

Developing leaders through mindfulness practice

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## Abstract

### Purpose

The study's objective was to examine whether and how mindfulness training and practice might impact indicators of three capacities identified as critical for leading in the twenty-first century: resilience, leading in complex contexts and collaboration.

### Design/methodology/approach

We conducted a non-randomised wait-list controlled study with 57 senior leaders (81 per cent female) who undertook an eight-week "Mindful Leader" programme.

### Findings

Our findings suggest the programme was effective in developing leaders in terms of their mindfulness, resilience and self-perceived leadership competencies such as collaboration and agility in complex situations. The amount of mindfulness practice the leaders undertook was associated with improvements in mindfulness, resilience and collaboration. Furthermore, participants reported that the programme was beneficial for them as leaders and that the training format was feasible. However, objective measures of cognitive functioning and leadership competence did not improve significantly within the mindfulness intervention group.

### Practical implications

Mindfulness practice may be a promising and effective method for leader development. Our results suggest that mindfulness can be learnt and developed by executive leaders, as long as they practice for at least 10 min per day.

### Originality/value

This is the first study to investigate how resilience, leading in complex contexts and collaboration can be developed through mindfulness training.

## Keywords

Collaboration Leadership development Mindfulness Resilience Leadership flexibility Leading in complexity

### Citation

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Through repeated practice, mindfulness triggers a shift in cognitive control to frontal brain regions. This enables us to perceive our world, our emotions, and other people without fight-or-flight, knee-jerk reactions and have better emotional resilience. This change in neurological wiring helps us perceive situations and make decisions more from our conscious mind, avoiding some of the traps of our unconscious biases. Operating more from our prefrontal cortex also enhances our executive function, the control center for our thoughts, words, and actions. I am the founder and managing director of Potential Project, the global leader in building mindful leaders and organizations. We help leaders and organizations enhance. ... Read More. Developing Mindful Leaders. Mindfulness is a teachable skill, says Carter, and the core skills to teach are focus and awareness. "With focus and awareness, leaders can make better decisions about where to place their attention moment to moment, enabling them to be more agile, creative and effective in their leadership." Mindfulness is a teachable skill, and the core skills to teach are focus and awareness. Jindal notes that mindfulness is a practice, so "residential training or longer workshops where leaders can practice the techniques to center themselves" are the best way to train it. Workshops should include "scenarios that might trigger a reactive response" and enable leaders to practice alternative responses. He taught leadership and mindfulness to businesses and the government for over 16 years, before mindfulness was even trending, making him the most experienced practitioner in his field. He teaches Mindful Leadership on Sydney University's #1 ranked executive MBA. He has 23 years of experience in mindfulness training, both as a personal practice and training others. Michael has trained with the world's best mindfulness teachers and understands mindfulness training at a very deep level. He holds a postgraduate qualification in mindfulness-based psychotherapy, as well as two business degrees. Mindfulness training is a novel method of leader development but contrary to its rising popularity, there is a scarcity of research investigating how mindfulness training may affect leader capabilities. To gain a better understanding of the potential of a new research field, qualitative research is advantageous. How may leaders increase their ability to be mindful? Both state and trait mindfulness can be developed and refined through the practice of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006, 2012). Mindfulness interventions are usually offered in a multi-week format and require the practice of formal meditative practices and informal mindful activities, such as mindful walking, as a means to develop mindfulness.