a “beautiful leadership” performance.

As Eagleton (1991) has suggested, “aesthetics was born as a discourse of the body” (p. 13). In this respect, Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762), a German philosopher and educator who coined the term *aesthetics* and established this discipline as a distinct field of philosophical inquiry, saw it as meaning perception through feeling (Baumgarten, 2007). In other words, perception here implies both the recognition and the interpretation of sensory stimuli. For Baumgarten:

aesthetics was much wider than art, including not only natural beauty but also our daily practices...he advocated an improved aesthetic perception (achieved through various forms of training) not simply for fine arts, but as a way of improving our general, including practical, functioning” (King, 2017, p. 10).

Ladkin’s (2008) interpretation of the aesthetic in respect to leadership also invokes the aesthetic as “born as a discourse of the body” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 13). Sinclair (2005) takes this further, noting that for her the embodied nature of leadership encompasses not only the aesthetic as defined above, but also includes physical stature, features, stance, gestures and voice. While the behavioural outcome of embodied enaction may be measurable, the qualities of that enaction thus arise first and foremost from the embodied experiences of the leader. Therefore, it is the enaction of embodied experiences, which are viewed as the behaviour of leaders, that can be termed a leadership performance.

Here both Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005) highlight a nuanced understanding of on the one hand what are often the observed behaviours of leaders, while at the same time acknowledging the need for the skilful *enactment* of a leader’s

performance, which arises first and foremost from their embodied experience in moments of a leadership performance. As such, it could be suggested that they argue for a clearer understanding of the difference between *excellence* and mere *effectiveness*.

Put differently, many people can mimic the motions of an accomplished dancer, but it takes practice and the development of skill to achieve artistry and excellence in performance. It may likely be the same in leadership. For example, an *effective* leader may simply get the job done through the application of force and effort, whereas an *excellent* leader achieves their goals with an economy of inner effort and does so in ways that inspire others to also reach for excellence in their own subsequent performances.

Taking a cue from sports performance, Australian long-distance runner Benita Johnson has noted that believing in one's ability (an internal state) is a deciding factor among athletes of similar physical strength, training and shape (Livingstone, 2012). Similarly, Staunton (2002) has suggested that individuals' core beliefs are embodied; that is, the beliefs and values that motivate people most consistently are literally *felt* as sensations in the body first. Thus, having the physical skill to be a great athlete does not, on its own, account for winning against other equally skilled athletes. Beyond the physical capabilities of the athlete (which can be measured and quantified), something more intangible – some deeper *way of being* – seems to be the decisive factor, which leads to an embodiment that enables one person to perform better than another.

Karssiens et al. (2013) have suggested this *way of being* is a human state comprising of “thoughts, feelings, emotions, and images, which affect one's thinking and acting at a specific moment” (p. 232). This *way of being* can be either closed, held captive by fixed patterns of thinking and acting, or open, a state in which the “body and mind are relaxed and can move freely in the openness of space and the dynamic of time: Being possibility” (p. 232). Acknowledging this

*way of being* in his own way, world-renowned golfer Jack Nicklaus writes in his autobiography, *My Story*:

Beyond good hand-eye coordination, perhaps my greatest gift in golf is the ability to compartmentalise my mind, to switch it at will totally from one activity or concern to another; then, for the required duration of the new focus, blank everything else out 100 percent (Nicklaus, 2007, p. 346).

To lead beautifully, then, as Ladkin (2008) has suggested, is not merely a matter of relying exclusively on conceptual models and theories of leadership development (Hamill, 2011). While logic, rationality and fact-gathering are important for leaders, many scholars focus on these objective factors to the exclusion of the subjective world. Strati (1999), who is seen as a pioneer in the field of organisational aesthetics (Sinclair, 2012), reflects that scholars and the people they study are often “purged of corporeality, so only (their) mind remains” (p. 3). Townsend (2009), similarly, has urged leaders to go beyond reason and rationality and connect with their values, feelings and relationships. The underlying premise behind Townsend’s work is that who we are on the inside may be a more accurate determinant of our leadership success than who we are on the outside.

Ladkin’s (2008) “leading beautifully”, then, is not dissimilar to Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspective. Here, the dramaturgical analogy could be considered similar to William Shakespeare’s claim that “All the world’s a stage”, (Shakespeare et al., 2014) emphasising that social interaction is somewhat like performing in a play (Gardner, 1992). Goffman further suggests that the interaction between performer (here leader) and audience (here team members) is in itself a performance which is shaped by both environment and audience. This performance is further constructed to provide those towards whom it is directed with impressions (or what Goffman referred to as ‘impression management’) that are seen as consistent with the desired goals of the performer. As Goffman writes: “What is important is the sense he [sic, i.e., the leader]

provides them [team members] through his dealing with them of what sort of person he is behind the role he is in” (Goffman and Berger, 1986, p. 298).

In this sense, individuals manage roles they perform within specific social settings (e.g., the leader in front of their team members) and, as such, attempt to manage the impressions they create in others. Goffman calls this the 'front stage' self, meaning that we display different kinds of behaviours depending on where we find ourselves and, specifically, when we know others are watching or are aware of us. According to Collett and Childs (2009), the front stage self is then played by, for example, leaders who attempt to maintain a self-image that is acceptable to others and is in accord with the social and situational expectations particular to that environment (i.e., what a leader is expected to be).

While the front stage self is often habitual, seeking to adhere to social conventions and expectations relevant to that specific situation, the impressions made in this social performance, when intentional, can be monitored by the performer (i.e., the leader). In doing so, it has been suggested that leaders are then able to direct the audience (i.e., team members) in the direction of a given goal or purpose and are therefore potentially able to steer people into a particular course of action that needs to be taken (Gardner and Avolio, 1998).

However, there is also a 'back stage' self, where we can either prepare for a front stage performance or put our front stage self aside completely. How we behave back stage is free from the expectations and norms that otherwise shape our behaviour. Put differently, the back stage self can be considered as who we are when no one else is around or watching, whilst the front stage self is who we want everyone else to believe we are. In Goffman's (1959) view, the 'self' is therefore a social construction and, for this reason, he suggests that there is no 'real,' 'tangible' or 'actual' self, just an ongoing and dynamic performance of the self, which shifts from context to context.

Goffman's (1959) argument is that a performance, by a leader in this case, is constructed to provide those towards whom it is directed with impressions that are seen as consistent with the desired goals of the leader. Acknowledging this, Ladkin's (2008) argument offers a subtler understanding of the leadership performance. The audience is not merely the receiver, but is also entangled in the process of leading. Audience members' ability to both detect the unfolding leadership performance and be caught up in it determines their reaction to that performance. What Ladkin is suggesting is that leading is about how the experience unfolds from moment to moment and how well a leader is able to manage their front stage self within that unfolding experience. From this perspective, then, leadership can be considered an embodied process of self-attunement, leading to the self-management (Manz and Sims, 1980) of the whole person in moments of leading.

At the heart of Ladkin's (2008) argument is the idea that leadership performance is largely predicated on what people do in the moment and how this, in turn, is received by an audience. Binney et al. (2003) agree: "The real work of leadership is in leaving the models behind and discovering in the here and now, with this group of people, this organisation and in this context, what leadership is possible and needed" (p. 15). This understanding draws not only on the cognitive experience of the leader (what they are thinking), but equally on the aesthetic experiences (what they are feeling or being) in the moment.

Given this, what we might call the embodiment of leadership neither negates nor lessens the importance of a leader's ability to envision the future or reflect on past mistakes. Rather, it focuses on those moments of crucial leadership performance where leaders are required to make decisions whilst simultaneously having to deal with their own *and* others' socially constructed, embodied experiences. This unfolding, embodied nature of leadership can be understood as similar to what Winther (2013) defines as 'self-contact'. Self-contact means that a leader is able to be in contact with their own embodiment, remaining focused and present and

thus having the “ability to include [their] heart and still keep a professional focus and a private boundary” (p. 344).

Furthermore, this approach to leadership suggests that, regardless of which leadership models are advocated or identified as effective, the leader must still put that approach into action. As such, a leader's body is not so much the antecedent to behaviour but, rather, the leader is always in their body as they navigate the world. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty (2014) says the body “can symbolise existence because it brings it into being and actualises it” (p.164). In the following section, this embodied approach and understanding in leadership is presented in greater detail.

## **2.5 The Embodiment of Leadership**

Historically, the body has been neglected somewhat in organisational literature in favour of cognition (see, for example, Kets de Vries, 1994; Ropo and Parviainen, 2001; Sinclair, 2005). This is perhaps unsurprising when we consider that neglect of the body, as both instrumental in lived experience and as a valid source of knowledge in the world, goes as far back in Western thinking as Plato's *Phaedo* (Platón and Gallop, 2009). Plato saw the body as negatively interfering with the search for true knowledge. The body, he claimed, interrupts our attention with all kinds of passions and fancies. In other words, the body distorts our apprehension of reality through our sense organs (Bostock, 1986). In this view, the body is merely a tool in the service of our intellect.

This way of thinking about the body has persisted in philosophies such as idealism (Shusterman, 2008). Idealism encapsulates a group of philosophies that argues that reality as we know it is a mental construct. Put differently, there is no reality independent of the mind (Dunham et al., 2010). Idealism influenced the theories of 17<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher René Descartes. Descartes' philosophy of separating the thoughts of the mind from the actions of the body

(known as Cartesian dualism) greatly influenced Western philosophy, resulting in the dominant idea that our mind is distinct from our body.

This view sees the mind as functioning independently (Damasio, 1994; Hansen et al., 2007). The view of the mind and body as two different ontological entities not only penetrated the world of philosophy and science but has also had a profound effect on how we view the world, how we learn and, in turn, how organisations have been led. Highlighting this view, Morgan (1997) uses the metaphor of an organisation as a machine to illustrate for how long the success of an organisation was seen as being built upon order, control, precision, routine, calculative processes and technical efficiency – in other words, solely reliant on the minds of those who ran it and worked within it (Rafaeli and Worline, 2001). This perspective is illustrated by Gibson (1997), who remarks: “From the earliest theorizing, organisations were the metaphorical mind of a mind/body duality: they were conceived as cognitive-rational entities” (p. 216).

More recent research challenges the focus on leaders’ minds (i.e., the over-reliance on cognition) to the exclusion of the body (Sinclair, 2005). Pullen and Vachhani (2013) note that leadership (and the study thereof) has often been seen as an “over-cognitivated phenomenon[on]” (p. 315). As Ladkin’s (2008) focus on ‘beautiful leadership’ performances also suggests, the performance of a leader is embodied, rather than simply a function of cognition. Sinclair (2005) agrees, remarking that:

Leadership is a bodily practice, a physical performance in addition to the triumph of mental or motivational mastery. Though leadership works at visceral and sensual levels, activating appetites and desires, this fact has been largely overlooked in most business writing about leadership (p. 387).

Following Sinclair’s (2005) and Ladkin’s (2008) line of enquiry, how well leaders perform depends not only on thinking, but also on perception, self-awareness,

physical presence and bodily practices, or what can be collectively defined as embodied knowledge. Embodied knowledge is defined by Lord and Shondrick (2011) as “generated and represented within a complex, dynamic system which relies on the brain, one's physiological experiences, and one's environment” (p. 208). According to Overton et al. (2012), embodiment is the integration of perception, thinking, feelings and desires expressed through a person's active engagement and agency in the world in which they live. Embodied knowledge, then, is knowing through the body and arises from the interrelatedness of embodied experiences (Ropo and Parviainen, 2001; Ropo et al., 2013).

According to Lord and Shondrick (2011), embodied knowledge can be subdivided into either online embodiment, where information processing occurs at the same time that the initial stimulus is perceived (e.g., making a judgement in real time or making sense of a situation as it occurs), or offline embodiment, which refers to information processing that occurs when the initial stimulus is no longer present. It follows that the act of leading can be considered to be at an intersection between a person's immediate online embodied knowledge (i.e., the present moment) and their offline embodied knowledge (i.e., reflections on past or future expectations) within the context of a specific time, place and audience (i.e., the social and cultural space a leader finds themselves in).

This view proposes that a leader's thinking processes cannot be understood in isolation from their body and, further, their body's interaction in and with the world (Wilson, 2002). From Sinclair's (2005) viewpoint, there is no leading without the bodily ability to do so, which also prompts questions about team members' reception and interpretation of these performances. Ladkin (2008) agrees that leading is a bodily practice and a physical performance as much as it is a mental one. From this perspective, the body is present in all aspects of leadership, since it is argued that embodiment itself is the fundamental way we are in, and of, the world (Overton et al., 2012; Merleau-Ponty, 2014).

What both Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005) are highlighting is that a leader's moment-to-moment embodiment shapes their leadership practice and thus impacts their performance. This position suggests that leaders should be understood as engaging "sensorially and emotionally, as well as cognitively, with their social worlds" (Ignatow, 2007, p. 118). This sensory dimension of leadership is echoed in Hansen et al.'s (2007) notion of meaning making through sensory knowledge and felt meaning, whereby meaning arises from our senses through feelings we have about a particular experience.

One way to further recognise the embodied aspects of leadership and how it manifests is through metaphor. Metaphors articulate what is observed, for example, "having one's feet on the ground" or "holding one's ground." These two metaphors suggest a leader who can be trusted, is upstanding or who takes a stand. As Melina et al. (2013) suggest, "Cool-headed, hands-on, tight-fisted, and cutthroat are a few more examples of the nearly infinite number of metaphors of embodiment that can be used to describe a leader's performance" (p. 42). As such, Lindsay (2013) has argued that it is the words we use to describe our experiences that give us insight into the functioning and structures of our bodies. Therefore, when we use metaphors that speak to personal truth, they have the potential to aid us in making sense of our lives. As most metaphors operate below our conscious awareness, bringing them forward into awareness may allow keen insight into what is often arising from the inarticulate body (Johnson, 2007). People may find it difficult at times to talk about their embodied experience and metaphor may be one way in achieving more clarity in this respect (Lindsay, 2013).

Further, as Ropo and Parviainen (2001) have argued:

Paradoxically, perhaps, the notion of embodied leadership offers the potential to contribute to an important and overdue direction in leadership studies, that is, the idea that leadership is not something "housed" in an individual (a person with a body) but is a discourse that is performed by a

person with a body, in relationship with others who are also performing an embodied discourse that both reveals and constitutes identity (p. 31).

As such, these discourses emerging from a leader's embodiment are informed not only by experiences and personal narrative, but equally by social and cultural narratives (Shamir and Eilam, 2005). Here, metaphors that others (i.e. team members) use to describe a leader can give insight as to whether what is being presented is congruent with that leader's privately held experiences. In other words, how others describe the embodiment of a leader, how they are seen to show up, can in turn be a leader's greatest teacher (Lindsay, 2013).

In the next section, I offer a summary of leadership theories covered in this chapter.

## **2.6 Summary of Leadership Theories**

To sum up the discussion thus far, leadership studies have employed many different definitions of leadership and the focus of scholarly attention has shifted over time from enumerating qualities inherent in leaders to looking at how leadership is constructed in particular situations or through ongoing performances. A more recent focus on embodied knowledge seeks to understand how leaders make active use of aesthetic experience (Choo, 1996; Hansen et al., 2007; Ropo and Parvainen, 2010). This aesthetic experience is rooted in our embodiment, which is deeply dependent upon place and audience.

Arising out of the leader's embodiment is the leadership performance that team members as an audience acknowledge and experience in the moment. The audience, also grounded in time and place, uses their own embodied knowledge in making assessments of the leadership performance unfolding in front of them and reacts accordingly (Hansen et al., 2007). A person's embodiment, especially in moments of leading, thus requires a level of self-awareness and appreciation of themselves as embodied agents in the world.

In the next chapter, I introduce several key concepts that may aid a leader in learning to become more aware of their embodied action and its influence on their roles in leadership. Moreover, some of the more prominent learning theories and their relationship to leadership performance are explored.

## **3 Exploring the Relationship between Learning and Leadership**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I outline the key theories in the domain of learning and its connection to leadership in general. Here, specific attention is given to the embodied nature of learning. In particular, experiential, psychodynamic, self-leadership, emotional, and, finally, somatic approaches to learning are emphasised.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) suggest that leaders are continuously learning and should therefore view all experiences as potential learning opportunities. Research shows that leaders primarily learn in four ways: job experience (Zemke, 1985), trial and error, by observing others, and through formal 'off the job' education (McCall et al., 1988; Kouzes and Posner, 2012). Souba (2006) remarks that leadership education and development have often been centred on "visible individuals and their talents" (p. 159). The outcomes a leader achieves are, similarly, most often quantified through their outward contributions and measurable achievements. In contrast, the embodied experience of a leader has been seen as "quiet, often private" (ibid.) and has, as such, traditionally been overlooked in the literature on developing leadership skills.

The perspective of embodiment discussed in the previous section suggests that the embodied experiences of leaders are central to their leadership performances. Approaches to learning that focus to various degrees on an embodied perspective may therefore be crucial in enabling a leader to become

more aware of their subsequent embodied action. In doing so, the ability of a leader to *learn* more practical ways of increasing their leadership excellence is scaffolded by the experience of their embodiment. In the following sections I highlight key learning approaches that may well have a direct impact on how a leader's learning is shaped and, in turn, how that may impact the way they lead in practice.

### **3.2 Experiential Approach to Learning and Leadership**

Proponents of experiential learning argue that real learning cannot take place without at least some active engagement on the part of the learner. Experiential learning theory (ELT) posits that knowledge is created through grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 2014). Experiential learning is defined as “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (Beard and Wilson, 2006, p. 2). In the view of Boud et al. (1993), experience itself is the catalyst for learning to take place. However, as McCall (2004) observes: “People don't automatically learn from experience. They can come away with nothing, the wrong lessons, or only some of what they might have learned” (p. 128). Crucially, then, experiential learning requires the intention to learn, along with the motivation to do so: without this, learning may simply not occur (Moon, 2004).

While experience is central to experiential learning, identifying how this learning takes place remains difficult. It is not a singular, all-encompassing event: rather, it is multifaceted and connected with other experiences. Boud et al. (1993) argue that trying to pin it down to a single moment in time changes the very experience itself. Further, Beard and Wilson (2006) suggest that experience denotes the active engagement of the whole person – body, thoughts and feelings – with the whole environment. Therefore, the perceived divide often articulated in the Cartesian dualism discussed earlier (Damasio, 1994; Hansen et al., 2007), between thoughts and embodied action, dissolves in the moment of experience itself (Madzia and Jung, 2016).

Beard and Wilson (2006) have suggested that through perception how we interpret and respond to the world, either arising internally or externally via a stimulus, can be viewed as experiential learning. It is important to note that, while two people may encounter the same stimulus, their responses have the potential to vary drastically because of previous experience, education, upbringing and life circumstances (Kuhn, 1970; Gibson et al., 1985; Massaro et al., 1993; Beard and Wilson, 2006). How we perceive stimuli therefore shapes how we learn from them.

Lewin (1947), Kolb (1984), Honey and Mumford (1992) and Dewey (1999) all identify different stages and styles of learning. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, which is very widely cited in learning literature, identifies four stages of learning:

1. Concrete Experience: An encounter with a new experience or reinterpretation of an existing experience.
2. Reflective Observation: Time is taken out from doing and reflection takes place on the experience.
3. Abstract Conceptualisation: Ideas are now formed based on reflection and analysis of the experience or modifications made to existing abstract ideas.
4. Active Experimentation: The learner now applies and tests theories discovered in the previous steps to see if they work. In other words, learning happens through doing. All these lead to the next concrete experience (Kolb and Kolb, 2005).

In respect to learning and leadership, McCall (2004) suggests that learning to be a leader can only be accomplished through experience. In this view, leaders need to be encouraged to experience what they seek to understand, rather than simply engaging in theoretical, or what Navarro (2008) refers to as *talk and chalk*, approaches to learning. Leaders should engage in learning activities that are

aimed at real-world problem solving (Baden and Parkes, 2013). Therefore, concrete learning experiences for leaders are often achieved through team-building exercises, simulations and secondments (Kok-Yee et al., 2009). McCall (2004) notes that the key outcome of learning here is how learning is revealed from the experience itself. McCall suggests this often happens in “fits and starts” (p. 130) and for this reason experiential learning is sometimes forgotten until a person is reminded of the solution again. Over time, and with enough experience with engagement of the actual experience, both learning and substantial positive change becomes visible.

Further, Earley and Peterson (2004) suggest that training programmes for leaders should include reasoning skills, thereby allowing understanding to take place through a logical approach where multiple premises, which are believed to be true or have been found to be true most of the time, are combined to reach a specific conclusion. This process allows a leader to make sense of, and translate, concrete experiences and reflections into a more abstract understanding that can be generalised as a course of action when faced with similar experiences at work in the future.

Kok-Yee et al. (2009) also note that, crucially, experiential learning opportunities for leaders should provide experiences that involve “the whole person (and not just their intellect) but also their senses, their feelings and their personalities” (p. 299). Learning should therefore be embodied, while promoting reflexivity (Parkes and Blewitt, 2011). As Gibbs and Costley (2006) note: “the primary concern of WBL [work-based learning] is with application rather than being theory led. The theory and reflection upon self in situ thus follows the practice” (p. 346). As such, experiential learning theorists view experience as the primary mechanism through which people learn to be leaders and stress the importance of active engagement with, and connecting specific situations to, generalised experience.

While common sense dictates the importance of the practical nature of learning through experience, this approach is not without its critics (Kolb and Fry, 1974).

Highlighting the psychodynamic aspect of learning, it has been argued that ELT does not adequately take into account the social, gendered or cultural aspects that influence the learning process (Freedman and Stumpf, 1980; Holman et al., 1997; Vince, 1998; Reynolds, 1999). In addition, Vince (1998) argues that ELT places emphasis on retrospective aspects of the learning process and, in doing so, fails to adequately take into account the “here and now” (p. 309) of experience. The ‘here and now’ of learning may in turn be hindered by unconscious defensive mechanisms that inhibit the learning process itself. In such cases, emotions such as fear or aggression may get in the way of the learning process (Vince, 1998).

Arguably, there are several other factors that may influence an individual's ability to learn and therefore lead effectively, which also need to be accounted for. For example, factors that are linked to psychological aspects of a leader's past, such as their upbringing, may play a part. To consider this further, in the following section, psychodynamic approaches to learning and leadership will be explored.

### **3.3 Psychodynamic Approaches to Learning and Leadership**

Drawing on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical work (Freud et al., 2001), the psychodynamic approach to learning emphasises the need to understand the conscious and unconscious forces that influence childhood experience and later shape behaviour and personality (Bastable, 2008). As Northouse (2018) notes: “The primary aim of the psychodynamic approach is to raise awareness of leaders and followers to their own personality types and the implications of those types on work and relationships” (p. 338). The psychodynamic approach also emphasises “learning from the conscious and unconscious levels of connection that exist between and shape selves and others, people and systems” (French and Vince, 2002, p. 7). This approach further brings to light the emotional aspects of leadership learning that may be largely influenced by earlier childhood experiences.

In leadership development, the psychodynamic approach to learning highlights the work arena where, for example, emotional experiences shape events and vice versa (Gabriel, 1998). Here, however, the psychodynamic perspective on emotions in organisations suggests that these emotional experiences in leaders arise from early life experiences that remain unresolved (Fineman, 2007; Lewis, 2008; Cupchik, 2013). For example, authoritarian leaders have been described as people who have been brought up in strict environments by disciplinarian caregivers, which accounts for their similar behaviour towards people as adults (Adorno et al., 1996). This may include a heightened propensity toward bullying employees (O'Moore, 1998; Einarsen, 1999).

Like ELT, the psychodynamic approach to learning acknowledges that a person's life experience can impact their approach to learning. In adulthood, a person's ability to apply (or disregard) learning from their experience is, as Brown and Starkey (2000) argue, built upon ego-defence and self-esteem. Here, the ultimate goal is to protect one's self-concept, as developed since childhood. From a psychodynamic learning perspective, the term 'self-concept' refers to the constructed beliefs one holds about oneself. For McDougall (1991), the self-concept is influenced by the creation of an inner theatre comprising people who have influenced our lives both positively and negatively. In this respect, from a psychodynamic learning perspective, leaders are influenced by earlier interpersonal experiences as they interact with those they lead in the present moment (Kets de Vries and Cheak, 2016).

The psychodynamic approach to learning therefore suggests that, for most people, learning and the deployment of that learning tend to be conservative, as individuals seek to not push boundaries in an attempt to hold on to their existing self-concept (Baumgardner et al., 1990; Baumeister et al., 1994). Brown and Starkey (2000) make a strong case that learning based on new information often does not occur (even when it is necessary) when said information is at odds with a person's desire to preserve and defend their self-concept, or, in other words, with the beliefs they have about themselves. For example, if a leader believes

they are competent in a specific area of their profession, they may not be open to a new way of learning to achieve the same outcome, even if the new approach presented is more efficient and productive. This 'not wanting to' often has more to do with preservation of the leader's ego-defence and self-esteem (e.g., not wanting to take advice from a seemingly subordinate employee), rather than the new approach lacking validity.

Brown and Starkey (2000) thus suggest that, because of psychological factors, a person does not necessarily engage in real learning just because they are exposed to experiences with learning potential. Accordingly, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the "psychodynamic factors in individual and organisational identity maintenance and the negative effects such factors can have on learning" (p. 103). Identity maintenance implies the need of an individual to preserve and defend their self-concept.

It has also been noted that a person's self-concept can be influenced by how other people see them. As such, an individual's urge to conservatively maintain self-esteem within their existing self-concept results in insulation from, and defence against, self-analysis and challenge (Brown and Starkey, 2000). The psychodynamic approach to leadership learning thus implies that leaders are more effective when they have insight into their own psychological makeup and the psychological makeup of those they lead. This approach does not favour one particular personality style or set of characteristics in leaders. Instead, leaders are said to need insight into both their emotional and habitual responses (Northouse, 2018). Self-analysis, then, is essentially self-awareness.

Psychodynamic theory thus posits a strong correlation between emotions and learning. This suggests that learning in respect to leadership development should not be treated in isolation from the emotions the leader is experiencing. Further, it is suggested in leadership development that the leader themselves learn to reflect on their current emotional behaviour as not simply arising due to the situation at hand, but also, possibly, being influenced by past experience (Kets

de Vries and Cheak, 2016). By focusing on and acknowledging weak areas that arise because of these factors, a leader can learn to strengthen their leadership capabilities. In a psychodynamic approach to leadership learning, leaders are thus encouraged to learn “from the conscious and unconscious levels of connection that exist between and shape selves [i.e., the leader] and others, people and systems” (French and Vince, 2002, p. 7). Here the role of emotions in shaping events and that of events in shaping emotions within both the leader and the organisation at large becomes crucial in learning to perform more effectively as a leader (Trehan, 2007).

The psychodynamic approach has, however, been criticised for its lack of focus on the current context of a leader’s response, such as in respect to emotions. For example, it proposes that emotional states are isolated, inner phenomena (Domagalski, 1999) born of childhood experiences. In so doing, this approach neglects current social and cultural aspects of emotions. Extending this critique further, the psychodynamic approach to leadership posits that the behaviour of a leader is primarily formed in the early stages of life. A person’s first experiences and understanding of leadership, it argues, occur in childhood and are usually derived from primary caregivers (Northouse, 2018). Although such an assertion may hold some value, emotions can have triggers. For example, as a leader we may be angry at someone in the workplace due to a specific incident that occurred. Emotions can therefore also be bound by context (Domagalski, 1999). In this sense, emotional experiences are not only due to experiences in early life, but also the result of social contexts in which individuals currently find themselves.

### ***3.3.1 Leader Development through Self-Leadership***

In [Section 3.3](#), it was noted that the psychodynamic approach to leadership learning implies that leaders are more effective when they have insight into their own psychological makeup, as well as that of the individuals they lead. Northouse (2018) noted that leaders need insight into both their emotional and habitual responses in order to lead more effectively (Northouse, 2018). Locke (2005) has

noted the importance of introspection (i.e., self-awareness), whereby a person is able to reflect on the content and processes of their mind. As he notes, this ability to self-monitor has important implications for self-esteem and mental health. In other words, self-awareness could, in turn, lead to a measure of self-influence in the leader which would enable them to make appropriate and needed changes.

In this regard, Mantz's (1986) seminal piece on self-leadership suggests that there is an emerging trend in organisations towards recognising the importance of the self-influence members can exercise over themselves to achieve the necessary self-motivation and self-direction to behave in desirable ways. This approach reorganises the control system often employed by organisations, in which appropriate behaviour, as well as the monitoring of that behaviour, is coordinated, rewarded and punished by the organisation (Lawler and Rhode, 1976). While organisations may situate a desirable culture through values, beliefs and a vision, at its heart, the self-influence system of members within an organisation requires equal attention if one is to consider the overall success of that organisation. In other words, while organisations may have described a culture they desire, each person in and of themselves is a separate entity with their own unique set of values and beliefs.

Self-leadership, therefore, is a learning process that proposes leveraging an individual's self-motivation and self-direction in ways that would enhance their own self-efficacy. Reflecting this realisation back onto leadership and learning invokes the extent to which leaders believe they are capable of successfully performing a specific and required change in behaviour (Bandura, 1986). In this sense, the leader learns through the awareness of their own behaviour and how that, in turn, impacts their leadership performance in relationship to their team members, rather than being mandated by an external influence (Manz, 1986).

As Manz (1986) points out, an overreliance on external controls that mandate needed change in leadership behaviour or the organisation in general may lead to a number of dysfunctional behaviours on the part of both team members and

leaders. For example, team members and leaders who only perform a set of behaviours because they are rewarded by the organisation's control system. From this perspective, neither team members or leadership behaviours are performed for their intrinsic value but, rather, because of necessity and because of what a person receives if certain criteria are met.

Self-leadership as a learning strategy is drawn from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and related work in self-control (Cautela 1969; Kanfer, 1970; Goldfried and Merbaum 1973; Mahoney and Thoresen, 1974; Bandura 1977; Mahoney and Arnkoff 1978, 1979). Self-leadership itself emerged from what was previously situated in organisational literature as self-management (Stuart, 1977; Manz and Sims, 1980). As such, self-leadership theory proposes three categories inherent within the self-influence continuum, namely behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies (Neck and Houghton 2006).

Behaviour-focused strategies encompass self-observation, self-goal setting, self-correcting feedback, self-cueing and self-reward. Self-observation focuses on raising a person's self-awareness as to why and when they engage in a specific behaviour. In respect to learning in leaders, this is seen as necessary in order to change or invalidate behaviours that may be currently ineffective (Neck and Manz, 2007). Through self-awareness, a person is able to set more productive and accurate behavioural change goals for themselves (Neck and Manz, 2007). Self-correcting feedback encourages a leader to critically reflect on behaviours that are undesirable, as well as failed change attempts, while setting self-goals to achieve alternative results (Manz and Sims, 2001). Furthermore, leaders can encourage self-cueing initiatives whereby they are encouraged towards behavioural-focused strategies through the use of posters, screensavers, a personal ritual or personal items that act as reminder cues and set the intention for the behavioural change to be accomplished.

Finally, it is suggested that once specific behavioural changes have been achieved, self-reward is important. This could take the form of the intrinsic value brought about by such changes and recognising them as such (Neck and Houghton, 2006). This is intrinsic motivation, which can be defined as: “The doing of an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated, a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external products, pressures or reward” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 56). In other words, while it is important for a leader, and to foster further self-leadership learning, to reflect and acknowledge when specific behavioural changes have been successful, it needs to come from a place of personal desire to do so.

Thirdly, constructive thought pattern strategies focus on developing habitual and constructive ways of thinking to impact leadership performance (Neck and Manz, 2007). These include recognising and replacing dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions, as well as negative images, with more constructive thought patterns such as positive self-talk and positive outcome visualisations (Ellis and Grieger, 1977; Neck and Mantz, 2007). It has been noted that individuals who learn to use positive outcome visualisations for an impending performance (i.e., prior to the event itself) perform more successfully when faced with the actual task (Driskel et al., 1994; Neck and Mantz, 2007).

Given the arguments presented above, the theme of self-regulation emerges from the self-awareness which is at the heart of self-leadership and the subsequent change strategies which are employed by that theory (Van Velsor et al., 1993; Porte et al., 2003; Gardner et al., 2005). As Latham and Locke (1991) have noted, “although people are natural self-regulators in that goal-directedness is inherent in the life process, they are not innately effective self-regulators” (p. 240). While self-regulatory theorists have noted the reality of “self-regulatory failure” (Baumeister et al., 1994), they often fall short of advising on strategies that can be applied to overcome this breakdown. While not all encompassing,

self-leadership theory attempts to offer specific behavioural and cognitive strategies to enhance a person's self-regulatory capacities.

Therefore, at the heart of self-leadership is the aspect of self-awareness, which then has the potential to invoke change in a leader through self-regulation. In other words, the ability to intentionally observe "one's own behaviour... [provides] a more accurate and richer interpretation of feedback loops, leading to the identification of specific behaviours that should be changed, enhanced or eliminated relative to goal attainment" (Neck and Houghton, 2006 p. 277). However, as Nichols and Schwartz (1991) note when acknowledging the inner dialogue of the leader, to be productive, the *self* in self-awareness needs to be:

not merely a passive, observing state of mind, but instead...also an active internal [self] leader, who helps the system of parts continuously reorganise to relate more harmoniously. In this leadership role the Self listens to each part and what it really wants, nurtures or comforts some parts, helps change the role of others, and negotiates with polarised parts to resolve their differences. For example, the Self may comfort and soothe frightened or sad parts, calm rageful defenders, or get striving achiever parts to compromise with parts that demand more relaxation (pp. 503-504).

Self-leadership has not been without criticism. The main criticisms are that the theory lacks empirical validation in organisation and more specifically leadership studies and that it is principally conceptual. This may largely be due to the slow development of reliable self-leadership measurement scales. In addition, critics have suggested that there is nothing unique about self-leadership theory, especially in light of its close resemblance to other motivational theories such as regulation theory. It is indeed clear that self-leadership as a construct has been built upon other established theories of motivation and self-influence (Neck and Houghton, 2006).

As we will see in the next section, by being self-aware, leaders arguably have the potential to positively impact both organisational and team success. With this in mind, the following section explores emotions and the difficulty in defining them and, more specifically, focuses on how emotions may manifest for leaders in a situational context.

### **3.4 Emotions, Leadership and Learning**

In the previous section on the psychodynamic approach to learning, the strong connection between emotions and learning was illustrated. Nevertheless, emotions have not always been given their rightful place within the literature. Prior to the 1980s, the role of emotions in the workplace was neglected by organisational researchers (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995; Sturdy, 2003; Fineman, 2007; Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011). During this time, emotions were largely an absent presence in organisational life: there, but not discussed. Instead, practising “administrative rationality” was recommended (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). As Gibson (1997) notes:

From the earliest theorising organisations were the metaphorical mind of a mind/body duality: they were conceived as cognitive-rational entities which could structure events, people, and situations so that individuals' irrational emotions would not infringe on goal-directed decision making (p. 216).

However, this view has since changed and researchers in the field of organisation studies now view emotion as playing a vital role in the workplace (e.g., Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Campbell et al., 2003; Fineman, 2007; Madlock, 2008). As Hochschild (1990) has suggested, emotion, far from simply adding “a new dependent variable to the traditional roster” (p. 117) of organisational study, is in fact the main missing ingredient in understanding organisational life. Hochschild (1990) has suggested that:

We [are not] plowing up the terminological ground, using a new word for what used to be referred to as 'values' or 'attitudes'. We are theorising all that becomes apparent when we make the simple assumption that what we feel is fully as important to the outcome of social affairs as what we think or do (p. 117).

Therefore, emotions, as Hochschild (1990) notes, cannot be removed from the interplay of social practices of organisational life. Emotions “say more about the type of social relations in which we live...than anything about our essential nature as human beings” (Burkitt, 1991, p. 2). Emotions, therefore, along with thinking and actions, are embedded within self, society and culture (Sturdy, 2003). They are fluid, bound by context and embodied (Cromby, 2007) and are learned within a social habitus (Lord and Kafner, 2002), which results in emotional dispositions that may arise in particular situations (Burkitt, 1997). Here 'social habitus' refers to the experiences of everyday life, through the values, lifestyle, expectations and dispositions of a particular social group (Scott and Marshall, 2005).

With this noted, scientists themselves are yet to define clear criteria to identify when emotions are present or not and, as Frijda and Scherer (2009) suggest, “the term 'emotion' may be one of the fuzziest concepts in all of the sciences” (p. 142). Indeed, Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981) found 92 definitions of the concept of emotion at the time their paper was first published. Laypeople are often convinced that they can see and recognise the presence of a particular emotion both in themselves and others. However, researchers have long noted the difficulty that people have in assessing, discerning and describing their own emotions (Saarni, 1999). In the next section I therefore look at the most recent understanding of emotions.

### ***3.4.1 The Difficulty in Understanding Emotions***

In the classical view of emotion, an individual is born with an innate suite of emotions (e.g., fear, happiness, sadness, anger). As such, they feel these

emotions when triggered by a stimulus, which in turn triggers a circuit in their brain (e.g., a fear circuit, sadness circuit, happiness circuit, etc.). This then invokes a bodily response, which causes them to behave in a certain way. In other words, in this view, emotions happen to people. However, with the advent of further advances in neuroscience, biology and anthropology, this common-sense view of emotions has been questioned. One of the most vocal researchers in this regard is Professor Lisa Feldman Barrett (2006) who focuses on the study of emotion. Other researchers have acknowledged a similar concern about this approach to viewing emotions (see also Russell, 1980; Scherer et al., 2001; Matsumoto and Hwang, 2011).

Barrett's (2006; 2017) research has shown that emotions are constructed. She suggests that "people experience an emotion when they conceptualise an instance of affective feeling," which means that "the experience of emotion is an act of categorisation, guided by embodied knowledge about emotion" (2006, p. 20). As Barrett notes, "Emotions are meaning. They explain your interoceptive changes and corresponding affective feelings, in relation to the situation" (p. 126). Emotions, then, according to Barrett (2017), occur through what she describes as interoception, which is our sense of our physiological conditions in our body. This sends a status update to our brains, after which we classify these physiological conditions into one of four rudimentary signals: pleasantness, unpleasantness, arousal and calmness (see Figure 1 below). These are collectively seen as affective feelings.

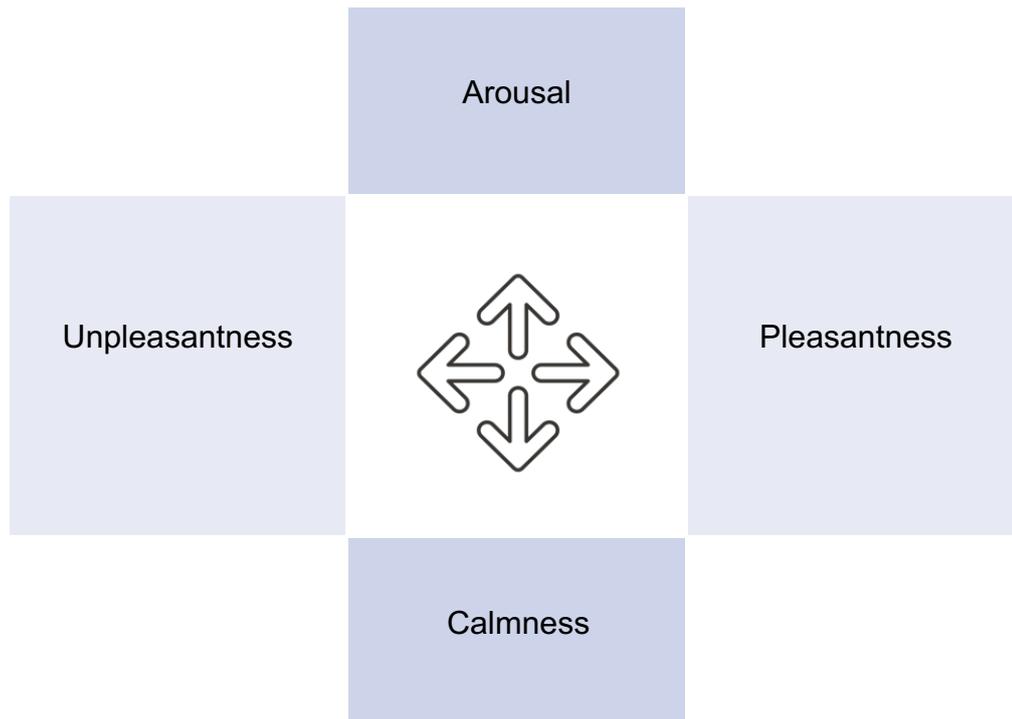


Figure 1: The broad range of affective feelings

In this view (Russel 2003; Barrett, 2017), emotions are formed through our brain's attempt to make sense of these incoming raw data (Russel 2003; Barrett, 2017). The brain achieves this by taking the data and filtering them through past experiences, through learned concepts and social reality. Here a learned concept infers the embodied knowledge we have from cultural norms, including emotion concepts. Barrett (2017) explains emotion concepts as follows:

Your familiar emotion concepts are built-in only because you grew up in a particular social context where those emotion concepts are meaningful and useful, and your brain applies them outside your awareness to construct your experiences. Heart rate changes are inevitable; their emotional meaning is not. Other cultures can and do make other kinds of meaning from the same sensory input (p. 33).

Social reality is the collective agreement and language that make the perception of emotions possible among people who share the same culture. In other words, emotions result from sensory input from the body or surroundings and the context

in which this happens. In turn, emotions are created through this sensory input, which are set forth and build upon memories accumulated from prior experiences.

Matsumoto and Hwang (2011) similarly argue that we create meanings about our affective feelings via “concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs” and that emotions are therefore “constructions that occur only because of memory, language, self-other knowledge, and abstract thinking” (p. 105). Such meanings or interpretations of affective feelings are influenced not only by biology, but culturally, socially and cognitively as we seek to explain, justify and rationalise them. They are also re-negotiated in their retelling, depending on audience and context.

In line with Barrett (2006), Scherer et al. (2001) and Desmet (2002) advocate an appraisal process whereby an emotion is elicited by a subjective evaluation of a significant event or situation in the environment that is seen as potentially beneficial or harmful. It is the interpretation of an event, *rather than the event itself*, which causes the emotion; therefore, an emotion is a result of a cognitive process, be that automatic, unconscious, controlled or deliberate (Scherer et al., 2001). Appraisals thus serve as an evaluative process to diagnose whether a situation confronting an individual has adaptational relevance (i.e., will this change cause a better fit in one’s environment or not). This allows the individual to identify the nature of that relevance and to produce an appropriate emotional response to it (Lazarus, 1991). Emotions, as conceived of in this way, can therefore be understood as follows:

In every waking moment, your brain uses past experience, organised as concepts, to guide your actions and give your sensations meaning. When the concepts involved are emotion concepts, your brain constructs instances of emotion (Barrett, 2017, p. 31).

In other words, this theory of constructed emotions overturns a long-held belief that emotions happen to you; in fact, they are made by you. If this is the case, a general argument can be made for emotional intelligence, at least in the sense that one has the ability to exercise more control over emotions than previously thought. This idea is elaborated in the next section, in which the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) is considered.

### **3.4.2 Emotional Intelligence**

One of the notable consequences of the constructed view of emotion described previously is that emotions are not simply objective reflections about events in the world, but are, rather, constructed. For this reason, it has been suggested that we have significantly more control over our emotional responses than previously thought (Barrett and Russell, 2015). Therefore, the concepts we have incurred over a lifetime, be they conscious or unconscious, can be potentially unlearned. This theory suggests that a person has the power to change their experience of emotions.<sup>1</sup>

It can be said that this view further implies the potential for EI, as it considers the possibility that a person can change their experience of emotions. In this respect, one can hardly object to the considerable attention that has been given to EI in organisational literature. Although Daniel Goleman (2006) has been credited with creating the impetus for the EI movement, the concept had been articulated and advocated by John Mayer and Peter Salovey (2000) in previously published articles. Pardey (2016) has made the case that EI is nothing really new and that it has been studied within social psychology for decades. While this may be so,

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<sup>1</sup> As will be seen later, in the section on mindfulness, this conception of changing or differently interpreting emotion is in line with how mindfulness practice suggests we see all our experience without judgement or expectation. It is suggested that we exercise curiosity in respect to what contributes to, or is contributing to, our feelings (i.e., affect) and, in turn, the associated emotions that arise (i.e., the meaning we assign to our affective feelings). In doing so, mindfulness practice argues we can learn to be with our feelings without attaching a narrative (for example, immediately assigning meaning to feelings, such as the emotion of anger). It is said that we gain wisdom in this process by interpreting our experience in more skilful ways (i.e., instead of simply being reactive to them in habitual ways).

it is hard to dismiss Daniel Goleman's (2006) role in bringing the formal study of EI into mainstream consciousness.

From a leadership perspective, EI is centred on a leader's ability to effectively identify, assess and manage their emotions and those of the people whom they lead. In their framework Goleman et al. (2003) suggest four EI competencies, namely self-awareness, self-management (also known as 'self-leadership' in leadership literature), social awareness and relationship management. The focus on emotions in respect to leaders is important, as they emerge in many learning experiences, for example in how to deal with disagreements at work. As was shown in Section 3.3, emotions can also hamper the learning process when obstructed by previous emotional 'baggage', for example traumatic emotional events that may have occurred in childhood and that are now triggered by similar interpersonal situations in the workplace (Beard et al., 2006). This is in line with Barrett's (2006; 2017) argument that we utilise memory as an evaluative process to decide how we will respond emotionally to a specific affective experience now. In other words, how we previously responded emotionally to similar experiences in our life will inform how we emotionally respond to a current situation.

According to Goleman et al. (2003) EI is not an innate talent but, rather, a collection of learned abilities. For example, in the psychodynamic approach to learning it was noted that the behaviour of a leader is primarily formed in the early stages of family life. Therefore, from this understanding, the leader's current emotional behaviour is being influenced by experiences in their childhood (or more generally from their life experience). As with the constructed view of emotions (Barrett, 2006), EI suggests that this emotional behaviour can be changed and re-learned (Slaski and Cartwright, 2003). If the constructed view of emotions has any merit, then these observations on EI may be correct.

Emotional intelligence, however, is not without its critics. Locke (2005) has argued that EI is not a form of intelligence as it is typically understood, that is, as the grasping of concepts, especially higher order or abstract concepts. In

addition, it has been argued that EI is often defined in such a broad and inclusive manner that it has become meaningless. Locke (2005) has argued that Goleman's (2003) EI model of leadership seems to neglect the intellectual aspects of effective leadership performance in organisations. However, Locke does agree with the importance of introspection (i.e., self-awareness), whereby a person is able to reflect on the content and processes of their mind. As he notes, this ability to self-monitor has important implications for self-esteem and mental health.

In addition, EI's focus is often on the positive, pro-social benefits of its use. This, however, neglects the reality that it can equally be utilised negatively – for example, in the case of people who may be seen to be high in EI, but then use that ability to advance their own agenda at the expense of others (Kilduff et al., 2010). As Kilduff et al. (2010) explain:

The strategic disguise of one's own emotions and the manipulation of others' emotions for strategic ends are behaviours evident not only on Shakespeare's stage but also in the offices and corridors where power and influence are traded (p. 147).

Furthermore, questions have been raised about the method by which EI is measured, namely via self-report scales. Barsade and Gibson (2007) have noted that emotional abilities are difficult to accurately report via a self-report scale and make the following comparison:

One might compare this approach to assessing mathematical skills by asking respondents, 'How good are you at solving algebraic equations?' rather than asking the person to actually solve an algebraic equation (p. 40).

Finally, EI is not effective in all work environments. For example, in professions that require an attention to emotions, such as those of salespeople, estate

agents, counsellors or customer service representatives, higher EI equalled higher job performance. Among scientists, mechanics, accountants and practitioners of similar professions, however, those with greater EI performed worse (Joseph and Newman, 2010).

With this noted, Barrett (2017) has argued that people often conceive of EI as one's ability to detect the correct emotions in others. However, starting from a constructed view of emotions, she suggests that this does not correctly describe EI. Instead, as she notes, EI can be thought of as being "about getting your brain to construct the most useful instance of the most useful emotion concept in a given situation. (And also when not to construct emotions but instances of some other concept.)" (p. 179).

With EI in mind, the existing literature suggests that leaders should be aware of, and regulate, their emotional states (Grandey, 2000). This perspective is often referred to as emotional labour, a concept that was first introduced by Hochschild (2012) in her book 'The Managed Heart', which was first published in 1983. Her work may be considered among the earliest research into how emotions affect organisational performance (Ashkanasy et al., 2002) and it is further discussed in the next section.

### ***3.4.3 Emotional Labour in Leadership***

Emotional labour can be considered a form of emotional regulation that seeks to create publicly visible emotional states through bodily and facial displays in the workplace (Mednick and Hochschild, 1985). Hochschild defines emotional labour as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (2012, p. 7).

However, she cautions that emotional labour in the workplace can be seen as emotions being *sold* for a wage and she compares it to what she terms "emotional work" or "emotional management", which implies similar emotional regulation

carried out in private, for example with our family and friends. In making this point, Hochschild (2012) offers the example of flight attendants, who are judged not only on their physical performance on the job, but also on their emotional actions, for example the ease of their smile. She argues that a flight attendant's smiles are part of their work (i.e., emotional labour).

As such, there is of course, a dark side to emotional labour that needs to be considered. What Hochschild denotes may be considered the commodification of human feelings as customer service (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990). Considered thus, the emotional expressions are displayed only to further a corporate agenda and can therefore be seen as disingenuous, rather than being a result of authentic behaviour (Bolton and Boyd, 2003; Burch et al., 2013). Further, there may be a conscious manipulation of organisational members through the use of emotional labour to get things done. This could include exploitation, alienation and dissonance, as well as the inauthentic display of emotions in order to motivate people to achieve a certain outcome (Ward and McMurray, 2015).

Several researchers have taken exception to Hochschild's insistence on focusing almost exclusively on the negative consequences of emotional labour (see: Rafaeli and Sutton 1987, Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, Morris and Feldman 1996, Bolton and Boyd 2003). As Sakiyama (2011) suggests, people may experience emotional labour positively. In respect to leadership, positive experiences through emotional labour have been termed *leading with emotional labour* (Humphrey et al., 2008). Sakiyama (2011) highlights two important and positive aspects of emotional labour: people may build important relationships as a reward for emotional labour on the one hand, while being skilled in emotional labour can allow one to deal with difficult interpersonal relationships at work on the other. Not surprisingly, then, individuals who seek to be good leaders are said to learn to perform emotional labour and apply it in order to achieve specific outcomes, such as improving team members' job satisfaction and commitment (Burch et al., 2013). Burch et al. suggest that team members increasingly expect

leaders to be empathetic and authentic and argue that emotional labour may be one way to achieve this.

Gooty et al. (2010) surveyed 65 empirical studies that focused on emotions and leadership at the individual and group level and found the following three common perspectives:

1. The emotions of a leader affect both team members and the work group via contagion processes, which, in turn, affect both follower and work group outcomes.
2. A leader's behaviours elicit a team member's emotional reactions, which, in turn, impact team member outcomes.
3. A leader's display of emotions affects a team member's rating of their (i.e., the leader's) excellence.

A cautionary note is required here, however. Much of the above suggests the positive framing of emotions and the avoidance of what are considered negative emotions. However, as Riggio and Reichard (2008) point out, at times emotions that are often seen as negative, such as frustration at and disapproval of a colleague's performance, are necessary to achieve positive outcomes. As such, Riggio and Reichard suggest a distinction needs to be made between positive and negative emotions as distinct from productive and unproductive ones. For example, being happy can be a positive emotion and yet unproductive when it is necessary to get things done. Fear can be seen as a negative emotion and yet may be very productive at times in driving our behaviour.

Regulating emotions is not always easy and the difficulty is increased by both the pressure on, and the tough decision-making required of, leaders (Day et al., 2001). This can be understood as social stress, which stems from a leader's relationships with others and from the social environment in organisations in general (Schneiderman et al., 2005). There is therefore a need to explore the general relationship between emotions and leadership, as posited in the

literature, and how this might inform leadership development. This is covered in the next section.

#### ***3.4.4 The Role of Emotions in Leading***

In respect to emotions and leading, researchers have found that leaders have a significant influence over the emotional states of their team members via their own display of moods and emotions (George and Bettenhausen, 1990; George, 1995; Cherulnik et al., 2001). To talk of the embodied subjective experience of a person recognises that emotion is both biological and contextually driven (i.e., it has both social and cultural dimensions). Therefore, how a leader then responds to these affective feelings is largely dependent on the context in which it arises and the internal narrative a person ascribes to it (i.e., how the person interprets these affective feelings with the information that is available to them at that time) (Matsumoto and Hwang, 2011).

Given this, it has been shown that a leader's positive emotional states are strongly correlated to employee work performance (George, 1995; Sy et al., 2005) and how they are rated by team members (Newcombe and Ashkanasy, 2002; Bono and Ilies, 2006). In addition, it has been suggested by several researchers (see: Lewis, 2000; Gaddis, 2006; Atwater and Carmeli, 2009) that team members are energised by a leader who creates a positive emotional environment through their enthusiasm, energy and excitement. The opposite is also found: leaders who display constant negative emotions are seen as being less effective in their roles.

When the spotlight is turned onto the role of emotions and learning, it is unsurprising that research has shown emotions are indeed crucial in the learning process (Hinton et al., 2008; Trigwell et al., 2012). It has equally been suggested that instances of negative emotions, such as fear and stress, can disrupt learning (McEwen and Sapolsky, 1995). Conversely, instances of positive emotions have been shown to drive learning (Hinton et al., 2008).

Therefore, when considering emotions, learning and leadership, it could be argued that if a leader is always in a negative emotional state in their work environment, it may hinder their ability to learn when necessary. As Fischer and Bidell (2006) have argued, cognition uses affective feelings to direct action. Learning to regulate one's emotions necessitates a leader's awareness of how various forces in organisational life, such as social dynamics, shape both their own emotional responses and those of their team members and how, in turn, these affect the learning process. For example, emotions emerge in many learning experiences at work, such as learning productive ways of dealing with emotionally charged disagreements. However, emotions themselves can, equally, hamper the learning process when a leader is obstructed by previous emotional 'baggage'. An example of such 'baggage', as noted earlier, could be previous traumatic emotional events encountered by a leader in childhood (i.e., the psychodynamic perspective), which may then be triggered by a similar interpersonal situation in the workplace (Beard and Wilson, 2006).

This acknowledgement of how past experiences of emotions may impact their reactions, as well as the recognition of emotional responses in similar situations, may allow for a leader to learn to increase their overall effectiveness in an organisational environment. Rajah et al. (2011) suggest that leaders should learn how to "regulate emotions beyond what they superficially display" (p. 1115). A leader's awareness of their own emotional states, and the ways in which they are triggered, may allow for a more accurate construction of meaning and decision making in teamwork dynamics (Choo, 1996).

A key aspect to learning and emotions for leaders may be what researchers (Tugade et al., 2004, Barrett, 2017), refer to as 'emotional granularity'. It is argued that some people have low emotional granularity, whilst others have higher levels of it. People with high levels of emotional granularity are more accurate in describing their affective state along a spectrum between pleasant, unpleasant, arousal and calmness. Conversely, people with low emotional granularity tend to report their emotions in more global, fixed terms (i.e., as either

pleasure/displeasure). This is often seen in young children who have not had the opportunity to develop adult-like emotion concepts and use terms such as 'sad' and 'mad' interchangeably to mean a feeling of unpleasantness (Barrett, 2017). Among adults, it has been shown that people with low levels of emotional granularity find coping with emotional experiences more difficult, as they are less able to accurately label their emotions and deal with them accordingly (Tugade et al., 2004).

While it has been suggested that a correlation exists between emotions and learning and that the role of emotions has a significant impact in the workplace and on leadership specifically, there is arguably space for further investigation. One promising field of learning enquiry that focuses on the embodiment of the *whole* person actively engaged in the world is that of somatic learning (also known as 'embodied knowing'). In the following section, this approach is dealt with in greater detail.

### **3.5 Somatic Approach to Learning and Leadership**

Somatic learning is an approach to understanding human beings as *integrated* systems of mind and body (Van der Kolk, 2015). In this approach, the mind and body are seen as one, dispelling the Cartesian myth of mind and body existing in separate domains. According to Damasio (1994), the mind is embodied in the full sense of the term, not just "embrained" (p. 118). Shusterman (2008) also argues that the living body is the instrument of all our actions and perceptions in the world. Candace Pert (1997), a neuroscientist and pharmacologist, notes that people's immune systems have both memory and a capacity to learn, much as the central nervous system does. The implication of this is that learning is not only located in the brain but is distributed *throughout* the body (i.e., somatic intelligence). For this reason, Pert (1997) is among many suggesting that the Cartesian paradigm of separating mental processes from the body is invalid.

Advances in neuroscience also suggest that a large percentage of the information we take in comes through the body (Siegel, 2012). This information has an active influence over our thoughts and emotions, which in turn affects our behaviour. As this perspective suggests, leaders who only attend to what is cognitively known invariably miss a valuable resource (i.e., their embodiment) that might make their leadership more effective (Brendel and Bennett, 2016). This information, taken in unconsciously by the body, is made up of hundreds of recurring sensory-motor patterns, also described as 'image schemas', which provide shape, importance and connection to experiences (Johnson, 2007). Crucially, these image schemas are first formed from our bodily interactions with our environment, our experience of language use, and our historical context (our lived experiences). From a somatic perspective, then, the body is more than just a vehicle that carries a person from one place to the next. Rather, it is a representation of the entire individual and a material reality from which a person's experiences are drawn (Overton et al., 2012).

Somatic learning posits that our ability to access information from our body through mind-body practices facilitates learning and transformation (Brendel and Bennett, 2016). These learning practices are often first explored in physical desires, posture, movement patterns and gestures (Brendel and Bennett, 2016). From this angle, embodied knowing integrates perception, thinking, feelings and desires expressed through a leader's active engagement and agency in moments of leading (Sodhi and Cohen, 2011; Overton et al., 2012). It has been suggested that leaders can, by focusing on learning somatically, bring these aspects of self into conscious awareness. For this reason, the way leaders lead may be directly related to their (lack of) awareness of what is happening within their own bodies and how they, in turn, interpret it.

For example, understanding emotions from a somatic perspective echoes the sentiments of how emotions come into being, as described by Barrett (2017). Here, one categorises affective states as specific emotions, based on the subsequent cognitive interpretation thereof (Thera, 1972; Johnstone et al., 2001;

de Quincey, 2005). For example, two leaders may be asked to address a group of team members. Both may feel the somatic sensations of butterflies in their stomach, clammy hands and a dry mouth, which are often associated with higher levels of stress (Palmer and Dryden, 1995). These physiological changes are also indicative of the fight/flight/freeze response, which occurs in response to a perceived threat (Cannon, 1967; Brodal, 2010; Goldstein and Kopin, 2007). However, one leader might interpret the feeling in the stomach – the somatic sensation – as a sign of fear (i.e., the fight/flight/freeze response), while the other might interpret the exact same sensation as an indication that they are excited to be speaking to this group. Crucially, the somatic sensations and affective feelings are the same for both, but how each leader *interprets* them differs.

From a somatic learning perspective, then, the objective would be to teach leaders how to interpret affective feelings in more productive or accepting terms. This ability might be enhanced through somatic training that acknowledges an unhelpful emotional response, but then teaches leaders how to relate to their feelings and sensations differently by interpretative reframing (Shusterman, 2008). Such a somatic approach to learning endeavours to change the meaning that emerges from that person's sensory-motor experience when faced with what they would normally consider a frightening event.

In respect to leadership, Shusterman (2008) suggests that somatic learning therefore offers a “clearer awareness of one's somatic reactions [so that] one can also improve one's behaviour toward others in much wider social and political contexts” (p. 25). The idea that awareness of somatic reactions is associated with leadership is not new. Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher who likely lived in the sixth century BCE, notes that leadership does not lie in power and rank but in the internal processes of self-realisation and harmony (Laozi et al., 1998). All leaders (indeed, all of us) are guided by our embodiment but do not necessarily focus on that embodiment consciously. Harmonious states of being thereby involve conscious awareness of our embodiment and, in turn, using that awareness to guide our actions (Pearson and Wilson, 2009).

Somatic learning seeks to teach leaders how to use their embodied knowledge to inform their awareness of appropriate leadership thoughts and actions. This can be achieved through scanning the body and having a critical awareness of preconceived embodied reactions to situations that arise at work (Shusterman, 2008). Somatic self-awareness suggests that leaders must recognise that their embodiment is *fundamental* to leadership success and that this can be trained for, as well as enhanced, through practice (Strozzi-Heckler, 2007). Similarly, Hamel (2011) suggests that leadership development requires the engagement of the body through motor-learning skills, rather than just relying on conscious memory. This method is aimed at:

shaping one's state of mind through somatic methods, such as sensing the body in movement or the movement within stillness (for example, breathing). Both draw students' attention to the rich, interdependent nature of actions, thought, and sensing, and to the impermanence and fluidity of life (Goldman Schuyler, 2013, p. 253).

Shusterman (2008) argues that a heightened sense of somatic self-awareness need not disrupt engagement with the outside world but, rather, improves our perceptions of that world. Lord and Shondrick (2011) observe that embodied "views of knowledge have the distinct advantage of bringing perceptual, motor, and introspective processes to bear on our understanding of leadership" (p. 217). This suggests that using somatic learning (or embodied knowledge) to recognise how leaders experience their role in the world should afford them greater clarity about their mind-body and their surroundings, including their team members. As Madzia and Jung (2016) have noted, learning is not simply about adding new content to a pre-structured mind but, rather, learning itself rewires the brain by making new neural connections. They argue that the connections arising out of learning act as scaffolding for "skilful bodily know-how of organisms [i.e., the leader] engaging with their environments" (Madzia and Jung, 2016, p. 2).

### 3.6 Summary of Approaches to Learning and Leadership

To bring the preceding sections together, these key learning theories I have reviewed focus on experience, psychodynamics, self-leadership, emotions and somatic principles as they relate to the process of learning to lead.

Experiential Learning Theory suggests that experience is a sense-making process, arising out of an active engagement “between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (Beard and Wilson, 2006, p. 2). Further, as the literature on the relationship between learning and leadership has suggested, a critical aspect of becoming an excellent leader is the emergence of knowledge by means of grasping and transforming experience (Kolb, 2014). Central to this position is the sense-making process arising from the active engagement “between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment” (Beard et al., 2006, p. 2).

Therefore, the experience on which a leader draws to respond to situations within their leadership roles seems to be, at least in part, informed by their life experiences. For this reason, the current behaviour of a leader may have been influenced to some degree by early experience in childhood. From a psychodynamic perspective then, leaders draw on their early life experiences to respond to varied situations as they lead. By acknowledging this, leaders come to understand that their current behaviour is likely influenced by their early life to some degree. Being aware of this connection may allow leaders to learn to apply more productive strategies in moments of leading, especially in instances where they feel their past hinders their ability to lead.

From an emotional perspective, leaders must be able to identify, assess and manage their emotional experience and that of those they lead in order to achieve success. Learning to regulate emotions may be largely grounded in a leader’s self-awareness of their embodied experience. It can allow a leader to self-influence a change to a more appropriate emotional response. Somatic learning

posits a more intimate relationship with our bodies. As a learning approach for leaders, it gives rise to greater awareness of bodily responses, allowing leaders to reinterpret their embodiment in a more conscious approach. In doing so, leaders may interpretively reframe their unhelpful embodiment to one that is more productive in the present situation. As the previous sections also highlight, an enhanced sense of self-awareness is central to learning and leading alike. One way in which a leader may enhance their self-awareness is through a greater understanding of self-leadership.

Secondly, the need for a leader to be both aware of and able to regulate their emotions is central to their success. This requires the identification, assessment and management of their emotions, as well as those of the team members they lead. The ability to regulate both emotions and embodied experiences may be largely grounded in a leader's somatic self-awareness. As such, a leader's ability to learn and apply new skills may be greatly enhanced, or held back, by the sense-making between their inner world and the outer world of the environment (Beard et al., 2006). Furthermore, as was noted in Section 3.2, experiences alone do not guarantee that learning will take place: a leader may require self-leadership, which may be exercised by intentionally applying strategies to achieve and sustain behavioural change. As Oakeshott (1967) notes: "Learning is the comprehensive activity in which we come to know ourselves and the world around us. It is a paradoxical activity: it is doing and submitting at the same time. And its achievements range from merely being aware, to what may be called understanding and being able to explain" (p. 156).

In the next chapter, the focus shifts to mindfulness. Here the concept of mindfulness is explored, along with its potential as a learning tool to enhance leadership excellence.

## 4 Mindfulness, Organisations and Leadership

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on mindfulness by defining the concept and discussing how it is typically practised. This chapter further highlights mindfulness as a potential training and teaching tool and its implications for enhancing successful leadership within organisations.

Mindfulness has become somewhat of a buzzword in the West in recent years (Grossman, 2014). Nowhere is this more evident than in the rising academic interest in the psychophysiological benefits of its application and practice (Coffey et al., 2010; Chiesa, 2012; Hart et al., 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2014). Several disciplines have been prominent in research on mindfulness, including education (e.g., Burke, 2010; Napoli et al., 2005); medicine (e.g., Epstein, 1999; Santorelli, 1999); neuroscience (e.g., Davidson et al., 2003; Creswell et al., 2007); counselling psychology (e.g., Bishop et al., 2004; Shapiro et al., 2008); and social and personality psychology (e.g., Giluk, 2009; Niemiec et al., 2010). Recently, mindfulness has also entered the organisational life of, for example, Google, Intel, General Mills, Goldman Sachs and others, with the objective of lowering stress and improving employee wellbeing and/or performance (Davidson et al., 2003; Reb and Atkins, 2015).

### 4.2 Defining Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the English translation of the Pali word *sati*. The literal translation of *sati* is 'memory' (Bodhi, 2012). Pali is a Prakrit language native to the Indian subcontinent and the language in which the teachings of the historical Buddha were originally recorded. Much of mindfulness as we know it today owes its origins and rich history to these teachings. Nonetheless, it has been suggested that the concept of mindfulness is equally rooted in the Jewish, Islamic and Christian religious traditions (Trousselard et al., 2014). The translation of *sati* as 'mindfulness' was first published in Davids and Stede's 1921 Pali-English dictionary and it has since become the main English word used to describe the

concept (Siegel et al., 2009). This section will define mindfulness, both in secular and non-secular contexts, with further discussion of its relation to embodied practice.

Given its roots in the Pali concept of *sati*, definitions of mindfulness tend to draw to varying degrees on the Buddhist tradition. Nyanaponika Thera (1972), a German-born Sri-Lanka-ordained Theravada monk,<sup>2</sup> defines mindfulness as “the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception” (p. 5). However, over the years, scholars have used a number of different definitions of mindfulness, some more secular than others. For the past 30 years, the scholarly literature on mindfulness has largely been dominated by two leading schools of thought: those associated with Langer and Kabat-Zinn (Hart et al., 2013). Langer’s (2016) concept of mindfulness is often suggested to be a more Western approach (Weick and Putnam, 2006), whilst Kabat-Zinn (1994; 2006) and colleagues draw more heavily on an Eastern philosophical perspective (Brown et al., 2007).

It could be argued that the prominence of secular mindfulness in psychology and the health sciences stems largely from the introduction of Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme to clinical settings in the 1970s (Chiesa, 2012). Kabat-Zinn’s widely cited definition of mindfulness, whilst inspired by Buddhist thought, is generally secular in nature. It describes mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, p. 145). Paying attention to experience moment to moment, as Dane (2011) points out, centres on both internal and external events in our perceptual field. In other words, it encompasses all the factors of experience of which a person is conscious at a given time (Brown et al., 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> *Theravada*, in Pali, means ‘school of the elder monks’. It is a branch of Buddhism that adheres to the Buddha’s original teaching, which is preserved in Pali.

On the other hand, Langer (2000) defines mindfulness as “a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context,” compared to a state of mindlessness where we “act according to the sense our behaviour made in the past, rather than the present...we are stuck in a single, rigid perspective and we are oblivious to alternative ways of knowing” (p. 220). Specifically, to be *mindless* is to ruminate on the past or be focused on the future. When this happens, one is considered to no longer be mindful (Brown and Ryan, 2003). As such, there are key differences between Kabat-Zinn’s and Langer’s conceptualisations of mindfulness:

Langer	Kabat-Zinn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a flexible state of mind</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• awareness that emerges</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively engaged in the present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• through paying attention on purpose in the present moment</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• noticing new things, being sensitive to context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-judgementally open to the unfolding of experience moment by moment</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Kabat-Zinn’s and Langer’s conceptualisations of mindfulness

In Figure 2 above, Langer’s notion of a ‘flexible state of mind’ is similar to that of Kabat-Zinn’s articulation of ‘awareness’. Both Langer and Kabat-Zinn infer the importance of being aware in the present moment within the fullness of experience. The main difference between the two definitions is that Kabat-Zinn’s position on mindfulness requires a non-judgemental stance to one’s experience. It is this non-judgemental aspect of Kabat-Zinn’s articulation of mindfulness that could be said to be inspired by Buddhist Psychology (Sun, 2014).

However, the Langer and Kabat-Zinn schools agree that the self-regulation of attention in the present moment is central to the application of mindfulness (Hart et al., 2013). Purposeful attention informs subjective experience (James, 1950)

and has the potential to transform how a person relates to their embodied experience (Feltman et al., 2009; Hunter and Chaskalson, 2013). The application of mindfulness therefore allows a person to systematically train their attention, enabling them to detect and recognise discrepancies between their current state of embodied experience and thereby prompting them to engage in alternative behaviour through self-regulation (Feltman et al., 2009). Mindfulness has also been regarded as impacting an individual's poise (i.e., posture, movements and gestures) (Brown et al., 2007).

While the potential benefits of mindfulness have been well documented, the realisation of the importance of being fully present is not new in Western thought. In his monumental work in psychology, *Principles of Psychology*, originally published in 1890, William James recognises the importance of being present when he writes:

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* (Master of himself) if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence (quintessential). But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about (James, 1984, p. 424).

While, as suggested earlier, scholars use slightly different definitions of mindfulness, all of them capture this same idea of attention consciously trained on the present moment. In a general sense, Glomb et al.'s (2011) definition best encapsulates the main criteria of mindfulness on which most scholars currently agree: that it can be considered a "state of consciousness characterised by receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experiences, without evaluation, judgement, and cognitive filters" (p. 119).

Daphne et al.'s (2012) comprehensive review of evidence-based research on mindfulness, published in a report called 'What Are The Benefits Of Mindfulness?', concludes that there is sufficient evidence to show that

mindfulness is effective in regulating our emotions, increases our flexibility to respond to challenges, and offers interpersonal benefits, such as enhanced satisfaction in relationships. Siegel (2007) determines that mindfulness actually enhances functions associated with the middle prefrontal lobe area of the brain. These key functions include self-insight, morality, intuition and fear modulation.

Research further suggests that people with high dispositional mindfulness, or those with a greater tendency to be mindful in everyday life (Brown and Ryan, 2003), are better able to regulate emotions (Lutz et al., 2008) and are more able to recognise their thoughts and emotions without reacting to them in maladaptive ways (Hayes et al., 2016). It would therefore appear that mindfulness allows a person to behave constructively, even though they may be having unpleasant thoughts or emotions. As a result, it endows them with “an adaptability and pliancy of mind with quickness of apt response in changing situations” (Nyanaponika, 1992, p. 90). It is thus evident that the existing research points to clear emotional and behavioural benefits to paying mindful attention to the present.

In the following section, some reflections on the embodied nature of mindfulness are offered. These reflections are important, as mindfulness in both practice and experience is oriented towards the whole person. In the end, it is the leader who has to bring forth their capabilities of leading in the moment. What follows are some ideas on how this might manifest and be achieved from a mindful perspective.

### **4.3 Reflections on the Embodied Nature of Mindfulness**

With the emphasis on “paying attention” (Kabat-Zinn, 2006, p. 145) and “a flexible state of mind” (Langer, 2000, p. 220), one could be forgiven for thinking that mindfulness is solely of the mind divorced from the body (i.e., solely a cognitive process, independent of sensory experience). Conversely, however, it has been noted that mindfulness is, at its core, a process of embodied reflection (Varela,

et al., 1991) that enhances attention to, and awareness of, what is taking place in the present moment (Brown and Ryan, 2003). In this sense, mindfulness emerges as a form of *a posteriori* knowledge, which derives from experience itself (Müller-Merbach, 2007).

The Buddha himself was a strong advocate of the body as an essential medium in experiencing mindfulness. The following two verses from the *Anguttara Nikaya* (Teachings of the Buddha), part of the Pali Canon which is said to represent the actual words of the historical Buddha, highlight this:

*Bhikkhus* [Monks], even as one who encompasses with his mind the great ocean includes thereby all the streams that run into the ocean, just so, whoever develops and cultivates mindfulness directed to the body includes all wholesome qualities that pertain to true knowledge.

*Bhikkhus* [Monks], when one thing is developed and cultivated, the body becomes tranquil, the mind becomes tranquil, thought and examination subside, and all wholesome qualities that pertain to true knowledge reach fulfilment by development. What is that one thing? Mindfulness directed to the body. When this one thing is developed and cultivated, the body becomes tranquil...and all wholesome qualities that pertain to true knowledge reach fulfilment by development (Bodhi, 2012, pp. 129-130).

Recent scholarship has also linked mindfulness to the body. As Kerr et al. (2013) note, the practice of mindfulness “lays out a predicted sensory-cognitive sequence of practice-related gains, whereby localised attention to body sensations enables subsequent gains in emotional and cognitive regulation by enhancing sensory information processing in the brain” (p. 12). As suggested above, Varela et al. (1991) take the stance that mindfulness is a process of “embodied reflection” (p. 28), allowing an awareness that exists prior to “habitual thought patterns and preconceptions” (p. 27), but at the same time suggesting

that mindfulness allows us to witness our mind and what it is doing while it does it. In that sense, mindfulness honours insights gained through somatic self-awareness, by witnessing one's embodied experience and being aware of one's reaction to the outer world. This creates an opportunity to engage in corrective, mindful, embodied learning (Shusterman, 2008; 2012). As Salovaara and Ropo (2013) have suggested:

Embodied learning comes with the possibility to create something that one remembers and through which a new image that is more preferred than the previous one emerges. The participants know that through felt experience (p. 208).

Crucially, mindfulness is not about avoiding the experiences one is currently undergoing; rather, it aims to aid individuals to become more aware of these experiences as they occur. This can be achieved through a number of different approaches to practising mindfulness, the most prevalent of which is reviewed in the next section.

#### **4.4 Mindfulness in Current Practice**

The most common approaches to teaching secular mindfulness employ various forms of meditative modalities of a therapeutic nature, including Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement (Carson et al., 2004), Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (Kristeller and Wolever, 2010), Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting (Vieten and Astin, 2008) and Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention for Alcohol and Substance Abuse (Witkiewitz et al., 2005). Researchers have been able to evaluate three well-established programmes, namely the MBSR programme (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1991; Knight et al., 2015; Hazlett-Stevens and Oren, 2017), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (e.g., Morgan, 2003; Ma and Teasdale, 2004; Davidson, 2016), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (e.g., Hayes et al., 2016; Harris, 2009; Rector, 2013). Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy has focused on helping patients

suffering from depression (Kuyken et al., 2012). Acceptant and Commitment Therapy, with the help of Harris' (2009) work, has moved from a purely therapeutic discipline into sport and the psychological self-help space. MBSR, however, is the programme most widely adopted in organisational settings (Chaskalson, 2011). With this in mind, the MBSR programme is discussed in more detail below.

In an MBSR programme, the focus is on yoga, the body scan, seated meditation and informal mindfulness, with specific attention directed at the cultivation of mindfulness overall (Bishop, 2002). The body scan is a meditative technique in which a person lies stretched out on the floor, while being mindfully aware of the entire body, focusing on bodily sensations and relieving tension wherever it is found. Seated meditation, sometimes referred to as *zazen*, is undertaken with the aim of calming the mind while obtaining insight into its nature as established in the Buddhist tradition. This tradition typically regards the mind as being not only the seat of the mental qualities of loving kindness and compassion, but also of anger, hatred, fear and suspicion. Collectively, the Buddhist interpretation of mind correlates with Damasio's (1994) findings, highlighted earlier, in which he suggested that the mind is embodied in the full sense of the term, not just 'embrained'.

The goal of mindful meditation practice, then, is to reduce what are seen as negative or destructive embodied experiences (i.e., thoughts, feelings, emotions etc.) and, rather, highlight the positive embodied attitudes that bring us joy (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho et al., 2011). This is a type of formal mindful meditation, which is the practice of sustaining attention on body, breath or sensations arising in each successive moment. Informal mindfulness, on the other hand, is the application of mindful attention in everyday life. Sauer-Zavala et al. (2012) studied the modalities of interventions used in MBSR and revealed that not all aspects of these interventions are equal. Specifically, the authors found that there is a greater improvement over time in psychological wellbeing through the practice of mindful yoga than there is through the body scan or *zazen*. They also found that

individuals with emotion regulation difficulties improved more through mindful yoga and sitting meditation than through the body scan.

As noted above, the bedrock for most classical approaches to cultivating mindfulness has been seated meditation practice (Conze and Buddhaghosa, 1956), which is designed to allow a person to become aware of where their attention is being held. While seated meditation is the starting point, there are several variations to this approach. For example, in practices such as transcendental meditation, a mantra is applied to enable practitioners to bring their attention back to the present and away from past/future thinking (Lehrer et al., 2007). As Olendzki (2009) observes:

The primary characteristic of meditation, and the term most often used to define it, is *ekaggatā*, which literally means one (ek-) pointed (-agga-) ness (*tā*).<sup>3</sup> Meditation is about focusing the mind to a single point, unifying it, and placing it upon a particular object (p. 38).

In other approaches to meditation, the breath is used as an anchor to tether a person to the present moment. Many mindfulness teachers, however, advocate moving one's practice beyond the *zafu* (meditation cushion) into all aspects of life, from washing the dishes to walking and eating (Shonin and Van Gordon, 2014).

A wide range of other mindfulness practices also exists. According to Didonna (2009), "traditional Buddhist teaching says there are 84,000 dharma doors. In essence, that means there are lots of ways to practice [mindfulness]" (p.477). Researchers have questioned whether these different variations should be analytically distinguished. Chiesa et al. (2011) state that "the currently applied mindfulness-based interventions show large differences in the way mindfulness is conceptualised and practiced. The decision to consider such practices as

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<sup>3</sup> These terms are all derived from Pali.

unitary or as distinct phenomena will probably influence the direction of future research” (p. 403). It is likely that mindfulness interventions will continue to be varied, given the different contexts in which mindfulness is practised and the emphasis on varied paths in Buddhist teaching. However, as Sauer-Zavala et al. (2012) note, above, different interventions may not be equally effective and so research needs to consider multiple forms of contemplative practice beyond classic forms like seated meditation practice. While there is an extensive body of work available on mindfulness-based practices, few scientific studies have examined movement-based embodied contemplative practices (Schmalzl et al., 2014). This may largely be due to the multifaceted nature of these practices, as each has specific sequences of movement, breath and modulation of attention (Wayne and Kaptchuk, 2008).<sup>4</sup>

Equally, Carmody et al. (2009) have examined how long mindfulness-based interventions need to last in order to generate significant results. The MBSR programme, for example, typically consists of eight to ten weekly group sessions, with one session being a full day retreat, which adds up to 32 class hours in total (Santorelli, 1999). In addition, participants are instructed to practise for 45 minutes a day at home. The considerable time and commitment required for MBSR programmes has led to a decline in participation (Carmody et al., 2009). It has also seen a shortened version of MBSR being created that lasts only six weeks, with an hour-long weekly group session and 20 minutes of daily home practice. Klatt et al. (2009) show significant pre-to-post improvements on the MAAS,<sup>5</sup> as well as a reduction in stress, following the shortened version of MBSR. Further, Keng et al. (2011), in their review of mindfulness-based interventions, find that a single brief mindfulness-induced session gives participants immediate positive effects on both emotion regulation and anxiety.

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<sup>4</sup> As will be seen later, my MIA workshop taught to leaders in this study could be considered a movement-based embodied contemplative practice.

<sup>5</sup> This is explained further in the Methodology Chapter, as MAAS was applied in this research project.

These results bode very well for organisations. A leader's ability to positively impact organisational effectiveness through the relatively simple practice of mindfulness has significant potential implications beyond the academic realm. In the following sections, the focus is narrowed to how mindfulness has been discussed and practised in organisations and, specifically, in leadership situations.

## **4.5 Mindfulness in Organisations**

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Deepak Sethi (2009), Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Organic Leadership, a leadership consulting firm, recognises the possible potential application of mindfulness to the work environment but notes that the challenge is to be mindful in the crucible of work and not just on the meditation cushion. In a similar vein, Tony Schwartz (2014), CEO and founder of The Energy Project, a company that focuses on developing sustainable work cultures, notes that what is needed is MIA, regardless of what a person can do with their eyes closed during formal meditation. Whilst these individuals are not academics, their experience as active leaders of organisations suggests that what matters most for leaders is the ability to be mindfully aware in everyday work.

Although research in this area has been slow to emerge, increasing attention is being paid to the role of mindfulness in organisations (Dane and Brummel, 2013). Several empirical studies have emerged over the past few years (e.g., Hülshager et al., 2013; Reb et al., 2014) and – as suggested above – companies such as Google (Tan, 2012), General Mills (Gelles, 2016) and Aetna (Wolever et al., 2012) now offer mindfulness-based programmes to their employees. Even the U.S. military has seen positive results with a mindfulness-based programme it developed, entitled the Mindfulness-Based Mental Fitness Programme. This programme was designed to help soldiers who were suffering from a broad range of psychological and physical health challenges due to prolonged exposure to stressful environments as a result of multiple deployments in war-torn areas (Jha et al., 2010).

Research findings suggest that mindfulness can improve organisational performance (Weick, 2006), especially in high performance work environments (Dane, 2011) where individuals are required to make a series of interdependent decisions in real time (Gonzalez, 2005). Employees who demonstrate high trait mindfulness or high dispositional mindfulness (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Glomb et al., 2011) experience less emotional exhaustion (Reb et al., 2016) and exhibit enhanced task performance (Dane, 2011). In addition, higher levels of wellbeing and social relationships have been observed amongst mindful employees (Glomb et al., 2011; Reb, 2015). One objection to these findings is that they focus mostly on how employee mindfulness relates to emotional exhaustion and job performance and not on how a person's mindfulness affects other people in the workplace (Reb et al., 2014).

Further, while the positive benefits of mindfulness are supported in the literature, criticism of its application in organisational settings is beginning to emerge. For example, Purser and Loy (2013), writing in a *Huffington Post* article entitled 'Beyond McMindfulness', argue that "rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organisations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will, and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots." Carrette and King (2005) suggest that mindfulness training in the workplace may be used by organisations as a way to pacify disgruntled employees and enforce the status quo. Ericson et al. (2014) further note that mindfulness encourages employees to act in line with their values and interests, which may then create tension between employees and what is seen by senior management as being in the best interest of the organisation.

Another critique of mindfulness as it is applied in organisations lies in whether or not practising it in a secular framework misses too much of its broader context and meaning. In Buddhism, mindfulness practice and its application are tools that aid a practitioner in the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion (Gunaratana, 2011). In addition, for Buddhists, mindfulness facilitates the

moment-by-moment observation of the Three Marks of Existence, namely, impermanence, suffering and no-self (Grabovac et al., 2011). Impermanence (in Pali, *annica*) suggests that all things are in a state of flux; mental and physical objects exist and events take place but they always dissolve. The human body, for example, displays impermanence in its ageing process: nothing lasts, everything decays. Suffering (in Pali, *dukkha*), as Harvey (2015) notes, is the mental and physical suffering of birth, living and dying. Much of our awareness of this suffering is observed in clinging to worldly desires. The Pali term *anatta*, or no-self, implies that there is no unchanging self or soul and, as with impermanence, the self is always changing. In other words, to hold onto a self is to invite suffering or *dukkha* (Harvey, 2004).

In Buddhist philosophy, the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, laid out a way to enlightenment (Nirvana) through what is referred to as the Eightfold Path (Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration). It has been suggested that these eight practices, taken together, may lead a person to living a noble life. Within the eightfold path, there are practices that can be seen as requiring moral judgement. Right Speech, for example, implies people should not tell lies or talk in a way that invokes hatred. Right Action implies action that is peaceful in conduct, whilst Right Livelihood implies refraining from making a living through means that would harm others, whether physically, emotionally or mentally (Bodhi, 1994). Mindfulness is thus only one aspect of this path, which is intended to aid a person in becoming more aware of feelings, thoughts, other people, themselves and reality. Put differently, mindfulness is part of a wider philosophy of life and only one aspect of the Buddhist spiritual path.

However, much of the modern literature on mindfulness as it pertains to organisations tends to focus on stress management and productivity; this may be due to what is seen as being of value in Western cultures. Wallace and Hodel (2008) argue that one cannot fully understand mindfulness without contextualising its practice within the broader framework of Buddhist philosophy

itself. Indeed, in the Buddhist perspective, there is a distinction between Right Mindfulness (in Pali, *samma sati*) and Wrong Mindfulness (in Pali, *miccha sati*). This distinction is ethical in nature, and highlights the aim of mindful practice as wholesome intentions and positive mental qualities that not only lead to positive human flourishing, but wish positive outcomes for others as well. For example, a white-collar criminal might exhibit mindful behaviour, but Buddhist thinking would categorise this as Wrong Mindfulness.

As Kang and Whittingham (2010) point out, Buddhist mindfulness is therefore not an ethically neutral practice but requires an ethical prejudgement of what is considered wholesome/skilful (in Pali, *kusala*) and unwholesome/unskilful (in Pali, *akusala*). In Kang and Whittingham's (2010) view, "a degree of ethical judgement is necessary to the proper practice of mindfulness as understood in Buddhism" (p. 164). Although, as noted above, in Buddhist psychology mindfulness is part of the eightfold path, secular mindfulness does not typically include the other seven elements in its teaching and practice.

The question thus arises as to whether something is lost by removing the spiritual aspect of mindfulness. This question is, at least partly, answered by Wachholtz and Pargament (2005), whose workplace study compares the spiritual practice of mindfulness to secular mindfulness practice, using a relaxation group as a control. According to the researchers, the relaxation group were:

given the same instructions as the meditation groups regarding physically comfortable positions and isolation. Unlike the meditation groups, the Relaxation group was not given explicit instructions regarding how to mentally occupy themselves during that time. However, they were told not to sleep or to think about stressful things (Wachholtz and Pargament, 2005, p. 374).

The authors illustrate that those from the spiritually based mindfulness practice group showed a significantly lower stress response in a pain-stressor test and were able to tolerate pain for a significantly greater period of time than the others (Wachholtz and Pargament, 2005). It may therefore be that completely removing mindfulness from its spiritual context and employing it in the interest of organisations dilutes the effectiveness of mindfulness practice to some degree. In essence, then, more research is necessary in order to arrive at a valid answer to the question raised above.

Regardless, existing research has suggested that by being more mindfully aware, a person is less likely to ruminate on both internal and external experiences and events that are not helpful to the situation at hand (Chambers et al., 2007). In so doing, people are said to exhibit increased relationship satisfaction (Barnes et al., 2007; Wachs and Cordova, 2007), fewer depressive symptoms (Hoffman et al., 2010), fewer negative reactions and less reactivity per se to emotions (Ortner et al., 2007). Other evidence suggests improved cognitive flexibility (Cahn and Polich, 2013; Davidson et al., 2003) and better working memory, enabling practitioners to remain on task more easily (Jha et al., 2010). All these things are said to be absent when one is not mindfully aware. Indeed, as discussed in the next section, the literature on leadership has also begun to address the impact of mindfulness-based practices on effective leadership strategies.

## **4.6 Leading Mindfully**

Overall, as suggested above, much of the research currently available on mindfulness deals with individual and social interaction, focusing on outcomes such as psychological wellbeing, improved immune functioning and stronger intimate relationships (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Davidson et al., 2003; Barnes et al., 2007; Wachs and Cordova, 2007). Conversely, only a few empirical studies have been conducted around the application of mindfulness to leadership (e.g. Bryant and Wildi, 2008; Reb et al., 2014; Sinclair, 2016).

Having read the little literature that does exist, I propose a conceptual model of mindfulness that might affect four interrelated aspects of leadership learning and practice. In particular, this model comprises the leader's self-awareness; their ability to self-regulate emotions and reactions; how their gesture, body posture and attitude affect their leadership performance; and the way a leader relates to, and communicates with, team members.

Firstly, my reading of leadership, learning and practice throughout this thesis, proposes that in order for this relationship to be successful – be that through leadership theories, experiential learning, the psychodynamic approach, somatic learning, emotions and learning – requires first a level of self-awareness. This is also true for mindfulness (Gonzalez, 2012). The literature on mindfulness is clear, that one cannot be mindful without having insight into one's embodied experiences (Gonzalez, 2012). Crucially, being aware of one's embodiment from a mindful perspective is to do so without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 2006). Self-awareness here then implies a non-judgemental, accepting stance in respect to one's embodied experience.

As Schuyler (2014) considers both the efficacy of brief mindfulness training for leaders and what those leaders should focus on:

Thus, I suspect that leaders do not need the depth of mindfulness training that has been provided throughout history for those who seek to become wisdom teachers; they need only brief training in awareness and compassion, combined with ongoing practice in being present to themselves, others, and life while working as managers, politicians, or military leaders (p. 26).

Mindful awareness is implied to be key in achieving success as a leader. As Senge (2012) has suggested:

Until you can stop the habitual flow of your mind, you cannot see what's around you. If you're going to be in a position of authority, you'd better have a high level of awareness of what's going on. Otherwise, all you can do is project your inner dynamics on the outer world. You look at our world today, and we've got a lot of people in positions of authority who don't know anything except how to project their own world-view on the larger world, so we have lots of problems (pp. 326–327).

Secondly, as such it is from and through a non-judgemental stance that leaders can now begin to allow for the improvement of the instrument of all their action, their embodiment, in the world itself (Shusterman, 2008). It is therefore through self-awareness that a leader may be able to self-regulate their embodied experience. In other words, the ability to change from one embodied state to another cannot occur without first having awareness, which in turn leads to the ability to self-regulate. As such, self-awareness has no practical value to a leader if that awareness does not result in an embodied change that leads to an excellent leadership performance.

Thirdly, when one reflects on the embodied experience of a leader, one cannot do so without acknowledging how leaders show up within an organisational environment. Here, mindful self-awareness can allow a leader to be aware of how their gesture, body posture and attitude affects those they lead. As such this inner awareness of 'self' is not only the leader's own experience of their embodiment, but also how their outer actions are being received by the audience they are engaged with. As was noted in Section 1.2, the observable exterior aspect of a leader's performance is equally important (de Quincey, 2005).

Fourthly, this then leads to mindful communication. Leading seeks to establish direction and to align people while motivating and inspiring them towards an end goal (Jacobs and Jaques, 1990; Zaccaro, 2001; Northouse, 2018). This is not possible without effective communication. As such, the conceptual model I propose for encouraging mindful leadership leads to better communication

between leader and team members as a result of being fully present with those being led. This however may only be possible if a leader is self-aware, able to self-regulate accordingly, and behaves in a way that is congruent with that embodiment.

For the sake of clarity, each of these aspects of mindful leadership learning is discussed in turn in the following sub-sections.

#### ***4.6.1 Mindful Self-Awareness***

Typically, in mindfulness training, mindfulness of one's embodied state begins with self-awareness (Gonzalez, 2012). Whilst leaders are not always leading, when they are required to do so, they set in motion a performance that is intended to inspire or influence others to take action (Conger, 1991). Leaders are therefore required to apply the appropriate leadership approach in those moments. This is achieved through their own personal experience and/or through various leadership learning tools. The success of the approach may be largely mediated by how well they are able to read their own embodied experience in those moments. In other words, the degree to which they are mindfully self-aware of their embodied state could positively affect the outcome of their leadership performance (Weinstein et al., 2009).

The various approaches discussed in Sections 3.2-3.5 may use different terms, but all acknowledge that self-awareness is crucial to the success of any learning methodology. Mindfulness embraces all these approaches but is qualitatively different, both in its immediate response and application. For example, leaders who find themselves in a situation in which they experience emotions such as anger can choose an alternative response, such as compassion, because they are mindful of that emotion as it arises and use non-judgemental awareness to choose not to react angrily (Weick, 2007). Therefore, mindfulness offers people a way to detach from their habitual responses and recognise that the fact they are feeling a certain way does not compel them to act in that way (Chödrön,

2013). By being mindful of what arises, without judgement, a leader may, especially in difficult moments, be clearer about the experience they are having, and thus be enabled to decide to respond differently (Sinclair and Seydel, 2016).

Self-awareness also denotes the awareness of mental states (e.g., ruminating on past or future thoughts, often in the form of a wandering mind). Much of our time is spent unknowingly ruminating about the past or the future, which is particularly unhelpful when we need to take action (Reb et al., 2014). Research shows that a wandering mind decreases task performance at work (Smallwood and Schooler, 2006). Mindfulness has been shown to reduce rumination (Brown and Ryan, 2003), thereby increasing task-relevant performance. Chatzisarantis and Hagger (2007) also find that mindfulness helps in translating intentions into actions. Even within the *dharma*, the teachings of the Buddha, which advocate mind training arising out of mindful practice, it is referred to as a process of “ridding ourselves of negative mental states and fostering and developing constructive ones” (Rinchen, 2001, p. 7). This suggests that leaders may be able to achieve their goals more successfully by applying mindfulness.

#### **4.6.2 Mindful Self-Regulation**

In addition to improving self-awareness of mental and emotional states, mindfulness is viewed by some scholars as engendering higher emotional regulation among its practitioners (Brown and Ryan, 2003). This is the “process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). The emphasis is on *modulation* of emotions, rather than the elimination of emotional responses or simply adapting one’s behavioural response to the environment (Aldao, 2013).

In this respect, someone who is more mindful may be better able to recognise and understand other people’s emotions, while better understanding and regulating their own (Arch and Craske, 2006). This is achieved through an enhanced and expanded attentional awareness in the present moment, without

judgement of one's emotions. Through this mindful attention, individuals improve their ability to attend to specific aspects of a situation, without being hijacked by a narrow interpretation of that situation. For example, a mindful individual who is criticised at work may be better able to weigh all the potential possibilities, rather than only becoming defensive (Roemer et al., 2015). Rather than automatically reacting to an emotion without reflecting on it (Webb et al., 2012), mindfulness allows for the consideration of alternatives (i.e. emotional granularity) to take place (Tugade et al., 2004; Garland et al., 2011; Barrett, 2017).

Some mindfulness practices, such as participants being asked to focus on their breath as an anchor to the present moment, may help them to self-regulate responses by dealing with what are generally regarded as negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, anxiety, etc.) (Arch and Craske, 2006). Emotional regulation may be due in part to the nature of intentional focus on pranayamic breathing (i.e., slow, deep breathing) in many meditative practices. In any kind of highly stressful situation at work, a leader's sympathetic nervous system (SNS) will be engaged. This is the part of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) that aids us in getting ready to fight, flee or freeze (Cannon, 1967; Goldstein and Kopin, 2007; Brodal, 2010). Focusing on slow, deep breathing in stressful situations has been shown to engage the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The PNS, while being distinct from the SNS, is also a component of the ANS. The role of the PNS is to aid us in calming down and bringing the body back to homeostasis after a stressful event (Brodal, 2010; Jerath, 2016). Pranayamic breathing has been shown to decrease oxygen consumption, decrease heart rate and lower blood pressure, all of which are raised when the SNS is activated (Pramanik et al., 2009).

When the SNS has been engaged, typically in a highly stressful moment, it has been shown to shut down the top-down cognitive functions of the prefrontal cortex and thereby strengthen emotional and habitual responses (Yang and Raine, 2009; Arnsten et al., 2015). The prefrontal cortex is the part of the human brain responsible for planning, expression of personality, decision making and

moderating social behaviour (Miller and Cohen, 2001). Meditation training with a view to cultivating mindfulness has been shown to enhance the neural correlates associated with the prefrontal cortex (Brefczynski-Lewis et al., 2007). The inference from these findings is that leaders skilled in mindfulness will be more successful on the whole, as they are better able to embody psychological wellbeing despite the presence of negative internal and/or external stimuli (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

As the following section shows, the ways in which a leader is embodied are also important.

#### ***4.6.3 Mindful Presence***

Some scholars argue that all the thoughts we have arise from the foundation of our embodiment (Pfeifer et al., 2007). In this view, our bodies not only change the way we think, but also how we feel about ourselves and others (and in turn how others perceive us). For example, a study conducted by Briñol et al. (2009) examines the ways in which posture influences people's self-confidence. A group of job applicants was asked to sit up straight while they filled out a mock application form that asked them to list their strengths and weaknesses pertinent to the job. Then they were asked to rate themselves. A second group of applicants was asked to sit slumped over and complete the same application. The answers of the applicants who were slumped over showed lower self-confidence compared to the answers of those who were sitting up straight. This research suggests that something as simple as posture can impact the chemicals produced in the brain and, in so doing, change people's feelings about their embodied experience.

Body posture is therefore argued to be linked to self-perception and the perceptions of others. As Didonna (2009) notes:

Our body posture has a very direct and powerful effect on our state of mind. We know that body and mind are interrelated, and for this reason the mindful state arises naturally when physical posture and mental attitude support each other (p. 477).

In Zen meditation, a practice utilised to train people in mindfulness, posture is crucial to success. As Russell and Tatton-Ramos (2014) have noted in respect to posture and the embodied nature of mindfulness practice, “The fact that bodily sensations can only be experienced in the present moment, and particularly so during movement, makes them an accessible entry point to mindfulness” (p. 110). Conversely, being mindful of posture and gesture can allow a person greater insight into what that posture and gesture may be communicating in the present moment to others, whether, for instance, one’s nonverbal cues are helpful to the current situation or not. If a leader needs to positively communicate an aspect of organisational change to employees but their posture communicates powerlessness, the message might be picked up by their team members as inauthentic. The consequences of these unintended postural messages can affect whether or not a leader is able to achieve a desired outcome.

As we will see in the following section, the way in which a leader communicates is also of importance.

#### ***4.6.4 Mindful Communication***

While much research has been conducted on how the behaviour of leaders influences team members, little empirical evidence exists on how the quality of leaders’ awareness and attention influences team members (Reb et al., 2014). Specifically, little research has been done on the connection between mindfulness and communication in respect to leadership. Where mindful communication has been researched, it has been in the fields of primary care physicians (Beckman et al., 2012) and nursing care (Prince-Paul and Kelley, 2017).

As was highlighted in Section 2.3, leaders are required to give direction, motivation, support and feedback to those they lead (Scandura and Schriesheim, 1994), which in turn highlights the relationality between leaders and team members. Uhl-Bien (2006) argues that “leadership is relational, and cannot be captured by examination of individual attributes alone” (p. 671). The quality of the relationship between a team member and leader is therefore essential to organisational success (Reb et al., 2014).

This shifting of mindful attention to the present moment, without judgement about what one is thinking and/or feeling, is said to allow for the adaptation of an orientation of curiosity, openness and acceptance toward one’s experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). In other words, mindfulness may afford higher relationship quality because mindful people are better able to be fully present with other people. As suggested earlier, mindfulness has therefore been argued to help people cope with relationship stress (Barnes et al., 2007) and emotionally relate to others better (Wachs and Cordova, 2007).

At the heart of this relational aspect of leadership is communication (Burgoon et al., 2000). Mindfulness has been shown to aid in communication and other relational activities. As Burgoon et al. (2000) argue, many of our social problems arise out of miscommunication. When people communicate with each other face to face, they display, and are afforded, both verbal and non-verbal cues to assist in comprehending that communication. In other words, communication between people happens in both linguistic and embodied registers (Lebaron and Koschmann, 2003).

In effective face-to-face communication, people communicate through coordinating “their talk, completing each other’s sentences, repeating each other’s hand gestures, and through changes in body orientation and gaze” (Ucok, 2006, p. 1024). It is not uncommon for people to miss the subtleties of these cues, for a variety of different reasons. Most people have a running narrative in their own minds, often taking the form of pre-planning an appropriate response while

not really listening to the person they are communicating with. Additionally, habitual responses and/or distraction by other means, such as a mobile phone ringing or other people interrupting during a conversation, can lead to missed cues (Burgoon et al., 2000).

This mindlessness in communication, as Langer (1992) points out, is often the cause of not only miscommunication but distress in the workplace, such as stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue. Naturally, all of this is made even more complicated as leadership today may happen at a distance, for example through written communication or online communication via video conference calls, Skype, etc. This, may reduce presence even though the communicating parties are electronically face to face.

It has also been noted that employees who have higher ambition and job involvement, especially those in a leadership position, are more likely to use communication devices after hours. While technology allows people to work from anywhere, it has also been shown to increase work-to-life conflict (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Rather than technology allowing us more freedom, it has been shown to increase distraction, as so much is vying for our attention at any one time (Oppenheimer, 2003). Mindfulness may offer some solutions to this, as it requires a person to pay full attention to what they are doing now, in the present moment, and in doing so reduces distractions (Jains et al., 2007).

Krishnamurti (1995) succinctly outlines what mindful communication should look like:

To listen there must be an inward quietness, a freedom from the strain of acquiring, a relaxed attention. This alert yet passive state is able to hear what is beyond the verbal conclusion...Most of us are after results, achieving goals; we are forever overcoming and conquering, and so there is no listening. It is only in listening that one hears the song of the words (p. 3).

Mindful communication, then, means paying attention purposefully to what is being said in the present moment, without judgement (Burgoon et al., 2000; Ucok, 2006). It includes not interrupting a person whilst they speak, remaining fully present in the unfolding communication whilst – when visible to the other parties – engaging in nonverbal cues, such as keeping eye contact and orienting one’s body towards the other participants in the conversation. This shows your interlocutors that you are fully present with them (Ucok, 2006). Nonverbal cues often accompany everyday verbal communication, but also communicate intention and emotion even in the absence of spoken language (Carney et al., 2010). Our perception of a person is therefore not based solely on what they say, but also on their body language, gesture, body posture and attitude (Cuddy et al., 2015). As this section has illustrated, communication is vital for organisations to flourish and may be improved through the practice of mindfulness.

In the following section, we will see how the embodied mindful leader begins to emerge in the literature.

#### **4.7 The Emergence of an Embodied Mindful Leader**

A leader who is mindful recognises how their embodied knowledge impacts current and future leadership performance. This concept echoes Ladkin’s (2008) and Sinclair’s (2005) interpretations of leadership, who view it as largely predicated on what people do in the moment of leading and how the audience perceives that performance. Although neither Ladkin (2008) nor Sinclair (2005) directly define it as such, they essentially discuss a mindful leadership performance. As Bill George (2010) has noted: “Mindfulness enables leaders to be fully present, aware of themselves and their impact on other people, and sensitive to their reactions to stressful situations”.

Halpern and Lubar, (2003) concur when they note:

But being present means more than just physical presence, important as that is. It means being present in the moment – focused totally and completely on what is happening right here and right now. It means, when you're with people, giving them your full attention, so that they will feel recognized and motivated. When you're not present to the people you lead, it weakens their willingness to commit. And being present also means being flexible, able to deal spontaneously with rapid change. Think of being present as a focused but flexible dance with the world in which the leader can instantly change step or tempo as the music changes (p. 18).

The utility of mindful embodied awareness could be understood as somewhat autopoietic (i.e. self-maintaining). In this sense, a leader is said to have within himself or herself all that is required to reorient towards a new way of being (Fairholm, 2004). In other words, autopoiesis denotes a process whereby a leader is able to choose his or her own embodied organisation and in doing so maintain these behaviours within the unfolding leadership performance. It is suggested that this is only possible if the leader is able to successfully navigate the space between intention and action (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). This space between intention and action infers the commitment to be mindful of one's embodiment in the present moment (Katafiasz, 2013).

As such, being fully present requires mindful awareness, which begins with noticing the full range of sensations, emotions, feelings and thoughts moment to moment without getting caught up in them and without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 2006). This non-attachment stance allows a leader to be aware of the content of their embodied experiences (Shapiro et al., 2006). In other words, it may allow them to avoid becoming habitually caught up in their embodied experiences, allowing, rather, for a clearer, more flexible and unbiased response to any unfolding situation (Eisenbeiss et al., 2014). Mindfulness practice thus proposes that the ability to reflect on one's embodied experience without judgement leads to more self-aware and compassionate leaders (George, 2012).

## **4.8 Summary of Mindfulness, Organisations and Leadership**

In summary, although mindfulness can be considered something of a fashionable term these days, there is in fact some debate about the exact origin of the word. Some scholars place the roots of mindfulness in Buddhism (Thera, 1972; Davids, 2015), whereas others locate them in other faiths, such as Judaism, Islam and Christianity (Trousselard et al., 2014). In relation to defining this construct, two important schools of thought, namely those of Kabat-Zinn (2006) and Langer (2002), were addressed. It was shown that, despite some differences in these conceptualisations, both emphasise the importance of self-regulation of attention in the present moment (Hart et al., 2013).

The current practice of applying mindfulness to organisational life was also discussed. Here, the relative danger of removing mindfulness from its spiritual context was illustrated. In all, the review of the literature pertaining to mindfulness points to a lack of focus on its applications to leadership. In fact, very few empirical studies were found to link the application of mindfulness to leadership (e.g., Bryant and Wildi, 2008; Reb et al., 2014; Sinclair, 2016). With this in mind, a conceptual model of mindfulness that might affect four interrelated aspects of leadership learning was suggested, namely mindful awareness, mindful self-regulation, mindful presence and mindful communication.

Taken as a whole, the literature review considered three strands of research, leadership, learning and mindfulness. In the next section, I offer a way of framing these three.

## **4.9 Leadership, Learning and Mindfulness in Context**

The combined literature review of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 focused on three primary strands: leadership, learning and mindfulness. The objective was to offer some understanding of the research and relevant debates in respect to leadership performance as a whole. In addition, it laid the foundation for my research questions.

In order to synthesise the three main strands of this literature review into a coherent picture, it is useful to take a step back. Before theories of leadership, before roles in organisations and at the heart of everything is the person. Each one of us has a body and, as the literature review discussed, the way in which we come to know our world is through this body. In alignment with the position of this thesis, my overall concept of the embodiment of leader[ship] is not, as Plato suggests, one which interferes with the search for true knowledge of oneself in the world or Descartes' notion of separate mind and body. Rather, our embodiment is an active, organic agent that both guides and structures our consciousness and action in the world (Shusterman, 2012).

Hoy (2005) has argued that one can simultaneously acknowledge the body's primary nature, yet at the same time take into account how the body is influenced socially, by its historicity and culture. For example, echoing back to Section 3.4, the view of emotions as constructed suggests that while there is a primary or primordial affective state (e.g., pleasant, unpleasant, arousal, calmness), emotions come into being due to our brain's use of past experience, organised as concepts, to guide our actions and give our sensations meaning (Barrett, 2017). Much of our past experience will therefore likely be informed by our history, set within the social norms and culture in which we were brought up. From this perspective, then, embodiment can be seen as more, or becoming more, than what it previously was. This acknowledgement of becoming sits at the heart of the embodiment of leadership: there is no gap between mind, body and a person's experience of reality (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). A person's experience of things arises out of that person's embodiment in the world.

Taking the main themes of the literature review together, the main question being explored and asked is to what extent mindfulness, as taught in an experiential, action-oriented way, can aid leaders in managing the leadership difficulties they described in moments of leading? In other words, as individual leaders, are we able to self-direct our own embodiment? This seems useful in respect to the ways in which people learn, as discussed in the earlier chapter on leadership and

learning. An equally important question is whether a leader can shape their own personal leadership performance (especially a performance which they may be unhappy with).

The literature review, with its discussion of the various ways in which leadership may emerge, of approaches to learning, and of training in mindfulness, clearly implies an ability to intentionally steer the instrument of all our action and perception (i.e., the living body) to a more desirable outcome (Shusterman, 2008). As such, John Dewey, an American philosopher and psychologist, advocated the practice and importance of reflective conscious control of one's embodiment, while maintaining the primacy of unreflective, immediate experience (Dewey, 1976). Richard Shusterman, an American pragmatist philosopher, calls this purposeful somatic or embodied self-awareness; in other words, purposeful exploration of our embodiment and its reaction to our experiences and the world. He argues that a heightened sense of embodied self-awareness need not disrupt our engagement with the outside world but, rather, allows for the improvement of the instrument of all our action and perception in the world itself (Shusterman, 2008).

Turner (2008) argues that in order to be a 'self' we must be able to reflect upon our identities, our actions and our relationships with others. As Turner notes: "the body is not just an object that is external to that subjectivity, but participates in an embodied agency towards the everyday world" (p. 527). As such, giving embodiment primacy and recognising how we show up in the world through it suggests possible greater clarity of our mind, our body and the world. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) note, fundamentally, our embodiment itself is the condition for meaningfulness.

If this is the case, how would a leader successfully engage in embodied self-awareness? As has been shown in Chapter 4, one promising approach is in the practice and application of mindfulness. Most notably, Varela et al. (1991) view mindfulness as a process of "embodied reflection" (p. 28). Mindfulness therefore

seems to allow a person to access the embodiment that exists prior to “habitual thought patterns and preconceptions” (p. 27) or, in other words, that part of their primordial embodiment, prior to socially and culturally constructed aspects of the self. Yet, and almost paradoxically, mindfulness equally seems to allow us to witness our conditioned embodiment and what it is doing, while it does it (Varela et al. 1991).

Mindfulness, with its stance towards non-judgement of all of inner (and outer) experience, especially as experienced in moments of leading, may allow for the exploration of what Edwards et al. (2013) refer to as non-cognitive methods. They highlight this approach as allowing “participants to access intuitions, feelings, stories, improvisation, experience, imagination, active listening, awareness in the moment, novel words and empathy” (p. 5). This, in turn, they suggest, may offer a wider appreciation for leadership within organisations (Edwards et al. 2013).

In a sense, mindfulness honours Merleau-Ponty’s (2014) primordial body, but the insight gained through mindful embodied awareness, by witnessing the inner flow of mind and body and its reaction to the outer world, serves as an opportunity to engage in corrective embodied measures through what could be referred to as embodied knowledge (Shusterman, 2008, 2012). In other words, it is a way for a person to explore their undesirable actions, or that which hinders them from performing at their best, as the experience it is, without judgement. In this sense, mindfulness, as noted earlier, is not about avoiding the experiences a person is having now; rather, it aims to aid a person in becoming more aware and more open to the experiences they are having moment by moment, as they occur. As such, having a non-judgemental stance “generally refers to suspending the filter of evaluating comments so that objects of mindfulness can be perceived as they are” (Huxter, 2016, p. 34).

As previously noted, the importance of this mindful skill was not lost on important thinkers like renowned psychologist William James as far back as the late 1800s. Although James said that mindfulness training offers “practical instructions for

bringing it about” (James 1984, p. 424), he seemed unclear on how to achieve that. In respect to leaders, mindfulness seems to offer a way for them to systematically train their attention, thus enabling a person to detect and recognise discrepancies between their current state of embodied experience and thereby prompting them to engage in alternative behaviour through self-regulation (Feltman et al. 2009).

#### **4.10. Literature Review Summary**

This literature review has looked at the results of existing research as they relate to leadership (Sections 2.2-2.6), learning (Sections 3.2-3.6), and mindfulness (Sections 4.2-4.7) Chapter 2 began by tracing the evolution of leadership approaches in management and organisations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was illustrated that, despite the longevity of this particular field of enquiry, a universally accepted definition of leadership continues to elude researchers. Nevertheless, the chapter discussed several important developments, key concepts and best practices as they relate to organisational and management studies. Following this, the chapter continued to explore the ways in which leadership study has shifted focus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In particular, the notion of the embodied nature of leadership was addressed. The chapter highlighted how leadership is currently understood within this framework.

In relation to learning, [Chapter 3](#) reviewed the literature dealing with key theories with direct applicability to leadership, with a particular focus on the embodied nature of learning. Specifically, it reviewed the literature pertaining to experiential, psychodynamic, emotion-based and somatic approaches. Lastly, Chapter 4 provided a definition of the term ‘mindfulness’, showing how it is typically practised, and illustrating its implications for leadership. Furthermore, this chapter demonstrated how mindfulness may act as a training and teaching tool, which has important implications for enhancing leader effectiveness within organisations.

In conclusion, this literature review chapter has illustrated that, although there is a longstanding tradition of emphasising the importance of excellent leadership within organisations, there is great scope for further investigation, especially as it relates to mindfulness. In the next chapter, the methodological approach underlying this study is presented.

## 5 Methodology

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodological process as applied in my research. Central to this chapter is the appropriate choice of methodology to most effectively answer my research questions. This begins with reflecting on the ontological and epistemological positions I adopted. The specific methods chosen to situate the research are then outlined, followed by an explanation of the steps taken to answer the research questions via the design of the study. Next, the ethical steps undertaken to safeguard the research participants are outlined and my role in this project is discussed. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary that reflects on the methodological process as a whole.

As was noted in earlier chapters, this thesis seeks to answer two primary research questions, namely:

**Research Question 1:** What are the embodied experiences described by leaders that arise in the present moment of leadership and which they feel may hinder their ability to lead successfully?

**Research Question 2:** Following on from Research Question 1, to what extent can mindfulness, as taught in an experiential, action-oriented way, aid leaders in managing the leadership difficulties they described in moments of leading?

### 5.2 Research Philosophy

Throughout the history of research, the question of how to study the social world has raised a number of key philosophical debates (Ritchie et al., 2014). One element of this debate is ontology, which is the researcher's philosophical position adopted in respect to the study of being, existence and the nature of reality (Blaikie, 2009). Following this, the epistemological stance denotes a

researcher's position on how knowledge of being or reality can be acquired, or, in other words, "How we know what we know" (Crotty, 2012, p. 8).

The debate can be very broadly divided into two main philosophical traditions: positivist and interpretivist paradigms (Carson et al., 2001). A paradigm is "a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts and propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan and Biklen, 2011, p. 22). In this sense, a paradigm can be considered a theoretical framework (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) that informs the way in which we see the world and, in doing so, frames the way we think about a research topic (Hughes, 2001; Fraser, 2008).

### **5.2.1 Positivism**

Ontologically, positivists see the world as external and independent of our knowledge of it (Carson et al., 2001). According to positivists, all research situations or phenomena have a single objective reality that is uninfluenced by a researcher's perspective or beliefs – in other words, positivism has an objectivist ontology (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988; Hughes, 2001).

As Bryman and Bell (2015) note:

Objectivism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. It implies that social phenomena and the categories that we use in everyday discourse have an existence that is independent or separate from actors (p. 19).

The philosophical approach of positivism is therefore rationalistic and empiricist in nature, originating from a long line of advocates, from Aristotle to Francis Bacon, John Locke, August Comte and Emmanuel Kant (Mertens, 1998). Epistemologically, a researcher applying a positivist approach seeks to remain

emotionally neutral about the participants they are researching, thereby allowing a distinction to be made between reason and feeling (Carson et al., 2001). In other words, a purposeful distance is sought between their own subjective biases on the one hand and the objective reality that they seek to study on the other (Cohen and Crabtree, 2016).

Science, fact, logic and reason play a central role in positivism, while personal experience is meant to be put aside (Carson et al., 2001). Positivism assumes that hard knowledge of human action is obtainable and may be explained by real causes that temporarily precede a person's behaviour. In other words, it is the lens that is deterministic, not behaviour (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

### ***5.2.2 Interpretivism***

An interpretivist ontology, on the other hand, proposes that reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through meaning and understanding. Rather than this reality being independent of us, as in positivism, meaning and understanding is developed socially and experientially (Carson et al., 2001). For example, Lynch (2000) notes:

Consensual beliefs and concerted practices give rise to objective social institutions. Accordingly, institutional facts like the value of currency or the price of shares on a stock exchange depend upon collective actions that presuppose the objectivity of those facts. These socially constructed facts are real, in the sense that they are intersubjective, exist independently of the observer, and persist in time, but their reality depends upon, and is continually sustained by, reflexive subscription to that very reality. (p. 29)

Epistemologically, interpretivism assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know and how we understand ourselves, others and the world at large (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This translates into a focus on capturing meaning arising out of human interaction (Black, 2006) and therefore allows for each

person to reflect on their own embodied experiences. These experiences are acknowledged as a valid source of knowledge.

While positivist researchers apply a mostly quantitative approach to their research, an interpretivist approach to research is usually more qualitative (Smith, 1983). In interpretivism, it is assumed that people are self-interpreting beings and priority is given to sense-making from an individual's experience (Taylor, 2005; Finlay, 2011). An interpretivist approach therefore usually employs a research design that is flexible insofar as participants' lived phenomenal experience is a source of data (Rossman and Rallis, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). A phenomenal experience is how things 'appear' to us in our own experience, the ways in which we experience things, and the meaning that we ascribe to these things within our experience. As Gubrium and Holstein (2009) note:

There's lots of talk about meaning, especially about what things mean to the people being studied. This is decidedly not talk about predictive models. Lived experience is on stage here. Rich description is the name of the game. There's little mention of standardised measurement. Instead we hear the trials and tribulations of 'entre and engagement,' 'access and rapport.' In contrast to descriptions of social facts and variable relations from an 'objective' distance – held at arm's length so to speak – we hear the admonition to get close to people, be involved. You've got to get out there, into the nitty-gritty, real world. Get your hands dirty. See it up close, for yourself (p. 4).

### ***5.2.3 My Research Philosophy***

Acknowledging the aforementioned, my position is that, in order to assess whether the embodied experiences that inform leadership performance change through the application of mindfulness in the moment, the positivist approach must be rejected. Instead, I need to seek the subjective and embodied

experiences of leaders in this study. Furthermore, I am interested in exploring personal meaning and sense-making through the lived experience of specific phenomena (i.e., MIA and leadership). Thus, I selected an approach that allows both the gathering and analysis of personal narratives from leaders' perspectives. In this respect, my interpretivist ontology to research takes the position that reality is constructed by people rather than by external factors (Thorpe et al., 2012).

It has been noted that subjectivity in qualitative research is intimately related (Morrow, 2005). As such, the researcher's 'subjectivity' guides the research process, from choice of topic and the methods employed to answering the research questions through interpreting the data (Ratner, 2002). As such, acknowledging my own subjectivity in my research is important, although I aimed to set it aside to avoid having it unduly influence my research (i.e. bracketing out my own implicit assumptions as best as possible) (Husserl, 1931; Morrow, 2005). I aimed to identify the components of phenomenal experiences (i.e., eidetic reduction) and especially unique or distinguishable characteristics of those experiences that relate to the research questions (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). In addition, in terms of epistemology, I see myself and the participants as mutually interactive and interdependent. This emergent and collaborative approach to research allows me to remain open to unexpected knowledge that may arise with the aid of research participants (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

To further support my position, an idiographic approach was employed throughout this research. An idiographic approach describes individuals' lived experiences through their personal perception and accounts of an object or event within a specific context (Smith, 2004; Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2011; Creswell and Poth, 2013). This is in stark contrast to a nomothetic approach, which is mainly concerned with the study of what we share with others, leading to the establishment of laws or generalisations about that shared meaning (Crowther and Lancaster, 2014). The latter is more common in the positivistic paradigm.

In this research, participants' descriptions of MIA were considered to be

contingent and individual to each participant. Therefore, their descriptions of MIA may or may not be similar to those of other research participants. This research did not seek to generate laws or generalisations to a wider population. Rather, it was deemed important to allow each participant's experience of MIA to present itself as specific to the phenomena under investigation.

In the next section, the specific methodology employed in this study is outlined. This begins with the design of the research. Here, the focus shifts to the strategy adopted in order to arrive at answers to the research questions.

### **5.3 Research Design**

Research outcomes for this thesis were sought through the use of a training intervention (i.e., the MIA workshop), interviews and a mindfulness scale assessment. In this sense, the project could be considered a case study, understood as a design that combines different methods to understand a phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2017). George and Bennett (2005) have argued that, as social science research methods continue to change and evolve, they are entering a new phase of development in which multi-method work is taking prominence (George and Bennett, 2005). Bromley (1990) defines a case study as a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest” (p. 302). In respect to this project, the systematic enquiry focused on MIA and its possible effect on leadership performance. Research was undertaken with an emphasis on four focal points of data collection:

- First point of data collection: MAAS questionnaire, followed by pre-training workshop interviews.
- This was followed by the MIA workshop.
- Second point of data collection: A second MAAS questionnaire, followed by post-workshop interviews which occurred no later than five days after the MIA workshop.

- Third point of data collection: After eight weeks of applying a self-directed approach to MIA in their roles as leaders at work, participants concluded the research phase with a final interview, followed by a third MAAS questionnaire.

## **5.4 Access and Sampling**

Members of a martial arts school in Perth, Australia, were invited to participate in the project. The instructor, who coaches one of my martial arts programmes and is the owner of the school, notified his students about the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. Students were then asked to contact me directly. Purposive sampling was thus employed in the selection of research participants for this study. The purposive sampling technique “is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (Etikan, 2016, p. 2). In this case, participants were required to be active martial artists but also to serve in a leadership role in their professional lives.

Once a potential research participant made contact, they were provided with a one-page overview of the study detailing what it entailed. I made myself available via email and Skype to answer any questions they had. Initially, I had twenty enquiries from people wanting to be a part of the study. From these 20, only 12 elected to move ahead with the study. While my initial cohort consisted of 12 people, ten men and two women, both my female participants had to withdraw from the study prior to the MIA workshop due to unforeseen work and family commitments. My final cohort for this study thus consisted of ten male participants, who came from a wide range of organisational backgrounds. Their job required them to influence people in various situations and direct them towards achieving specific goals. As such, they can be classified as being in a leadership role. Their details are presented in figure 3 below.

Participant (pseudonyms)	Occupation	Industry
Jas	Senior Sales Manager	Construction
Andy	Chief Executive Officer	Engineering
Scott	Senior Information Analyst and Team Leader	Information Analysis
Gab	Senior Civil Engineer and Team Leader	Civil Engineering
Mitch	Senior Technician and Team Leader	Security
Rob	Chief Executive Officer	Transportation
Mic	Senior Sales Executive and Team Leader	Car Sales
Jon	Building/Finance Specialist and Team Leader	Construction
Dom	Senior Officer and Team Leader	Law Enforcement
Len	Partner in a Construction Firm	Construction

Figure 3: Participant details

## 5.5 Research Methods

In the following sections, I outline the specific methods I employed to generate my data. This commences with an overview of the data collection tools employed, namely the MAAS and semi-structured interviews. I then go on to outline the stages of my research process. This includes the deployment of my MIA workshop. The actual contents of the MIA workshop are covered in more detail

in Chapter 6. In the final section, I outline how my data was analysed.

### ***5.5.1 Mindful Attention Awareness Scale***

The trait-based MAAS (Brown and Ryan, 2003) questionnaire was used in conjunction with interviews during this study. Sample items include: “I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later” or “I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.”

Each participant was given a MAAS questionnaire to fill out prior to each interview. As the scale is available in the public domain, special permission was not required to use it for this research. The MAAS has 15 items and is a self-report questionnaire. A clean copy of the MAAS survey can be found in [Appendix 2](#). Respondents choose an answer on a Likert scale from 1 to 6, with 1 representing ‘almost always’, and 6 representing ‘almost never’.

The MAAS questionnaire captures a participant’s sense of their own mindfulness across a range of different aspects. More specifically, it focuses on assessing core characteristics of mindfulness, namely open attention to awareness in the present moment, with an emphasis on emotional and behavioural regulation, as well as interpersonal phenomena and wellbeing. The authors of MAAS (Brown and Ryan, 2003) have noted that in order to score the scale, a mean must be computed for the 15-item questionnaire. Higher mean scores reflect higher levels of the reported trait (i.e., dispositional) mindfulness, whilst lower scores reflect lower levels.

While the interviews were qualitative, allowing for open-ended responses, the questionnaire was quantitative in nature (Creswell, 2014). As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) note, when reflecting on the applicability of a mixed method approach to research:

What is most fundamental is the research question – research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers. Many research questions and combinations of questions are best and most fully answered through mixed research solutions (pp. 17-18).

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have further suggested that:

In a qualitative research study, the researcher might want to qualitatively observe and interview, but supplement this with a closed-ended instrument to systematically measure certain factors considered important in the relevant research literature (p. 19).

For these reasons, the MAAS questionnaire was applied in my research to measure pre- and post-training trait (i.e., dispositional) mindfulness. With this in mind, the questionnaire illustrated how each participant considered their level of dispositional mindfulness in their daily life pre-mindfulness training. While the post-workshop interviews explored whether any changes occurred to participants' trait mindfulness as self-reported by participants, the MAAS questionnaire offered a complementary view of this potential change in trait mindfulness.

The MAAS was chosen as it specifically seeks to identify the trait mindfulness levels of a person (i.e., how mindful they believe themselves to be in daily life). This allowed for a comparison to be made between the mindfulness report made by participants through the interview process and how they reported their mindfulness level on the scale. As is seen on the pre-workshop and post-workshop MAAS (see [Chapter 7](#)), there is a clear increase in recorded post-workshop trait mindfulness over pre-workshop MAAS scores. While interviews alone did suggest an increase of mindfulness post training workshop, the post-workshop MAAS scores support these claims.

The change of MAAS scores pre-workshop to post-workshop also support the contention that trait mindfulness can be increased through state mindfulness training, which, in the case of this research, was the MIA workshop. This confirmed that it is possible to develop a method of teaching mindfulness that is more action-oriented and thus resembles more closely the ever-changing, often chaotic and unpredictable nature of modern organisations.

While there are several mindfulness-based scales available, the MAAS questionnaire has been employed in several studies since its inception (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Carlson and Brown, 2005; MacKillop and Anderson, 2007) and has been shown to have excellent psychometric properties. The questionnaire takes only five minutes to complete and requires no understanding of mindfulness as a concept. All ten research participants in the study completed the MAAS questionnaire at the relevant focal points of data collection.

There are limitations in applying the MAAS. Most notable is the self-report nature of the MAAS. In other words, answers on the scale are subjective. As Grossman (2008) has pointed out, in this case, it is important to have external references to compare to the self-report conclusions. As such, in this study interviews were applied to assess the reliability of trait mindfulness scores pre-intervention, post-intervention, and at the final stage of the research.

Secondly, since MAAS is a questionnaire in respect to trait mindfulness in a general sense, this may have had some influence on how participants answered in respect to their roles as leaders. This may be especially true post-MIA workshop and at the final stages of the research, when participants answered the questions more in line with how mindfulness as an experience showed up in their roles as leaders. The MAAS is not specific to the relationship between mindfulness and leadership; if it was, different outcomes may have been recorded (Kotzé and Nel, 2016).

Finally, there is a concern to ask participants to answer MAAS which seeks to discover a person's level of overall trait mindfulness, when little previous information on what being measured is available. In other words, if participants have little knowledge and/or experience with mindfulness, there is a chance that they may have misunderstood or misinterpreted questions.

### **5.5.2 Interviews**

Interviews formed the main avenue through which my research questions were answered. As part of the research design itself, interviews were applied to assess participants' pre-workshop understanding of leadership and, especially, mindfulness. Interviews after the workshop explored the implications of mindfulness in their roles as leaders.

More specifically, and as outlined in Section 5.3 above, interviews were conducted at three points in the research process: prior to the MIA workshop; post-workshop (up to, but no more than, five days afterwards); and after eight weeks of autonomous, self-directed mindfulness practice in which research participants actively sought to apply mindfulness to their work environment. In the interviews, participants were encouraged to give detailed accounts when reflecting on their understanding of mindfulness, both prior to and after the training workshop and in the weeks that followed. Crucially, questions that would reflect participants' thoughts, feelings, memories and descriptions of the situation in which each experience occurred were included (Creswell, 2014).

The three stages of interviews were slightly different, both in design and intended outcome. The pre-workshop interviews focused on what could be noted as pre-mindfulness reflections, with a specific focus on how participants defined leadership, the embodied struggles they encountered in their roles as leaders and what, if anything, they knew about the concept of mindfulness. The second stage of interviews took place post-mindfulness training. In other words, they were conducted after the participants had been taken through the MIA workshop.

These interviews shifted more to how mindfulness influenced participants in their roles as leaders in organisations in the immediate aftermath of the workshop. As such, these interviews primarily served as a way to explore whether mindfulness had any benefit to and/or impact on their leadership roles. The final interview series took place after participants were asked to both practise and deploy mindfulness in their roles as leaders for eight weeks and sought to explore if and how participants' initial application of mindfulness post-workshop had changed (if at all). In addition, they explored whether their understanding of leadership had changed since beginning the research process, as viewed through a mindful lens. In addition, these final interviews focused on participants' overall experience of mindfulness during the eight weeks of autonomous practice and application in their roles as leaders.

All interviews were semi-structured. Drever (1999) has suggested that semi-structured interviews are effective in small-scale research such as mini-studies and case studies. In addition, semi-structured interviews are largely a qualitative method. While there were specific questions to ask participants, the interviews allowed for the order in which questions were asked and the wording to be changed based on the respondent's interests or concerns (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Semi-structured interviews also allow for the establishment of rapport with respondents (Dale, 1996). I also deemed it necessary to approach the interviews in this way because I recognised that each person would have their own personal experiences of what was covered in the MIA workshop and of mindfulness itself. Interviews were approximately 30-45 minutes in length and were recorded via a dictaphone and iPhone simultaneously for accuracy. (See Appendices 3, 4, and 5 for a complete list of questions in the pre-workshop, post-workshop and final interviews.)

There are, of course, limitations to this method. Time constraints were a factor with participants due to two factors: first, I was in another country (i.e., Perth, Australia) specifically to conduct this research and I was there for only two weeks. Second, participants could only give me a limited amount of their time to interview

them pre- and post-workshop, mostly due to their work schedules. Thus, I had to fit in the MIA training workshop, on top of conducting 20 interviews, during a period of less than two weeks in Perth. This meant that there was no time for further interviews and I had to work with what was uncovered within a single interview with a participant. If I had failed to uncover what was required in that interview, it would have not been possible to either re-do the interview or ask for a follow-up interview. While the first two interviews with each of the participants were face to face, the final interview was carried out via Skype. There was, of course, a reduction in social cues as a result, as I was unable to read body language, etc., as I had done in the face-to-face interviews. Unlike the face-to-face interviews, which were conducted in the martial arts gym where the MIA workshop was conducted, telephonic interviews such as those carried out via Skype lessen the interviewer's ability to create an appropriate ambience for the interview (Opdenakker, 2006). For example, some of the final interviews were carried out while participants were at work on a break, as not all participants could be interviewed from home (which was also due to the time difference between Perth and my home in Johannesburg).

Finally, the sensitive nature of the interviews needs to be considered. There is some disagreement as to what could be considered a 'sensitive research topic' (Elmir et al., 2011). However, in respect to my research, participants were asked, for example, about struggles they had in leading, which is a potentially sensitive topic. This theme continued the subsequent week and in the final interviews, when they were asked how these difficulties showed up in their work environment and their roles as leaders and the degree to which mindfulness had aided them in managing these experiences. This could have potentially elicited strong emotional responses from participants (Cowles, 1988). I worked hard to build rapport with each participant, as I recognised its importance in enhancing my access to my participants' subjective experiences (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). However, it was still up to the individual to decide how forthcoming they would be in answering my questions.

### **5.5.3 Stages of Research**

Below I outline the specific stages and execution points of my research.

#### **a) Pre-workshop**

Prior to the commencement of the MIA training workshop during the weekend of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March, all ten research participants were asked to complete the MAAS questionnaire, followed by an initial interview. Discussions during the interview revolved around questions that I had established prior to that interview. As none of the participants (except for one, Gab) had any training in mindfulness, I decided to pursue the original workshop developed for the research study. Had all participants had experience of and a background in mindfulness, it might not have been possible to pursue my initial idea of first teaching mindfulness tools in action prior to asking participants to apply those tools in the action of leading. This workshop assumed that the participants had no prior background or understanding of mindfulness, although each participant had previous martial arts experience.

#### **b) MIA training workshop**

All research participants attended a workshop that introduced them to both the concept and application of mindfulness, specifically as it would be applied in action. Throughout the workshop, participants were asked to reflect on the drills being presented, both in respect to awareness of changes that occurred to their embodied experiences in the moment and how they saw themselves applying the tools in their roles as leaders. I provide more details of the workshop in [Chapter 6](#).

#### **c) Post-workshop**

In the week following the MIA workshop, participants were once again asked to complete the MAAS questionnaire, followed by a second interview. The second MAAS questionnaire offered an opportunity to see whether participants' initial

understanding of their personal level of mindfulness had changed. In the second interview, participants were asked to reflect on the workshop training experience, including what they felt they had learned and how they saw that experience informing their roles as leaders going forward. As participants were interviewed up to five days after the training workshop, an opportunity also presented itself to ask whether they had already had an occasion to apply some of the tools and principles they had learned. Participants were then asked to continue to practise MIA at work for the next eight weeks, with an e-mail sent each Monday to remind them to do so.

#### **d) Final research stage**

The final interviews took place via Skype eight weeks after the training workshop and entailed participants filling out, for a third and final time, the MAAS questionnaire, this time online. Although all ten participants completed the MAAS questionnaire online, only nine of the ten participants were available for the final interview. Unfortunately, the tenth participant was not reachable due to workload and scheduling conflicts. The third MAAS questionnaire offered an opportunity to assess whether and how participants' understanding of their personal mindfulness had changed since the first two MAAS questionnaires were completed. In the final interview, questions revolved around how participants' understanding of mindfulness had changed over the eight weeks of self-directed application of mindfulness to their roles as leaders.

#### **5.5.4 Data Analysis**

Analysis of data for this research focused specifically on the pre-interview, post-interview, and final interviews, with the inclusion of the MAAS. Whilst the interviews were considered the primary source of data in understanding the efficacy of mindfulness to leadership performance, the MAAS supported the findings of those interviews. The MAAS was specifically important to track changes to trait (i.e., dispositional) mindfulness of leaders in this study pre-workshop, post-workshop, and after eight weeks of autonomous mindfulness practice and implementation.

As such, below I highlight first the method that was applied in analysing the MAAS results, especially in light of the fact that each of my ten participants were asked to first complete the MAAS prior to each interview. This is then followed by the method deployed to analyse my interviews.

#### **a) Method applied in the MAAS analysis**

A combination of descriptive and inferential analyses was employed to analyse the data collected from the MAAS questionnaires. Descriptive analyses involved the calculation of means and standard deviations (Ritchie et al., 2011; Holcomb, 2017), while inferential analyses included a series of one-way repeated measures to test differences between two or more means (Blaikie, 2006). In the present research, all ten leaders were evaluated through completing the MAAS at three data time points in respect to their trait mindfulness (i.e., pre-workshop time point, post-workshop time point, and at the conclusion of the autonomous practice time point). The dependent variable was trait mindfulness.

Considering the analytical stages highlighted above, a total mean score of overall mindful attention for each of the data time points was first calculated. Thus, differences in participants' overall mindful attention between pre-workshop, post-workshop, and after eight weeks of autonomous practice could be assessed. The objective of this analysis was to determine to what degree the MIA workshop had an impact on the overall trait mindfulness of research participants. Subsequently, a total mean score for each of the mindfulness-based questions on the MAAS at each time point was calculated to evaluate differences in mindfulness attention among the three data time points. The aim of this analysis was to examine the mindful attention experiences most influenced by the MIA workshop. Finally, each of the participants' mean MAAS scores were evaluated pre-intervention, post-intervention and eight weeks after the intervention, to ascertain which of the participants improved the most in trait mindfulness over time.

Taking the above into account and due to the small sample size, the primary focus of the analysis of the MAAS was the interpretation of descriptive data. As

such, inferential analyses (Blaikie, 2006) are reported in a complementary manner to assess the effectiveness of the MIA workshop.

### **b) Method applied in the analysis of interviews**

Interview data were treated with an interpretivist lens. The analysis of interviews was thematic in nature (Braun and Clarke 2006; Smith et al. 2009). As such, themes that were generated through this analysis aided in answering the research questions, but also allowed new and unexpected themes to arise (Clarke and Braun, 2013). The underlying premise of thematic analysis is to uncover patterns within data which offer the opportunity to interpret and make sense of those data. The audio interviews I recorded were transcribed by an independent transcriber, who signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Where necessary, modifications in analysis were made to accommodate three sets of interviews that were conducted at different stages of the research process and therefore needed to be treated as separate points of both analysis and findings.

The primary steps of analysis are outlined below:

Stage 1 involved reading and re-reading each individual interview within that specific interview series to become familiar with the overall data (i.e., pre-workshop interviews, post-workshop interviews, final interviews). In addition, I listened to the audio interviews while reading the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

During stage 2, initial coding, I printed all the transcripts, highlighted anything of interest within individual transcripts, specifically as it pertained to themes in the literature and answering the research questions, but allowing for new experiences to emerge. For an example of this process, see Figure 4 below.

Rodney	How would you define excellent leadership?	Initial coding
Jas (Research participant)	I believe an excellent leader is someone who takes control, leads by example, someone who's got confidence and self-belief.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autocratic leadership style</li> <li>• Front stage</li> <li>• Self-concept</li> </ul>

Figure 4: Initial Coding

This second stage was important. Whilst I kept an open mind and my approach was still exploratory, my focus shifted to the semantics of the data. In other words, a meaning was attributed, as well as its logical relation to other sentences, so that sense could be made from the experiences described by the research participants. Here the goal was to gain a 'big picture' understanding of the overarching issues discussed in the interviews.

In stage 3, once initial coding was finalised, I looked for patterns across and within all transcripts within a specific interview series and then sorted by themes. Here I sought themes while reflecting on analysing the coding previously done. Themes were collated collectively from a specific interview series (i.e., only from the pre-workshop interviews, only from the post-workshop interviews or only from the final interview series). This allowed for potential consensus of themes to emerge from research participants in respect to a specific interview series. In this stage of analysis, I developed mind maps to aid in this process, as shown in

Figure 5 below.

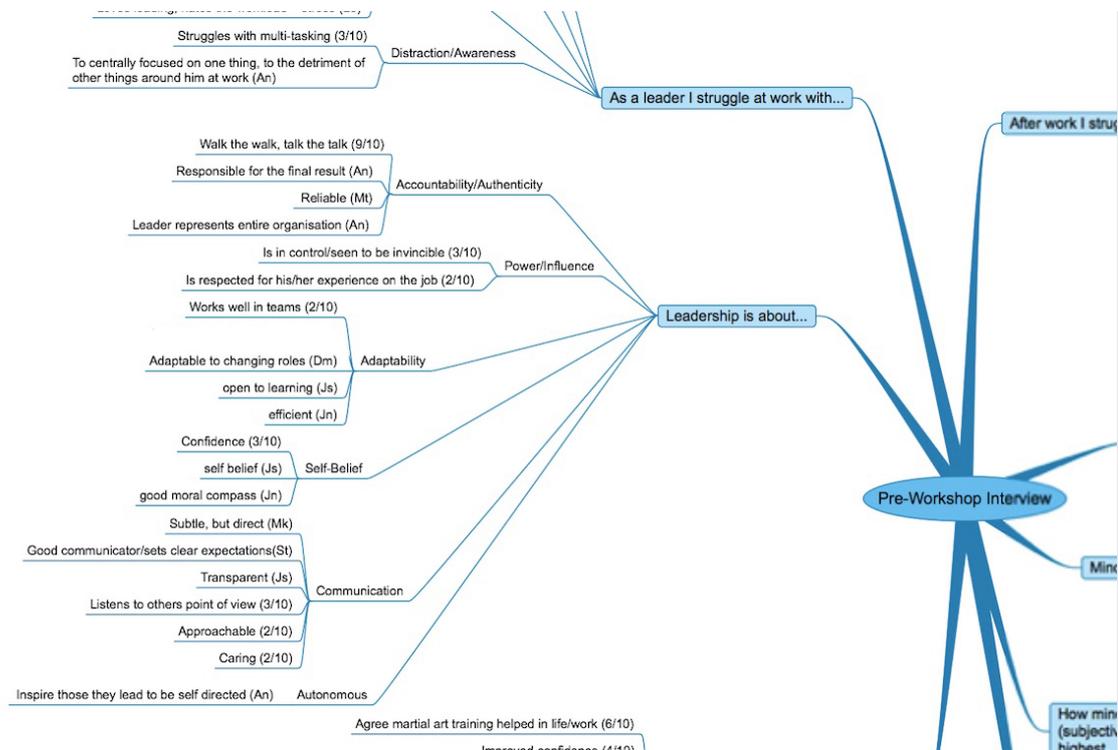


Figure 5: Excerpt of a mind map from the pre-workshop interviews

Figure 5 above is an excerpt of a mind map from the pre-workshop interviews. Where I abbreviate, such as ‘Jn’, ‘Dm’ etc., this suggests an individual participant response. Where numbers and slashes are used (e.g., 2/10), this denotes how many participants out of ten (here that number being 2) had a similar response to the interview question.

In some instances, themes emerged from the interview questions themselves, whilst in others they emerged from the answers to the interview questions posed. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that when looking for themes, it is important to remember that the *you* is closely connected to the lived experience of the participant and the analysis that comes forth will, in a sense, be a collaboration between researcher and participant. As Smith et al. further note, “Themes are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual” (p. 92).

I also made a point of ensuring that themes were collated specifically within their interview stage. I did this in order to ensure that the data analysis would map to the pre-workshop, post-workshop, and final phases of this study. This was important as the pre-workshop interview assumed no knowledge of mindfulness on the part of the participants, whilst post and final interviews occurred once participants had not only learned mindfulness, but had the opportunity to apply it in their roles as leaders. For this reason, I started with all the pre-workshop interviews. This required reading them, then coding and finally looking for patterns so themes could emerge. I then repeated the process for the post-workshop interviews and final interviews. In writing up the analysis, I again retained a chronological approach to reflect how the research project unfolded, starting first with the outcome of pre-workshop interviews, followed by post-workshop interviews and concluding with the final interviews.

## **5.6 Ethical Considerations**

In this section, the steps taken to secure the safety of the research participants are outlined. Furthermore, any potential risks and difficulties are presented, as well as the precautions taken to guarantee participants' confidentiality. Measures taken to ensure correct dissemination, consent and feedback are also discussed. The section starts with situating this study, which is followed by a description of how I minimised physical and psychological harm to my participants. I then outline my role as researcher, with some final thoughts on ethical considerations in this study.

### ***5.6.1 Situating This Study***

The University of Leicester Ethics Officers considered this study to be of greater than minimal risk to participants. The primary risk was physical injury. Secondary concerns were psychological in nature (e.g., distress, embarrassment). Thirdly, there was a risk of a power imbalance between me (as I was also the trainer) and the research participants. Related to that, my closeness to the topic under investigation was also identified as a potential ethical issue. Safeguards to protect

all participants in this research study were implemented to respond to these concerns. Moreover, once a participant agreed to participate, they were asked to provide written consent (see [Appendix 1](#) for the informed consent form). Finally, I made myself available to answer any questions regarding risks and benefits when negotiating participation and throughout.

### ***5.6.2 Minimising Physical Harm***

For most leaders, the only opportunity to practise skills pertaining to their leadership performance is in the crucible of work, where their actions often have real and substantial consequences. Combining MIA training with the embodied practice of martial arts experience therefore offered participants the opportunity to engage in an experience in which quick decisions were required. In doing so, they also had the opportunity to engage in mindful practice in the moment of making those decisions.

While there was still risk of injury in terms of basic exercise and bodily movement, such as stretching, twisting and punching, these risks were minimised as each of the participants was already a martial arts practitioner. This prior experience made participants not only more physically capable but also more familiar with what the training involved. Secondly, participants were given the opportunity to practise individually at their own pace and ability, in a non-competitive environment. There were no assessments of ability or skill, nor pressure to perform to a certain standard, which also lowered the risk of psychological distress or any kind of embarrassment. The most important element during the workshop was for participants to practice mindfulness while in motion and to accomplish certain tasks. The primary aim of the research in this regard was highlighted consistently throughout the training session.

Before beginning the training workshop, participants were encouraged to discuss the activity with their physician. If they had any physical concerns or pre-existing conditions, they were given the opportunity to discuss these privately with me. It

is important to reiterate that the martial arts training was undertaken strictly for the purpose of mindfulness training and, although this necessitated moving intentionally and consciously, it did not involve any combat between participants or with me.

During the weekend-long workshop, all participants were given visual demonstrations and individual attention in learning the movements. Any participant could raise their hand for help at any time during the training experience. The process undertaken in the workshop was thoroughly explained to all participants before any new activity was begun. Moreover, participants were reminded throughout the training that they were welcome to opt out of any movement sequence or drill if they felt either unable to complete the actions or if it made them feel uncomfortable.

### ***5.6.3 Minimising Psychological Harm***

To reiterate, this study focused on the experience of mindfulness as applied to participants in their roles as leaders. Participants were asked to reflect on, and speak about, their embodied experiences in applying MIA and encouraged to express these experiences in their own words throughout the interview process. It was made clear that there was no correct way to speak about an experience, only what came naturally to each person. If participants did feel embarrassed or under stress, I ensured that they were aware that they could stop talking, skip questions or withdraw their participation at any time. In addition, full disclosure of the purpose of the study was given to all participants prior to the commencement of the study itself (Patton, 2015).

During the process of securing ethical approval, another concern was noted in respect to both the learning and practice of mindfulness: its potential of possibly becoming detrimental to participants' leadership (or to their lives in general) and how that could be managed ethically. Firstly, leadership, by definition, involves guiding people and processes to achieve objectives. Secondly, it has been

suggested that mindfulness increases awareness of what is actually happening (both within the subject's own mind-body and externally in the immediate environment). Therefore, mindfulness could be considered to deepen awareness of, and thereby inform one's ability to respond to, real-world events. For this reason, it was not expected that mindfulness practice as such would lead to a detrimental outcome. Nonetheless, it may be that mindfulness simply had no positive bearing on a leader's performance.

Since participants were asked to speak about their experiences in leadership roles, they might then offer details about their jobs, colleagues and team members. In order to protect each participant's anonymity, and the anonymity of any third party, pseudonyms were assigned and used in all written research materials. Furthermore, names of companies and any potentially identifying information have been changed. In addition, distinctions were made between external-group anonymity and in-group confidentiality. In other words, all participants were asked to sign a confidentiality/non-disclosure agreement, meaning that anything said or observed during the group training sessions was not to be discussed outside the group. No opportunity during the training event was provided for this either. This was included in the participant consent form (see [Appendix 1](#)). Similarly, all the research materials were stored safely so no one could gain access to them. Physical materials, such as completed informed consent and MAAS forms, were stored in a locked filing cabinet, with me as the sole key-holder. All digital files were password protected and backed up on an external hard drive that was also locked away when not in use.

#### ***5.6.4 My Role as Researcher***

As already mentioned, I acted as both the trainer and the researcher in this study. While this could potentially have presented difficulties in terms of power imbalances with participants, it is crucial to note that these were not my students, meaning that I did not know them personally. Secondly, students who attended this martial arts school were mainly attending training for self-defence, fitness and fun. The experience I would be offering them would – in contrast – focus on the

relationship between embodied practice as an action-oriented tool and mindfulness. In addition, I am a registered Somatic Movement Educator with the International Somatic Movement Education and Therapists Association. As such, I am required to adhere to strict confidentiality when working with individual clients and groups.

With the above acknowledged, as a researcher, I also understand the need to consciously be reflective about my attitude to the subject under investigation and remain open to new understandings that could potentially emerge from this project (Berger, 2013). To this extent, I acknowledge that my previous experience, my beliefs and my understanding of the relevant theory need to be taken into account in my research. I worked to be reflective on how the phenomena under investigation were being presented and, equally, how they were experienced by the participants themselves (Tufford and Newman, 2010).

My focus during the research period was on being attuned to the meaning of the situation being presented and focused on the participants' personal experience and not my own (Finlay, 2011; Berger, 2013). In this sense, when asking a question of participants during the MIA workshop, even when I felt I knew the answer, I allowed the necessary time for participants to discover the answer themselves. Corbin and Strauss (2015) also note that it is important for a researcher to acknowledge and to tell participants about their own biases and beliefs early in the research process so that participants understand their position. I did so prior to the commencement of my study.

### ***5.6.5 Final Ethical Considerations***

At both the first and final interviews, I ensured that all participants had relevant contact information and knew that they could make contact if they had any interest in the findings. Consent was also sought at the commencement of the study, should the research be published. If it happens that a paper that focuses on a specific person or group of people is to be published, I will also proactively

offer a summary report relevant to that paper to the person/people involved. Consent was written, as already detailed, and participants were asked to read a short statement about the project before being given an opportunity to ask any questions about the project and/or the process. They were then asked to sign the consent documents (see [Appendix 1](#)). Participants were given a copy of both the project statement and the consent form to retain. All the participants were over 18 years of age and able to give their own consent. Moreover, all costs pertaining to the research were covered by me and research participants participated in all aspects of the research study at no cost to themselves.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has introduced, and provided a detailed description and justification of, the methodological approach and research design employed within the present study. The chapter commenced with a discussion of ontological and epistemological positions. Here, the various advantages and drawbacks of adopting either a positivist or interpretivist paradigm were outlined. Ultimately, it was explained why an interpretivist approach to research was deemed most appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Next, the research design was outlined. In this respect, I illustrated that the current research can be considered a case study. Then, the methods were presented. Here, both the MAAS questionnaire and the interviews were detailed. The sampling method, which was purposive, was then outlined. The specific research process, in terms of data collection points and timing, was also outlined. Guidelines for a thematic analysis were then presented in regards to my data analysis. Finally, I discussed ethical considerations, in terms of physicality, psychology and power imbalance, and the ways in which these were addressed.

While observations of participants during the MIA workshop informed the data analysis to some extent, they were not integral to the final analysis of the data overall. This is due to the fact that I experienced some difficulty in being attuned

to the observable experiences of participants, while at the same time having to teach the workshop itself. Where observations *were* emphasised was during the interview stages, which were, additionally, the primary aspect of data collection (with the MAAS questionnaire as supplement). This also afforded me some opportunity to observe how each participant behaved at pre-workshop, post-workshop and final stages.

In the following chapter, I discuss how the MIA workshop itself was structured. Specifically, the chapter deals with the proposed learning outcomes of the workshop and provides some examples of how the lessons of mindfulness were taught in action.

## 6 Learning Mindfulness through Action

### 6.1 Introduction

Reflecting back on what was noted in the literature review on mindfulness, whilst few empirical studies have investigated the application of mindfulness to leadership, researchers *are* starting to identify the impact of mindful practice on leadership performance (e.g., Bryant and Wildi, 2008; Reb et al., 2014). Consequently, the question of *how* leaders should be taught mindfulness arises. Kathryn Goldman Schuyler (Baugher and Schuyler, 2014) Professor Emeritus of Organization Development at Alliant International University, has noted:

Few people draw on deep practices of embodiment to develop managers, leaders, and consultants. I know of none who have both consulted from such a deeply grounded embodied perspective and used this consulting experience for systematic action research (p. 21).

This is precisely what I have sought to achieve in this research, by consulting and teaching leaders through the MIA workshop how to achieve a deeply embodied experience of mindfulness, through an action oriented process, and in turn, to then apply that knowledge into their professional lives. Schuyler (Baugher and Schuyler, 2014) goes on to suggest, “I believe that the leadership field as a whole will benefit if it is nourished by experiential forms of embodied learning that have rich theoretical and scientific roots” (p. 21). The MIA workshop is such an attempt.

As such, in [Section 4.4](#) of the literature review, the more passive forms of mindfulness training, such as seated meditation, were discussed. These particular methods of mindfulness training are currently the most widely applied approaches to teaching the concept. In addition, as further outlined in Section 4.5, both Ladkin’s (2008) and Sinclair’s (2005) interpretations of leadership suggest that it is a leader’s moment-to-moment embodiment that shapes their practices of leadership. Given this, they both emphasise the importance of a leader’s embodied experience in the present moment. The question, then, is how

someone can improve upon that embodied performance in the moment of leading. While mindfulness seems to offer promise in this regard, teaching mindfulness to leaders may necessitate an approach that acknowledges and seeks to simulate its application in the moment of leadership performance itself.

With this noted, the following sections outline the specific procedures employed for teaching MIA to leaders in the current research project. To reiterate, this workshop itself was guided by my second research question (i.e., To what extent can mindfulness, as taught in an experiential, action-oriented way, aid leaders in managing the leadership difficulties they described in moments of leading?) Taking this into account, and giving due consideration to the arguments of Sethi (2009) and Schwartz (2014) presented earlier, as active leaders of organisations, is it possible to develop a method of teaching mindfulness, but one that is action-oriented and thereby resembles more closely the ever-changing, often chaotic and unpredictable nature of modern organisations?

Included here is a potential solution to the concerns advanced by both Sethi (2009) and Schwartz (2014), who argue that mindfulness in a calm space is not the same as the mindfulness required in the chaos of the working environment. Specifically, my workshop was focused on teaching mindfulness in such a way that it may be applied in the *action* of leading. Additionally, the following sections outline how this training considers both Ladkin's (2008) and Sinclair's (2005) positions on the importance of a leader's embodied experience in the present moment, and how, through MIA, such learning can potentially be enhanced.

## **6.2 Mindfulness-in-Action Training**

Bringing Sethi's (2009), Schwartz's (2014), Ladkin's (2008) and Sinclair's (2005) arguments together, mindfulness may aid in moments of leadership performance. From this perspective, the aim for leaders is thus the cultivation of MIA. In considering how mindfulness may be taught to leaders to achieve this aim, a potential approach is one that is, in itself, action-oriented. In other words,

mindfulness should be taught to leaders through an experiential learning approach that encourages both the learning and the application of mindfulness through action, as opposed to passive meditation. In addition, this approach should honour what was covered in the literature review, such as key ideas in mindfulness training, where the awareness of being situated in the past or present leads one away from the present moment (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

Drawing on my personal experience as a lifelong martial artist and my expertise as a coach, I developed a workshop that would meet the aims of building on what was outlined in the literature review, as well as offering an approach to learning MIA. The workshop, which I taught to ten leaders from various organisations, was conducted over a weekend and consisted of three hours of training each day. The workshop addressed six key concepts on how mindfulness can be understood and cultivated in practice. Each of the key mindfulness-based concepts was taught primarily through accessible martial art-based drills, in keeping with the theme of 'mindful action'.

The six concepts were:

1. Imperfection
2. Grounded Thinking
3. Attitude Embodied
4. MIA
5. Exhalation
6. Resilience

The acronym IGAMER was created for the workshop. This acronym was developed in order to help participants remember the components and concepts covered during the exploration of MIA. This would later become important as participants moved back into their professional lives and had to remember the

various tools taught, as well as how to apply them at work.

While these six concepts were designed by me, I drew from principles said to enhance mindful awareness, as outlined in the literature review. While I separate them as a heuristic device for ease of understanding, taken together, they illustrate that MIA is first and foremost an embodied experience. After each key concept was presented and learned, participants were asked to think of ways to apply those lessons to their professional lives, with particular attention to their roles as leaders. The central focus in all of these key concepts is to both learn and practise MIA. Crucially, this diverges from the ways in which many approaches to mindfulness are typically taught and practised (e.g., seated meditation).

In the following sections, the reasons that martial arts can be considered a viable approach to teaching MIA are explored. Further, the importance of embodiment through somatic self-awareness, which articulates the perspective of mind-body as one and allows embodied mindfulness to take place, is outlined. I then present the conceptual framework that informed the workshop, followed by an overview of what it entailed, as well as the main learning outcomes that I hoped to achieve. To conclude this chapter, a reflection on the MIA workshop itself is offered.

### **6.3 Martial Arts: A Viable Approach to Teaching Mindfulness-in-Action**

The martial arts are embodied practices and patterns of movement which people practise for a number of reasons, including self-defence, improved health, exercise and self-discipline (Kim, 1991; Madden, 1990; Wingate, 1993). In addition, and crucial to this research, the martial arts are noted for their emphasis on mind-body harmony, as well as a turning inward to focus on subtle levels of experience and awareness (Zarrilli, 2004). As an embodied practice, the focus of martial arts training is on developing attention and somatic self-awareness. Central to martial arts practice is, therefore, the development of the capacity to

act with full attention to what is taking place in the present moment, both internally and externally, in one's immediate environment (King, 2015). These are also central aims of mindfulness practice in general (Brown and Ryan, 2003), thus rendering martial arts a potentially ideal training vehicle for teaching mindfulness (Milligan et al., 2013).

Furthermore, martial arts have already successfully been applied to teaching leadership principles to executives and MBA students alike (Clawson and Doner, 1996). In particular, Clawson and Doner (1996) used a Japanese martial art, Aikido, with their participants, who subsequently achieved a greater understanding of leadership principles. Strozzi-Heckler (2011), a well-known martial artist and embodied learning expert, brought his experience to organisations and leadership training after his success in working on those same principles with the United States Special Forces. Equally, while Liu (2004) writes more in line with the metaphorical lessons from martial arts as applied to organisational success, he still sees the value in the cross-over of those martial arts principles to organisational life.

Crucially, as noted earlier, for most leaders, the only opportunity to practise skills pertaining to their leadership performance is in the crucible of work, where their actions can often have substantial consequences. Because of this, I considered it unlikely that a leader would use their actual work environment in the first instance to actively practise and engage in MIA without prior training and practice in mindfulness itself. Using martial arts as embodied practice allowed my leader participants to both train in and experience MIA in a safe environment, prior to being asked to apply it to their professional lives. The training environment permitted the research participants to pause, reflect on the mindful techniques being taught, ask questions, troubleshoot, and/or reset when necessary. This initial practice of MIA was considered crucial to teaching mindfulness before participants were asked to apply this new skill in their roles as leaders.

There is a concern with any training intervention in the ability to turn knowledge into action, or known as the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2008). Pfeffer and Sutton (2008) highlight two key ingredients to bridge this gap, that is relevant to the success of the MIA workshop. Firstly, that knowing comes from doing and teaching others. In this respect my deep personal experience and knowledge in mindfulness and martial arts become crucial. Secondly that action counts more than concepts and elegant plans (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2008). Taking action counts more than elegant plans and concepts. In other words, learning by doing, which is the central premise of the MIA workshop. From this perspective, the martial arts training experience acted as an original action oriented learning component, with the objective being to transfer that knowledge from the MIA workshop to the participants' actual work environments. Two elements were central in the assessment of the outcome of the training intervention:

1. Generalisation: The degree to which the knowledge and skills of MIA could later be applied to various situations in which participants find themselves in their roles as leaders.
2. Maintenance: The degree to which changes through the application of what was learned in the training intervention will persist over time (Blume et al., 2009).

In addition, many of the embodied experiences encountered by participants through the martial arts-based drills were similar in nature to the experiences they face in their professional lives. For example, quick decision making, especially in organisational crises, is an ability often prized in leaders (Bavelas, 1960; Alkharabsheh et al., 2014). The outcome of such decisions may impact organisational strategy, change and workforce structure (Westaby et al., 2010). In a similar vein, quick decisions need to be made in martial arts training, especially in light of recognising a viable target and engaging it with accuracy. However, a person's attitudes, beliefs and perceived control in the moment of decision making itself may all hinder the intention of making such a decision (Westaby et al., 2010). Mindfulness training has already been reported to improve

a person's attentional focus (Jensen et al., 2012). With this in mind, conducting martial arts-based drills (i.e., using simple punching moves against padded mitts) offered an opportunity to gain valuable feedback in the moments after execution, as they related to perceived control and the expectation of a certain outcome versus a mindful approach to the same situation.

## 6.4 Somatic Self-Awareness

As was noted in the literature review (Section 4.2) the Buddha himself was a strong advocate of the body as an essential medium in experiencing mindfulness. This has been suggested as a viable path by researchers of mindfulness, who note that mindfulness *starts* with the body (Kerr et al., 2013). As also noted in Chapter 3, the focus on somatic learning seeks to bring embodied experience to the forefront (see [Section 3.5](#)).

A central aspect of this study is thus training leaders in mindfulness techniques that are underpinned by somatic self-awareness (Eddy, 2002). Somatic self-awareness is the process of being open to observing and exploring ourselves through sensing and moving. As this in and of itself implies embodying the fullness of the unfolding experience, it allows mindfulness tools to be experienced in the same way (Zahavi, 2002; Fogel, 2011). The medium for this awareness was the practice of martial arts-based drills. This approach offered participants an opportunity to learn by doing (Leonard and Lang, 2010), thereby putting mindfulness into action.

The research question here (i.e., Research Question 2), as outlined earlier, focuses on whether teaching mindfulness in an action-oriented way in a weekend workshop would allow participants to effectively transfer those skills into their leadership roles within a work environment. As such, this question extends to understanding a person's ability to apply MIA when actually leading.

## 6.5 The Mindfulness-in-Action Workshop

In this section, the concepts of the MIA workshop are presented in the order in which they were taught. Although several martial arts-based drills were taught, just one from each section of the workshop has been chosen to illustrate the primary lesson being presented. Furthermore, although some drills were similar to each other, they were set up with small differences so as to communicate the key learning points from each.

### 6.5.1 Concept 1: Imperfection

This was described as the concept of *Wabi Sabi* in the workshop, a Japanese term that denotes beauty in imperfection (Koren, 1994). A central message of mindfulness training is to see sensations, emotions, feelings and thoughts (i.e., one's embodied experience) not as fixed but, rather, as imperfect and impermanent (Khong, 2009). Setting the stage to teach mindfulness in the workshop, I deemed it important to discuss this first, as each participant would later be required to view their reactions to their embodied experiences non-judgementally (Shapiro et al., 2008).

**A drill example from the workshop:** The starting point of the workshop was a drill in which participants were asked to hit a padded target that moved at random. They were then instructed not to make any mistakes. In other words, they were asked not to miss, with each move they made being perfect. As was seen in the drill, the chance of this happening is slim, even for a skilled practitioner of martial arts. Participants therefore made errors and became frustrated, with some even giving up and abandoning the task as what was being asked of them seemed impossible. This drill was used to illustrate the illusion of perfection on the one hand but, equally, to prime participants for upcoming drills that would teach them that it was in fact their attachment to future expectations, or holding on to past mistakes, rather than being present in the moment that made the performance feel impossible.

This was followed by a discussion of what the Japanese mean by the term *Wabi Sabi*. The following is a verbatim excerpt from what I presented to participants at the workshop:

Perfection is the enemy of success. Simply put: if we always strive for perfection before committing to action, that's a sure-fire guarantee we will never achieve anything worthwhile. Don't get me wrong: I'm not against perfection. No, I want to draw attention to the fact that waiting for the perfect moment, or striving for perfection, can keep us stuck where we are – in the mud of life. In other words, the ideal of perfection should never be an excuse for inaction. Rather than waiting for everything to be perfect, it's much better to prepare as best you can, then begin by taking the first step, and be aware of any errors, or missteps, along the way. Use your action and interaction with the world around you as a source of feedback, and then correct your course as you go. Aim for constant improvement, rather than reach for the impossible ideal of pure perfection.

### **6.5.2 Concept 2: Grounded Thinking**

A crucial aspect of mindfulness is being aware of where your attention is being placed. Another way of exploring this is through grounding your attention towards your embodied state. This means, in other words, giving these embodied experiences, which are often experienced unconsciously, a firm theoretical or practical basis and, in doing so, turning one's attention purposively toward them. For example, an individual is considered to be mindless if they are embroiled in, or ruminating over, past or future thoughts (Langer, 2000). One of the key aspects of mindfulness is thus being present in the moment, without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Bishop et al., 2004). By this understanding, one has to first know when one is not being present to begin with (Baer, 2003).

In this section of the workshop, I introduced participants to Refocus Thoughts (RFTs) as a form of mantra which they could employ while the drill was being

executed, as a way to steady the mind and be more present. Refocus thoughts also aided participants to recognise when their mind wandered away from the task at hand (Baer, 2003). These techniques are discussed in more detail below.

**A drill example from the workshop:** Rather than attempting to hit the pad perfectly, in this drill I asked participants to monitor their embodied experience while trying to make contact with the target. They were instructed to take note of where their attention was being directed. Participants were also asked to acknowledge when they found themselves attempting to predict where the target would next be and, in sensing their frustration every time they missed, how long they held on to that frustration. The objective of the drill was to show that the more participants tried to predict where the pad would be, or the more they held on to the frustration of a past mistake, the more they missed and made mistakes. In other words, projecting into the future, or holding on to the past, makes success more difficult when performance matters.

I then taught participants RFTs. These are made up of cue words, which are purposefully learned implicit statements, repeated in the thinking mind throughout the duration of the drill.<sup>6</sup> The cue words for the drills were designed by me and relevant to the drill being taught. Participants were encouraged to create their own RFTs for experiences they encountered in their professional lives which required them to remain present. The cue words (e.g., balance, tight, breathe) that I designed specifically for the drill and taught to the participants aided them in refocusing their attention away from past or future thoughts (and/or images) back to the present moment. By repeating the cue words over and over in their minds, whilst doing the drill one more time, participants noticed that their ability to engage the target increased. For instance, they learned that it was not so much thinking itself that was problematic but, rather, where thoughts tend to be focused

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<sup>6</sup> While it is argued throughout this thesis that mind and body are fundamentally one and the same, it is also acknowledged that people in general do not see it/them as such. As noted in the literature review ([Section 2.5.](#)), the idea of the separation of mind from body goes as far back as Plato and is often inherent in our Western socialisation and education. Therefore, and as a heuristic device, teaching key concepts of mindfulness required first approaching the topic using specific terms for ease of understanding. For example, 'thinking mind' was used to refer to the mental processes that occur in the mind's eye (i.e., the mental picture we conceive). Later in the workshop, the importance of the embodied process of mindfulness (i.e., mind/body as a whole) was articulated and stressed.

(i.e., on the future or the past).

### **6.5.3 Concept 3: Attitude Embodied**

In Zen meditation, posture is imperative for meditation to be considered successful. Moreover, posture is seen as having a crucial role in the development of mindfulness itself. Being mindful of one's posture may make a person more aware of how their body presents itself in any given situation and also aid them in becoming more focused in general (Payne and Crane-Godreau, 2013). Here, Attitude Embodied implies the awareness of your current posture. In being mindful of this, you can change your posture to one that is more conducive to the situation at hand (i.e., purposively changing the position of the body). For example, if we take the idea presented above in respect to Zen meditation, a slumped posture is seen to affect a person's ability to be alert and to remain aware while meditating, both of which are said to be needed to be successful in mindfulness practice (Shaw, 2009).

**A drill example from the workshop:** Using the previous drill, I asked participants to monitor their embodied experience. When participants found themselves starting to anticipate or predict where the pad would be, they were tasked with engaging an Embodied Anchor (EA) technique. The purpose of an EA technique is to use a physical expression (like knocking one's boxing gloves together) to remind a person to return to the present moment. Unlike RFTs, that steer thoughts away from the past or future and bring a person back to the present moment, anchoring is somatic in nature, changing one's posture to achieve the same aim. Another way to think about an EA technique is as the intentional altering of one's physical posture to a more positive one and, in doing so, changing the way one feels about a specific situation. For example, as was noted in the literature review, Brion et al. (2009) have suggested that a person's posture can influence self-confidence. Equally, as Didonna (2009) has argued, our body posture "has a very direct and powerful effect on our state of mind" (p. 477). Therefore, an EA technique that has a centring effect, bringing a person back to the present moment, may likely enhance a mindful state.

The tag line used in the workshop to elucidate this idea was “how you show up matters more than you think”. As such, I encouraged participants to reflect on moments as leaders where they felt less in control or overly anxious and how that in turn affected their posture or poise. I then asked them to devise a plan to apply an EA when those moments showed up at work, as a tool that would allow them to bring themselves back to the present moment. Here I discussed some examples from research highlighted in the literature review, for example the work of Cuddy et al. (2015), Didonna (2009) and Brion et al. (2009).

#### **6.5.4 Concept 4: Mindfulness-in-Action**

As noted earlier, Conze and Buddhaghosa (1956) suggested that, historically, mindfulness was developed primarily through meditation practice; however, MIA is about taking every opportunity to practise being mindful. In this section of the workshop, the focus was on the application of mindfulness in the moment, where the lessons that were previously covered helped in achieving a broader understanding of mindfulness itself.

**A drill example from the workshop:** As the whole purpose of the MIA workshop was to teach participants how to be mindful in action, all previous drills led to this moment. By applying the same drill as before, participants were encouraged to strike the randomly moving pad, but this time to only apply RFTs and EA techniques when they felt their embodied experience taking them away from the present moment. This would happen, for example, when they made errors and began to attach to those errors either through ruminating on those mistakes or embodied experiences such as frustration. When these strategies (i.e., RFTs and EA techniques) were not needed, participants were asked to simply attend to their breath and continue with the drill. The objective was to teach participants that it was possible to perform the drill without becoming attached to its consequences and to complete the task without judgement, which are key components of being mindful. I then encouraged participants to be more mindful in the coming weeks at work and to find opportunities to apply MIA.

### **6.5.5 Concept 5: Exhale**

In this section of the workshop, I taught participants that, when all else fails, nothing tethers you to the present moment faster than your breath. Additionally, your breath can help to calm you down. As McCown et al. (2010) suggest, “The first foundation is mindfulness of body, which typically begins with bare attention to the sensations of the breath, bringing the mind and body together and calming them” (p. 71).

**A drill example from the workshop:** For this drill, I encouraged participants to monitor or observe their embodied experience and notice either when their body tightened up after making a mistake and/or, more commonly, how their thoughts drifted off into past mistakes or future expectations. When that happened, I asked participants to simply focus their attention on their breath and get back to the drill at hand. I encouraged participants to apply breath exercises at work, not only when they felt anxious but, equally, when being more mindful seemed appropriate.

### **6.5.6 Concept 6: Resilience**

The final key aspect of the MIA workshop focused on a discussion of the potential difficulties participants might face in applying mindfulness in their professional lives. For example, participants might simply forget what they have learned. At times, they may find they do not want to be mindful because the practice is difficult or it is easier to go back to old ways of being. Here resilience is required. In other words, to be successful in applying mindfulness requires consistency and to practise even when one does not want to do so. Nowhere is that more important than in moments of setback. In addition, I used my personal experience with mindfulness, not only in life but also as a martial artist, to illustrate that with practice, success is possible. There were no drills in this section of the workshop.

## 6.6 Personal Reflections on the Workshop

Upon completion of the MIA workshop, one main reflection emerged, namely regarding the language used. Specifically, I deemed it imperative to make the MIA training workshop accessible to all participants. This is why I decided to use language that does not exactly echo that used elsewhere in the mindfulness-based tradition or in the relevant literature. For example, instead of using the term 'mantra' (Engström et al., 2010), I used the term 'Refocus Thought Strategy'. This allowed for the concept to be taught without 'Eastern' or 'spiritual' connotations.

Crucially, as I myself am a Buddhist, which means that my understanding of mindfulness derives from that tradition (Kang and Whittingham, 2010), I recognise that mindfulness is often perceived to be linked to spiritual practice or theism (e.g., Buddhism) and therefore may not be equally well received by all. I therefore made a concerted effort to deliver the workshop without overly referencing this spiritual tradition. This, however, did not reduce appreciations surrounding the origins of mindfulness, which historically owes much of its rich heritage, tradition and understanding to Buddhism (ibid.). I both recognise and acknowledge that this understanding was crucial to the success of this research project. With that in mind, I made a concerted effort to include ideas, concepts and understanding of mindfulness from both the Buddhist tradition and from current research on the topic. This was done in such a way as to avoid 'mystical labels', by instead using language that can be considered secular in nature.

Further, I avoided using terminology that may be understood in academia, but may not be well received or even understood by the general public. For example, I circumvented terms such as 'somatic self-awareness', using terms such as 'Attitude Embodied' instead. Overall, I felt the workshop was a success. Based on comments in interviews from participants, they valued the experiential, action-oriented approach to learning mindfulness. In hindsight, if I had the opportunity to do it all over, it might have been more valuable to have more time to introduce the concepts covered and, specifically, more time for participants to practise mindfulness. As is shown in the outcome of the MAAS (see [Chapter 7](#)), there was

an immediate improvement in trait mindfulness post-workshop, but this did deteriorate somewhat over the next weeks. With more time to practise mindfulness, possibly the overall effects of mindfulness in their roles as leaders might not have declined as much as it had by the end of eight weeks.

## **6.7 Chapter Summary**

The MIA workshop allowed the theoretical framework of MIA to come alive for research participants. As outlined previously, the process offered began first by allowing participants to understand when they were and were not mindful. Building on this awareness, the workshop moved into allowing participants to understand the embodied nature of mindfulness.

This was largely accomplished through viewing thoughts, posture and breath as interrelated aspects of the embodied experience. In other words, while we may often see these as separate expressions of our self, the goal in the workshop was to show in action how each of these components impact each other. As such, while the workshop was separated into concepts for ease of understanding, the end practice was to bring them together as fully embodied experiences.

MIA was further supported by two important ideas: firstly, that perfection of performance is an illusion and that it is our judgement of our performance that often interferes with our best work; secondly, that to be successful at MIA requires resilience. In other words, it needs the willingness to bounce back from setbacks, especially when being mindful does not work out as expected. The crucial take-away from the workshop was that mindfulness is possible, but only with practice.

In the next chapter I outline and analyse my findings. This includes analysis of the interviews, especially how they highlighted mindfulness in the post- and final workshop interviews. Where applicable, and relevant to the analysis, the MAAS outcomes are also discussed.

## 7 Findings and Analysis

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of my research based on data collection undertaken in three distinct phases, as outlined in Section 5.3. Each phase highlighted a specific point of data collection, with its own set of aims. To reiterate, the research questions underlying this study are:

**Research question 1:** What are the embodied experiences described by leaders that arise in the present moment of leadership and which they feel may hinder their ability to lead successfully?

**Research Question 2:** Following on from Research Question 1, to what extent can mindfulness, as taught in an experiential, action-oriented way, aid leaders in managing the leadership difficulties they described in moments of leading?

In the following sections, the overall findings emerging from the MAAS are first discussed. Here the primary aim is to demonstrate the level of trait mindfulness among my research participants, both collectively and individually. As previously noted, the main impetus for the use of the MAAS was to allow participants to self-report trait/dispositional mindfulness pre-workshop, so I could evaluate whether changes occurred post-training and in the final stage of research. Changes in the MAAS would thus support related findings in the interviews. This is then followed by analysis of participant interviews. Interviews with research participants are presented thematically. The discussion of each theme is supported with verbatim extracts from the interviews to give meaning and depth to the findings. A reflection on answers given to MAAS questions and/or results that are relevant to the theme in question is also provided. (For overall mean scores for individual MAAS questions, including the questions themselves, see [Appendix 6](#)).

In the following section I first turn to the analysis and findings of the MAAS. All names have been changed throughout to protect the identity of participants, as I established earlier.

## **7.2 Analysis and Finding of the MAAS Results**

As was noted previously in [Section 5.4](#), ten leaders from various industries participated in the MIA workshop over a weekend. All participants were men and nine out of the ten had no previous experience with mindfulness (with the exception of “Gab”). The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown and Ryan, 2003) was employed to assess trait mindfulness at three time points; prior to the MIA workshop, after the MIA workshop (no more than a week later), and after eight weeks of autonomous mindfulness practice and implementation in their roles as leaders. The MAAS (Brown and Ryan, 2003) includes 15 items and evaluates awareness of and attention to the present moment. Respondents are asked to indicate how frequently or infrequently they have experienced these items on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost always) to 6 (almost never). Higher scores represent higher mindful attention.

Three primary stages of analysis were adopted to highlight the findings of the MAAS data. First, a total mean score of trait mindfulness among all participants for each time point was calculated. Subsequently, these differences in mean scores among the three time points were explored. This process offers an opportunity to assess if the MIA workshop had any impact on leaders’ mindfulness. As such, a positive impact on individual trait mindfulness was recorded by the MAAS post-workshop, which led me to analyse which of the MAAS questions showed the most improvement.

Finally, I analysed the differences in mindful attention as explored through the MAAS questions along the three time points, but in respect to each individual participant. Here descriptive analysis was employed, affording the opportunity to analyse which individuals improved the most in trait mindfulness over time. As such, whilst leaders had the opportunity to discuss their experiences with both

the practice and implementation of mindfulness to their roles through interviews, MAAS offered an opportunity to correlate these findings.

In the following sections, I begin with the analysis and findings of improvement of mindful attention over time, followed by which questions on the MAAS most improved during this period (i.e., post-workshop and after eight weeks). I then conclude with an analysis of individual participants who had the greatest improvement in trait mindfulness overall as recorded by the MAAS results.

### ***7.2.1 Improvement in Mindful Attention over Time***

Research participants reported lower mindful attention prior to the workshop ( $M = 3.43$ ) than after the workshop ( $M = 4.19$ ). However, a slight decrease in mindfulness attention was observed after eight weeks of autonomous practice and implementation ( $M = 3.77$ ). Prior to the workshop, participants engaged somewhat frequently in non-mindful attention experiences, whereas after the workshop they engaged somewhat infrequently in non-mindful attention experiences. After eight weeks of independent practice, involvement in non-mindful attention experiences was between somewhat frequently and somewhat infrequently.

Thus, the MIA workshop shows improvement in mindfulness attention after its completion, but its impact was less pronounced after eight weeks. Nevertheless, it should be noted that after eight weeks of autonomous practice and implementation of the mindfulness tools presented in the MIA workshop, mindfulness attention was still higher than prior to the workshop.

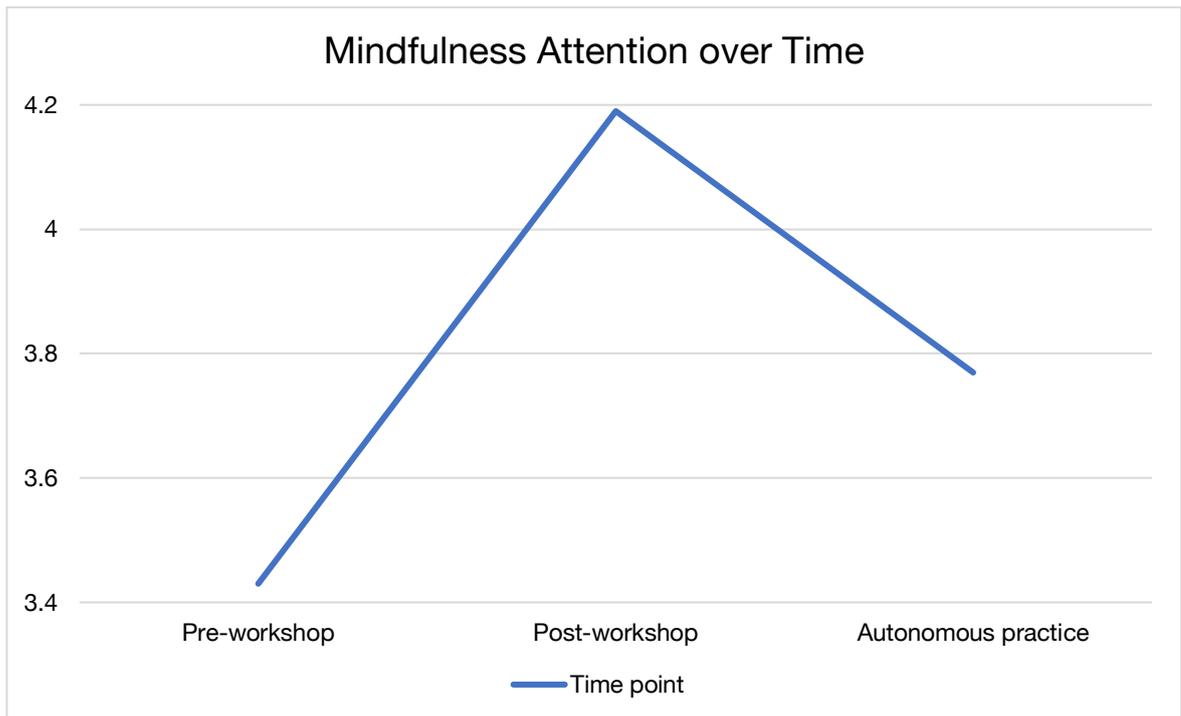


Figure 6: Trait mindfulness of all participants over the eight-week period

### 7.2.2 Analysis of Responses to Individual MAAS Questions

Analysis of the responses to individual questions across time showed significant differences in 7 out of the 15 mindful attention questions. In the answers to these seven questions (see below, Figure 7), participants displayed higher mindful attention after the workshop, compared to prior to the workshop. It was observed that the MIA workshop had the greatest impact on attention to a new person's name. Prior to the MIA workshop, individuals reported that they forgot a person's name almost as soon as they had been told it for the first time (i.e., very frequently), but after the workshop, this had decreased to somewhat infrequently. However, mindful attention in respect to all seven of these questions slightly decreased after eight weeks of individual practice, although it was still higher in most instances than prior to the workshop (see Figure 7 for a visual demonstration of differences). Potential reasons for this will be further discussed in Section 7.4.1.

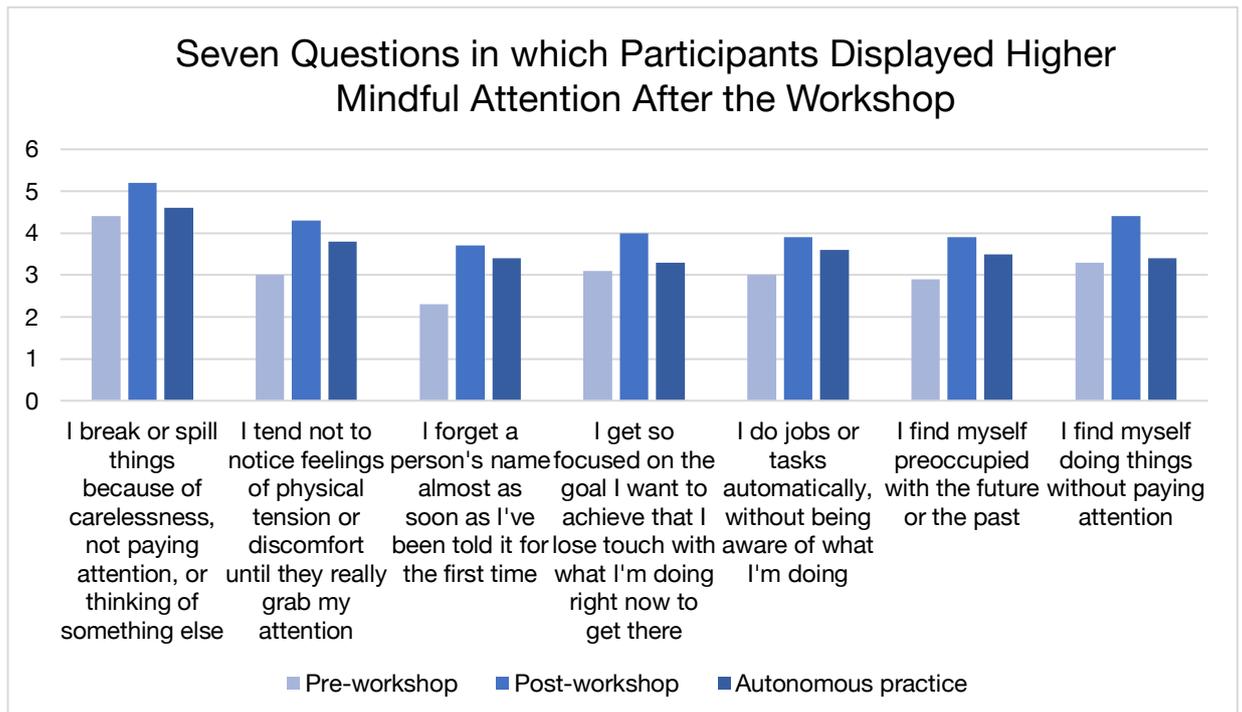


Figure 7: Questions with higher mindful attention after the workshop

### 7.2.3 Individual Improvement in Mindful Attention over Time

Interesting patterns emerged as to individual changes in mindful attention over time. Notably, all participants reported an improvement in mindful attention after the MIA workshop. With four participants showing only a marginal improvement (Mitch, Jas, Scott, and Jon). Participant Lee made the highest improvement, as his engagement in non-mindful attention changed from somewhat frequently prior to the workshop to almost somewhat infrequently after the workshop.

However, the positive influence of the workshop appeared to decrease after eight weeks of autonomous practice, as six out of ten leaders displayed a lower engagement in mindful attention than observed after the workshop. Also, participant Scott reported even lower mindful attention than the one displayed prior to the workshop, but this might reflect his greater awareness of engagement in non-mindful experiences (see Figure 8 for overall mean scores of each participant and Figure 9 for a visual representation of overall trait mindfulness for each participant).

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>
1. Mitch	3.67	3.73	4.20
2. Jas	3.67	3.80	4.00
3. Dom	4.07	5.20	4.00
4. Rob	2.93	4.00	3.53
5. Scott	4.00	4.07	3.33
6. Andy	3.13	4.47	3.87
7. Jon	3.33	3.53	3.67
8. Lee	2.87	4.73	3.47
9. Mic	3.33	4.40	4.40
10. Gab	3.33	3.93	3.27
Total	3.43	4.19	3.77

Figure 8: Overall mean scores for pre, post and final MAAS

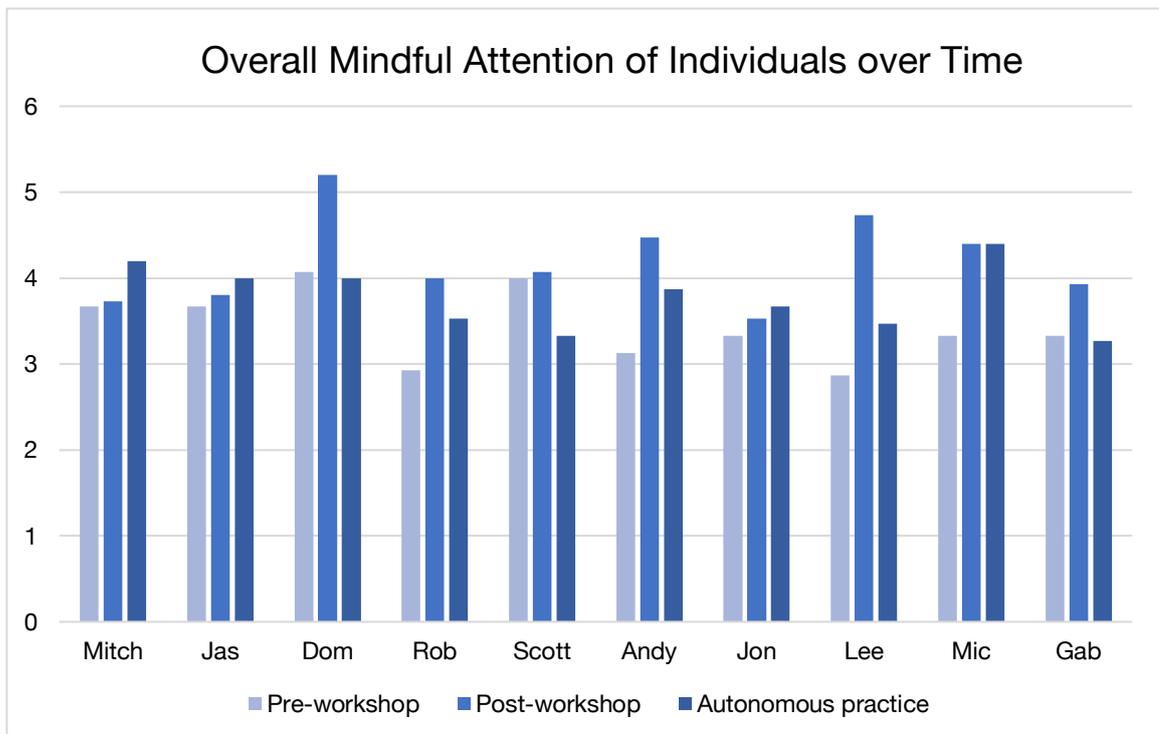


Figure 9: Overall MAAS scores for pre, post, and final MAAS

It can thus be extrapolated from these results that prior to the MIA workshop most leaders engaged somewhat frequently in non-mindful attention experiences. After the workshop, progress was made and they were involved somewhat infrequently in non-mindful attention experiences. Nevertheless, and as previously noted, after eight weeks of autonomous practice, participants either engaged somewhat frequently or somewhat infrequently in non-mindful attention experiences. As will be shown in [Section 7.5.2](#), participants who were more successful in improving their trait mindfulness over time did so because of purposeful mindful strategies employed.

It should be stressed though that the decrease in mindful attention cannot determine the effectiveness of the MIA workshop, because the systematic application of mindfulness tools was not controlled.

In the next section I analyse the findings from my interviews with participants. The themes that are presented are not a complete representation of everything that emerged from the interviews. Rather, they focus on answering the research questions. Through exploration of the themes, the reported experiences of the research participants in their roles as leaders are highlighted. Specifically, these themes cover experiences that participants felt may hinder their ability to lead successfully and the extent to which the application of MIA affected those experiences. As previously noted, where applicable, MAAS results are included in support of the interview findings.

### **7.3 Pre-Workshop Interviews**

In the pre-workshop interviews, the primary focus of discussions centred around three themes, which arose as a function of the questions I asked in the interviews. (See [Appendix 3](#) for a list of the pre-workshop interview questions.) The themes were:

- Theme 1: Defining excellent leadership
- Theme 2: Leadership struggles

- Theme 3: What is mindfulness?

### ***7.3.1 Theme 1: Defining Excellent Leadership***

One of the first interview questions I asked participants was how they would define leadership. The overarching consensus from participants was that a leader was someone who leads by example. The need to be authentic and accountable as a leader was a common sub-theme. For example, Jas, who is a senior sales manager in construction, noted when defining leadership, “I believe an excellent leader is someone who takes control, leads by example, someone who’s got confidence and self-belief.” Here, Jas invokes Goffman’s (1959) articulation of a front stage self. As such, Jas seems to imply that a leader is required to manage themselves in front of their team so that they will be perceived as someone who is confident and in control. In addition, his use of the term “takes control” seems to suggest a more autocratic style of leadership (Manning and Curtis, 2014), where the leader takes the role of decision maker. Andy, who was previously a national operations manager for a leading health products company but now heads his own company, echoed these sentiments about how he views leaders in their roles:

If you show you’re wavering and unsure on something then it just flows downhill for lack of a better term and not only does that confidence in you waver but also what you’re asking them [team members] to do. But, if you [as the leader] don’t believe in it then why should they be doing it?

Andy, like Jas, articulated the social construction of leadership performance in the need to present a front stage self (Goffman, 1959). It has been suggested that the act of performing is what creates and sustains others’ views of an individual (Collett and Childs, 2009). Here, Andy seems to create a view of leadership based on what the leader believes excellent leadership should look like to those they lead. Both Jas and Andy’s comments about excellent leadership contained elements of performance and impression management. They

suggested that a leader should be seen to take control and show unwavering confidence. Here, leadership performance is both intentional and purposeful (Goffman, 1959). Further, there is a clear idea that leaders should lead from the front, be able to do what they ask others to do and, in doing so, be able to impress upon their team what kind of leader they are. Again, this echoes Goffman's notion of impression management (Goffman and Berger, 1986).

Similarly, as Scott, a senior information analyst and team leader, suggested, "Leading by example is really a big thing. You can't expect people to do things that you aren't good at doing yourself." In this sense, too, Jas, Andy and Scott view leaders as people who lead by example. All three deemed it important that leaders adhere to the social conventions and expectations they believed were relevant to their roles (Goffman, 1959). The strong emphasis on leading by example also articulates one of the main characteristics of what has been defined as authentic leadership. As Avolio and Gardner (2005) note, "Authentic leaders are described as leading by example, as they demonstrate transparent decision making, confidence, optimism, hope and resilience, and consistency between their words and deeds" (p. 326).

It was clear, however, that for certain research participants, such as Gab and Lee, leadership goes beyond a single individual leading by example. Instead, a leader should represent the *entire* organisation. As Gab, a senior civil engineer and team leader, remarked when asked what excellent leadership practice meant to him: "Somebody who's authentic, somebody who lives the values of the company and he [sic] listens to his employees and they work together as a team." Here, Gab, while acknowledging the need for authenticity, equally acknowledged a democratic style of leadership. More precisely, his ideal of leadership seems to suggest valuing both the input of, and involving team members in, the decision-making process (Manning and Curtis, 2014), while simultaneously remaining focused on the organisation's vision (Northouse, 2018). His sentiments highlight the opposite of an autocratic style of leadership, in which the leader takes the role of sole decision maker (Manning and Curtis, 2014). As an interesting side note,

Gab was the only person in my research group who had previous experience with mindfulness.

In a similar vein to Gab, Len, a partner in a construction firm notes:

I would say an effective leader would have to be someone that's approachable, and is caring. Someone who listens to you, engages with you, no matter what your level is within an organisation. Whether you're at the bottom or the top, an effective leader engages with people similarly across all levels. That's at least where I try to position myself with my team. I'd try and treat them all equally. I probably don't put myself out there so much in a boss role or a dominant role, but rather try to be part of the team.

Len's articulation of an effective leader speaks to a mostly democratic approach to leadership, centred on good communication. As was highlighted in the literature review, Manning and Curtis (2014) noted that a democratic leadership approach is about nurturing and offering feedback to team members, while valuing their input and involving them in the decision-making process.

Participants also highlighted that effective communication and team autonomy are key to leadership success. Specifically, autonomy, encouraged by a democratic leadership approach (Manning and Curtis, 2014). Andy, for instance, highlighted this approach to leadership when he said: "Somebody who leads through example, who doesn't necessarily tell people what to do, but people do what is required because they realise they need to do it rather than just be expected to." However, despite participants acknowledging the effectiveness of a democratic approach to leadership, many seemed to struggle with this aspect of their job. Scott, for instance, when defining what excellent leadership meant to him, articulated what could equally be considered a more rational/masculine view of leadership, "Good communication, setting clear expectations of what you expect from the people you're leading." Yet, later in the same interview, he talked

about his frustration with the people he leads:

Mostly people are just not listening. Especially [when] I'm on the phone a lot dealing with call centres and managers and stuff over east [i.e., Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane]. You seem to get a lot of people that just don't seem to pay attention to what you're saying. They're obviously not taking notes or anything, they're just trying to recall it later. They remember certain aspects of the conversation, but then they try to say "oh, that wasn't said" in respect to other parts.

Mitch, a senior technician and team leader, highlighted similar frustrations:

I do get a bit frustrated sometimes when they don't understand what I mean. So when I'm explaining something, if I don't explain it in a way they understand. So I get a bit frustrated and they get a bit frustrated as well, because obviously they sense I'm frustrated. It just gets a bit circular [pause]. I find myself telling them what to do instead of leading them to do things on their own. So I find myself, yeah, being too much of a boss if you know what I mean.

While it was clear what excellent leadership meant to these respondents, they still noted that they struggle at times to bring the aims of their leadership to fruition. Here, a change of language from the beginning of the interviews to constructions used later on was noticeable. For example, opening comments in respect to leading were softer, such as "people I lead" when discussing positive aspects of their leadership, which later changed to "they". This could signify an example of 'othering' and a more critical rendering of team members. There seems to be a conflict here between the espoused discourse of participants as to an excellent leadership approach and their self-reported practice as leaders. This discussion highlighted mainly a democratic leadership style and yet, perhaps, implies Scott and Mitch want to practise a more autocratic style of leadership (Manning and Curtis, 2014) whereby team members simply do what they are told. At the crux of these later comments seems to be an issue of miscommunication

or lack of effective communication. This will be discussed further in Section 7.4.4 in respect to post-workshop interviews and the theme of mindful communication.

### **7.3.2 Theme 2: Leadership Struggles**

Leadership struggles emerged as the second key theme in the pre-MIA interviews. Here, impression management for these leaders seems to come in various guises. As DuBrin (2011) notes, impression management often manifests itself in relation to the type of industry in question. Rob, who heads up a transport truck servicing company in a male-dominated industry, said, “I feel like I have always had to prove myself. Even though I am not that tough guy, I feel like I need to put on that macho act.” Here, Rob acknowledged that he has to construct this particular identity out of necessity. Additionally, he must manage impressions (Goffman, 1959) that are consistent with what he believes is expected of him as a leader in his industry. Rob further remarked that, “being a nice guy made me feel weak. I don’t think it should have because that’s just weird but it does.” His notion of this being “weird” may point to a necessity to assume/perform the identity that is dominant in his industry, the ‘macho act’. Here, he appears to attempt to maintain a performance that is socially acceptable to others at work, even though he clearly does not agree with it. This could be considered emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012), albeit a more masculine form and suggests that Rob’s backstage self is different to the front-stage self he presents at work (Goffman, 1959).

For Mic, who heads up a sales team in the automotive industry, the situation is similar. Specifically, Mic talked about the emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) of constantly having to show that he is in charge, that he is the ‘alpha’ and must be taken seriously: “Yeah, because I don’t want to. I don’t want to be sticking my chest out all the time, it’s emotionally draining.” Here, Mic’s leadership experience also highlights a leadership aesthetic (Hansen et al., 2007). In this sense, aesthetic enaction refers to a capacity for action guided by embodied feelings (Eagleton, 1991, Baumgarten, 2007; Ladkin, 2008). Although he suggested that this aesthetic is difficult to regulate and sustain, he feels the need to apply

cognitive, bodily and expressive strategies to fulfil the emotional display his job necessitates.

In addition to emotional labour, these data suggest a constant jostling for acceptance in the workplace, tied to self-concept (Leary and Tangney, 2014), applying to leaders working towards being accepted by those they lead and, at times, their fellow leaders. After all, one of the goals of leadership is said to be to inspire others to achieve the goals and/or vision of the organisation (Northouse, 2018). As Jas suggested, “I think most leaders will struggle with the acceptance of who they are amongst their peers.” As such, self-perception is informed by a person’s feelings, beliefs, attitudes, goals and behaviour (Leary and Tangney, 2014).

As Jas continued to explain his need for acceptance as a leader, he highlighted key concerns such as, “Am I doing the right thing? Is what I’m doing, or the way I’m doing, leading by example, is it correct? Have I been accepted? Am I getting the respect? Do they [his team] talk behind my back?” These concerns may go beyond the achievement of leadership goals, speaking to a deeper issue about a leader’s identity, their credibility and their ‘right’ to be called a leader rather than being able to generate tangible organisational outcomes. As such, leaders are not independent of their team members but, rather, are interdependent. In other words, leader and team members rely on each other, creating the necessary conditions for leadership influence to take place (Reicher et al., 2005).

Mic likewise observed that there is a need to be accepted in the workplace and that any lack thereof is often not spoken about among leaders. He suggested that being a leader often makes it difficult to discuss stress at work with anyone else: “No one really discusses the brutality that really happens at work.” This is arguably made even more difficult when higher management sets an agenda with which others, including leaders further down the organisation, do not agree. As Andy also acknowledged:

I don't like being the bad guy necessarily...but professionally being the bad guy when you're pushed into a situation by your superiors that I don't necessarily agree with, I have a hard time with that.

Andy acknowledges that emotional labour may be required (Mednick and Hochschild, 1985) to not be perceived as being the 'bad guy' by those he leads.

As Haslam (2011) and others (e.g., Knippenberg et al., 2003; Sherif, 2006) argue, leadership is not a zero-sum game but, rather, a relationship between leaders and team members within a social group. In this sense, a leader has to navigate the goals of the organisation, as well as their own goals and those of team members in order to achieve a successful outcome (House, 1971). As a leader, getting the job done can therefore be a fine balancing act.

Another key aspect of leadership is said to be the achievement of results (Northouse, 2018). However, as Matsumoto and Hwang (2011) note, achieving results can often be difficult when dealing with team members' emotions. Jon, a building and a finance specialist, explained this as follows:

I mean, there is an old classic saying that an objection is only a request for more information. So often we are trying to work through what is the underlying issue that they [team members] are trying to resolve. But sometimes you're pushed to try to get a result. You know you have to have the empathy for them, but you have to park that and come back to it later.

Here, Jon seems to suggest that, at times, he is required to advance the agenda of the job at hand and the organisation as a whole, by setting aside his own empathy and the feelings of his team in favour of results. In addition, most of the research participants highlighted the difficulty of not bringing their work home with them, which included the difficulties and stress of the day. As Andy remarked, "You don't switch off from work. Sometimes the emotional toll of the day stays with you. It's hard to shake it off." In this respect, work invariably affects

relationships at home, especially with children. One research participant, Mic, made this observation explicitly, stating:

I'd come home angry. I couldn't switch off and I drive an hour from work to home, so I am in the car by myself. I just can't get the space in my head to switch off. So when I walk into the house, and my kids are right there, it's difficult.

This struggle was not only about letting go of the emotional toll of work but equally of one's professional performance. As such, the front stage and back stage (Goffman, 1959) are not separate. Leadership therefore is not just a performance but also involves emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012). This leaves a mark which is not easily removed, as is also reflected in Gab's observations:

Part of it is just running through the conversations...I think, "oh I could have done this better, I could have said that better." I just reflect on my performance and how I did...it used to keep me awake a lot. It still does, at times, keep me awake.

While what is being described is less about emotion in the workspace itself and more about taking the job home with you, it seems that this in and of itself lends to an increase in participants' overall stress. Len echoed these sentiments:

I've got to come home and do the paperwork, emails, etc. So, I'm still working on that. I would say I'm struggling with that, finding the time, especially for my kids, allotting time for them. Instead I'll come home, and go "Oh, I've got spare time. I better jump on the computer and do this and that," etc.

Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (2007) note that employees who have higher ambition and job involvement – like the participants in this research – are more likely to use communication devices after hours. While technology allows people to work from anywhere, it has also been shown to increase work-to-life conflict. Even during the working day, when the interviews took place, it seemed that the thought of having to work after hours was not very far from participants' minds. As Mic remarked: "Right now I'm thinking about, unfortunately, the stuff at work that I still have to do tonight." In talking about coming home and being with his children without really being with them, Jas noted that, "They say I'm there, but I'm not present, you might as well be somewhere else." Not being 'present' is a hallmark of mindlessness, where a person ruminates on the past or is focused on the future (Brown and Ryan, 2003). However, it is suggested that the application of mindfulness allows a person to systematically train their attention, enabling them to detect their current state of mindlessness, thereby prompting them to engage in more mindful behaviour (Varela et al., 1991; Langer, 2000; Brown and Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Müller-Merbach, 2007).

### ***7.3.3 Theme 3: What is Mindfulness?***

As was noted previously, with the exception of Gab, who had some previous experience, all participants were new to the practice of mindfulness. This was evident in their answer to MAAS question 13 "I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past". Pre-workshop, most leaders were particularly preoccupied with the future or the past, as five leaders engaged in this experience somewhat frequently (Scott, Andy, Jon, Mic, and Gab) and three leaders were involved in it very frequently (Jas, Rob and Len). After the workshop, however, seven leaders increased their mindful attention of the present moment, with Len reporting the highest gains (see figure 10 below for a visual representation of these changes).

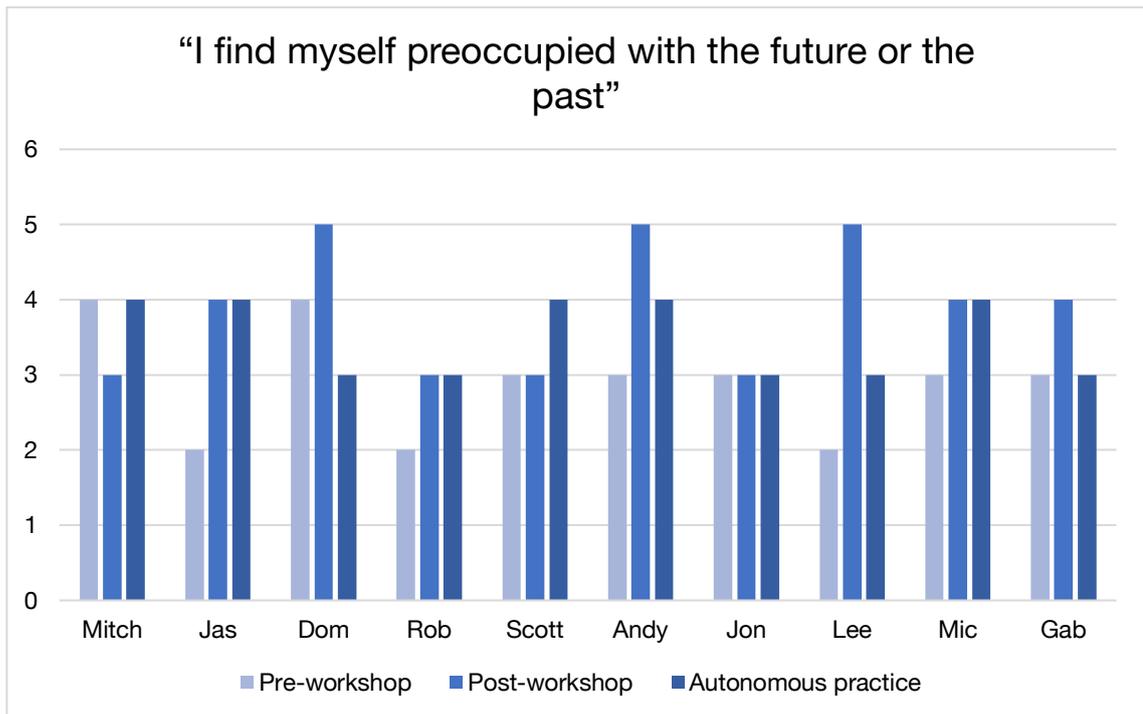


Figure 10: Mindful attention experience, question 13

While participants had mostly heard about mindfulness, they did not know how they could actually learn to be, and practise being, more mindful. For instance, Mic stated that, “I would just assume mindfulness is being in the moment, aware of what’s happening around you and how to control what you can control.” This statement shows Mic’s awareness of mindfulness and its potential utility, but also his uncertainty as to how to develop it. Participants were also aware of the necessity of being more mindful. In particular, Jas noted that:

I’m always looking in[to] the future, but I base my decisions on the past. I’m never just there, I’ve been told this before. I’m always looking at what I need to do to get this or that, just work, work, work, work, or do, do, do, and it’s hard to let go.

When asked to reflect on the MAAS questionnaire, many of the participants highlighted the fact that they tend to forget names a lot or are not fully present when driving, arriving at their destination and wondering how they got there. For example, seven of the ten participants answered ‘very frequently’ and ‘somewhat

frequently' to the MAAS question regarding forgetting names. Dom, a senior officer in charge of a law enforcement team, noted:

The one thing that does make me chuckle, there's a couple of things on there [the MAAS questionnaire]. One of them was – and I think, I hope we'll look into it – is driving to a destination and then thinking 'hang on, I missed that journey,' you know? That happens to me a lot. That was one thing that really sort of hit home with me.

It was interesting to note that when reflecting on mindfulness, and/or the lack thereof, most participants remarked on the familiarity of the behaviours featured in the MAAS questionnaire. Other examples include forgetting a telephone number as soon as they were told it. These are all mundane things we do each day and mostly mindlessly. I believe the question in most participants' minds was that, if someone is unable to be mindful in small, mundane life experiences, how mindful is that person in the bigger, more important and performance-related tasks required at work? By recognising the mindlessness in these everyday activities, participants seemed to realise how mindless they actually were in general. Even though the research participants' understanding of mindfulness was limited at the outset of the study, with most not having any experience of it, there was also a sense of excitement among them in learning more about being mindful. As Jon enthusiastically acknowledged when asked what he knew about mindfulness:

Not a great deal. But I was happy with not coming in with too many wrong ideas of what it could be. So for me it is being present in the moment, in a lot of ways, but it's also, I think, doing something with that somehow. So whether that does lead to those increased efficiencies – that would be awesome. I'd love to master that.

### **7.3.4 Pre-Workshop Interview Reflections**

On reflection, for the research participants in this study, being a leader initially meant leading from the front, being authentic and having the confidence to do so. It was important to them that those they lead saw them as possessing these characteristics. To this end, there was a considerable amount of focus on ensuring that their front stage self was aligned to these ideals of leadership behaviour (Goffman, 1959). While several participants also acknowledged the importance of a more democratic style of leadership (Manning and Curtis, 2014), managing people was something they struggled with in practice. Unwittingly, many slipped into a more autocratic style of leadership, taking the role of decision maker when faced with the complexity of managing team members in practice. Moreover, even though most of the research participants were unfamiliar with mindfulness practice, they were eager to experience the training in light of how it could potentially help them overcome the difficulties they encountered in their roles as leaders.

## **7.4 Post-Workshop Interviews**

There was a marked increase in reported trait mindfulness in the week following the MIA workshop, compared to initial findings pre-workshop. As participants were asked to intentionally apply state mindfulness during that week, using the tools, strategies and tactics they were taught during the MIA workshop, this may account for this reported increase. This result supports the findings presented by Tang et al. (2015) who showed that trait mindfulness can be improved with state mindfulness training. To reiterate, trait mindfulness refers to a person's baseline and/or average mindfulness, whereas state mindfulness is the ability to improve upon trait mindfulness through intentional training (for example through meditation or, in the case of this research, the MIA workshop). While the MIA workshop was held over a full weekend, as discussed in [Chapter 5](#), all participants had a minimum of five full working days to intentionally apply the mindfulness-based tools taught before the post-workshop interviews. These themes emerge from the data, as opposed to being a function of the questions I asked. In these interviews, four themes were noted:

- Theme 4: Mindful Self-Awareness
- Theme 5: Mindful Breathing
- Theme 6: Mindful Presence
- Theme 7: Mindful Communication

Participants' reflections on mindfulness may give insight into why there was a marked increase in trait mindfulness on the MAAS and why participants overall had a positive experience in applying mindfulness as their roles as leaders at work.

#### ***7.4.1 Theme 4: Mindful Self-Awareness***

It has been suggested that one of the first stages of becoming more mindful is the ability to discern when mindfulness is not present (Kabat-Zinn, 2014). Mindlessness often presents itself with a focus on future or past-based thinking (Langer, 2016). This was highlighted by the answers to question 3 of the MAAS ("I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present").

Prior the MIA workshop, participants' ability to stay focused on what's happening in the present was either somewhat frequently or somewhat infrequently. Only a few of the participants showed change in awareness to the present moment post-workshop. Overall, the MAAS results showed that participants struggled to remain present. There were two exceptions, Mic and Mitch, who improved their attention to the present over time (see Figure 11 below for changes to the awareness of the present moment as captured by the MAAS results).

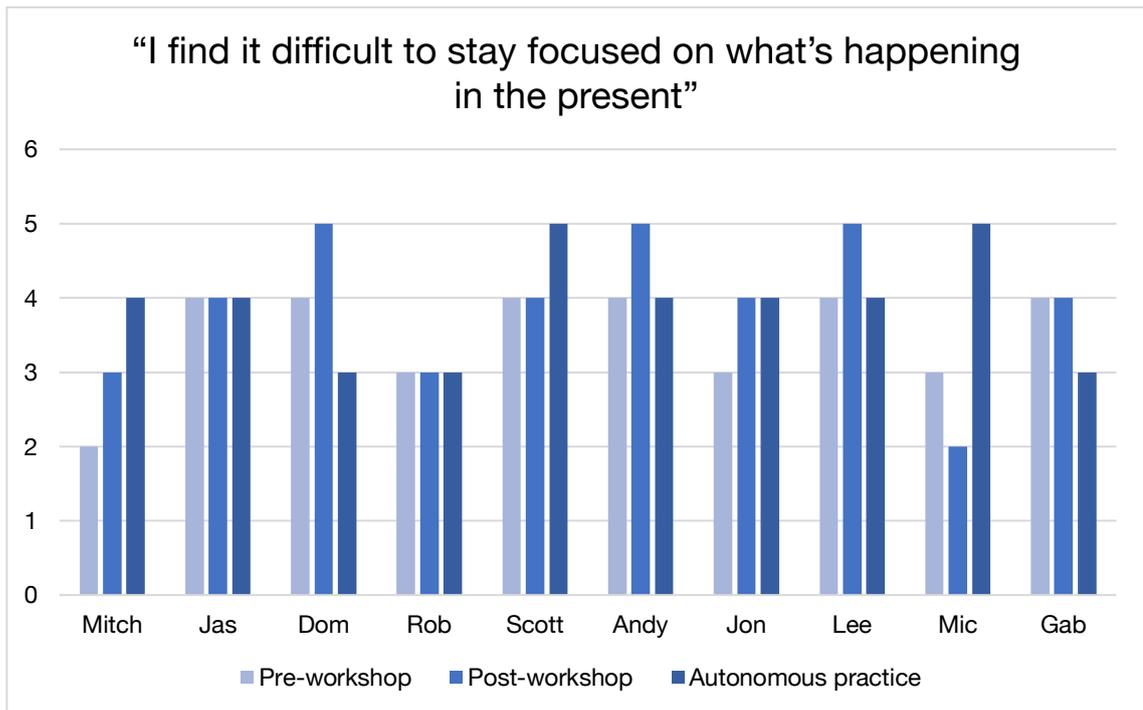


Figure 11: Mindful attention experience, question 3

As Jon noted: “My mind’s going to drag me away from the present at times, and it’s going to drag me to the past, and when it does, to just see it, recognise it and bring myself to what is happening now.” Another part of being mindfully aware of the present is understanding that everything does not need to be controlled (Bishop et al., 2004). Indeed, one of the lessons highlighted in the MIA workshop was that the fact that something is not perfect does not mean it is unworkable. By intentionally applying mindfulness during the week at work, it seemed that participants were better able to put things into perspective in this way. More precisely, Jon said:

Yeah, I guess, just acknowledging that there’s parts [at work] that you can control and there’s parts that you can’t. So it’s not a case of being perfect. I mean that idea of the *wabi sabi* [beauty in imperfection] definitely resonated, because we are trying to kind of chase this perfect dream, perfect house, perfect, you know. It doesn’t mean much at all, does it?

Gab also realised that awareness of being somewhere other than in the present moment is not always immediately apparent (Smallwood and Schooler, 2006):

First on Monday, I set the intention for the day to apply mindfulness, being in the moment and not judging. As I was going through the day, I was kind of feeling not fully aware. There was something there that wasn't allowing me to be fully present. And then by the end of the day, I had a really nice high moment and just realised what it was. It was that subconsciously I've been rushing throughout the day, so my subconscious belief that I've got to do things fast didn't allow me to be fully in the present moment. It was nice just to have that realisation: "Hey, man, even though your private stuff is some subconscious beliefs and stuff going on in the background, you have got to make it conscious and once you do, then you can slowly start letting go of those" and that was one of them, just to slow down, not to rush during the day.

I then asked Gab how important self-awareness was in respect to his realisation. He responded as follows:

It is key, right, having that self-awareness. I mean, this thing might be in the subconscious but you are not entirely aware of it and it might take a little bit of time to actually, "oh, hold on, pick up on this" and that really was the kind of thing that was bothering me a little bit and not allowing me just to be present.

Another key ingredient of successful mindfulness is being present without judgement (Shapiro et al., 2006; Wachs and Cordova, 2007; George, 2010; Sinclair and Seydel, 2016). According to Jon, he realised this at work when dealing with a difficult situation:

Part of me wanted to fly off the handle about why the tender process was so long before we get to a point where a decision is made. I was invited in to write a formal offer after placing an expression of interest, and it was my formal offer that got knocked back, but my expression of interest was accepted. So there's a whole series of things going on there. But if you don't attach to that [judge it] and just sort of move past it then you can see what comes about potentially from here forward. So it's interesting to see if you've got a whole series of things in your life, whether it's kids, parents, if you handle it better every time by using that approach, and where it may lead.

Mindfulness is also said to change the quality of even routine experiences, such as those you take for granted (Tenney and Gard, 2016). Dom highlighted this point:

Yeah, the whole mindfulness, the whole living for the present. I can see why you targeted people who have leadership roles or high stress jobs because I'm constantly doing it now. Since the workshop, I've consciously made the effort on every job I go to focus on the present moment, rather thinking about the next two or three appointments that I have lined up. I tried to give my full attention, full focus on that particular person I was dealing with in the moment. Today, for example, I really noticed the difference. I was with other [police] officers at a protest and there was so much going on. You know, so much to do. Every single person I spoke to, however, I was constantly conscious of the fact that let's just focus on you now and let's give you my 100% attention – and it's such a more positive experience every single time.

Answers to question 3 of the MAAS questionnaire also suggest that research participants were aware of not being present prior to the workshop. The self-reported score increased post-workshop for half of the participants, which is likely due not only to the mindfulness tools practised in the workshop, but also to the fact that the requirement to keep practising was fresh in their minds. Still, as Len observed, it takes practice of being aware to be mindful: "I believe it's quite a slow

process. It's been tough. I'd say it's been tough to apply it through the week because it's so easy to go back to the way I was operating before.” However, as Gab suggested, none of these realisations would be possible without an understanding of what it meant to be mindful: “you wouldn't know where you are at and you would just go off on this tangent and not realising you are not present.” On this count, participation in the MIA workshop seemed to provide crucial tools and strategies that could be implemented when the leaders in the study needed to be more mindful. Jon noted that:

You can be mindful without being obsessed about it. It's not like you have to constantly be reflecting, “Am I mindful? Am I mindful? Am I mindful?” every second of the day. But having the tools and the ability to both recognise and engage in strategies to be mindful when you do need to be is crucial.

#### ***7.4.2 Theme 5: Mindful Breathing***

As noted above (Section 7.3.2), research participants highlighted how emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) took its toll on them as leaders. Indeed, it often exacerbated stress at work and in their private lives as well. It was noticeable from the post-MIA interviews that much of the stress encountered by participants, both at work and at home, was due to rumination. Using breath as a tool to shift the thinking mind's focus away from those stressful thoughts and to tether participants to the present moment seemed to have a positive effect (Shonin and Van Gordon, 2014). Such a practice has the added benefit of activating the calming effects of the PNS (Brodal, 2010; Pramanik et al., 2009; Jerath, 2016). Rob said that focusing on his breath really aided him in overcoming stress:

Well then, the one benefit I've seen just now. If I'm thinking about something, especially if I'm thinking about something stressing me, I breathe and I'm back here in the present. Interestingly, I don't always end up thinking about the same thing, the thing that was bothering me before. Most of the time,

it's on to something else, something new. My mind's already on a different chain of thought.

Dom also highlighted that stress for him starts on the drive to work, because just getting to work in the mornings can be a challenge. Here, too, he said he was able to engage his breath to overcome this:

I'm on day shifts all week this week so I am up at half six in the morning and being in rush hour traffic. I'm always trying to think of 'breathe' on the road. Remembering the journey, you know, just taking everything in. I often get stressed when people cut me off on the freeway, people are constantly merging over here, or there, indicating back and forward. Whereas now, I'm just like "breathe, be present, you know what, I'm still going to get to work."

As noted earlier, breathing tethers a person back to the present moment and enhances their concentration, which was specifically taught to participants in the MIA workshop ([Section 6.5.5](#)). Mitch also suggested this was beneficial for him:

I'll start to wander off and I'm like [takes deep breath] concentrate on what I'm doing [at work] ...It made me a bit more efficient as well because I'm sticking to one thing at a time.

Likewise, Mitch said that taking the time to stop and breathe helped him in frustrating situations at work: "I would stop for a second and go [takes a deep breath] and I just continue on." Jon suggested he even applied mindful breathing during his break time at work, finding that it centred him and kept him from constantly reflecting on things that were happening at work. According to Jon, this was something he had struggled with in his downtime:

There's a little coffee shop and a wall where I'll just grab a coffee and my dog just jump[s] up and sit[s] on my lap overlooking the ocean. I just really tried to focus on some breathing at that point, trying to not let my thoughts – normally what I am doing at that point is, where it's downtime, I am normally letting my mind take me to what needs to be done that day, and then other stories, and before you know it you have got all these thoughts.

Similarly, Rob reported that focusing on his breathing really helped him to more easily return to the present moment at work:

I find that it's good to breathe, I always say "breathe". And do it. Usually I say it out loud, but sometimes I just say it in my head. It just [takes a breath] and then I find it's quite easy to get back to the present.

These responses in respect to an intentional focus on pranayamic breathing (i.e., slow deep breathing), as taught in the workshop through breath-focused drills, support certain research findings. Pranayamic breathing has been shown to affect the ANS by engaging the calming effects of the PNS (Brodal, 2010; Jerath, 2016). In other words, when an individual finds themselves struggling with difficult emotions, their stress response is heightened. On the other hand, focusing on breathing aids in calming an individual down.

None of the data above directly reference mindfulness and its immediate link to leadership practice. Rather, the data seem to be focused on how mindfulness can improve general experience, which could be expected in the days after the workshop, because it focused specifically on mindfulness in a broader sense. Had the workshop focused on specific leadership skill sets, there might have been different outcomes.

For example, many of the participants highlighted aspects of being mindful showing up in areas of their life beyond their roles as leaders. While this research

study is focused on how mindfulness may aid moments of leadership performance in a work place environment (defined by the participants themselves), it suggests that being an excellent leader is not just what happens at work, but how their personal private lives directly affects their performance at work. Therefore, through being more mindful in a general sense, not only in their roles as leaders, participants became more mindfully aware of other aspects of their life when not at work. It is argued that satisfaction with work-life balance is positively associated with job satisfaction (Saltzstein et al., 2001; Shockley and Singla, 2011). In addition, emotional labour, the continuous regulation of emotions on the job, has been shown to be associated with poor work-life balance (McNall et al., 2009; Pandey and Singh, 2015). Put differently, a more stable work-life balance may likely enhance leadership capabilities and efficacy at work (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2014). Being mindful, not only at work but in a serious attempt to practise mindfulness in all aspects of one's life, may aid in improving work-life balance, and in doing so, as noted above, also enhance leadership capabilities at work.

### ***7.4.3 Theme 6: Mindful Presence***

Moving to the third key theme of the post-MIA interviews, Mehrabian (2007) argues that a person's perception of others in the workplace is crucial, with up to 55% of communication being non-verbal. People therefore often make assessments about another person based purely on what they observe. This is somewhat reminiscent of the reflections of both Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005), who suggest that a leader's moment-to-moment embodiment shapes their leadership practice and thus impacts their performance. Gab reported that being mindful of how his body was engaging in experiences at work (i.e., mindful presence), gave him much greater insight into the experience he was having:

Switching from thinking so much and more so to feeling the environment, I find that very important. I applied it at work when I have to make a decision. "How does that feel to me? Did that feel good? What feels better?" and using the body to make day-to-day decisions.

Furthermore, Jas said that being more mindfully present at work changed other people's perceptions of him too: "I generally hang on to a lot more [difficulties at work] and a lot of people would see that I'm quite agitated, so I'm not as approachable." But then, during the week of practising mindful presence, Jas reported a dramatic change. Laughing about it, he stated:

I think I may have become maybe too approachable because everyone is coming to me. The door – I had to shut my door every now and then and say "give me some time." The day goes so much faster because everyone's always there asking for help.

Mic felt the same, noting that by changing the way he 'showed up' at work by being more mindfully present, he came across like "a genuine person." Moreover, he stated that "I feel like they [his team] are getting more of the real me." This echoes Cuddy et al.'s (2012) research, in which they note that the type of posture a person has, either one that is open and expansive or closed and contracted, changes how they feel about themselves. It is not unreasonable to assume that being mindful, which is to say being present, accepting and non-judgemental in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2006), would signal to others a sense of calm, openness and approachability. As Kabat-Zinn (1994) observes:

Mindfulness practice means that we commit fully in each moment to be present; inviting ourselves to interface with this moment in full awareness, with the intention to embody as best we can an orientation of calmness, mindfulness, and equanimity right here and right now (p. 22).

For example, it is natural for us to recognise that someone is upset without talking to them, simply by observing their body posture and facial expressions. The same can be said if someone is happy (Mehrabian, 2007). As Cuddy et al. (2015) argue, our perception of a person is therefore not based solely on what they say, but also on body language, gesture, posture and demeanour. This is echoed by Jas,

who noted that, “My team knows when not to approach me, just by my demeanour. You know, once I am in work mode, it’s like, they can just sense it from my body attitude.”

#### 7.4.4 Theme 7: Mindful Communication

Probably one of the most profound reported shifts in the leadership style of participants in the week following the MIA workshop was how communication changed for them. This was also recorded in the MAAS results, specifically in regards to question 11 (“I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time”) Prior to the MIA workshop, six leaders were involved with multitasking either somewhat frequently (Rob, Jon, and Lee) or very frequently (i.e., Mitch, Jas, and Mic). After the MIA workshop, four participants increased their mindful attention in regards to multitasking, with this increasing over the eight weeks of autonomous mindfulness practice for participants Mitch, Scott, and Mic. For most of the other leaders, their results remained at stable frequency between post workshop and at the culmination of the research (i.e., Jas, Rob, Andy, and Jon).



Figure 12: Mindful attention experience, question 11

Reflecting back on how he previously communicated with people at work, Andy noted:

Obviously, I think we get too caught up in predicting the future, predicting what conversations might arise, how somebody might react to this, might react to that, and then you've already created the story in your own mind that when you come to talk to them, you're dealing with that story and not really with what's going on in front of you.

Equally, Gab said he found being mindful during communication with colleagues was "super important". In reflecting on how mindful communication unfolds, he suggested:

Because you are fully there, you can firstly listen to the person completely and be fully aware of what that person is saying to you. Secondly, it helps you remain calm. Having that mindfulness allows you to stay calm in a situation where there is highly charged emotions.

This shifting of mindful attention to the present moment during communication, without judgement, seems to have allowed Gab to adopt an orientation of curiosity, openness and acceptance toward his experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). In this case, this happened especially during communication with team members at work.

Similarly, Jon said he found that being mindful that week allowed him to see another person's point of view more clearly. As Burgoon et al. (2000) suggest, communication is central to effective relationships between leaders and team members. They further note that many of our social problems stem from poor communication, so getting this right may lead to more excellent leadership performances. In the pre-workshop interview, Jon had highlighted the inherent tension between having to get 'results' (i.e., a more binary masculine trait) and

“to have...empathy for them [team members].” As he began to apply a more mindful approach to communicating at work, he reported that his attitude began to change when faced with a difficult situation with someone in his team:

I was sort of annoyed and disappointed, but I just thought, “No, don’t attach to it. Try and just see where they are coming from,” and I did. I acknowledged that. I said, “I can understand why,” then just went into problem-solving mode.

Len, who spent the week travelling, noted:

As I was travelling through the week, I pulled myself back occasionally when I thought about it. I’d probably find that dealing with the same old suppliers, a couple of clients I dealt with during the week, that I definitely had more clarity when I applied it [mindful communication], and I could remember a lot more about what we discussed and issues that we’d raised etc.

Similarly, in his dealings with clients while being mindfully present, Mic said, “Today for the first time I was able to do it [be mindful], get in the moment right there with the client. I’m remembering names a lot more without even thinking about remembering their names.” These successes support Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) definition of mindfulness and his argument that being mindful needs to be done “on purpose” (i.e., intentionally) (p. 4). In addition, as noted by Moon (2004), experience alone (i.e., in this case, of mindfulness) is not enough for potential learning to take place. Rather, what is required is the intention to learn, along with the initiative to do so. These remarks from participants also highlight McCall’s (2004) argument that experiential knowledge (i.e., in this case, of mindfulness) is sometimes forgotten until a person is reminded of the solution again.

Likewise, Rob’s experience of mindful communication, “both with customers and staff,” seemed to be positive and “put them in a better place.” Specifically, Rob

noted that he was “dealing with it in the present, not giving them pre-fabricated stories from my mind.” In his words, “our relationships have been good. I’ve noticed a change there.” As Rob acknowledged, mindful communication requires a person to purposely pay attention, in the present moment, to what is being said without judgement (Burgoon et al., 2000; Ucok, 2006).

Throughout the post-workshop interviews, all participants reported similar experiences. Mic further remarked that being present and not attaching to unhelpful emotions “allows people to connect with you more.” Dom could see why mindfulness is so applicable to leadership because, as he noted, “being in mindful communication with a team member is a far more positive experience.” Equally, Mitch reported that, “there is less frustration when explaining something to someone if you begin from a mindful position.” Importantly, this was in stark contrast to his reactions in the first interview when discussing communication in his role at work. In this interview, as already suggested, Mitch noted, “I do get a bit frustrated sometimes when they [team members] don’t understand what I mean...and they get a bit frustrated as well because obviously they sense I’m frustrated.”

In the section that follows, some key reflections about the MIA workshop, on the part of participants, are offered.

#### ***7.4.5 Participants’ Reflections on the Workshop***

Analysing the post-MIA workshop interviews, one key theme is that there seemed to be a positive acceptance and practice of mindfulness in the week following the workshop. As a researcher, it is important to step back and ask why. Why did participants embrace mindfulness so fully and completely? Experiencing a potential learning event is not enough to ensure learning takes place. Rather, as noted earlier, what is required is the *intention* to learn, along with the self-initiative to do so (Moon, 2004). In respect to the MIA training workshop, it is important to reiterate that all participants entered into the research project of their own accord.

It was thus clear from their initial interest that they were curious and keen to participate in the project.

As such, participants were asked in the post-workshop interview what they felt about learning mindfulness through an experiential learning process. On this issue, Dom noted that being asked to practise MIA, in the midst of his job and in his leadership role, versus sitting on a *zafu*, stood out. In particular, he felt that the use of an experiential learning process is far more proactive. As he suggested, “Anybody can sit there in silence, focus and be mindful, but doing the same in an intense meeting, for example, is a whole different ball game.” He continued, “There’s no action in the first example. I loved how the workshop focused on the action bit.” Reflecting on learning how to be mindful in action, Jon similarly explained that he “wouldn’t know any other way to train something other than in action.”

Likewise, Mitch felt the MIA workshop and practising MIA was closer to real life:

If you’ve only practised mindfulness while sitting on a *zafu*, and then when it comes to real life, you may be tempted to go sit on that *zafu* again to get back to mindfulness...Whereas, if you’re practising it in chaos as you suggest, then you can do it anywhere.

Similarly, Mic said seated meditation would not have appealed to him: “Just sitting down for me and meditating wouldn’t be attractive enough to me. I feel that learning to do it in action makes more sense. I like the whole act of being engaged in being mindful.” Jas did not feel he was the kind of person to meditate either. An embodied, action-oriented workshop was more appealing to him. He also noted that he felt many people may not know there is another way to practise being present other than meditation:

That whole meditation thing, I've never been interested in it, never done it, and never tried it because I don't find it appealing. Just the thought of me sitting down by myself with my own thoughts, I can't do it. This [the workshop] is a different way of having the same effect, but in an environment that's quite familiar to you, you know, as you noted in the action of life.

#### ***7.4.6 Post-Workshop Interview Reflections***

As suggested above, in respect to the application of mindfulness the week following the workshop, participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive. This may have been partly due to the novelty of the workshop experience and the fact that the tools learned were also fresh in their minds. However, as Len noted at the end of the first week, he had early success, yet, as time went on, being mindful and remembering to do so became more difficult at work. On the other hand, Jas reported that by the end of the first week, applying mindfulness at work was easier than at home. It was clear from these remarks that, as time went by, participants began to struggle more in applying mindfulness than they had done immediately after the workshop. This became more apparent in the final interviews, which are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

### **7.5 Final Interviews**

By the final stage of the data collection, participants had been practising, and applying the concept of, mindfulness in their roles as leaders for eight weeks. They were asked to be autonomous about their practice and application of the mindfulness strategies, tactics and tools covered during the MIA workshop. As suggested earlier in the Methodology chapter, other than a reminder e-mail sent out at the start of each new week to both practise and apply the tools of mindfulness to their roles as leaders, participants received no further encouragement prior to the final interview.

Final interviews were conducted with nine of the ten participants. As mentioned previously, due to workload and scheduling conflicts, it was not possible to make an appointment with the tenth participant, Scott, even months after the research had been completed. Scott did, however, complete the final MAAS questionnaire. In the final interviews, four themes were highlighted. As with the pre-workshop themes, these themes arose as a function of the questions I asked, namely:

- Theme 8: Struggles with Mindfulness
- Theme 9: Positive Strategies with Mindfulness
- Theme 10: Work Success with Mindfulness
- Theme 11: What Makes a Mindful Leader?

### ***7.5.1 Theme 8: Struggles with Mindfulness***

Compared to the noticeable increase in reported trait mindfulness in the post-workshop MAAS findings, there was a decrease in mindfulness after the eight weeks of self-directed mindful practice and application (see Figure 6). Nonetheless, this score still remained higher than that reported in the pre-workshop findings. The degree to which each participant continued to engage in intentional mindfulness during the period leading up to the final MAAS may account for the drop in trait mindfulness (e.g., forgetting to apply and practise mindfulness). However, two participants, Rob and Dom, noted in the final interviews that their answers to the final MAAS were not because they felt they were less mindful at this point. Instead, these answers were given because they were so much more mindful now than they were prior to the training. In other words, the participants were now far more aware of moments of mindlessness than they had been previously (Langer, 2002). To be precise, Dom stated:

When I did your last questionnaire – yesterday or the day before yesterday – I noticed that, perhaps a couple of questions, I didn't want to misconstrue them. "Where would you say you are becoming less mindful?" How can I

explain this? I don't think I am becoming less mindful. But because I am trying to be more mindful I am more conscious of when I am not being mindful. Does that make sense?

Rob made similar remarks:

It's funny because when I was doing that questionnaire, it's not that I was trying to remember specifically my answers from before, but I think we're so unmindful generally that you could actually answer that first questionnaire as being more mindful. And then once you've practised mindfulness, you could answer lower on the mindfulness scale, because you're more aware of what you're really doing now.

As briefly discussed in the previous section, there was already a recognition among some participants post-workshop that applying mindfulness was not always going to be easy. This was highlighted further in the final interviews, when they were asked to reflect on any difficulties they experienced in the continued application of mindfulness to their roles at work. As Len noted, "I have to say it's been quite difficult because of the way we've just trained ourselves over the years to think about the future and the past. That's the way I've run my business for such a long time". This recognition of practice being a long-term commitment was echoed elsewhere. As Rob explained:

Yeah. I've, on one hand been surprised at how well I've been able to implement it [mindfulness], and on the other hand, I've been surprised at how long in reality it is going to take. When I first started, I could bring myself back to the present, but it would actually be for a second or two. Now, I can stay present much longer – but going beyond that, it's likely going to be years and years of practice, I would imagine.

Jon further highlighted the fundamental difficulties in the practice of being mindful: “I guess for me it is practising to delete this mind clutter that creeps in when you are trying to be present on purpose.” The language here is noticeable. In the previous section, the language was much more positive, evoking participants’ enthusiasm and excitement about their experiences with mindfulness during the week following the MIA workshop. In the final interviews, however, the language was much more muted.

Part of the respondents’ difficulty in applying mindfulness was simply the inability to remember to be mindful. It is interesting that the original Pali word *sati* that we know today as mindfulness means ‘memory’, or ‘to remember’ (Bodhi, 2011). Remembering to be mindful is a longstanding commitment. This did not go unnoticed by the research participants. In this respect, Jon explained:

At work I’ve been in some ways going through the motions and then pulling myself up and saying, “Hey, you’re going through the motions here. Are you aware you are going through the motions and how do you feel?” What I’ve been doing is pulling myself up, going, “Hey, be present.”

Jon’s experience of mindfulness seems to have been cyclical throughout the eight weeks of autonomous practice:

I have had weeks where I think I’ve deployed it. And I’ve had weeks where I have been thinking about it. And I’ve had weeks where I’ve not done enough of it, if that makes sense?

As he further explained:

It's funny. It sort of comes in waves and I am not entirely convinced that I've probably done as much as I could have. But at the same time, I've had moments where I said, "Yeah. I've been getting somewhere with this."

In fact, Jon articulated in his own words the difference between trait and state mindfulness, something which had not been covered in the workshop:

It is almost like a weekly prompt, if you haven't been conscious of it. Because it almost feels as if there are two levels to it [mindfulness]. There are times when you are doing it almost naturally and then there are other times where I have to prompt myself to do it. It would be good to try to increase both of those.

Similarly, Jas explained what it took to constantly remind himself to be mindful:

They do say it takes 21 days to break an old habit. So after the third or fourth week of trying to remind myself all the time to be more mindful, it became more natural. I found I wasn't always having to sit back and reflect in the day and go, "What could I have done better?" You kind of picked it up much quicker.

Participants' energy levels throughout the day also seemed to play a role in how successful they were in being mindful. For example, Gab noted that the more tired he became at work, the harder it was to be mindful: "By the end of the day I was maybe getting more tired and sometimes the old habits kind of still creped [sic] in."

### ***7.5.2 Theme 9: Positive Strategies with Mindfulness***

While participants may have had to remind themselves to be mindful, some deployed strategies on their own initiative that heightened their chances of being more mindful at work. One of these strategies was deliberately having the intention to be mindful first thing in the morning, as Gab explained:

Many times, I would start my morning with a meditation and set an intention to be mindful and to surrender. I would see that intention playing out. If I got to a point where I wasn't mindful, I would just tell myself that I'm going to click my fingers and say "change." In that way I started my day by being mindful.

Shapiro et al. (2006) suggest that intention is important in successfully applying mindfulness. The authors refer to intention as one of three axioms, or building blocks, of successful mindfulness, along with attention and an attitude towards (or qualities of) being mindful. This builds on Kabat-Zinn's (1994) definition of mindfulness, where, as also suggested above, he notes that being mindful needs to be done "on purpose" (i.e., intentionally) (p. 4).

Gab also noted that this strategy of having the intention to be mindful extended to difficult situations at work: "If I was going into a high-pressure meeting, I would also do the same thing...Just before that meeting I would set that intention to be mindful again." Similarly, by having an intention to be mindful, Mic also created a ritual that he felt allowed him to be more effective at work: "I start from the moment I get up telling myself 'I'm not here to put pressure on myself. I'm here to be in the moment and enjoy what's going to happen in the next hour'. And then it just seems to roll really easy into work." These sentiments reflect Kabat-Zinn's (2004) argument that, "Your intentions set the stage for what is possible. They remind you from moment to moment of why you are practicing in the first place" (p. 32).

Secondly, the focus on breath seemed to be an effective precursor to the application of mindfulness at work. On this count, Jas explained:

There were times [at work] when I couldn't just get up and go. I would just slow myself down using my breath. The one thing you taught me was the effectiveness of exhaling – using it just to slow things down. That worked for me quite a lot, especially in an environment when I'm trying to teach or explain something to someone at work, or trying to get a point across without getting stuck and fixated on that one point.

Gab also reported that on days he was less mindful, a focus on his breath really aided him in becoming more mindful:

In some cases, by the end of the day I still drift into some old habits. On some days I was just striving too hard in my thinking and I just needed to take more time out just to relax and breathe. When I got into that zone that helped me stay mindful.

Above, Gab highlights the need to relax. As Arch and Craske (2006) note, focusing on the breath serves not only as an anchor to the present moment, but may also aid in activating a self-regulatory response, helping a person deal with negative emotions like anger, frustration, anxiety, etc. Focusing on the breath in moments of stress has also been shown to decrease oxygen consumption, decrease heart rate and lower blood pressure, all of which are raised when the SNS is activated (Pramanik et al., 2009). It is likely that in highly stressful situations at work or moments of exhaustion, a leader's SNS will be engaged (Brodal, 2010). It has been noted that engaging the SNS shuts down the top-down cognitive functions of the prefrontal cortex and, in doing so, strengthens habitual responses (Arnsten et al., 2015; Yang and Raine, 2009). As Gab notes, "by the end of the day I still drift into some old habits."

### **7.5.3 Theme 10: Work Success with Mindfulness**

Moreover, while participants said it was necessary to remind themselves to be mindful, the overall effect of being mindful at work certainly seemed to be positive. These positive effects extended even to mundane workplace experiences, as Dom explained:

[As a police officer] we get good jobs, we get bad jobs. We get exciting jobs. We get boring jobs. Today it was a protest through the city. It was a pro-life, anti-abortion protest. There was actually a thousand people there, I'm surprised how many had gathered. I had been given the boring job of guiding them up there, not supervising the whole thing, but just doing point duty. I was conscious of the fact that it is a boring job, in policing terms I suppose, but they've all made their way there today for something they feel strongly about. I made a mindful effort to speak to the people there and wave to the kids and say hello. Giving out that positive energy, and just being mindfully present. I got so much positive energy back. Everyone was so grateful and enthusiastic. It's sort of rubbing off in all of my work environment now.

Jas reported that being more mindful in his role as a leader, instead of being in a constant state of wanting to control everything, allowed him to be more relaxed and accepting: "I don't get frustrated as much. I don't dwell on it [problems at work]. I feel far more relaxed and free." He also suggested that this allowed him to loosen control over his team members, giving them more autonomy:

I found that for my team members, the people working for me, they always found that I was always on their back. They didn't like the idea of micro-managing and they didn't really enjoy it, you can see it. I have been standing back a bit more, being mindful, they now seem to feel a bit more relaxed, yet still know the expectations required. It's good because I don't really have to push them anymore.

Here, Jas is invoking a more *laissez-faire* style of leadership, preferring now to take a step back, allowing his team members to make decisions for themselves, and only helping when asked. This can be compared to the more autocratic style he described prior to the mindfulness training (Manning and Curtis, 2014). Rob described similar experiences at work, both with his team members and his customers:

At work, it's about not over-thinking situations, you know, rather than thinking about potential problems, but rather dealing with actual problems. Which has meant when I'm dealing with my customers and team members, things just seem smoother. My responses seem to hit the target more often. I never seem to be on the back foot, although I would have thought I would have been more on the back foot because I didn't have pre-prepared answers and pre-prepared scenarios and excuses. It's been quite a shock because, as I say, I'm just reacting to what actually happens in the moment and it seems to work better.

As Rob noted, this outcome was surprising, as most of our time is spent pre-empting difficulties, rather than engaging in the difficulties we face mindfully as they happen. Not having pre-judged a situation at work seemed to allow him to be clearer and more effective in his responses. Mitch noticed this too as, when he was more mindful at work, difficult situations seemed to turn out better:

I was having a few moments where I was having a few issues on site. I started to get frustrated. I realised I was frustrated but, being mindful, I wasn't worried about it and just continued on working. And I got the job done, and done properly. Previously, when I started to get frustrated I couldn't do the work. This time it seemed like I put that story away and just started working again. I was getting the job done quicker.

Similarly, Len suggested that being more mindful at work allowed him to better regulate his emotions, which has been noted to be important for leadership success (Grandey, 2000). Here Len articulates what can be considered a positive expression (Sakiyama, 2011) of emotional labour (Mednick and Hochschild, 1985), in which his regulation of his emotions led to a positive experience at work. As he notes:

I feel [mindfulness] definitely made some changes for the positive. I approach these difficult situations with mindfulness with some architects at work, and it turned out quite well. Where sometimes those situations could possibly get the better of me, I probably feel a little bit calmer and I'm dealing with some of my emotions that may pop up when you're dealing with these sorts of high pressure situations more effectively. So I do feel it is making a change but I also feel that I've got a long way to go.

Mic said mindfulness helped him here as well: "I would say that mindfulness-in-action makes me feel less argumentative with my boss and team members that are trying to be overbearing."

Finally, Jas, in reflecting on the impact of mindfulness both in his role as a leader and at work over several weeks, suggested:

Now, after learning more about mindfulness, it's very important. I think every leader or every person in a position that oversees and manages people should be well aware of how they act around other people. And that what they do and the actions they take, and how they feel influences and changes people's habits and mindsets.

While the above shows favourable results in respect to the application of mindfulness in participants' roles as leaders, most remained hyper-focused on their goals on a frequent basis and neither exposure to the workshop nor

independent application of mindfulness tools exerted a significant influence on these rates. This can be seen by figure 13 below.

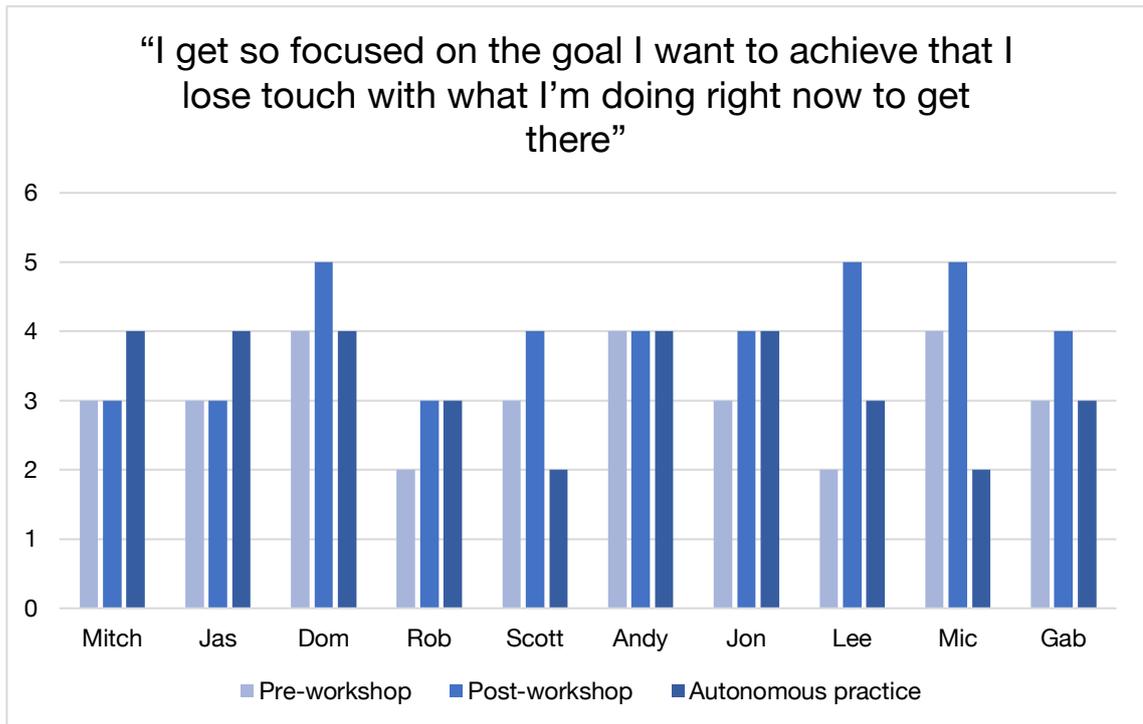


Figure 13: Overall results for question 9

It could be hypothesised that the strategic role of participants as leaders puts them under pressure to be hyper-focused on goals, which in turn shifts their attention away from what is required right now to get there (i.e. sensitivity to context). Consequently, leaders may have had the willingness to enhance their awareness after the workshop, but after eight weeks reality may have dictated otherwise.

#### 7.5.4 Theme 11: What Makes a Mindful Leader?

Jas felt that applying mindful leadership strategies invoked a sense of ‘leading by example’ that he could then teach and instil into his own team:

If I can demonstrate how to not attach to things myself...then hopefully, no doubt, they [team members] would not attach themselves to the negative

thoughts that always come into their own minds at work. I think it benefits not just myself, but a lot of people around me.

Mic also highlighted some important outcomes of being a mindful leader. He suggested that his experience in applying mindfulness with those he leads, when they need him most, was crucial in allowing his team to feel fully supported: “Oh, I think mindfulness is everything. By being mindful in every action you take with someone you’re trying to lead it impacts them so much.” He continued:

There’s a particular guy at work at the moment who is having a really challenging time closing sales. We’re trying everything to help him, but it’s just a matter of going through how he goes about his process. I’m being mindful of always stating the positive and genuinely listening to what he has to say. He knows now I am not there to try to burn him, he doesn’t feel pressure from me, which is what I want.

Gab highlighted similar sentiments when he remarked:

It’s very important in terms of having team members coming to you, sometimes quite stressed and quite anxious and emotional. Being able to stay calm in those situations and being mindful is very helpful there, it helps you tap into that creative problem-solving mode. In the end mindfulness is crucial for performing at your best.

Likewise, as Len realised, being more mindfully present at work seemed to heighten people’s perception of his authenticity. In his own words, being mindfully present allowed the people that he was in charge of to know that he was “a genuine human being.” According to Len, “mindfulness seems to really aid in that.” As he further noted, “I can feel the connection with people now a lot more than what I perhaps did before.” Rob also said he was listening more attentively to the people who worked for him: “I’ve probably paid a little bit more attention to

what they're saying, rather than just telling them what I'd already thought about previously.”

These comments highlight an interesting shift. In the first interviews, there was an emphasis on leadership as achieving goals, whereas in the final interviews, the emphasis has shifted to more of what could be considered as pastoral care (Augsburger, 1986), offering emotional support, as well as embodying a presence that allows team members to feel supported. While my data suggest that mindfulness training produces improvements in capacities that could be considered key for successful leadership, such as Gab's notion of tapping into a creative problem-solving mode, existing research on mindfulness has not adequately addressed how mindfulness practised by a leader changes the relationship they have with their team members.

At the conclusion of his final interview, Mic articulated the overall positive experience he had with mindfulness:

You don't realise that you're just feeling better all the time and it's not until you step back and realise, “This is why.” It's like “wow, I really feel good a lot of the time.” It's because I've been in that moment right there, honest with myself. I'm enjoying it. It's really cool.

Dom's parting words echoed these comments:

This is my journey. Just being positive and being mindful, I'm just going with the flow and being present and relaxed and making the most of it. It has just been amazing.

In the next section, some reflections on the final interviews are offered.

### **7.5.5 Reflections on Final Interviews**

In the final interviews, research participants highlighted their struggles with mindfulness. While practising mindfulness the week following the MIA workshop seemed to be successful for most, several weeks later, there was a realisation that it was easy to fall back into old habits. In other words, mindfulness would require consistent practice. Another interesting finding emerging out of this stage of data collection was that those participants (i.e., Gab and Mic) who took it upon themselves to develop intentional strategies to engage in mindfulness appeared to be the most successful longer term. Participants who developed intentional strategies said they had achieved greater success with not only the practice of mindfulness but also its application to their leadership roles. In addition, there seemed to be a departure from the command and control style of leadership reported in pre-workshop interviews to what could be considered as a more mindful leadership approach. This highlights a more empathic, caring, open and accepting approach to leading teams. Furthermore, this attitude towards their team members was highlighted in how leaders now viewed themselves.

It has been noted that to improve one's leadership, being self-aware facilitates change, learning, intelligence and transformation (Neck and Manz, 2012; Bennett, 2016). Crucially, however, the main aspect of mindful awareness is that it is done without evaluation, judgement and cognitive filters (Glomb et al., 2011). In other words, the awareness of aspects that hold you back is based on acceptance and compassion for yourself (Neff and Rude, 2007). Nothing in Rob or Dom's interviews suggested judgement or lack of compassion. Rather, their comments openly acknowledged how mindless they had been, or could generally be, and indicated a recognition of their personal mindfulness trait change itself.

## **7.6 Overall Findings**

Overall, the results suggest that the MIA workshop in this study increased leaders' awareness of their engagement in non-mindful attention experiences. In addition, it was shown that mindful attention is difficult to achieve in certain tasks,

especially those that may interfere with the role of participants as leaders. The MIA workshop appeared to be less effective in instances where mindful attention was already satisfactory (as shown in the MAAS results). Finally, the decrease in mindful attention documented after eight weeks of autonomous practice should be interpreted carefully, as outcomes are highly dependent on the degree of systematic application of mindfulness tools.

With that noted, two findings emerging from this research are particularly notable. Firstly, it is noteworthy how important mindful communication is to a leader's performance. Not only did participants feel more connected to their team members, especially in moments of discussion, but mindful communication also allowed them to be less judgmental and not to be overrun by unhelpful thoughts and emotions. These sentiments of mindful communication are beautifully captured by Sinclair (2016) when she notes:

Mindfulness is usually understood to be a solitary, internal activity. While this is partially true and the research discussed so far shows how mindfulness changes internal processes such as thinking and giving attention, mindfulness is also fundamentally an interpersonal activity. In Buddhist traditions, the point of cultivating mindfulness is to benefit others. Happiness and fulfilment are not achieved in isolation but with, through and for others (chapter 7, para. 5).

Secondly, some participants, on their own initiative, created daily rituals to invoke mindfulness throughout the day at work. The analysis shows that these individuals had the most success with mindfulness overall (i.e., after eight weeks). This is an important point. In Section 3.2, it was suggested that experiential learning requires the intention to learn, along with the motivation to do so; without this, learning may simply not occur (Moon, 2004). All participants were taken through the same MIA Workshop, yet only a few were motivated enough to take that experience and purposively integrate it into their lives and roles as leaders. It is clear, too, that for many of the research participants, their

growth in being mindful at work and in their roles as leaders happened, as McCall (2004) suggests, in “fits and starts” (p. 130). As such, the experiential knowledge of mindfulness participants obtained through the workshop was sometimes forgotten until they were able to remind themselves about needing it again.

As acknowledged earlier, the results illustrate that a brief training intervention, in which mindfulness was taught, allowed for positive transfer of these mindfulness-based tools to a leader's professional life (i.e., at work). This section equally showed that the approach to teaching mindfulness in an action-oriented, experiential way through the MIA workshop was well received by the leaders in this study. Most agreed that if they had been offered to learn mindfulness through seated meditation, it would likely not have been as effective for them.

The key learning elements applied in my workshop were experiential and somatic learning. This allowed for the sense-making process to take place through somatic martial arts drills designed to teach MIA. In doing so, participants were actively engaged in both their inner world and the outer world of the learning environment they found themselves in during the workshop (Beard and Wilson, 2006). While I did not focus much on the psychodynamic and emotional learning aspects in my design of the workshop, it was clear that, through learning mindfulness in the workshop and applying it further in their roles as leaders, participants became more aware of how those experiences shape their leadership performances.

Mindful awareness taught participants to notice the full range of sensations, emotions, feelings and thoughts from moment to moment, without getting caught up in them and without judgement. This non-attachment stance allowed leaders in my workshop to be more aware of the content of their embodied experiences during their subsequent self-directed practice (Shapiro et al., 2008). For example, as was noted in [Section 7.3.4](#), one of my research participants, Gab, noted that being mindful during communication with colleagues allowed him to stay calm in a situation that was highly emotionally charged. It was clear that this shifting of

mindful attention to the present moment during communication, without judgement, allowed Gab to adopt an orientation of curiosity, openness and acceptance toward his emotional experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). As such, it offered him a new way of engaging with his emotions that he may not have previously considered. This ability arose from the overall learning experience participants engaged in during the MIA workshop.

## 7.9. Chapter Summary

Chapter 7 discussed the findings and analysis emerging as a result of this study through the use of the MAAS and interviews. The approach adopted in the present research in analysing the MAAS results of ten leaders at three data points led to insightful patterns that are summarised in the following remarks.

Firstly, overall, leaders reported higher mindful attention after their participation in the MIA workshop, in comparison to prior to the workshop. The change in MAAS scores from pre-workshop to post-workshop also support the contention that trait mindfulness can be increased through state mindfulness training, which, in the case of this research, was the MIA workshop. After eight weeks of independent application of mindfulness tools, mindful attention decreased slightly, but it was still higher than before the workshop.

In general, Lee made the greatest improvement in mindful attention experience between pre-workshop and post-workshop time points, followed by Andy and Dom. Participants Mitch, Jas, Scott, and Jon progressed the least between pre-workshop and post-workshop time points. Concerning mindful attention prior to the course, leaders displayed the lowest mindful attention in the experience “I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told it for the first time”. The second lowest mindful attention was observed in the experience “I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past”.

In contrast, participants stated high mindful attention in the experience “I snack without being aware that I’m eating”. The next highest mindful attention was identified in the experience “I break or spill things because of carelessness, not

paying attention, or thinking of something else”. The MIA workshop had the greatest impact on the experience “I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told it for the first time” and the least on the experience “I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later”.

The interviews showed that while leaders experienced an immediate positive effect with applying mindfulness in their roles as leaders in the week following the MIA workshop, this declined somewhat after eight weeks (this was also correlated with the MAAS results). It is important to note that individuals were expected to be self-directed in their mindfulness practice and application during the period following the workshop (i.e., for eight weeks). However, even with the drop in mindfulness as recorded by the final MAAS questionnaire, overall findings still show a positive correlation between mindfulness and a leader's perception of their leadership performance.

Taking all of this into account, in the next chapter I reassess my research aims and research questions in the light of the findings of my study.

## 8 Conclusion

In this chapter I provide a summary of the findings in relation to the research aims and questions. Then, the contributions of my research to the wider literature and its implications for the fields of leadership studies and to Leadership and organisational learning and development are considered. This is followed by discussions both in respect to the limitations of this study and possible avenues for future research. Finally, I conclude with an autobiographical reflection, wherein I reflect on the experience of carrying out research, being a researcher and the overall process of the research journey itself.

### 8.1 Recapitulation of Research Aims

Leadership is a bodily practice, a physical performance in addition to the triumph of mental or motivational mastery. Though leadership works at visceral and sensual levels, activating appetites and desires, this fact has been largely overlooked in most business writing about leadership

(Sinclair, 2005, p. 387).

As was noted both in the beginning of this thesis and in the literature review, both Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005) have argued that it is what leaders do on the inside in the present moment of leading that allows for excellent leadership performances to unfold. In other words, how a leader is able to either enhance and/or manage their emotional content, feelings, sensations and thought processes (i.e., their embodied experience) during leading may well be the distinguishing mark of an excellent leadership performance. This thesis has sought to uncover how to better understand these claims through teaching leaders how to achieve a mindful embodied approach to leadership performance. As has been shown, mindfulness is one promising line of enquiry to achieve this. As such, mindfulness is an embodied practice that is said to enhance a state of being attentive to, and aware of, what is taking place in the present moment (Brown and Ryan, 2003).

It is clear from my literature review on mindfulness (and my own personal experience) that mindfulness is a practice that needs to be learned (see [Section 4.4](#)). It is also clear that there are many ways in which mindfulness can be taught (Didonna, 2009). However, as I have previously noted, both Tony Schwartz (2014) and Deepak Sethi (2009) raise concerns that more passive forms of teaching mindfulness to leaders, such as through seated meditation, may be ill suited for the ever-changing, often chaotic and unpredictable nature of modern organisations.

With the above noted, it is clear that Ladkin (2008) describes what she terms the aesthetics of a beautiful leadership performance as arising in the present moment of action itself. As such, in an attempt to understand the present moment of performance more clearly, this research offered leaders an active, action-oriented approach to learning mindfulness. Priming leaders through learning to be present in the MIA workshop, allowed participants to achieve the same mindful presence in their roles as leaders within various organisations (i.e., in the action of leading itself).

Subsequently, the unfolding experiences of research participants' mindfulness in the action of leadership were assessed. The approach was equally informed by the literature, especially the literature about the various embodied forms of learning in which leaders engage (i.e., experiential learning, etc.) and by my own personal experience as a coach, martial artist and long-time practitioner of mindfulness. The outcome of this approach is discussed in the next section.

## **8.2 The Findings of This Study in Relation to the Research Questions**

This research answers two research questions. Below I address these research questions by restating them in light of the outcome of this research. Additionally, I include the workshop here as an integral component in bringing about the

success of this research. Without the workshop it would have not been possible to answer my research questions.

**Research question 1:** What are the embodied experiences described by leaders that arise in the present moment of leadership and which they feel may hinder their ability to lead successfully?

While the review of the relevant literature highlighted that leaders often have the weight of the organisation on their shoulders, the first research question focused on what these experiences may include. The leaders in my study encountered several difficulties in their careers. These difficulties emerged within moments of leadership performance and therefore affected their ability to lead with excellence.

In this regard, I uncovered several key issues. Firstly, these leaders felt that in order to be effective in their roles and to be accepted, it was necessary to manage the impressions they presented in front of team members. This outcome of the research acknowledged the dramaturgical approach, specifically impression management, as presented by Goffman (1959). This in turn increased the social stress felt by leaders within their work environment. Here social stress is stress resulting from a person's relationships with others and from the social environment of organisations in general (Schneiderman et al., 2005).

As a further consequence of both impression management and the subsequent social stress, participants in my study noted how this affected both their self-concept and how well they were able to regulate their own emotions. This was compounded by a focus on being result-oriented. This in and of itself often hindered participants in their ability to create a more democratic style of leadership, a style which most participants felt would be more conducive to leadership success. With all this combined, participants highlighted that the

stress from work was often taken home, which in turn further affected their roles at work on returning.

While these reflections on leadership difficulties by participants were mostly their pre-workshop experience, it is important to note that at the time of these experiences, they too once occurred in the present moment of leadership performance. Highlighting this argues for the relevance of the findings for the second research question (see p. 267) where exploring mindfulness' role in aiding leaders in overcoming these leadership performance difficulties become important.

Firstly however, I discuss the importance of the MIA workshop as a viable method to teach mindfulness-in-action.

**The MIA workshop method:** Taking the arguments of Sethi (2009) and Schwartz (2014) seriously as active leaders of organisations, is it possible to develop a method of teaching mindfulness, but one that is more action oriented and in doing so resembles more closely the ever-changing, often chaotic and unpredictable nature of modern organisations?

The research findings suggest that the method applied in this study was successful in teaching participants how to be mindful in action. Through the workshop, participants were able to recognise the crucial aspects of embodied self-awareness needed to be more mindful in action in their roles at work. In an organisational context, participants found they were able to troubleshoot in the moment when needing to, deploying the various tools covered in the workshop to enhance their mindfulness, such as the use of breath or the adjustment of body attitude (i.e., mindful presence).

Participants really took on board the holistic nature of MIA presented in the workshop. Rather than seeing it merely as a cognitive exercise. They applied a

mindful approach both to their posture and to how they 'showed up' in their roles at work, including being mindful of their physiology when dealing with difficult situations. These findings are in agreement with the literature on 'Mindful Self-Regulation' and 'Mindful Presence' (see [Section 4.2](#) and [Section 4.3](#)).

Crucially, the MIA workshop gave participants the confidence to be more mindfully aware of how they interacted with those they lead within their respective organisations and, in doing so, positively enhanced those relationships. This concurred with Blum et al.'s (2009) notion of assessing the successful outcome of a training intervention, which they suggested required generalisation. In this case, generalisation implies that participants were able to apply the knowledge gained in the MIA workshop to various situations in which they found themselves in their roles as leaders.

As such, the research findings show that it is possible to develop a method of teaching mindfulness that is action-oriented. Participants themselves acknowledged that the MIA workshop experience closely resembled the ever-changing, often chaotic and unpredictable nature of modern organisations they experience in their roles as leaders.

**Research question 2:** Following on from Research Question 1, to what extent can mindfulness, as taught in an experiential, action-oriented way, aid leaders in managing the leadership difficulties they described in moments of leading?

My research findings support the positions of both Ladkin (2008) and Sinclair (2005; 2016), who suggest that a leadership performance is largely predicated on what people do 'on the inside' when leading in the moment and, in turn, how well that is managed.

Participants in my research who were actively engaged in mindfulness in moments of leading felt that doing so improved their leadership experience

overall. This was specifically evident in struggles they had identified previously in their leadership roles. Being more present and aware without judgement (i.e., being mindful) allowed them to engage with similar moments more skilfully. As such, overall, participants recounted a more positive experience when leading. This is in line with the literature on the outcome of mindfulness interventions in organisations (see [Section 4.5](#)).

In addition, by being mindful, participants were more prepared to explore alternative approaches to leadership in practice (for example, a more democratic style of leadership). This finding is in line with the literature, where it has been noted that mindfulness leads to an increase in cognitive flexibility (Davidson et al., 2003; Cahn and Polich, 2013). The aspect of non-judgemental awareness in mindful experiences may also play a role here (Kabat-Zinn, 2006).

A notable outcome of this research was the importance of effective communication in leadership success. 'Mindful Communication' which is to say, being fully present, without judgement when communicating with others, was shown in the findings and analysis chapter to play a positive overall role in improving relationships with team members at work. This, too, was highlighted in the literature, where it has been noted that mindfulness creates opportunity for curiosity, openness and acceptance toward one's experiences (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness seems to afford higher relationship quality because it seems that mindful people are better able to be fully present with other people (see [Section 4.6.4](#)).

Consequently, and specifically in the week following the workshop, the overwhelmingly positive comments from research participants about applying mindfulness showed that an active, action-oriented approach to learning mindfulness was conducive to improving leadership performance in the workplace. Overall, my results indicate that the brief training intervention in mindfulness aided participants in managing the present moment as leaders within their respective organisations more skilfully. They were apparently able to apply

those mindful skills in their professional lives and there was an overall positive effect. These results answer my second research question, suggesting that mindfulness has an overall positive effect on leadership performance.

With that noted, it is clear that successful mindfulness required intentionality on the part of participants. As was seen in [Section 7.5.2](#), participants who set a mindful intention for the day had more success in applying mindfulness than those who did not. As time went on, especially past the first week following the MIA workshop, it became clear that continuing to apply mindfulness in their professional environments as leaders was difficult for many participants. Here, Blume et al.'s (2009) comments on determining the successful outcome of a training intervention become important (see [Section 6.3](#)). As Blume et al. (2009) note, success in a training intervention is defined by the degree to which the knowledge and skill set (i.e., mindfulness in practice) can later be applied to various situations in participants' roles as leaders (i.e., generalisation).

Secondly, what is important is the maintenance of that knowledge and skill set over time. The results from this research show that the week after the MIA workshop, leaders were both able to generalise and maintain mindfulness in practice. It was only as the weeks went on that this began to decline. This speaks to the need to continue to intentionally practice and apply mindfulness daily.

### **8.3 Key Contributions to the Field**

In this section I outline the key contributions emerging from this research. The research makes two primary contributions: first, to the literature on leadership studies and second, to the literature on leadership, organisational learning and development. I conclude with a section on potential ways in which this research could be taken forward by other researchers.

### ***8.3.1 Contribution to Leadership Studies Literature***

The results from this research have real and worthwhile implications for leadership in practice on an organisational level. The research makes a contribution to the field of leadership studies by offering a much clearer picture of the role of embodied awareness in the present moment through mindful intention and its potential to shape a leader's performance. At its core, this research offers an application of mindfulness to the role of leadership, in the moment. This highlights the crucial point of Ladkin's (2008) argument that leadership performance is largely predicated on what people do in the moment and how this, in turn, is received by an audience.

Many of the scholars cited in this thesis have acknowledged the importance of self-awareness to leadership success (see: Manz, 1986; Nichols and Schwartz 1991; Choo, 1996; Locke, 2005; Sinclair, 2005; Neck and Manz, 2007; Ladkin, 2008; Shusterman; 2008; Pearson and Wilson, 2009; Northouse, 2018). Self-awareness has however little impact unless it invokes inner change for the better and in doing so leads to action. As was highlighted throughout this thesis, a promising line of enquiry to improve self-awareness is mindfulness. Crucially, a point was made that in order for mindful awareness to be successful in leadership performance it needs to be fully embodied (Vago and Silbersweig, 2012; Cebolla et al., 2016).

While many of the scholars cited in this thesis have noted the importance of self-awareness to change and the role of mindfulness in establishing such change, a specific approach in achieving this for leaders has thus far been lacking. This is where my research adds value to the study of leadership. In my literature review, I proposed a conceptual model of mindful leadership, where four interrelated aspects of leadership learning and practice come together. These aspects are 'Mindful Self-Awareness', 'Mindful Self-Regulation', 'Mindful Presence', and 'Mindful Communication'. This model was then integrated into practice in my MIA workshop. As was noted in the post-workshop theme analysis (Sections 7.4.1-

7.4.4), much of what was taught in the MIA workshop through the mindful leadership model above presented itself positively in leaders' roles at work.

In the workshop, I used the IGAMER acronym to help participants experience this mindful leadership model. It is clear from the research findings that participants understood mindfulness not simply as a function of cognition but, rather, as requiring a deeper awareness of their embodiment in moments of leading. This, in turn, included how their leadership performance may be received by their team members. This understanding among my research participants was evident in the findings post-workshop. Here participants highlighted that their leadership performance had improved by their being mindfully self-aware, not only in respect to what was occurring situationally, but also in respect to their breath, their presence and their communication with others. In other words, they experienced mindfulness as an embodied practice.

As was noted in the literature review, mindfulness should be considered as both an embodied practice and experience (Varela et al. 1991; Shapiro et al., 2006; Shusterman, 2008; 2012). In this way, a picture of the embodied mindful leader emerges. Here, and as highlighted in the literature review, what becomes important to a leadership performance is a leader's mindful embodied self-awareness, through which they are able, by being mindfully aware in the moment, to self-regulate before leadership action comes into being.

Many of the themes from the literature review showed up in the analysis and findings of interviews. For example, in the interviews, aspects of various leadership styles were acknowledged, such as autocratic, democratic and laissez faire styles (Manning and Curtis, 2014). There were elements of dramaturgy, where participants felt the need to put on a front stage self in order to be accepted as leaders within their respective industries (Goffman, 1959; Goffman and Berger, 1986; DuBrin, 2011), which, as is expanded upon in Section 8.4, are mostly male dominated. The themes of being authentic (Gardner, 2005) and

having to engage with both emotional labour and regulation presented themselves as well (Hochschild, 2012).

With the above taken into account, none of this has any value if a leader is unaware of how these concepts (for example various leadership theories) present themselves in moments of leading. Therefore, there needs to be a measure of awareness before action. In other words, a leader requires a deep sense of embodied awareness of their inner world, how that shapes their outer performance and, crucially, how that performance is received by others. As has been presented in this thesis, one way leaders could achieve this is through intentionally applying the mindful leadership model presented. Considering that, as noted in the literature review, few studies have been undertaken on the connection between leadership and mindfulness, this model may offer one useful approach to achieving success when seeking to adopt a mindful approach to leadership performance.

For example, through being self-aware of their embodied experience, leaders in my research were able to make the appropriate adjustments to their momentary actions in order to reach their leadership goals. In other words, rather than leading from habit, through applying the leadership model presented in this thesis, they were able to actively choose alternatives to their behaviour. In some cases, this was evident in a change of leadership approach. For instance, some leaders acknowledged that a democratic approach to leadership was desirable, yet found it difficult to implement and thus defaulted to a more autocratic style. Later, and through being mindful, they were able to be more successful in implementing a democratic style of leadership in practice, with other participants embracing a different style of leadership all together (i.e., laissez-faire approach). This might have not been possible, had participants not been mindfully self-aware of how their actions were impacting both themselves and their team members.

Therefore, I suggest these findings contribute to leadership studies by prompting a clearer understanding of some of the necessary key ingredients (i.e., the

mindful leadership model) that allow for, as Sinclair (2005) has noted, “Leadership [as a] bodily practice, a physical performance in addition to the triumph of mental or motivational mastery” (p. 387) to take place.

### ***8.3.2 Contribution to Leadership and Organisational Learning and Development Literature***

The overall success of this research was due to the MIA workshop. As was noted earlier by Schuyler (2014), “I believe that the leadership field as a whole will benefit if it is nourished by experiential forms of embodied learning that have rich theoretical and scientific roots” (p. 21). The MIA workshop was such an attempt. The workshop is thus a further contribution to the field, involving the design and delivery of a physical workshop embodied in martial arts and mindfulness as a form of leadership development.

As was highlighted earlier in the thesis, Schuyler (2014) argued that:

Few people draw on deep practices of embodiment to develop managers, leaders, and consultants. I know of none who have both consulted from such a deeply grounded embodied perspective and used this consulting experience for systematic action research (p. 21).

I acknowledge that as researcher, my approach to studying leadership may be somewhat different to how it may be commonly approached. It could be argued that I may have simply observed a leadership development workshop as a data site (like observations in an organisation). However, to both design and deliver training as an integral part of research is what makes this thesis unique. The MIA workshop is both methodologically novel and a potentially valuable tool for leadership learning. Thus, it is applicable not just in the context of this thesis, but provides a valuable contribution to the wider leadership and organisational learning and development literature. I am conscious of the risks I took, by acting

as both trainer and researcher, while encouraging participants to learn and 'embody' a mindful practice relevant to leadership. Overall however, I feel I was successful in converting theory into practice, and in doing so developed unique insights into how embodied mindfulness can be applied to leadership performance.

As noted in [Section 4.6](#), a model of mindful leadership was presented. However, this model still had to be taught to leaders in my study. It is clear from the literature review that mindfulness is an embodied skill that requires training. In other words, it would be uncommon for a person to know what mindfulness is without first being taught how to achieve this embodied state. The success of the research project thus depended upon a method to teach participants MIA.

On reflection, I would say this was by far the most challenging aspect of bringing this thesis to fruition. The available literature on learning and on how mindfulness is currently being taught contains no precedent for teaching mindfulness in an action-oriented way (especially to leaders). As noted in [Section 4.4](#), mindfulness tends to be taught through seated meditation, a body scan, or some form of slow-moving somatic practice, such as yoga. To date, I do not believe an action-oriented experience involving martial arts movement patterns as a vehicle to teach leaders MIA has been utilised in researching the subject of mindfulness.

One of the main concerns in leadership development training as highlighted earlier, is the gap between knowing and doing (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2008). My contribution to the leadership and organisational learning literature is evidence of the effectiveness of allowing leaders to first experientially engage with the concept of MIA before applying what they learned to their roles as leaders. As such, a mindful learning experience that is first experiential and attempts to invoke many of the embodied experiences a leader may encounter in their professional lives (i.e., quick decision making, the need for self-regulation to accomplish a goal, etc.), seems an appropriate way of both learning and being able to apply such skills in the domain they are being developed for. Many of the

skills leaders in this research learned and developed in the MIA workshop and as an extension of the mindful leadership model (i.e., mindful self-awareness, mindful self-regulation, mindful presence and mindful communication) positively showed up in their professional lives.

As was noted earlier, the tools and mindful leadership model taught to leaders in the MIA workshop allowed them an opportunity for appropriate adjustments to momentary actions in order to reach their leadership goals. For example, the understanding of mindful self-regulation can include constructing a different view of affective feelings. A mindful pause of self-awareness may lead to a different conclusion of affective feeling, such as “I am not actually angry, but rather frustrated with the current situation.” A mindful pause in monitoring breath can give a person insight into their levels of stress in the current situation and changing how one breathes can not only lower one’s stress levels, but change one’s affective states to a calmer disposition. A mindful pause in reflecting on presence can lead to a renegotiation or a reorientation of body posture to present a different view of meaning to others. For example, being mindful of embodied experiences as they unfold may highlight that the posture being presented to others is stiff and rigid, allowing for a different posture to be adopted and presented. In communication, a mindful approach can lead to more genuine conversation, as the unfolding dialogue is not pre-empted first with judgement. In the same light, through being mindful in moments of communication, one can assess if one is truly and fully there or not.

Taking this further, an important contribution to leadership and learning literature is that of mindful communication as it both relates to leaders and, in turn, how that impacts the relationship they have with their team members. This is important because as Olivares et al., (2007) have noted:

Although individual-based leader development is necessary for leadership, it is not sufficient. Leadership requires that individual development is

integrated and understood in the context of others, social systems, and organizational strategies, missions, and goals (p. 79).

When one refers to the literature on mindful communication, this topic seems underdeveloped. As was noted in Section 4.6.4, if mindful communication has been researched at all, it has been in the fields of primary care physicians (Beckman et al., 2012) and nursing care (Prince-Paul and Kelley, 2017). Crucially, however, there are similarities in the findings about how physicians/nurses interact with their patients/colleagues and the leaders in this study. For example, in their study of primary care physicians who were specifically taught mindful communication, Beckman et al. (2012) found that:

mindfulness skills improved the participants' [primary care physicians] ability to be attentive and listen deeply to patients' concerns, respond to patients more effectively, and develop adaptive reserve (p. 1).

As highlighted in the findings in this research, leaders engaged in mindful communication experienced similar outcomes. The outcome of this research thus shows that learning about mindful communication has the potential to enhance interpersonal experiences between leader and team members and thus allow for more effective leadership to take place. Applying mindful communication into a leadership learning frame, will then likely result in strengthened interpersonal relationships in the workplace in general.

Overall, the combination of embodied practices, the IGAMER method and the workshop informed by the mindful leadership model offered an engaging experience in the learning and development of leaders. This study has provided crucial insights into the efficacy of an action-oriented, experiential approach to teaching mindfulness to organisational leaders. Moreover, it has shown how the cultivation of mindfulness impacts leaders' experiences and performance, both in the crucible of work and in their leadership approach.

Specifically, this group of leaders illustrated that even a short MIA training intervention was enough to foster very useful skills to their overall roles as leaders for the future. As a side note to this observation, in the time since beginning my doctoral studies, I have further developed the MIA workshop into a training workshop for organisations. In 2017 for instance, I taught the MIA workshop to both Google and AirBnB in Singapore. I am scheduled to teach aspects of this workshop to Singapore Airlines in 2019.

## 8.4 Taking the Research Forward

In the following section, I offer some options on how my research could be taken further. This also includes aspects of my research that were noteworthy, but were either outside the scope of my planned study or only retrospectively provided promise for further research.

This research focused specifically on mindfulness and its role in the performance of participants at work and in their roles as leaders. However, it was evident from the interviews that work-life balance often had a negative impact on participants' ability to lead effectively. From this research, it is clear that mindful practice aided many of the participants in having better relationships and communication with their children and significant others and in other personal/social settings. It is unclear, however, to what degree the practice of mindfulness outside their professional lives in turn impacted their day-to-day experience of being leaders within organisations. As such, perhaps a further study could incorporate specifically this crossover of mindfulness practice from home to work and vice versa.

As was noted earlier in [Section 4.4](#), Carmody et al. (2009) examined how long mindfulness-based interventions need to last in order to generate significant results. It could thus be questioned whether one MIA workshop is all that effective in teaching mindfulness. A useful line of enquiry for future research could thus be the impact on leaders' performance of a series of workshops rather than one.

Secondly to this, taking into account the decrease of mindfulness by the end of the eight weeks, could a series of workshops over the full eight weeks have allowed for a more consistent mindful experience?

Furthermore, all participants were men. Although, as noted earlier, the study initially included two women, both had to withdraw at the last moment due to prior work and family commitments. The participants in my research worked in mainly male-dominated sectors (e.g., construction). Most of the men in this study had a tendency to articulate their view of leadership in decidedly masculine terms (i.e., rationalistic, or a more masculine form of emotional labour). How would this be articulated by a female audience? There is in addition an interesting thread about these ten men working in these 'masculine sectors' wanting to learn to be better leaders via what could be viewed as the decidedly non-masculine practice of mindfulness. As such, a possible future stream of research could focus on leaders in other types of business sectors. A future study of this kind including both male and female participants, or perhaps just focusing on female leaders, might show similarities, as well as differences, in the findings based on gender. For example, one study on mindfulness showed that mindfulness had a greater effect on women than men (Rojiani et al., 2017). In that study, women showed a greater decrease in negative affect and an increase in compassion as noted on various scales. It was also suggested in that study that mindfulness-based interventions may be maximised by gender-specific modifications.

One of my main intentions was to offer an action-oriented approach to learning mindfulness. In this sense, I chose martial arts practice as a somatic delivery vehicle that would allow for the concept of mindfulness to be taught in action. As has been noted previously, the most common form of mindfulness practice to date has taken the form of seated meditation training. Future research, utilising a somatic action model, could look at other action-oriented somatic disciplines (e.g. dance, tennis, golf, etc.) or use a more traditional form of mindfulness practice, such as meditation, to ascertain similarities or differences between these delivery methods. In this sense, the question is posed as to whether an active learning

approach to teaching mindfulness is more conducive to positive results than a more passive mindfulness approach such as seated meditation. This is an important consideration when, as was the case in this study, researching action-oriented leaders who deal with considerable work stress in ever-changing environments that are often chaotic and unpredictable. Put differently, what a leader is required to do on a daily basis is often in stark contrast to practising mindfulness in a quiet room while seated on a meditation cushion.

Finally, the reduction in trait mindfulness by the end of data collection is an interesting phenomenon that raises important questions. When the MAAS is applied multiple times with the same participants, as was the case here, to what degree does becoming more mindful affect these results? Being mindful arguably requires equal recognition of being mind/ess. It is possible, then, that increased trait mindfulness allows one greater awareness and clarity of when one is not being mindful. If the starting point is first to answer a questionnaire such as the MAAS without any previous understanding of and/or training in the concept of mindfulness itself, how accurate is the outcome of that questionnaire?

As was seen in the final MAAS questionnaire, trait mindfulness had seemingly fallen, yet two important points stand out. Firstly, there were two research participants who specifically highlighted in the final stage of the research that they might have answered the MAAS differently not because they were less mindful, but because they were *more* mindful of being mindless. These were unsolicited comments from both of these participants. What would the outcome be if this was an intentional question asked of all participants?

Secondly, the final interviews showed a more nuanced understanding of mindfulness, both in its application and difficulties in applying it within a work environment. If only the comments in the final interviews had been considered, it could have been concluded that participants had a much better understanding of the concept of mindfulness itself. This was, however, in contrast to the decline in trait mindfulness in the MAAS questionnaire compared to the initial results (i.e.,

post-workshop results). Still, and importantly, the MAAS results remained higher than pre-workshop results.

As such, there remains a discrepancy between the lower MAAS scores at the final interviews, versus the overall positive experience as described by participants. On reflection, then, a person's greater awareness of what it means to be mindful may have a very real impact on scales like MAAS when applied, especially post-training and with personal experience of engaging in mindfulness practice. This is another line of inquiry that would benefit from further research.

In the following and final section, I offer an autobiographical reflection of my journey, the experience thereof and what I have learned.

## **8.5 Autobiographical Reflection and Concluding Thoughts**

When we speak with our lives and our bodies  
we can be very effective at changing the world,  
whatever form this action takes.

Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk, peace activist, and author

Several years ago, I began to take my own personal mindfulness practice more seriously. The reasons were twofold. Firstly, I had realised that, growing up as I did, with an abusive alcoholic mother and a neighbourhood fraught with gangs and bullies, the trauma from that period still remained. As I read more about mindfulness, it seemed to offer some hope in helping me manage these experiences more effectively. Secondly, I wanted to improve my personal leadership skills. This was motivated by the continued growth of my martial arts lifestyle brands, with representatives now all over the world. I was no longer simply a coach but, rather, a leader of a team that spanned every corner of the globe.

On embarking on this research study, I was struck by how much many of the literature review topics I addressed resonated with me, especially in light of my own experience of leadership. In the psychodynamic approach to leadership, for example, it was noted that leaders draw on early life experiences to respond to varied situations as they lead now. For a long time, I led from a position of “this is just who I am.” But, as my own experience of mindfulness deepened, I began to realise that how I led was, in part, a function of how I had viewed leadership in early childhood. As one could surmise from my opening above, it was not wholly positive. Mindfulness, thankfully, allowed me to work through experiences from my childhood without allowing it to adversely impact my current leadership role.

Secondly, as my own organisation began to grow, I was acutely aware of my increasing levels of stress, most notably in interpersonal relationships. In this regard, much of what my research participants noted in their own struggles with leadership, for example the aspects of impression management and specifically having to present the tough guise, was something I was accustomed to in my own occupation as a martial arts coach. It was incredibly interesting to hear the similarities in struggles that my research participants had experienced as leaders in their various roles. And, while I recognised mindfulness had had a profound influence in my own life, I suspended such claims in anticipation of a possible alternative outcome in my research.

I am, of course, encouraged by the end results of my research study. It was clear that mindfulness practice, especially as applied in moments of leadership, had positively impacted my research participants’ roles. With that said, a major finding of the study is that, without the intention to purposively both practise and engage in mindfulness, especially in difficult moments, the positive effects of mindfulness decrease over time. In some ways, mindfulness reminds me of fitness training. If you let it slide, you lose it. Mindfulness, as presented in this research, while being of value, clearly requires consistent practice. This was, of course, noticeable from the positive outcome on the MAAS the week after the MIA workshop as compared

to the decline at the end of the eight-week study.

Being mindful, especially in action, is by no means an easy task. This was evident in participants' later reflections. As Kabat-Zin (2014) suggests, fully embodying mindfulness requires:

Learning how to suspend all your doing and shift over to a being mode, how to make time for yourself, how to slow down and nurture calmness and self-acceptance in yourself, learning to observe what your mind is up to from moment to moment, how to watch your thoughts and let go of them without getting caught up by them and driven by them, how to make room for new ways of seeing old problems and for perceiving the interconnectedness of things (p. 6).

On reflection, the years I have spent on my research have been challenging and rewarding. I have been both surprised and encouraged by the findings. While I only read this much later, at the conclusion of writing my thesis, it was interesting to find the following statement by Professor Donna Ladkin, writing in respect to Amanda Sinclair's recent book *Leading Mindfully: How to focus on what matters, influence for good, and enjoy leadership more* (2016). In her review of the book, Ladkin notes that "Being present" in leadership, rather than just "doing" it, can make profound differences in how leaders are experienced and their impact (2016, p. 1).

In the beginning of this thesis ([Section 1.2](#)) it was highlighted that both Ladkin's (2008) and Sinclair's (2005) interpretations of leadership suggest that it is a leader's moment-to-moment embodiment that shapes their practices of leadership. As such, they both emphasise the importance of a leader's embodied experience in the present moment. Through this research, it became clear that how well a leader is able to regulate their embodiment in moments of leadership performance was key to achieving success. At its heart, it suggests that in order

to achieve an improved leadership performance how the moment of leadership is managed is crucial. Beyond self-awareness, what stands out from my research is the importance of an accepting, non-judgemental position to one's unfolding embodied experience.

In other words, we cannot choose what happens to us in life, but we can choose how to respond to it. This sentiment was not only articulated by the historical Buddha 2,500 years ago, but equally by more contemporary thinkers such as Victor Frankl, who was an noted neurologist, psychiatrist, and a Holocaust survivor. I have personally cited one of his most prominent quotes from his book *Man's Search for Meaning* in reflecting on my own life's journey: "Everything can be taken from a man [sic] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (2004, p. 86). I read Frankl's book at age 17 and it enabled me to work through a difficult time in my life sleeping on the city streets. I saw this same realisation in my research participants, that one can choose to respond differently to a given situation when the right tools, such as mindfulness, are available.

In fact the importance of the present moment shows up even in the writings of Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher, who noted in *The Meditations*:

Don't panic before the picture of your entire life. Don't dwell on all the troubles you've faced or have yet to face, but instead ask yourself as each trouble comes: What is so unbearable or unmanageable in this? Your reply will embarrass you. Then remind yourself that it's not the future or the past that bears down on you, but only the *present*, always the *present*, which becomes an even smaller thing when isolated in this way and when the mind that cannot bear up under so slender an object is chastened (Marcus Aurelius et al., 2002, p. 97).

In conclusion, this study has provided crucial insights into the efficacy of an action-oriented, experiential approach to teaching mindfulness to organisational

leaders. Moreover, it has shown how the cultivation of mindfulness positively impacts leaders' experiences and performance, both in the crucible of work and in their leadership approach. Specifically, the group of leaders considered in my study illustrated that even a short training intervention, where MIA was taught, was enough to foster very useful skills to their overall roles as leaders both in the present and as a primer for the future. Based on my research findings and what I have learned, I would define mindful leadership as purposefully choosing to become fully attuned to the present moment with clarity, poise and equanimity.

On final reflection, I would like to end with a quote from Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything*. Her words articulate the overall experience of this research better than I could:

What would I do if you never came here?' But I was ALWAYS coming here. I thought about one of my favorite Sufi poems, which says that God long ago drew a circle in the sand exactly around the spot where you are standing right now. I was never not coming here. This was never not going to happen (Gilbert, 2010, p. 294).

# Appendix 1: Consent Form

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**Rodney King**

(Telephone: +27732553381 e-mail [Rodney@crazymonkeydefense.com](mailto:Rodney@crazymonkeydefense.com)/  
[rk236@le.ac.uk](mailto:rk236@le.ac.uk))

### Information Sheet

**A. Purpose of the Study.** As part of the requirements for my PhD degree at the University of Leicester's School of Management, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with mindfulness in action and its role in leadership performance. My supervisors are Dr. Richard Godfrey and Professor Joanna Brewis.

**B. What will the study involve?** The study will involve you participating in a weekend workshop where you will be training in martial arts (something you already practice and participate in) but with a focus on mindfulness training. The objective of this study is to offer you mindfulness training in an experiential, active, embodied environment using martial arts as the chosen vehicle, with the intention of learning mindfulness, and then recording its potential efficacy for your role as a leader in your professional life.

As a participant in this study you will be asked to take part in three main areas:

**1. Pre-training—** Here in private, one on one with myself as researcher, and you as the research participant we will discuss your leadership role, the challenges you personally face in that role, and your current understanding of mindfulness if any. These data will be kept strictly confidential.

**2. Training event—** You will take part in a weekend training event, using martial arts (something you already participate in) as a vehicle to learn, and train mindfulness. You will not be asked, under any circumstance, to engage in any form of physical combat against another person. Rather, the focus will be on embodied development. Instead of training in martial arts to 'fight,' you will train in martial arts to develop your skills in mindfulness and embodied awareness, through martial art-based movements. You will be given the opportunity to practice individually at your own pace and ability, in a non-competitive environment. There will be no assessment of your martial art ability or skill, nor pressure to perform to a certain standard. You will also not be asked to talk about your role as a leader, or disclose any background of that role during the open training event—the focus will be specifically about learning, and developing mindfulness skills through the embodied practice of martial arts. All participants will be asked not to discuss anything they have seen or heard during the weekend outside of the group.

**3. Post-training—**After you have been taught mindfulness in action through participating in the workshop, you will be asked to reflect on that experience, in private, one on one with myself as researcher, and you as the research participant. In this interview it is hoped that we can include what you felt you learned and how you could see that experience informing your role as leaders going forward. These data will be kept strictly confidential.

**4. Post in-the-field experience—**One further interview with you will take place two months after the training program. During the 2-month period leading up to that final interview, you will also be asked to keep a diary of any experiences you may have with mindfulness and leadership experiences. These data will be kept strictly confidential.

Each interview you participant in will be 45-60 minutes in length and, for accuracy, will be recorded in person, or via Skype. Interviews will be semi-structured.

**C. Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked to take part in this research study because you volunteered through the advertising initiative we conducted at your martial arts school. You identified your interest in being part of this study as you find yourself in a role of leadership in your professional life (i.e. outside of the martial arts school).

**D. Do you have to take part?** The answer is no! – participation is completely voluntary. While you will sign this consent form to participate in this research study, you still have the option of withdrawing before the study commences or at any point after data collection has started. You can also opt to withdraw after the data collection has finished. Where data renders you identifiable (e.g. from interviews yielding qualitative data), and should you withdraw at any time, that data related to you will be destroyed.

**E. Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous. This anonymity includes and extends to any and all people you may mention confidentially to me; for example, other participants in the study, family, friends, work colleagues, employees etc.

**F. What will happen to the information which you give?** The data I collect during the study will be stored in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act, the University of Leicester's Research Code of Conduct and its Code of Practice for Data Protection (see <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/researchsupport/research-integrity>). You have the right to withdraw at any point without giving any reason, and participation is, as suggested above, wholly voluntary.

**G. What will happen to the results?** The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be seen by my supervisors, and two examiners (one employed at the University – the internal examiner – and one elsewhere - the external examiner). The thesis will be made available in electronic form via the University's Research Archive (<https://lra.le.ac.uk/>). Parts of the study may also be published in peer-reviewed academic journals, conference presentations, press interviews, research blogs, articles and posts. At all times strict confidentiality will be maintained.

**H. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part as you are already a practicing martial artist. It is possible that talking about your experience of mindfulness and or your role in leadership, as well as your experience on the mat, may cause some discomfort. In that respect, you only have to talk about, or offer information that you feel comfortable with. You can stop talking about any element we discuss, at any time, with no reason given to me as researcher.

In respect to mindfulness practice itself, some negative side effects have been shown such as intrusive memories, cognitive, perceptual and sensory aberrations (a departure from what you consider normal for yourself), changes in your sense of self and impairment in social relationships. **However** and this is very important, mindfulness experts agree that such extreme adverse reactions are very rare and are most likely to follow prolonged periods of meditation, such as weeks on a silent retreat. We will not be doing this for this study. In this study, you will only be asked to partake in brief mindfulness practice for no more than a few minutes at a time. This is also what you will be asked to engage in, in your work environment, after the training program. As noted, no research to date has shown that brief mindfulness practice leads to severe adverse effects as noted earlier.

**I. What if there is a problem?** At the end of the training intervention or interview I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, you can suggest talking at another time, and/ or to not discuss your experience any further. Remember, you can, at your discretion, stop taking part in this study at any time.

**J. Who has reviewed this study?** The Management and Media and Communication Research Ethics Committee at the University of Leicester, UK. Approval must be given by this Committee in order for a study like this to take place.

**K. Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact me: Rodney King on mobile: +27732553381 or by email at [Rodney@crazymonkeydefense.com](mailto:Rodney@crazymonkeydefense.com)

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form on the next page.

### Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Rodney King's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interviews with Rodney King to be recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study for any reason - without repercussions, at any time - before it starts, or while I am participating, or afterwards.

It has been made clear to me, that in rare instances there may be negative side-effects of mindfulness practice, and that if mindfulness practice makes me feel uneasy, I can stop, or ask to leave the study at anytime.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up of the research by disguising my identity.

I understand that names and any other identifying information about the participants who take part in this study are completely confidential. I understand further that anything said or observed during the group training sessions (i.e., the workshop) is not to be discussed outside the group.

I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project, especially during the training workshop, that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any

subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

## Appendix 2: The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

### Day-to-Day Experiences

**Instructions:** Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how frequently or infrequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what *really reflects* your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Almost Always	Very Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Very Infrequently	Almost Never

I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.	1	2	3	4	5	6
It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	1	2	3	4	5	6

1	2	3	4	5	6
Almost Always	Very Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Somewhat Infrequently	Very Infrequently	Almost Never

I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I snack without being aware that I'm eating.	1	2	3	4	5	6

## **MAAS Scoring**

To score the scale, simply compute a mean of the 15 items. Higher scores reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness.

### *Appendix 3: Pre-Workshop Interview Questions*

1. What attracted you to take part in the upcoming workshop?
2. Could you please tell me more about your role as a leader?
3. How would you define excellent leadership?
4. In your view, what would you say excellent leaders need? [prompt only if they do not lead towards inner and outer characteristics]
5. As a leader yourself, to what extent does how you think and feel affect your leadership role, and performance? Can you give me some examples?
6. Based on what we just talked about [repeat here what they noted in Q 5] what personal strategies have you found that work for you in those instances as a leader? Can you give me some examples?
7. Have you heard of mindfulness? What is your understanding of mindfulness?  
(if answer is no, do not continue with questions 8 and 9).
8. Based on what you know about mindfulness, do you feel it would benefit you in your role as a leader? If so how?
9. Do you feel you are mindful at work? Can you give me some examples of when you are? Can you give me some examples of when you are not? How do you feel this affects your performance as a leader?
10. Is there anything else you want to say at this point or feel I should have asked?

## Appendix 4: Post-Workshop Interview Questions

1. How did you find the workshop? What specifically stood out for you in the way it was delivered? [prompt only if they don't pick up on the action aspect of the workshop].
2. Now that you have an understanding of mindfulness, and how to both practise and apply it, how would you see this practice informing your role going forward as a leader? Could you give me some examples? In what instances could you see yourself applying mindfulness-in-action?
3. How has your view of mindfulness changed now, compared to before the workshop?
4. How mindful would you say you are now in this moment, compared to before you completed the workshop? Can you give me some examples of what has changed? [if any change].
5. Where do you feel it will be challenging to apply mindfulness-in-action in your role as leader, and why?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add at this point? Possibly you think there is something important to add that we haven't discussed yet?

## Appendix 5: Final Interview Questions

1. Remembering back to our first interview, has your definition of being an excellent leader changed since you began practising mindfulness? If it has changed, in what way? Can you give me some examples?
2. How have you found practising mindfulness since the workshop? [if it has been difficult, in what way?] [if you have had successes, in what way?].
3. Now that you have been practising mindfulness, what role would you say mindfulness plays in your day to day role as a leader? Can you give me some examples?
4. Which mindful strategies from the workshop have you personally implemented that have helped you in your role as a leader? Have you adapted, or changed any of the tools we covered in the workshop? If so, in what way? Can you give me some examples?
5. Has your view of mindfulness changed since the workshop? To what extent and how?
6. How mindful would you say you are now, compared to before you began practising it?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add at this point? Possibly you think there is something important to add that we haven't discussed yet?

## Appendix 6: MAAS Results

### Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Results

Participants in my research were asked to fill in the MAAS questionnaire that consisted of 15 questions to be answered using a Likert scale with the following variables,

1 Almost Always	2 Very Frequently	3 Somewhat Frequently	4 Somewhat Infrequently	5 Very Infrequently	6 Almost Never
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What follows are the results of each question on the MAAS scale, as answered either prior or post workshop, as well as in the culmination of the research after each participant practiced mindfulness in action for 8-weeks.

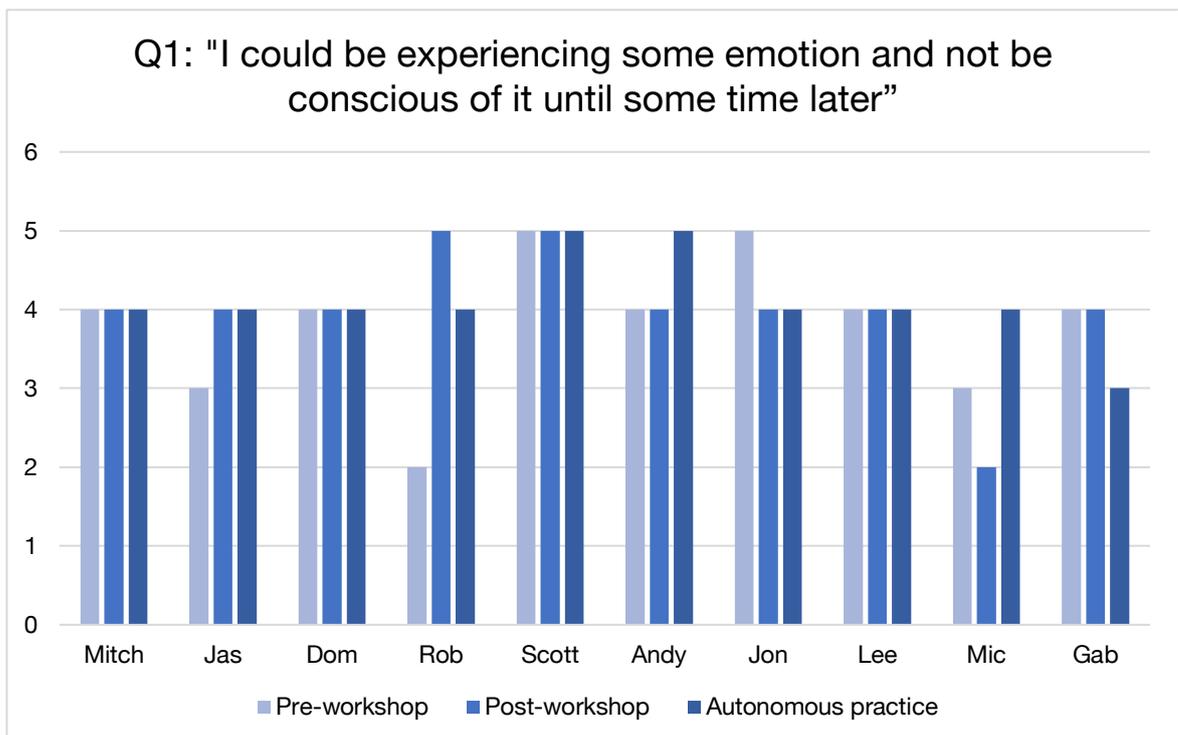
The blue line graph represents the pre-workshop answers, the green line graph for post-workshop answers, and the red bar graph demonstrate answers now given after 8-weeks of practice.

The lower the score (e.g. 1), the less mindful attention was present, the higher the score the more a participant was mindfully aware (e.g. 6).

**Q1: "I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later"**

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	4	4	4
2. Jas	3	4	4
3. Dom	4	4	4
4. Rob	2	5	4
5. Scott	5	5	5
6. Andy	4	4	5
7. Jon	5	4	4
8. Lee	4	4	4
9. Mic	3	2	4
10. Gab	4	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>4.10</b>

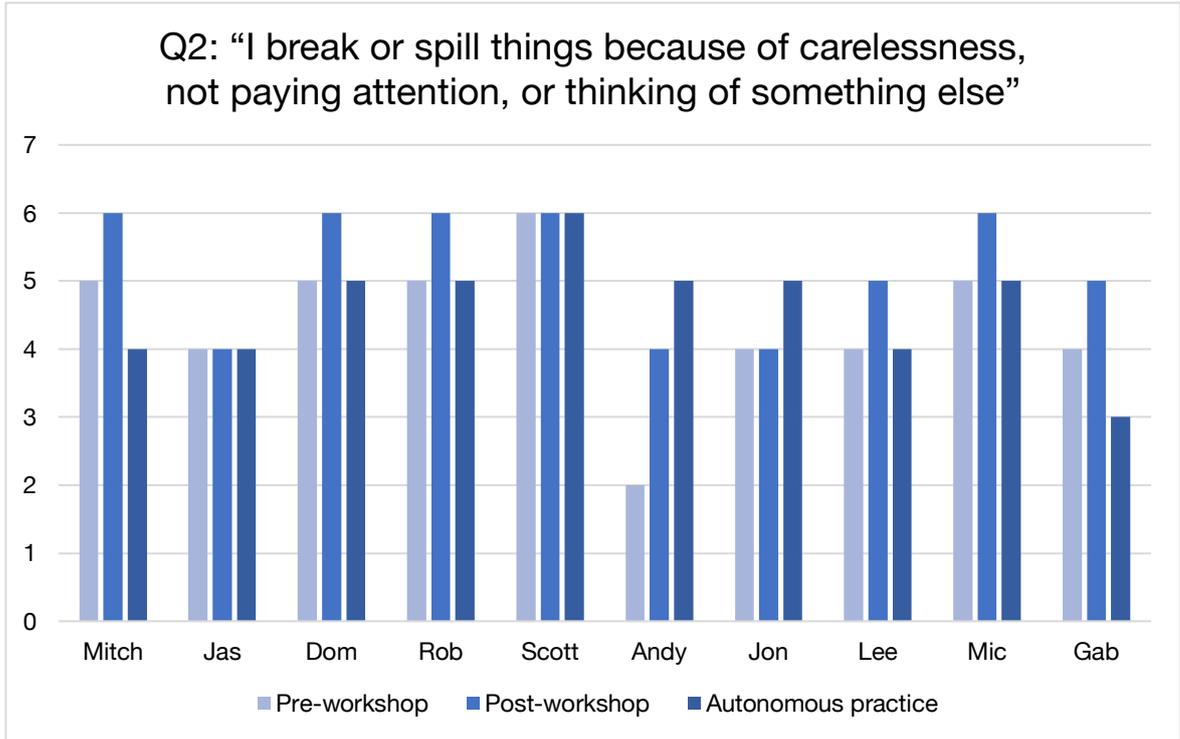
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q2: “I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else”**

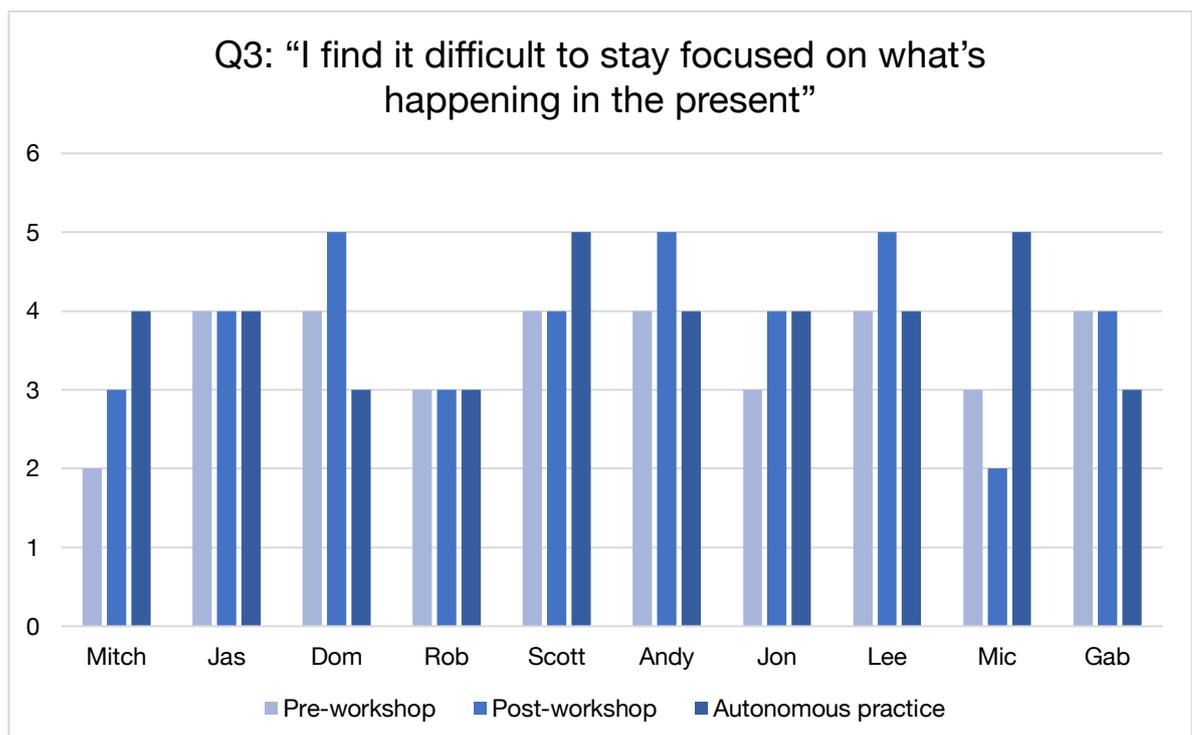
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	5	6	4
2. Jas	4	4	4
3. Dom	5	6	5
4. Rob	5	6	5
5. Scott	6	6	6
6. Andy	2	4	5
7. Jon	4	4	5
8. Lee	4	5	4
9. Mic	5	6	5
10. Gab	4	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>5.20</b>	<b>4.60</b>

Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



Q3: "I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present"			
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	2	3	4
2. Jas	4	4	4
3. Dom	4	5	3
4. Rob	3	3	3
5. Scott	4	4	5
6. Andy	4	5	4
7. Jon	3	4	4
8. Lee	4	5	4
9. Mic	3	2	5
10. Gab	4	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>3.90</b>

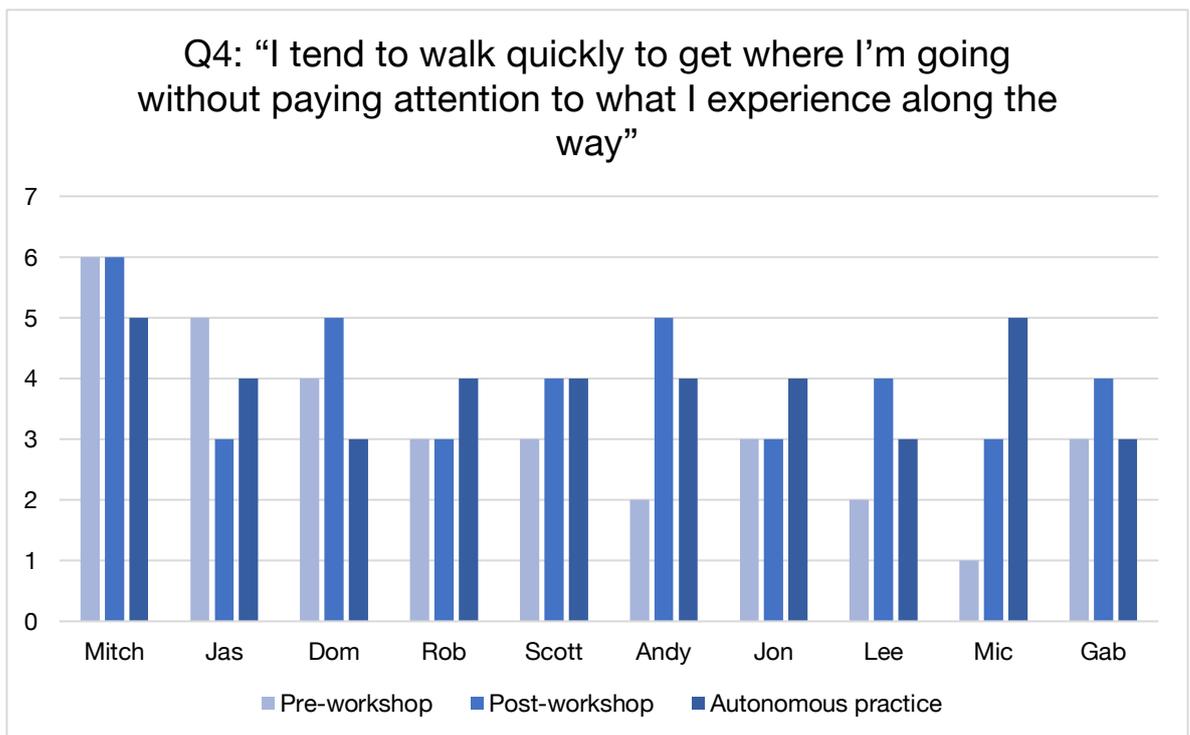
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q4: “I tend to walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way”**

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	6	6	5
2. Jas	5	3	4
3. Dom	4	5	3
4. Rob	3	3	4
5. Scott	3	4	4
6. Andy	2	5	4
7. Jon	3	3	4
8. Lee	2	4	3
9. Mic	1	3	5
10. Gab	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	3.20	4.00	3.90

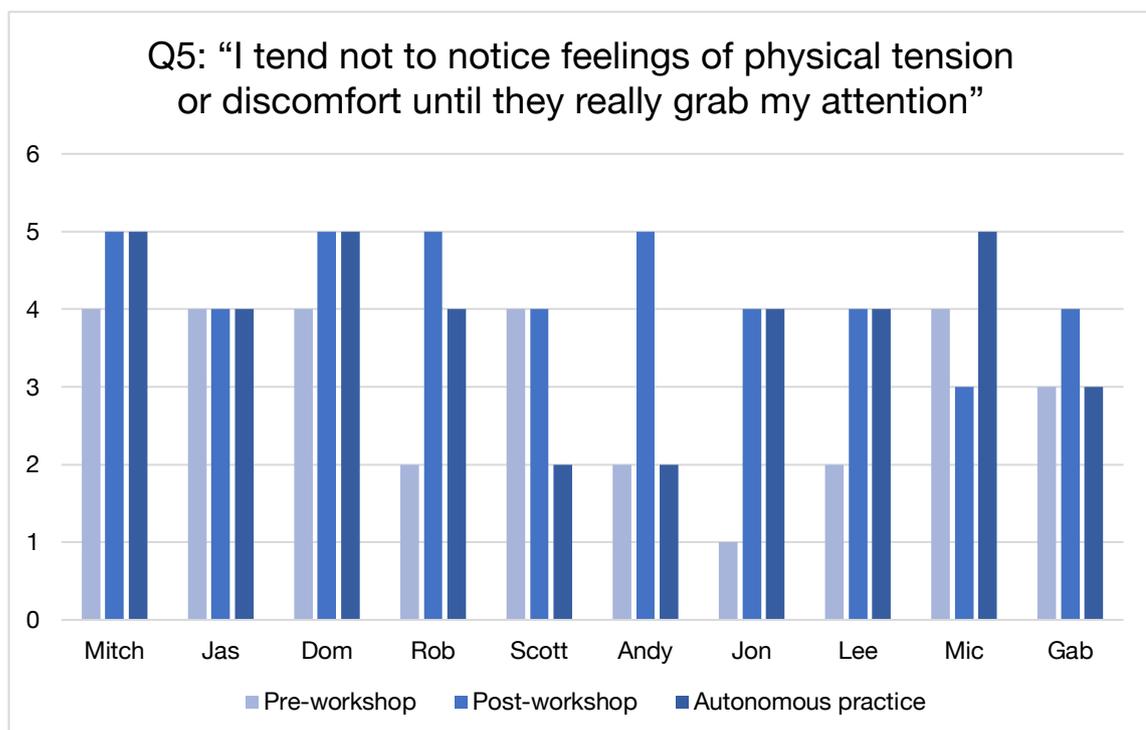
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q5: "I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention"**

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	4	5	5
2. Jas	4	4	4
3. Dom	4	5	5
4. Rob	2	5	4
5. Scott	4	4	2
6. Andy	2	5	2
7. Jon	1	4	4
8. Lee	2	4	4
9. Mic	4	3	5
10. Gab	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>4.30</b>	<b>3.80</b>

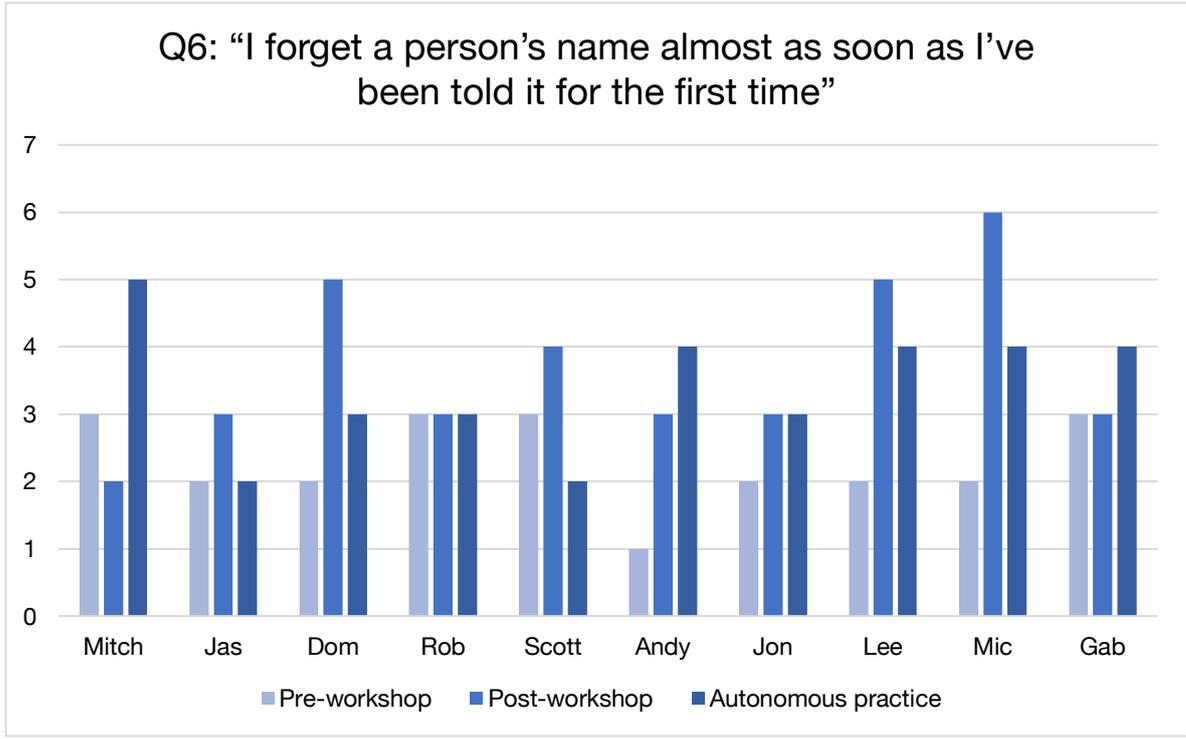
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q6: “I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told it for the first time”**

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mt	3	2	5
2. Js	2	3	2
3. Dm	2	5	3
4. Rb	3	3	3
5. St	3	4	2
6. An	1	3	4
7. Jn	2	3	3
8. Le	2	5	4
9. Mk	2	6	4
10. Gb	3	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.30</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>3.40</b>

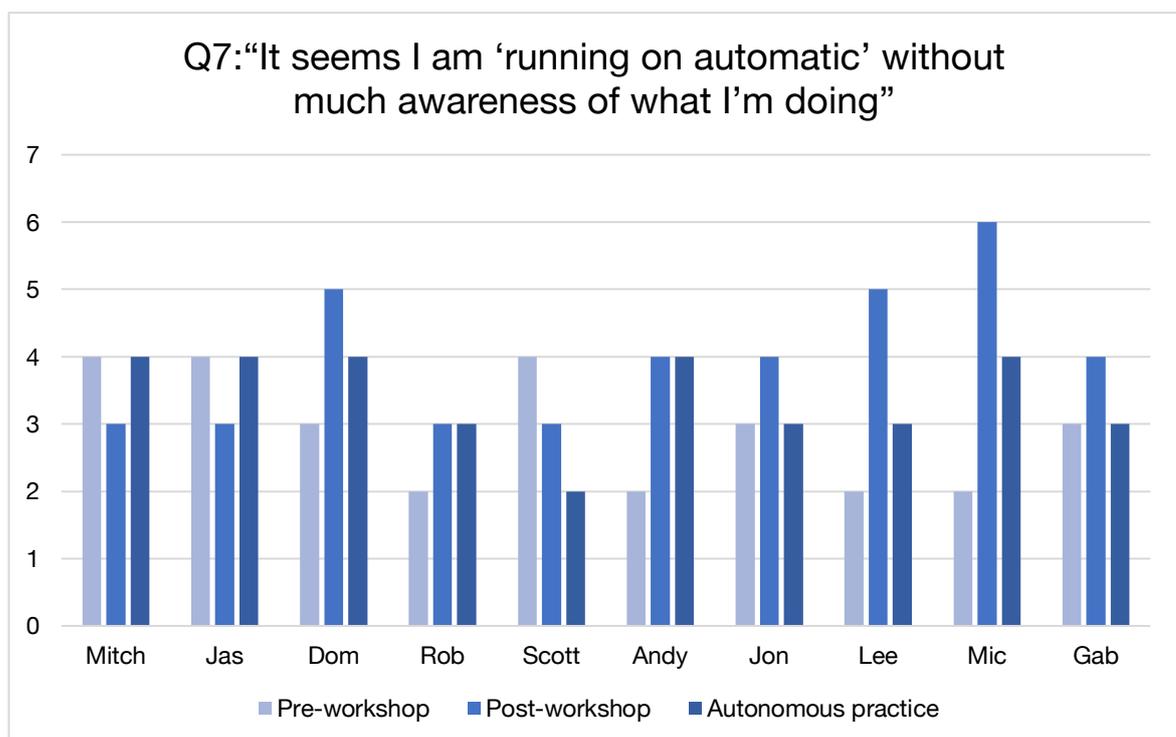
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q7: “It seems I am ‘running on automatic’ without much awareness of what I’m doing”**

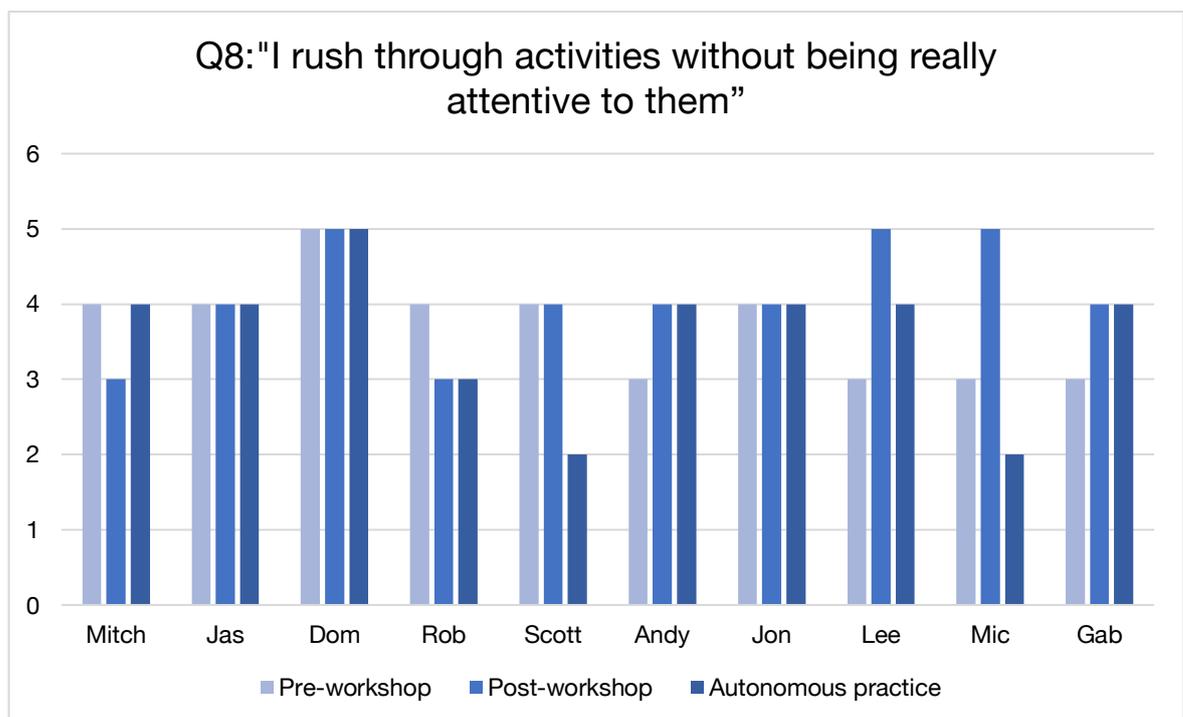
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	4	3	4
2. Jas	4	3	4
3. Dom	3	5	4
4. Rob	2	3	3
5. Scott	4	3	2
6. Any	2	4	4
7. Jon	3	4	3
8. Lee	2	5	3
9. Mic	2	6	4
10. Gab	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	2.90	4.00	3.40

Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



<b>Q8: "I rush through activities without being really attentive to them"</b>			
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Pre-workshop</b>	<b>Post-workshop</b>	<b>Autonomous practice</b>
<b>1. Mitch</b>	4	3	4
<b>2. Jas</b>	4	4	4
<b>3. Dom</b>	5	5	5
<b>4. Rob</b>	4	3	3
<b>5. Scott</b>	4	4	2
<b>6. Andy</b>	3	4	4
<b>7. Jon</b>	4	4	4
<b>8. Lee</b>	3	5	4
<b>9. Mic</b>	3	5	2
<b>10. Gab</b>	3	4	4
<b>Total</b>	3.70	4.10	3.60

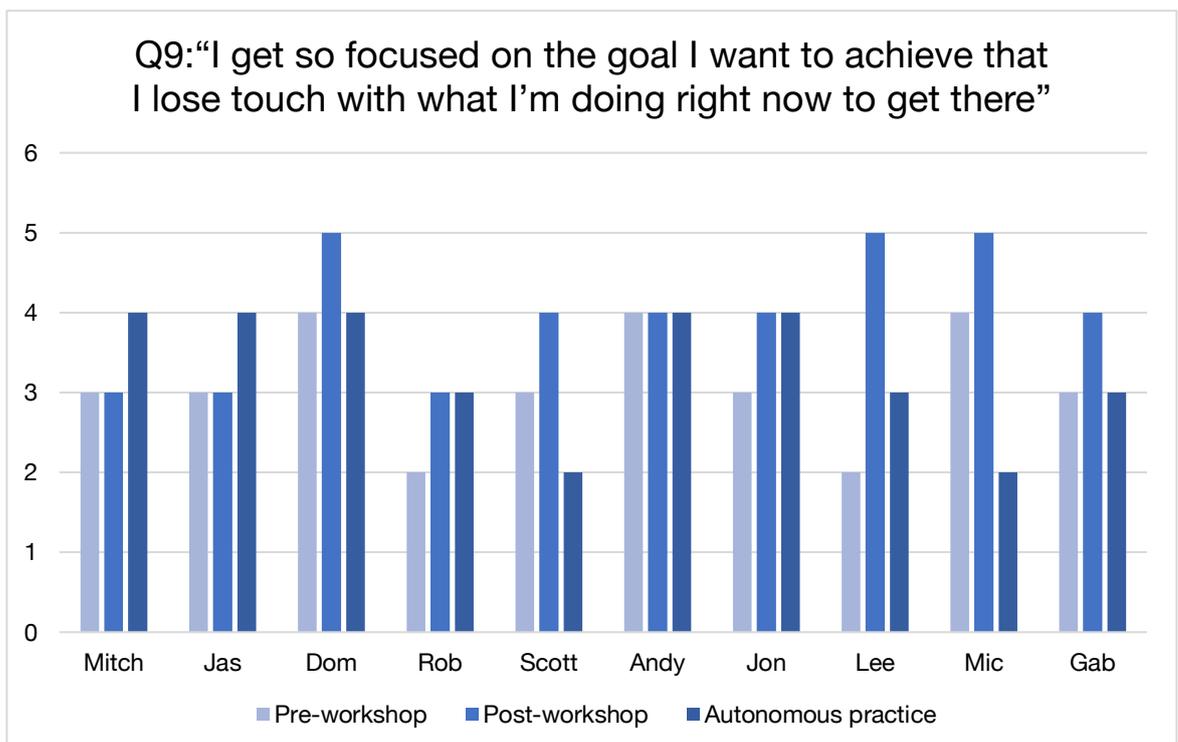
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q9: "I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there"**

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	3	3	4
2. Jas	3	3	4
3. Dom	4	5	4
4. Rob	2	3	3
5. Scott	3	4	2
6. Andy	4	4	4
7. Jon	3	4	4
8. Lee	2	5	3
9. Mitch	4	5	2
10. Gab	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>3.30</b>

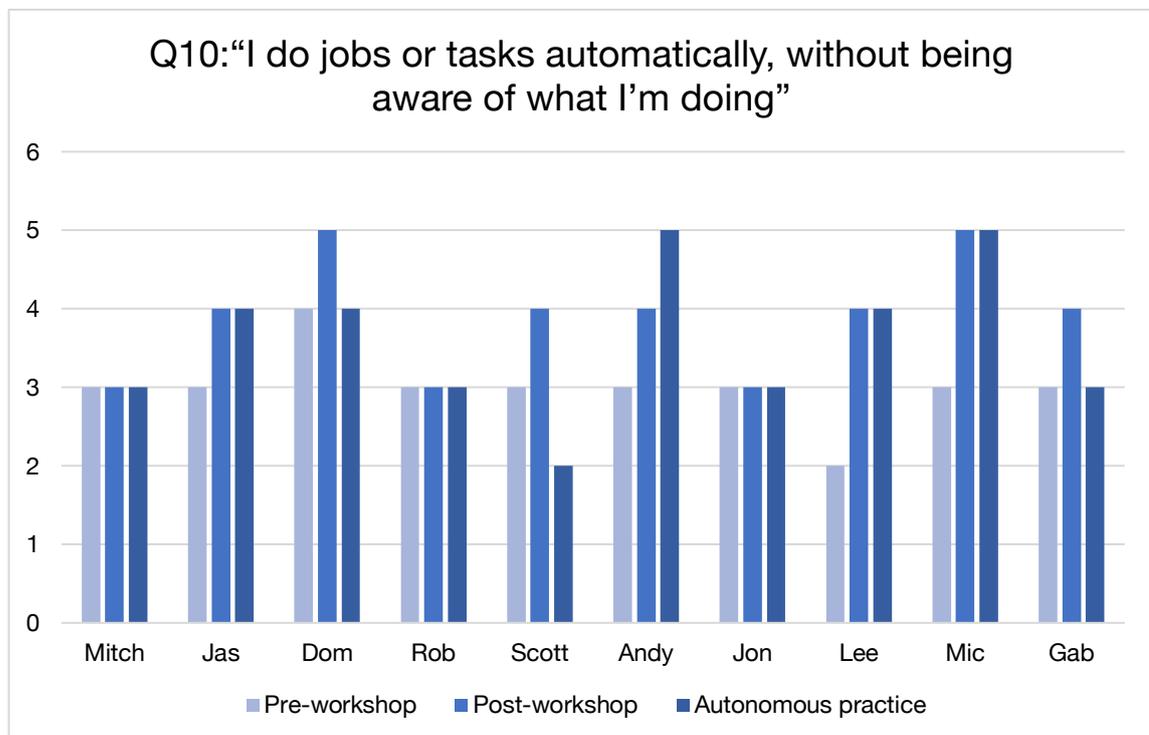
Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q10: "I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing"**

Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	3	3	3
2. Jas	3	4	4
3. Dom	4	5	4
4. Rob	3	3	3
5. Scott	3	4	2
6. Andy	3	4	5
7. Jon	3	3	3
8. Lee	2	4	4
9. Mic	3	5	5
10. Gab	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	3.00	3.90	3.60

Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



**Q11: "I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time"**

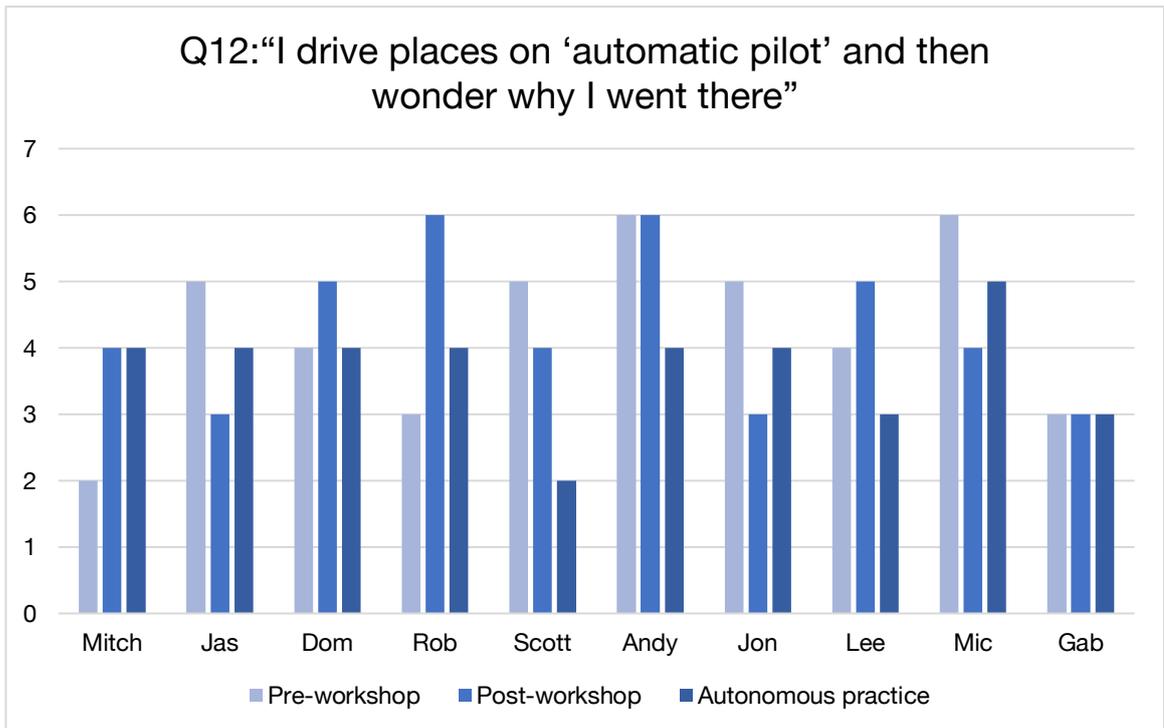
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mt	2	2	3
2. Js	2	4	4
3. Dm	4	6	3
4. Rb	3	3	3
5. St	4	3	4
6. An	5	5	5
7. Jn	3	3	3
8. Le	3	5	4
9. Mk	2	4	5
10. Gb	4	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>3.70</b>

Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



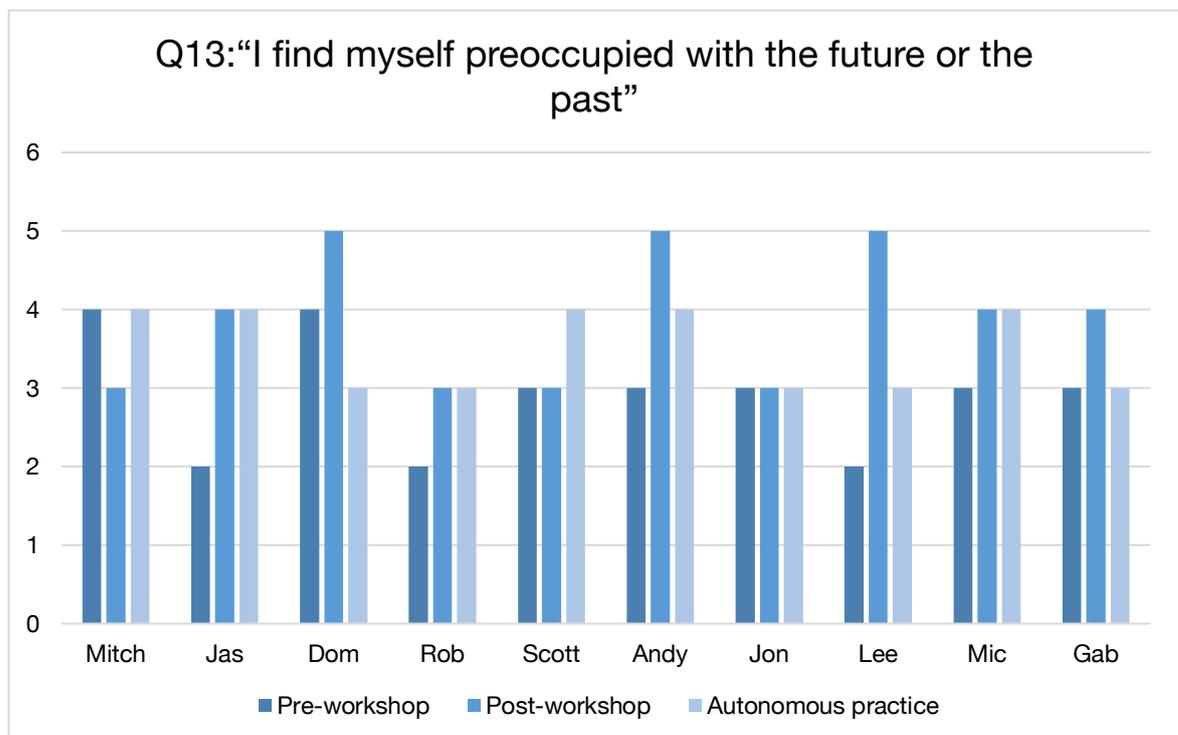
Q12: "I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there"			
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	2	4	4
2. Jas	5	3	4
3. Dom	4	5	4
4. Rob	3	6	4
5. Scott	5	4	2
6. Andy	6	6	4
7. Jon	5	3	4
8. Lee	4	5	3
9. Mic	6	4	5
10. Gab	3	3	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.30</b>	<b>4.30</b>	<b>3.70</b>

Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



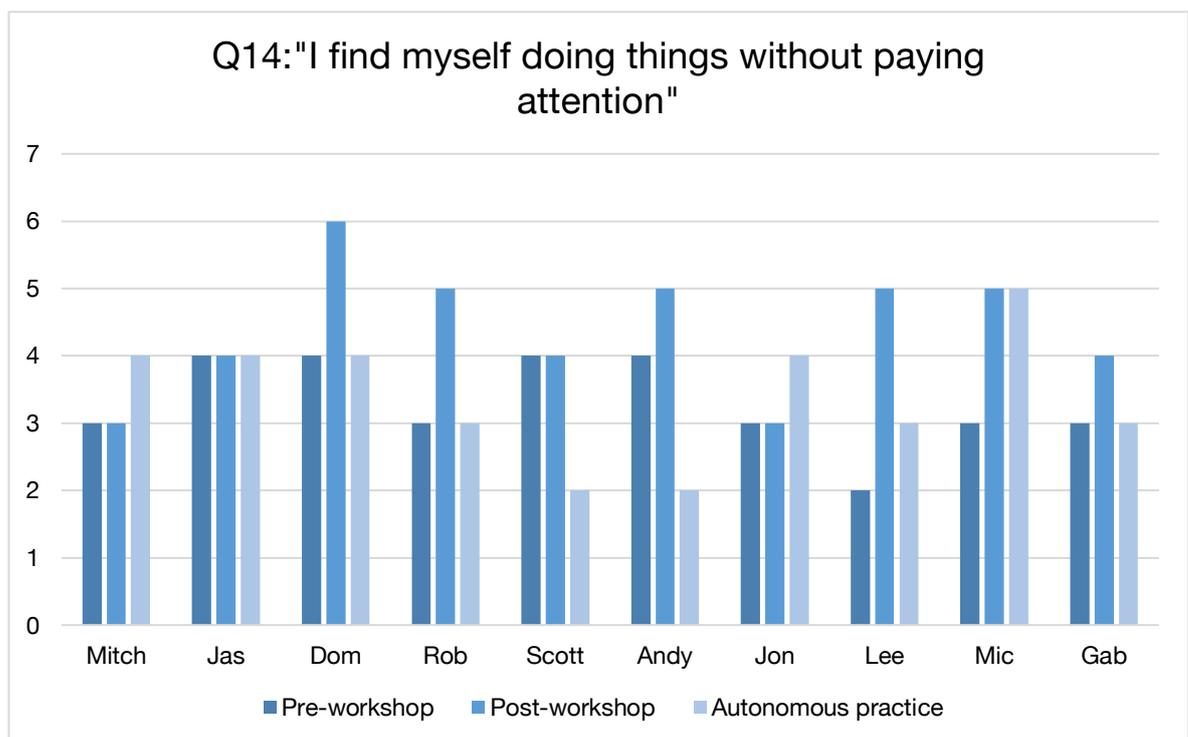
Q13: "I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past"			
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	4	3	4
2. Jas	2	4	4
3. Dom	4	5	3
4. Rob	2	3	3
5. Scott	3	3	4
6. Andy	3	5	4
7. Jon	3	3	3
8. Lee	2	5	3
9. Mic	3	4	4
10. Gab	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	2.90	3.90	3.50

Note. 1 = almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



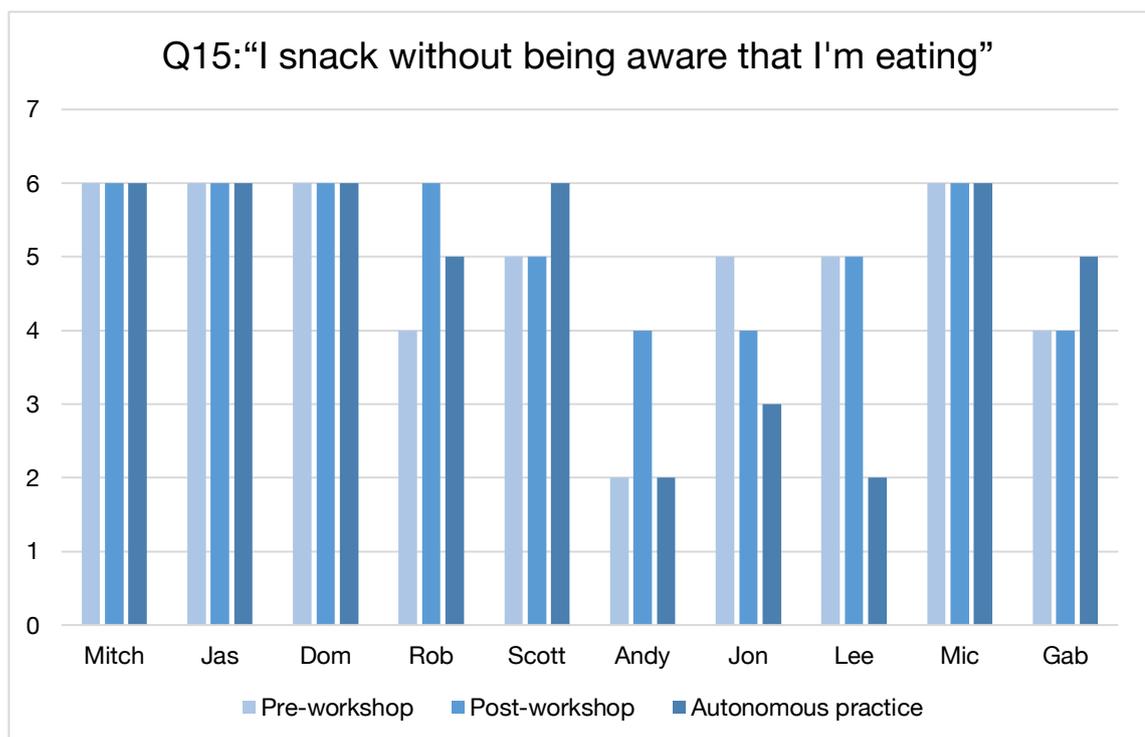
Q14: "I find myself doing things without paying attention"			
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mt	3	3	4
2. Js	4	4	4
3. Dm	4	6	4
4. Rb	3	5	3
5. St	4	4	2
6. An	4	5	2
7. Jn	3	3	4
8. Le	2	5	3
9. Mk	3	5	5
10. Gb	3	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.30</b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>3.40</b>

Note. 1 = almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



Q15: "I snack without being aware that I'm eating"			
Participant	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop	Autonomous practice
1. Mitch	6	6	6
2. Jas	6	6	6
3. Dom	6	6	6
4. Rob	4	6	5
5. Scott	5	5	6
6. Andy	2	4	2
7. Jon	5	4	3
8. Lee	5	5	2
9. Mic	6	6	6
10. Gab	4	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.90</b>	<b>5.20</b>	<b>4.70</b>

Note. 1= almost always; 2 = very frequently; 3 = somewhat frequently; 4 = somewhat infrequently; 5 = very infrequently; 6 = almost never



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