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# POSITIVE ORGANISATIONS IN MINUTES

Caryn Cridland, Doris McIlwain, Phd, & Allan Bull, Phd  
Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia

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## ABSTRACT

Positive organisations impact society. They spread positive emotions, behaviours, relationships, and engender a positive culture via reciprocity. Positive emotions spread through organisations, via contagion (at a physiological level), creating meaning for others via accumulated interpersonal events (Fredrickson, 2011). This promotes organisational transformation through upward spirals.

The current study indicates that brief interventions of little over one minute may impact employee behaviour when resolving interpersonal issues. It supports previous research indicating that even brief compassion inductions lead to increased compassion, higher levels of perceived self-other similarity (Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010), and increased positive perceptions (Fogarty, Curbow, Wingard, McDonnell, & Somerfield, 1999).

## INTRODUCTION

The study aimed to investigate whether brief compassion and mindfulness inductions influence individuals' responses to real-life workplace scenarios. It was hypothesised that the inductions would affect participants' choice of resolution (options differed in level of compassion, or an opportunity for change).

**Hypothesis 1:** Participants who receive a compassion-based induction will demonstrate more compassion than those who receive a mindfulness-based induction (Mindfulness group) or no induction (Control group).

**Hypothesis 2:** Participants who receive a mindfulness-based induction will demonstrate more compassion than those who receive no induction (Control group).

**Hypothesis 3:** Participants will display different levels of compassion across the vignettes rather than one singular state of compassion.

**Hypothesis 4:** Women will demonstrate more compassion than men.

## KEY

**Vignette 1 - SexHarFem** (Sexual Harassment: participant asked to identify with female complainant)

**Vignette 2 - RacDisc** (Racial Discrimination: participant asked to identify with male complainant)

**Vignette 3 - BullyHar** (Bullying and Harassment: participant asked to identify with female complainant)

**Vignette 4 - SexHarMal** (Sexual Harassment: participant asked to identify with male complainant)

**Note.** \*\*Higher scores = Higher Level of Compassion (LOC)

## METHODOLOGY

124 participants (50 males (18-70 years) and 74 females (18-69 years), mostly from a community sample (90%) were randomly allocated to three groups: Control, Mindfulness and Compassion. The latter two listened to an induction before completing an online survey. One engendered a state of mindfulness (observing their inner states and external environment (Brown & Ryan, 2003); 2.59 minutes), the other, a state of compassion (awareness of the interconnection of human relationships, and of a common humanity (Neff, 2003); 1.25 minutes). Participants were then asked to answer questions (with options that presented differing levels of compassion) (Erdynast & Rapgay, 2009) on four emotionally-charged vignettes based on real-life workplace scenarios involving: sexual harassment, racial discrimination, bullying and harassment. They were asked to rate, in order of preference, what the best resolution would be if they were one of the characters. There were five responses per story. Responses were work-related and explored whether decision-making conformed to five developmental levels of compassion, based on Rawls' social contract theory and the Dalai Lama's (1999) Tibetan Buddhist concept of Principled Compassion.

A Prescal analysis of Coombs Unfolding Technique revealed that Goodness of Fit was high: Dispersion accounted for 94-97%; Variance accounted for 79-89%. Coombs Unfolding Technique revealed a single linear ordering held for the general population for our adaption of Erdynast & Rapgay's codified notion of compassion. Jacoby's (2009) method of uni-dimensional unfolding with SPSS was used to obtain single Level of Compassion [LOC] scores for each participant on each vignette. Mean scores were calculated for each vignette and named according to the main issue. Unfolding showed that for the two sexual harassment vignettes (*SexHarFem*, *SexHarMal*) higher scores represented higher LOC. For bullying and racial discrimination vignettes (*BullyHar*, *RacDisc*) lower scores represented higher LOC, so these scores were reversed.

## RESULTS

Correlations were obtained between total mean scores of rated compassion level for each vignette. *SexHarFem*, *SexHarMal* and *BullyHar* were all positive and significant at  $p < .01$ . *RacDisc* was positively and significantly related to *BullyHar* at  $p < .05$ . ANOVA revealed significant differences between groups and genders on some vignettes. Overall, those in the Compassion group showed the most compassion, indicating that in some situations, brief interventions may influence people to be more compassionate, or behave more fairly and respectfully, positively valuing both points of view. Mindfulness group males showed the least compassion overall. There were significant differences between men and women in the Mindfulness group on one vignette. While this requires replication, it suggests that brief mindfulness interventions may not result in optimal outcomes for everyone in every situation.

**Hypothesis 1** was supported in Vignettes [Vigs] 1 and 4 (Figs. 1 and 2). A test of between-subjects effects revealed a significant main effect of group  $F(2, 124) = 3.11$  at  $p < .05$  and a significant two-way interaction between group and gender for *Vig 1* ( $F(2, 124) = 4.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Pair-wise comparisons indicated significant differences between male participants in the Mindfulness group and the Compassion group ( $p < .001$ ). Men induced to feel compassion demonstrated more compassion than men induced to feel mindful. A trend was also revealed. Men in the mindfulness group demonstrated less compassion than the controls ( $p < .072$ ). There were no differences for women (Fig. 1). A significant two-way interaction between group and gender was also found for *Vig 4* ( $F(2, 124) = 3.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (Fig. 2). Pair-wise comparisons showed a number of trends: i) Females exposed to compassion-based inductions and mindfulness-based showed more compassion than Controls ( $p < .075$ ) ( $p < .063$ ), ii) Males exposed to mindfulness-based inductions showed less compassion than the Control group ( $p < .067$ ), and those induced to feel compassion ( $p < .075$ ) (Fig. 2). A trend for *Vig 2* showed Compassion group men showed more compassion than Mindfulness group men ( $p < .086$ ).

**Hypothesis 2** was not supported. Results went in the opposite direction to predictions. Mindfulness group men demonstrated significantly less compassion than Compassion group men for *Vig 1* ( $p < .001$ ). They also demonstrated significantly less compassion than females in the Mindfulness group for *Vig 4* ( $p < .001$ ). Overall, the Mindfulness induction tended to reduce the LOC of males. In three out of four vignettes, males in the Mindfulness group demonstrated less compassion than males in the Compassion or Control groups (significantly for *Vig 1*; trends for *Vigs 2* and 4). Results for *Vigs 2* and 3 were not significant and did not support Hypothesis 1 or 2 (Figs. 3 and 4).

**Hypothesis 3** was supported. Inter-correlations between the vignettes indicated that, while there was a significant positive relationship between three of the four vignettes, it was weak to moderate. This indicated that participants displayed different conceptions of levels of compassion across the vignettes. This supports previous compassion research by Erdynast & Rapgay (2009).

**Hypothesis 4** was partially supported. Mindfulness group women showed significantly more compassion than men on *Vig 4* ( $p < .001$ ). A trend main effect was also revealed. Women showed more compassion overall than men in response to *Vig 4* ( $p < .078$ ). The significant two-way interactions for *Vigs 1* and 4 also confirmed the impact of gender on LOC (Fig. 5).

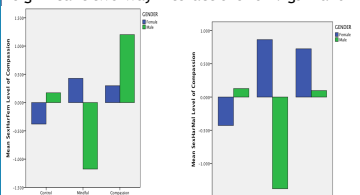


Fig 1. Mean LOC scores for Vig 1

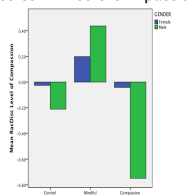


Fig 2. Mean LOC scores for Vig 2

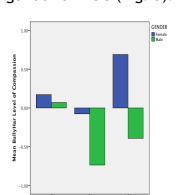


Fig 3. Mean LOC scores for Vig 3

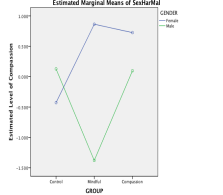


Fig 4. Mean LOC scores for Vig 4

## CONCLUSIONS & LIMITATIONS

These preliminary results reveal that some forms of brief intervention may assist individuals to respond to challenging situations in the workplace with more compassion, fairness, breadth of perspective, and positivity. They have implications within, and beyond the workplace, for those wishing to spread positivity and compassion. Organisational transformation may result from brief interventions, negating the need for costly, lengthy, and time-consuming interventions. Leaders may be able to influence people positively in minutes. They could add positive and compassionate language to their presentations, and dialogue at meetings, to increase positive workplace behaviours. Training leaders in brief positive interventions may help transform organisational culture or communities in minutes rather than years.

The current study supports Oveis et al's (2010) findings that time-delimited compassion-based inductions can influence people's responses. It also supports previous conclusions that compassion is not a singular state that applies in all situations across the board. Instead it is construed differently, depending on the situation, and upon the individuals' capacity (structural-developmental level) (Erdynast & Rapgay, 2009).

The mindfulness results were the most consistent across all four vignettes. Mindfulness appears to affect men and women differently. When men were encouraged to be mindful, they tended to show less compassion than those in the Compassion or Control groups. Mindfulness may not produce optimal results for everyone in every situation, particularly not for men. These results concur with the mixed results that have been found for mindfulness and empathy, and conclusions that mindfulness may be unhelpful in some contexts (Teasdale, 2010), as well as indicators that it can lead to decreased negative emotional experience following a stressor (Ekblad, 2010). The finding that men and women respond differently to mindfulness and compassion-based inductions are also consistent with previous research indicating gender differences in displays of compassion (Beutel & Marini, 1995; Betz, O'Connell and Shepard, 1989).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study does not tell us how participants would behave in real-life workplace situations. Assessing the impact of inductions in real-life situations or through observational simulations would indicate whether these results are generalisable, and overcome the limitations associated with online surveys (inability to control the testing environment).

Future research could look at the impact of personality, trait-compassion and trait-mindfulness, on state-compassion and state-mindfulness, on workplace decision-making (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Insight may be obtained as to whether compassion or mindfulness-based inductions illuminate inherent characteristics, or whether it's possible to induce these states in non-predisposed people.

Including a wider range of vignettes, across behavioural type and gender, including counterbalancing the voice of the vignettes would assist in determining the effects of gender on compassion. The present conclusions with regard to mindfulness are limited given the short exposure compared with previous research involving intensive 5 or 10-day, or 8 to 12-week or longer, interventions (Tispsord, 2010; Davidson, 2010). Future research could include longer inductions.

## CONTACTS

Caryn Cridland  
email: caryn@mindfulmediation.com.au  
phone: +61 410 346 946

