



What are the effects of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making?

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Abstract

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) or Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training were designed to prevent relapse to depression. Studies have shown the effects of MBIs are due to its documented benefits in decreasing subjectively reported stress and its increasing use as stress management interventions at worksites (Wolever RQ et al. 2012). Professor Jon Kabat- Zinn, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic in Massachusetts discussed the importance of MBIs on the human brain from a neuroscientific perspective. Kabat-Zinn argues that the “brain is an organ of experience. It is actually shape shifting, transforming itself on the basis of our experience from moment to moment. This is called functional connectivity or neuroplasticity. It has been shown that in eight weeks of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction [training], different regions of the brain become denser. Other parts like the amygdala which is the stress reactivity centre, actually reduce” (Richardreoch.info, 2019).

The primary research aimed to investigate the extent to which the effect of MBCT training had on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of politicians and their approach to decision-making in the realm of British Parliament. It is worth noting that research into the effectiveness of mindfulness on decision-making remain limited. The research sought to identify if integration of mindfulness in politics and public policy are associated with benefits of transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy level. The research also sought to identify if mindfulness was a potential investment for society in transferable capacities associated with heart and mind. It was also interesting to research if these capacities had the ability to underpin our wellbeing as individuals and could assist job implementation more effectively. Jamie Bristow (2018, p.87) asserts in his *Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy* (MPPP) paper that politicians are finding new ways to approach political discourse, and a corresponding enthusiasm for policy that tackles society’s problems at the level of the human heart and mind.

Findings from this study: (A) To provide evidence of the effects of practicing mindfulness on politicians, (B) To show the effect mindfulness can have on their decision-making processes and its impact on the wider society, and (C) To investigate the efficacy of MBCT training in British parliament. The study involved six interviews with participants from various backgrounds within a political setting.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One, Introduction	6
Rationale for commissioning the study	6
Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)	6
Outline of the dissertation	7
Chapter Two, Literature Review	8
Formation of the MAPPG	8
Launch of the Mindful Nation UK report in Parliament	9
Purpose of the research study	9
Mindfulness – a universally applicable practice and natural human capacity.....	9
Moral reasoning and ethical decision-making	10
How improving decision-making and mindfulness can improve	10
legal ethics and professionalism.....	10
Improving decision-making through mindfulness.....	11
Tackling society’s problems at the level of the human heart and mind	12
Conclusion	13
Chapter Three, Methodology and Methods	14
Introduction.....	14
Research purpose.....	15
Research design.....	16
Explanation of the critical paradigm.....	16
Research methods.....	17
Methods	18
Interviews	19
Participants.....	20
Research Validity	21
Chapter Four, Findings	23
Introduction.....	23
Key Themes	23
Discussion by themes	23
Theme 1: Assessment on the effect of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making	23
Theme 2: Organizational methods of implementation to Sustain the long-term benefits of integration of mindfulness at work	26
Theme 3: Assessment on the research potential, adding value to what has already been established	27
Theme 4: Assessment against pursuing or not pursuing mindfulness.....	28

Theme 5: Integration of mindfulness in politics and public policy associated with benefits of transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy level	29
Theme 6: Wellbeing Outcomes at Political level and Objectives for Public Policy	29
Chapter Five, Analysis and Discussion	31
Introduction.....	31
Assessment on the effect of decision-making within Parliament	31
Methods and assessment on the effect of MBCT in Parliament.....	32
Limitations of assessment effect.....	34
Benefits of assessment effect.....	35
Sourcing sustainable funding for assessment of effect.....	35
Sample analysis.....	35
Conclusion	36
Chapter Six, Conclusions and Recommendations	37
Summary.....	37
Limitations	37
Academic recommendations:.....	38
Policy Recommendations:	38
References	39
Appendix 4 – Metacognition	46
Appendix 5 - Interview questions.....	47
Appendix 6 – Figure 1. The Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption	48
Appendix 7 – Benefits According to Research.....	50
Appendix 8 – Compassion and Loving Kindness.....	51
Appendix 9 – Books and materials used for Literature Review research.....	53
Appendix 10 – Social Media: Radio 4 FM Westminster Hour Broadcast and House of Commons Address	54
Appendix 11 - 7 Proven Benefits	55
Appendix 12 – Publications	58
Appendix 13 – List of Interviews	60
Appendix 14 - Key Recommendations.....	61
Figure 1 The 8-week MBCT Programme	33
Figure 2 The human brain by Katy Thomas, 2019	34

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning	Abbreviation	Meaning
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group	MI	Mindfulness Initiative
BREXIT	Britain's Exit	MPPP	Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	MNU	Mindful Nation UK
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	OM	Organisational Method
MAPPG	Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	Participant
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy	REBT	Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction	UAE	United Arab Emirates
MBI	Mindfulness-Based Initiatives	WHO	World Health Organisation
		WWWC	What Works Wellbeing Centre

Chapter One, Introduction

The aim of the study sought to assess, investigate and explore the effects of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with politicians and those involved in training them in an eight-week Mindfulness Based-Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) course. The MBCT programme involved an approach to psychotherapy that uses Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) methods in collaboration with mindfulness meditation practices and similar psychological strategies (En.wikipedia.org, 2019).

Rationale for commissioning the study

Overall wellbeing is essential for the development of society (Maccagnan et al., 2019). Corey L. M. Keyes (2007, p.6) argues that mental illness is a persistent deviation of normal functioning that results in emotional suffering and significant impairment of functioning at a high cost to society. Personal wellbeing is an important ability developed during childhood. Emotional, social and physical development of young children has a direct effect on their overall development and on the adult they will become (Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development, 2019). Crane and Reid (2016) assert that, “policy implementation includes a parallel emphasis on developing integrity from the inside out (training [politicians] so that there are expectations regarding on-going attention to self-integrity) and from the outside in (developing anchor points in the form of governance and standards that people from within and without the profession can relate to”).

Christian Staerklé (2015) highlights, “[meta] cognitive” approaches to decision-making [as] one of the most important research domains in political psychology and rational choice theory [as] the most commonly used theoretical framework to explain decision-making processes. Mindfulness practice is linked with improved decision-making (Fiol & O'Connor, 2003) and a possible intervention that could demonstrate the effects of political decision-making. It employs a methodology which enables the individual to (re)discover and (re)connect to their personally held deep frames and values.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)

An increasing body of neuroscientific evidence indicates that mindfulness practice, such as meditation or attention exercises, lead to desirable “neuroplasticity”: physical changes in the brain that help dampen down people’s stress response while strengthening brain circuits responsible for

complex problem solving, attention management and creativity (Davidson & Lutz, 2007). According to recent research, just fifteen minutes of mindfulness meditation can help debias decisions (Hafenbrack et al., 2014) and significantly improve memory, executive functioning and task performance (Zeidan et al., 2010). Implementation of MBIs in politics and public policy occur principally in response to organisations increasingly concerned with the resilience and wellbeing of employees. Jamie Bristow (2018, p.87) *Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy* (MPPP) document states that “mindfulness training has found its way into the realm of government, with parliamentary programmes seeding ambition amongst politicians to research and employ its transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy levels”.

The Mindful Nation UK (MNU) report was the first policy document of its kind, seeking to address mental and physical health concerns in the (four key) areas of education, health, the workplace and the criminal justice system through the application of MBIs (see Appendix 14). The benefits of mindfulness (see Appendix 11) and its effect on decision-making through MBIs such as MBCT training, could facilitate building an economy over the coming decades that is more adaptable, more human-centred and at the same time, more environmentally sustainable.

Outline of the dissertation

Chapter Two – the literature discusses the benefits and effects of practicing mindfulness on politicians, together with the effect it can have on their approaches to decision-making.

Chapter Three - methodology and methods, explores semi-structured interviews, data collection and document analysis, which were chosen for undertaking the empirical research.

Chapter Four - the findings collected from the empirical research are presented and analysed in the form of both the interviews undertaken, including the *Mindful Nation UK* (MNU) report and *Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy* (MPPP) document.

Chapter Five - will present a conclusion, summarising the research study and findings, before presenting a number of policy recommendations for government, based on these findings.

Chapter Two, Literature Review

Introduction

In this section, the aim is to assess and explore the effect mindfulness has on politicians and their approach to decision-making which questionably has the potency and capacity to impact the wider society. The aim will be to corroborate this knowledge through document analysis from several different authors by means of manuscripts, articles, publications, reports, and so on. The methods applied will hopefully augment value to the project and consolidate the evidence for this literature review. In terms of reports – a landmark day for the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group (MAPPG) was the launch of the *Mindful Nation UK* (MNU) report in the Houses of Parliament in October 2015 (see Appendix 12). The MNU report was commissioned in 2014 as a result of the growing interest in mindfulness and MBIs, in an expanding range of domains including health and care services, psychology, psychotherapy, leadership and management, work in prisons, workplace training, the military and education at all levels. The significance of the MNU report is outlined in the dissertation as a method of demonstrating the importance of mindfulness in politics and public policy. Terry Hyland, (2016, p.1) discusses how members of MAPPG, some of whom had experience in mindfulness practice themselves, intended the project to achieve three main aims:

- Review the scientific evidence and current best practice in mindfulness training.
- Develop policy recommendations for the government based on these findings.
- Provide a forum for discussion in parliament for the role of mindfulness and its implementation in public policy (Terry Hyland, 2016, p.1).

Formation of the MAPPG

This groundswell of experience and support led to the formation of MAPPG, which began an inquiry into the possible wider benefits of mindfulness practice. Eight hearings later and having listened to the testimonies of eighty expert witnesses, the group was ready to publish its report. Among the recommendations are: expanding the availability of MBCT courses in the NHS, developing mindfulness in education by supporting pioneer schools programmes, offering courses for government staff and introducing the training to offenders in the criminal justice system. All these measures would be supported by care to ensure high quality mindfulness teaching. On Tuesday afternoons, groups of politicians from all major parties gather together to meditate.

Launch of the Mindful Nation UK report in Parliament

Oxford Mindfulness Centre (OMC) founder Mark Williams, during the launch of the MNU report led politicians in a mindfulness meditation practice and cited: “Rarely in any footage of British Parliament are we greeted with silence. Yet instead, rowdiness, a great deal of jeers and yelling, even when someone else is talking. Mindfulness promotes the exact opposite: Silence. Space. Friendliness. Kindness. Non-striving. Patience. These qualities may be considered integral to the practice of mindfulness, but they are rarely associated with politics” (mindfulness Initiative, 2019).

Purpose of the research study

The study aim was also to: (a) identify building blocks for the research from the existing literature, (b) identify gaps and/or limitations in the existing literature that the primary research addressed and, (c) discover why wellbeing should be placed at the heart of politics and public policy. In conducting this limited type of research, it might unfold whether the self-care treatment of politicians practicing mindfulness led to policymakers becoming less disproportionate and more balanced in their approach to decision-making. Especially, as MPs' decisions (wholesome or pejorative) theoretically can profoundly impact the wider society. However, there seems to be sufficient evidence to show that mindfulness does have the capability to improve performance and decision-making.

Mindfulness – a universally applicable practice and natural human capacity

Mindfulness is a 2600-year-old practice with roots in Buddhist meditation. It is a universally applicable practice and a natural human capacity. Mindfulness is defined as “the awareness that arises through intentionally paying attention in an open, kind and discerning way” (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Mindfulness involves being aware of what is arising without changing the experience, but rather changing the relationship to the experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994). Mindfulness practices are designed to enhance awareness of thoughts, feelings, somatic sensations, intention/motivation, and behaviours. Research has shown that mindfulness skills have physiological benefits for clinical (e.g. pain, cancer, heart disease, depression, and anxiety) and nonclinical populations (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004b). Psychological benefits include enhancement of cognition and creativity, attention and concentration, self-esteem, interpersonal functioning, self-view, and empathy. Physiological benefits include improvement in immune system functioning, modulation of cortisol, increased cerebral blood flow and shifts of activity of the two brain hemispheres, and increases in rapid eye movement sleep (Shapiro, Walsh, & Britton, 2003). Several meta-analyses have supported the notion that

mindfulness training programs such as MBSR, reduces symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, and enhances well-being across clinical and non-clinical samples (Kabat Zinn, 1990), (e.g. Baer, 2003b; Bishop, 2002; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004a; Jazaieri, Goldin, Werner, Ziv, & Gross, 2012), (Shauna et al, 2012, p.504-505). Remarkably, “this awareness in practices rooted in Buddhist contemplative traditions are commonly utilised by members of the British Parliament – in a period of economic austerity and cutbacks in public services” (Boyce 2011).

Moral reasoning and ethical decision-making

The ability to teach or enhance one’s moral reasoning and ethical decision-making behaviour is an important question to address in our world today. The link between mindfulness (present moment attention) and moral reasoning (a cognitive developmental construct) is an important one to make. According to Professor Thomas Rest (1983) based at the University of Minnesota; there are four key components to moral behaviour: (1) moral sensitivity, (2) moral judgement, (3) moral motivation and commitment, and (4) moral motivation and moral character and competence. Rest defines moral sensitivity as the awareness a person has regarding their actions (or inactions) and the potential effects their behaviour has on others (including the awareness that a situation has a moral component). Once there is awareness, moral judgement is the decision point of taking the morally best course of action. Moral motivation and commitment are the prioritisation of moral values over one’s own personal values. Finally, Rest (1983) indicated that moral motivation and moral character and competence are having the strength to follow through with the morally best course of action. The foundation of moral reasoning rests on awareness. Mindfulness helps one cultivate this awareness through intentionally attending to the present moment in an open (motivation and commitment) and discerning (judgement) way (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009), (Shauna et al, 2012, p.505).

How improving decision-making and mindfulness can improve legal ethics and professionalism

It can be said, too, that politicians who behave unethically and unprofessionally do so for various reasons ranging from intention to carelessness as we have witnessed through various social media platforms. Political blunders can also result from decision-making flaws as we have experienced in the past, for example, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s iterative ‘slip of the tongue’ and ‘casual’ rule-breaking. Impulse Control is said to be one of the potential benefits of mindfulness in the workplace and for positions of leadership (Bristow, 2018, p.88). The MPPP document outlines politicians are forever in the public eye and are under immense pressure to make the right decision, or it can come

back to haunt them. Rudey and Schweitzer (2010) argue that, MPs are more conscious of ethical principles [and] more conscious of preserving their integrity. Policymakers are placed in adversarial situations. Politicians often mention responding, not reacting, as a key learning from their MBCT course. They also noticed improvements in self-regulation which help them to behave in ways they won't later regret.

Another decision-making villain is the bias to place too much weight on short-term emotions in making decisions. This bias may lead to rash decisions under the powerful sway of visceral emotions (Huang 2015, p.48). Applying the WRAP Model for approaches to decision making to legal ethics and professionalism is an approach designed to repair cognitive biases and to address decision-making process issues (Huang 2015, p.52). Widen Your Options, Reality-Test Your Assumptions, Attain Distance Before Deciding, and Prepare to Be Wrong. One of the main pitfalls in decision-making is having a narrow frame. That means, you don't consider possible alternatives that might be better options (Karyn Hall, 2019).

Improving decision-making through mindfulness

Karelaia and Reb (2015, p.3) contends that “we are seldom fully aware of our thoughts, actions, emotions, and of what is happening around us. Even when it comes to making decisions, an activity that is often quite conscious, deliberate and intentional, people are typically not as aware as they could be”. Karelaia and Reb maintain that as a result of this, decision quality may suffer. Awareness of what is taking place in the present moment, both internally and externally can help people make better decisions. Imagine electing the wrong constituency into government or marrying the wrong person, both might be considered bad decisions. Wrong decisions can destroy people, families and organisations (Karelaia and Reb, 2015, p.3).

Governments are also a place of great decision blunders. Some would argue that Britain's withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union or most commonly referred to as Brexit was one of them. For example, the decision to hold a referendum for the leave or remain campaign without sufficient information to guide the UK public's vote. Karelaia, N, and Reb, J. (2015) assert that Mindfulness is also likely to facilitate decision implementation by reducing the intention-behavior gap (Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007). Recent research suggests that mindfulness may indeed help translate intentions into actions. A study involving 545 individuals took a decision-making test involving a “sunk cost scenario” ... participants who practised mindfulness for fifteen minutes before the test were significantly more likely to make a rational decision (The Mindfulness Initiative, 2015,

p.22). MBCT is linked with Meta-cognition – a core dimension of mindfulness practice and involves thoughtfulness and rational judgement which is fundamental for political decision-making.

Russo and Shoemaker (2002) imply that making decisions involves four stages: (1) framing the decision, (2) gathering and processing information, (3) reaching a conclusion and implementation, and (4) learning from feedback. It is said that mindfulness training may support all stages of the decision-making process. Karelaia & Reb (2014) argue that mindfulness may enhance the decision-making process as it disengages individuals from habitual patterns of thought and behaviour. Mindful people (using mindfulness for personal benefit) are more likely to notice that there is a decision to be made rather than maintaining the status quo.

Brown, Ryan, and Cresswell (2007) are of the opinion that mindful decision-makers are less reactive, have increased awareness of core needs, values, and goals (Bishop et al., 2004), are fully engaged and are free from distraction or judgement with a soft open mind. All this enhances the decision-making process, resulting in higher quality decisions that support personal and organisational objectives (Karelaia & Reb, 2014, p.1). They also assist decision-making processes by disengaging decision-makers from counterproductive sunk-cost biases (headspace 2014). One study found meditators were more likely to let go of sunk-cost biases compared to a control group (Hafenbrack, Kinias, & Barsade, 2014). It found mindful decision-makers were less emotionally invested in the decision and better able to make choices based on relevant information that is available in the present moment (headspace 2014).

Tackling society's problems at the level of the human heart and mind

Jamie Bristow (2018, p.87) declares in his MPPP paper that mindfulness may in fact contribute to the flourishing of society, and thus, help to tackle society's problems at the level of the human heart and mind. Bache and Reardon (2016, p.155) believe the problem is how to transform that abstract political narrative into a governmental agenda and put it effectively onto the political decision agenda as a precise objective and measurable goal that produces an impact on people's lives. Perhaps, the MBCT programme delivered to MPs in Parliament presents a more concrete political narrative as it aims to contribute to the emergence of mindfulness training in numerous policy narratives (Bristow, 2018, p.87).

Mindfulness might be more than a targeted intervention for specific issues and may in fact contribute to the flourishing of society more broadly. Caroline Lucas is among MPs backing the idea that compassion should play a greater role in decision-making at Westminster, in order to help protect the

most vulnerable in society (Stewart, 2019), (see Appendix 8). The College of Policing now considers [care &] compassion and ‘emotional awareness’ to be core competencies (Bristow 2018, p.90). Kindness and compassion were on the agenda at the Mindfulness in Politics Day at the House of Commons on October 17th, 2017. The Conservative MP of the Finnish Parliament and former MP Lenita Toivakka hoped mindfulness would cultivate a gap in politics in Finland and globally, promoting “kindness and heartfulness” (Bristow (2018, p.88 & 89).

Conclusion

In conclusion, assessment of effect for society according to Nancy Hey, (2019) would be for the government to produce policies that matter most against people’s values. Societal advancement with human beings placed at the Centre and the purpose of the wellbeing of future generations. Many people yearn to dwell in a society where they feel safe and secure with wellbeing placed at the epicentre of all things. Conservative sports minister Tracey Crouch, and the Labour MP, Thangam Debonnaire are among those backing the idea that compassion should play a greater role in decision-making” (Stewart, 2019) “Such an uplift could support the development of precisely those human capacities of heart and mind that we currently need most of all” (Crane and Reid 2016).

Chapter Three, Methodology and Methods

Introduction

Methodology is concerned with why, what, from where, when and how data is collected and analysed (Guba and Lincoln 1994, p. 108). This chapter details the research purpose, paradigm, design, methods and validity for researching the effects of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making. It outlines the study's overall purpose of building theory, its research paradigm and associated implicit assumptions on the nature of social reality, its research design and rules of inference. The choice of methods and their application in collecting and analysing data on sense making in the context of politicians practicing mindfulness for their own benefits, affects the decision-making process. Ensuring philosophical and methodological transparency in collecting and interpreting data is of pertinence given that in the field of public administration, within which this study is firmly located. Yang et al. (2008) assert that research is both interdisciplinary and applied and thus, is not governed by a single theoretical or methodological approach (UoB).

Bristow's (2018, p.87) MPPP paper highlights the importance of mindfulness in politics and emphasises how "mindfulness training has found its way to the realm of government, with parliamentary programmes seeding ambition amongst politicians to employ and research its transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy levels". Owing to the nature of their role, politicians are under immense public scrutiny and face several challenges associated with politics persistently. Regular mindfulness sessions held at parliament on Tuesdays and led by Chris Cullen from the Oxford Mindfulness Centre (OMC) – help to lessen some of the pressure. Many politicians grasp hold of these practices and perceive it to be a valuable use of time during their busy schedules when they can simply switch off from everything and pay attention to what really matters inside the heart, mind and body. Bristow (2018, p.89) implies that any decision-maker needs a clear mind. Studies have shown from a clinical context (e.g. psychological and psychiatric) [mindfulness] has the capacity to change the structure of the brain and develop certain skills in adults such as handling difficult feelings, being calm, resilient, compassionate and empathic (Baer 2003; Salmon et al, 2004), developing intellectual skills, sustaining attention and concentration (Jha et al, 2007; Chambers et al, 2008; Zeidan et al, 2010). Professor Katherine Weare's *MiSP Research Summary 2012* paper, highlights the effect of brain imaging studies on adults, and demonstrates that mindfulness meditation reliably and profoundly alters the structure and function of the brain to improve the quality of both thought and feeling (Katherine Weare, 2012). Dutch MP Esther Ouwenhand uses

mindfulness to stay in touch with her own values or belief system to which she describes as most important. MPs are beginning to acknowledge the growing appeal of mindfulness practice in areas that have been scientifically proven to boost wellbeing and decision-making, for example:

- **Attention** (legislators absorb a colossal amount of information each day)
- **Impulse Control** (responding not reacting)
- **Kindness** (mindfulness practice increases empathy)
- **Meta-cognition** (core dimension of mindfulness practice, emphasised in MBCT)
- **Prevention of Mental Illness** (mental health has rapidly climbed the political agenda)
- **Wellbeing** (low levels of habitual ‘taking notice’ - primary factor in the UK’s poor wellbeing scores)
- **Technology and Attention** (cultural and behavioural changes driven by digital technology)
- **Emotional Awareness & Compassion** (to be core competencies, critical for crime detection and public trust)
- **C21st Workplace** (cognitive and emotional capacities of individuals determine the health, resilience and future performance of businesses)

(Jamie Bristow, 2019, p.88, 89, 90) - *Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy*.

Research purpose

The overall purpose of the research was to facilitate insight into the perceptions or belief-systems of politicians who practice mindfulness for their own personal benefit and whether or not it influenced their approach to decision-making. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews only and documentary analysis of the MNU report and also the MPPP document as a data source (see Appendix 12). Thus, my data collection strategy consisted of a combination of interviews and documentary analysis for the purpose of this study. As well as the participants identified for interviews, the study also included information on MPs who had undertaken the MBCT training and MPs who decided against pursuing mindfulness after they had taken the MBCT training.

By assessing and investigating the specificities of politicians who take the time to practice mindfulness for their own personal wellbeing, the study sought to learn about some of the generic conditions by which the decision-making of parliamentarians might be understood. To this effect, the goal of the fieldwork in UK Parliament was to answer the questions ‘what are the shared perceptions or belief systems that exist?’ and ‘why do they exist?’. In answering these questions, the study sought

to build theory based on the observations made within the House of Parliament's real-life scenario by tunnelling through what may seem to many as a "hidden" world. The aim was to shine a torchlight into that world and communicate the findings to the reader and attempt to show the effect of mindfulness on decision-making processes politicians must make. The process also attempted to identify whether the contemplative and compassionate-inducing qualities of mindfulness encouraged or compelled MPs to make better informed choices that tackle society's problems at the level of the human heart and mind.

Research design

The object of study was to show that politicians using mindfulness for their own personal benefit significantly shaped the epistemological and ontological assumptions that have underpinned the research project. Consistent with the object of study, the epistemological approach of this research project has been firmly rooted in the qualitative approach associated with a constructivist-interpretive paradigm and idealist perspective, principally concerned with interpreting the processes by which people come to explain or account for the world in which they live (Gergen et al., 1985). Conducting a wide range of techniques such as semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to understand the experiences and practices of a sample located in their own social context. Brown (1980) suggests that, adopting such a paradigm required the researcher to avoid forcing the realities of politicians into neatly pre-defined theoretical categories, which he or she imposed as meaningful. Instead, the researcher needed to move away from a concern with external classifications and move towards people's self-referential categories (Steven R. Brown 1980).

Explanation of the critical paradigm

The ontological position of the critical paradigm is historical realism and takes the view that reality has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Realities are socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence (James Scotland 2012, p.13). The epistemological position of critical epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena and linked with societal ideology. Knowledge is both socially constructed and influenced by power relations from within society (Scotland 2012, p.13). According to Scotland (2012, p.13), "Reality is alterable by human action". Indeed, one reality that has been altered by human action is the integration of mindfulness in the realm of 11 governments around the world. Paradigms are based upon its own ontological and epistemological

assumptions. Since all assumptions are conjecture, the philosophical underpinnings of each paradigm can never be empirically proven or disproven (Scotland 2012, p.9).

Exploring the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research, ontology is the study of being (Crotty, 1989, p. 10) and epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge (Keith Morrison, Lawrence Manion, and Louis Cohen, 2007, p.7). Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words *what is* (James Scotland 2012, p.9).

Epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words *what it means to know* (James Scotland 2012, p.9), the nature of the relationship between the would-be knower and what can be known (Egon G. Guba and Yvonne S. Lincoln 1994, p. 108). Consequently, as a researcher it seemed logical to examine factors from an interpretivism position, e.g. perceptions of how things really are and how things really work.

Interpretivists have a different view of what political analysis should look like (they wouldn't call it political science, for one). Because the people involved in this study are not independent from the world around them (subjective ontology position), or act on beliefs and preferences, it is possible to explain their actions by referring to the relevant beliefs and preferences. Our realities are mediated by our senses, an observation that systemically underpins one of the core principles of meditation practice. Williams & Penham, (2011) emphasise, by practicing mindfulness and just focussing on what is going on within our bodies, we are paying attention to our senses.

Research methods

The overall purpose of the study's research design was to facilitate an empirical investigation into the perceptions or belief-systems that, (a) politicians practising mindfulness for their own personal benefit share, (b) does it effect on their decision-making process and the wider society, and (c) if so, can it be evidenced. The fieldwork consisted of two phases: firstly, the study sought to identify existing shared perceptions among the benefits of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making. Alongside this approach we used document analysis in the form of the MAPPG report and MPPP document, informed by, and building on the findings; secondly, the fieldwork presented back to the reader its shared perceptions in order to discuss their meanings.

Data analysis

The data collection and data analysis process were framed and informed by the effect mindfulness had on politicians and their approach to decision-making theories as presented and discussed in the literature review. The data analysis was taken from the six participants employed to conduct the

research. Six of the interviews were recorded with consent. One of the interviews was conducted using an electronic emailing system. So, part of my data analysis included information extracted, (a) from an email exchange, and (b) from recorded devices, e.g. (iPad or mobile device). Once all the data was collected, the researcher could then analyse, examine and inspect the relevant material to be gathered and added to the findings chapter.

All the information seemed significant, conversely, it was vital to choose the information from each participant that either shared similar perceptions or belief systems that validated the argument. “Data analysis is going to involve identifying common patterns within the responses and critically analysing them in order to achieve research aims and objectives” (Research-Methodology, 2019). Having to playback the recording verbatim was a tedious task, however, it did enable the capture of data in its truest form with the emotion of the speaker encompassed, opposed to a transcript of words without any emotion attached. It was more about breaking down the gathered information into components that allowed the researcher to examine them and extract insights that answered the pertinent questions of the inquiry, test hypotheses, or prove or disprove perceptions, theories and propositions.

Typically, data analysis encompasses a process of inspecting and tidying up the raw data collected, and then employing a particular technique of analysis to gain knowledge about ‘the story’ that the data tells in response to the research question. By comparing these approaches and seeing where there were meeting points along them, the researcher was able to gather the data so that they could actually underpin where there might be errors of truth more firmly. This is how the researcher moved towards his marginal position while undertaking his research on values. Theoretical research contained no practical or empirical application. Instead, based its findings on existing theories and other published works. The focus was on extracting what is theoretically significant about a particular phenomenon in the social sciences.

Methods

Interviews

Phase one of the study worked with individual participants all linked in some way to MAPPG, the Mindfulness Initiative (MI) or the OMC. The six participants were employed by the researcher. Textual and ethnographic methods were implemented to explain and further analyse the shared perceptions of the effects of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making. Methods are the specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyse data (Crotty, 1998, p. 3) and for the purpose of this study took on a qualitative approach. Accordingly, the study made use of a plurality of methods and a plurality of theories, which were selected for their suitability in satisfying the requirements of the different stages of the inquiry, while keeping with the ontological and epistemological direction established.

Six participants were interviewed (see Appendix 13). Each participant was selected on the basis of the researcher's personal knowledge of who each of them were and how their field of excellence might support the study. As a teacher of *Paws b* (pronounced 'pause be') and *.b* (pronounced 'dot-be') curriculum and member of the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) – the familiarity already existed. Equally, the challenges to gaining access still proved difficult, principally with Participant 1 (P1) and the current state of politics with, (a) Brexit threatening, (b) economic austerity, and (c) the study taking place during the summer recess period. Several email correspondences were distributed, however, with little to no response. The study hinged on P1, chiefly because he was the main source of the study as a politician practicing mindfulness and working in parliament.

The interviews with P1 were recorded and conducted via WhatsApp video call. Sound Recorder via mobile device was also employed as a backup in case of lost signal. Participant 2 (P2) was recorded and conducted via Zoom Video Conferencing which provided remote access to communications software that combined video conferencing, online meetings, chat, and mobile collaboration. Participant 3 (P3) was conducted and recorded face-to-face in Costa Coffee using Sound Recorder and Apple iPad recording software. Participant 4 (P4) was conducted face-to-face at the London School of Economics. Participant (P5) was conducted via mobile device communication and recorded using Apple iPad recording software. Participant (P6) was conducted via electronic mail exchange of computer-stored messages by telecommunication.

Thirteen set research questions were proposed to each participant (see Appendix 5). Some of the participants completed Consent Forms (pre) or (post) interviews, Participant Information and Ethical Considerations Part A and Ethics Consideration Part B for Appendix 1, 2, and 3, however, for the purpose of this dissertation, Appendix 1, 2, and 3 have been omitted by the author. I also applied for/gained ethical approval for the research from University of Birmingham. At least five out of the six participants had already taken the MBCT course. The semi-structured interview method was chosen as the means of data collection because of two primary considerations: (1) they were well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues which enabled probing for more information and clarification of answers and (2), the varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group precluded the use of a standardised interview schedule (Louise BARRIBALL et al., 1994, p.3) and was deemed to be an appropriate method for my research. Each participant was given the opportunity to talk around the proposed set of questions and the interviewer could also go into different areas of enquiry. All participants were questioned about their roles and values, e.g. constructed global desired life consequences, or in more simple terms, what people find important in life (Hayes, Strosahl and Wilson, 1999; p. 206). Their beliefs about the effect of mindfulness and decision-making were examined closely.

Homogeneity in using identical questions for five out of the six participants from different backgrounds and settings was to gain wider evidence for mindfulness training having the capability of having a positive effect on politicians and improving decision-making. However, because of time limitations and diverse working backgrounds, not all questions were fitting or could be answered by the interviewees, particularly pertaining to P4 and P6. Although the semi-structured style approach allowed the researcher to ask questions that might answer the research question. It was also interesting to ascertain whether the perceptions and belief systems differed at any stage of the questioning.

Participants

Overall, there were 6 participants; 1 female and 5 males. The participants ranged in age from 35 to 85, with a total mean age of $(33+85)/2 = 59$. Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: methods of sampling from a population involved as mentioned by C. Robinson (2014), Theoretical Sampling Methods where the process involves... a “comparison” group to provide contrast with existing participants answering the same research questions (Anselm Strauss 1987). Participants also took part in a convenience sample drawn from their availability and willingness to take part. One

research question included MPs who had taken the MBCT course but decided against pursuing it further. The same question was put to MPs who took the course and chose to pursue mindfulness further.

Documentary analysis

The Mindful Nation UK report embarked on a systematic analysis produced by P2 together with Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group which all participants referred to or had some involvement in and underpinned the implementation work within our public policy setting. The *Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy* paper was also produced by P2. In it he states that, “wherever mindfulness finds popularity in public life, the necessary conditions usually include an advocate with a strong desire to share the benefits they have personally experienced through mindfulness practice – and an accompanying sense that those benefits (See Appendix 11) will improve the functioning of their organisation or institution” (Jamie Bristow, 2018, p.88).

The paper, *Mindfulness and Decision-Making: A brief based on Karelaia & Reb’ (2014)* refers to mindfulness as a “secularised practice devised from ancient Buddhism and defined as the intention to be present in the here and now, fully engaged in whatever is happening, free from distraction or judgement, with a soft and open mind has been suggested to enhance the decision-making process, resulting in higher quality decisions that support personal and or organisational objectives. Mindfulness Training (MT) may support all stages of the decision-making process” (Headspace 2014).

The paper, *Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms* produced by Scotland, J. (2012) explores the philosophical underpinnings of three major educational research paradigms: scientific, interpretive, and critical. The aim was to outline and explore the interrelationships between each paradigm’s ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods.

Research Validity

The project’s research approach was characterised by pragmatism, ongoing collaboration and consultation with research participants, practitioners, teachers and academics, and a willingness to

traverse disciplinary boundaries in learning from, and building on, existing scholarship. This contributed to ensuring the validity and integrity of the research process and its findings. In addition, it supported the author's reflexive struggle to adequately represent the other without personal bias, while finding a constructive role for his own subjective self.

Chapter Four, Findings

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present and analyse the findings from the primary research, which included undertaking documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews. The concepts set out in Chapter 2 will be drawn upon throughout this chapter, and findings presented and discussed against each of the six key themes:

Key Themes

Theme 1: Assessment on the effect of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making

Theme 2: Organizational methods of implementation to sustain the long-term benefits of integration of mindfulness at work

Theme 3: Assessment on the research potential, adding value to what has already been established

Theme 4: Assessment against pursuing or not pursuing regular mindfulness practice

Theme 5: Integration of mindfulness in politics and public policy associated with benefits of transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy level

Theme 6: Wellbeing outcomes at political level and objectives for public policy

Discussion by themes

Political Sensitivity

Theme 1: Assessment on the effect of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making

Assessment of effect was analysed as to determine, to what degree, the effect of practicing mindfulness had on politicians and its capacity to influence the decision-making process. There was substantial and conclusive evidence concerning the relationship between mindfulness and decision-making between the 6 Participants, except for P5 who focussed on political sensitivity surrounding decision-making. In fact, out of the 6 Participants, P5 was the most cautious. It did appear that the mindfulness programme was never explicitly or publicly intended as an intervention aimed at

changing peoples' decision-making processes. Therefore, it might get construed as interference in political processes which seek to evade any transpired perceptions. Subsequently, political sensitivity was the main reason why observations in parliament for this research were off limits for the purpose of this study. A sense of just offering the course without intervention in MPs psychological processes seemed crucial to P5. P2's and P5's views on decision-making contrasted. P2 seemed more positive about the psychological effects on decision-making, whilst P5 appeared more reticent. However, for the most part, P5 agreed with both P1, P2 and P3. P5 expressed, "psychologically, mindfulness is about reactivity and meta-cognition as key processes". Equally, P5 couldn't recall a specific quotation directed at decision-making whereas P1 and P2 could and referred to Timothy Loughton MP's comment on politicians practicing mindfulness. Loughton expressed that these colleagues who practiced mindfulness were more civil toward each other, with improved listening skills. P5 agreed that there were decision-making processes within Loughton's comment.

The Benefits of MBCT

Since 2012, 250 parliamentarians from cross constituencies had undertaken the eight-week MBCT programme. P2 confirmed that 250 Members of Parliament (MP) and Members of the House of Lords (MHL) engaged with the course on different levels. P1 observed that some managed two or three sessions out of the eight-week course and a seed may still have been planted. Some politicians remembered vaguely to pause during stressful intervals which were beneficial to their mental health and decision-making. P2 expressed that capacity build up could make MPs less headlong going into exchanges or decisions. More profoundly, there were approximately 25 to 30 MPs who completed the eight-week programme. Eleven still attend the regular weekly practice sessions (not necessarily altogether) established in Parliament on Tuesdays and is led by P5 since 2013. The regular weekly attenders reported that certain preoccupations were different for them now as mindfulness had moderately become an important part of orienting their attention. P3 observed just how beneficial practicing mindfulness was to MPs as it appeared to be associated with better physical and mental health and facilitated better conversations, enhancing the ability to argue more skilfully.

Holistic Approach to Mindfulness

Assessment of the holistic aspect associated with mindfulness meditation in its abstract form might prove difficult to assess. For this reason, the benefits of mindfulness on approaches to decision-making might be overlooked. Perhaps, calculations could be implemented using authentic and honest politicians. P1 demonstrated this authenticity and honesty through his own personal practice of

mindfulness. P1 reported that mindfulness had made him more considerate and decelerated his decision-making as he used to be impulsive. In principle, a method to assess effect and capture evidence could be performed via a Case Study on P1. This would solely be based on trust owing to his authenticity and honesty using a daily log system of his mindfulness practice. Another method for assessment of effect might be obtained through someone else's observation of P1. For instance, in a YouTube video clip exchange between P1 and former Prime Minister, Theresa May and former speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow (see Appendix 10), Bercow announced that P1 "had noticeably become a much calmer and more phlegmatic fellow, these days, which wasn't always the case in the past". Bercow confirmed the effect mindfulness has had on P1 and his decision-making overall, which arguably presents its own evidence of assessment of effect.

Metacognitive Awareness

P2 thought that a change in an individual's metacognitive awareness (MCA) was an important capacity that developed in the course of mindfulness practice and might explain the link between P1 becoming less impulsive and more considerate. Metacognition is "thinking about thinking" ... "aware of one's awareness" (En.wikipedia.org, 2019) (see Appendix 4). P5's rationale on the awareness attribution part of MCA apportioned the possibility of being able to take an objective or observer stance on the executive functioning of our emotions and the whole of our human experience. MCA develops the ability to become less identified with the subject matter, e.g. more *aware* of anger rather than *being* angry. Perhaps this explains P1's (decreased) impulsivity and (increased) consideration for others on identifying less with the subject matter. Reconditioning the mind might possibly result in fewer depressive episodes and perhaps, by disassociation with particular thoughts, less likely to get dragged back down. P5 agreed, in one area, that decision-making can help with cognitive resolution. The urgency to immediately react to something gets superseded with different capacities that alert the response part of the brain, allowing it to make a more rational decision. Caroline Lucas MP and Sir Desmond Swayne MP attested to the value and positive effect of mindfulness in controlling reactions, impulses or aggression by using the response part of the brain that helps us make better informed choices.

Theme 2: Organizational methods of implementation to Sustain the long-term benefits of integration of mindfulness at work

Organizational Methods (OM)

OM implementation to sustain the long-term benefits of integration of mindfulness at work in the UK differed from other parliaments. P1 revealed the Swedish parliament were the first to establish a mindfulness practice in 2011. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) established theirs in 2013. There were reported benefits affiliated with the introduction of mindfulness to 11 parliaments around the world. One reason the mindfulness programme remained strong in the UK was attributed to a systematic and comprehensive eight-week MBCT programme taught by top class teachers from Oxford University and encompassed a number one psychiatric department. The Recruitment of top-class teachers in the country to teach the programme was one OM.

Additional OM's incorporated weekly drop-in classes for the MPs that previously undertook the course as a way of maintaining traction with MPs. Further OM required for sustainable financial backing or even sustainable teachers for that matter, exclusively based its reliance on funding from the Oxford Mindfulness Foundation (OMF). The OMF is a charity that finances the Oxford Mindfulness Centre. P2 said that MBCT teaching in Westminster had been delivered free of charge by the OMC since 2013. P5 specified the illegalities behind not being able to charge MP's for these courses in the way that one could charge members of the public. Owing to this infringement, politicians taking part in the courses in parliament were invited to donate to the charity, mainly because it was prohibited to sell anything on the parliamentary estate. P1 sensed that the heaviness in reliance on the OMC might become a cause for concern for the programme's permanency.

Procurement

Parliaments analogous to Wales, Iceland and possibly Sweden had managed to secure funding from institutions in an effort to sustain funding within their parliaments. Repeated efforts of engagement with the Wellbeing Function in the UK House of Parliament had proven burdensome and ended in failed attempts to persuade them to fund the programme. However, things did seem moderately positive as there was some movement to potentially secure funding from the Learning and Development Team with overall responsibility for training and funding. Presently, the MBCT programme is currently being outsourced. P5 expressed that sustainable funding was difficult to procure and required further negotiation. Wales had managed to form a procurement process that

selected the University of Bangor to deliver training programmes for Welsh assembly members and politicians, with an allocation of funds to their parliament endorsed for 3 years. Statistics in 2017 disclosed that 40 politicians from 14 countries came to Westminster for a day of practice with Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn. Since that meeting, mindfulness training had been launched successfully in 9 further parliaments. Amongst them, France, Denmark, Iceland and Ireland received training paid for by their own parliaments. These countries tend to have mindfulness greater embedded in their formal processes. What remained unambiguous was the moderate concern and cavalier attitude around the mental health of MPs in parliament, particularly during the prolonged Brexit process with tensions heightened. Nonetheless, there was a sense within parliament that the mindfulness programme was valuable and should be funded by parliament, similar to Wales, France, Denmark, Iceland and Ireland.

Theme 3: Assessment on the research potential, adding value to what has already been established

Identifying Gaps

P1 stressed it was completely worthwhile to identify gaps and affirmed that this research might add value to what had already been established. Other researchers could also help move mindfulness in the political setting further along by enhancing the research already available. With that being said, P1 was not completely certain how the research could be proven with many politicians refusing to discuss their personal practice as they remained afraid people might associate them with madness. It was also made clear by P1 that discussions relating to the benefits of personal practice amongst some MPs had improved significantly if compared to 6 years ago when the mindfulness programme was first introduced to parliament. P1 saw evidence of this improvement as he communicated openly about his mental health and personal mindfulness practice.

P1 as an MP working in parliament (see Appendix 13) said, “the information from politicians was that mindfulness was beneficial” (see Appendix 11). P2 highlighted an additional paper entitled *Building a Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace* which he felt was worthy of research in adding value to what had already been established as it had a section on decision-making. In addition, P2 drew attention to published summaries on why mindfulness might be helpful on ‘decision-making’ and ‘biases’. P6 emphasised the Compassion in Politics website which might be good to assist the research. P3 analysed the benefits and value of research in connection with the Mindfulness Initiative and Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, since they were renowned for their established and ongoing research. P3 estimated, someone on board, and at master’s level, involved in the external

interview process of politicians, economists and authors through assimilation of their perspectives and experiences was insightful and beneficial in identifying and or, potentially, filling in gaps. Just by being a few steps removed, with the objective to provide an enlightening evaluation was groundbreaking. Indeed, 5 of the participants expressed their fascination concerning what this research might reveal. It was noted by P3 who works for P2, the rarity in strapping down P2 for an interview due to his exceptionally demanding schedule in the UK and abroad was confirmation in itself of just how much value P2 placed on this type of research.

Theme 4: Assessment against pursuing or not pursuing mindfulness

Assessment

An accurate assessment on the effect of pursuing mindfulness proved difficult to ascertain from the participants concerning certain politicians who had undertaken the MBCT training but decided against pursuing it further. P5 said it was problematic to assess which politicians had continued with their mindfulness practice post MBCT training, and to what extent. This was attributable to attendance of the classes not being the solitary assessment of engagement. It was noticeable that some politicians proceeded to use their mindfulness privately. The complexity with private practice makes factors inexplicable to assess unless MPs keep a daily log and communicate what they are doing privately as mentioned earlier. It was explicit from P1 that several politicians began the MBCT course but failed to complete it due to a variety of reasons.

In contrast, P1 asserted that there were some politicians that turned up to one or two sessions but still use mindfulness for their own personal benefit, whilst others were dedicated and turned up to every single lesson and completed all the home practices. In terms of assessment of effect, it seems, perhaps – just a small amount of mindfulness can impact capacities associated with metacognition and self-regulation, and this can be seen in MPs who only turned up for one or two sessions. Nevertheless, this made it difficult to hypothesise, or for anyone to speculate whether there would be assessable data in terms of the effect of no longer coming to the drop-in classes at the end of the course, thus making an assessment against pursuing MBCT training problematic to evaluate.

Theme 5: Integration of mindfulness in politics and public policy associated with benefits of transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy level

Evolution vs the Human Brain

Accomplishment of a function might be an observation of the *Mindful Nation UK* (MNU) report and *Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy* (MPPP) paper (see Appendix 12). P2 underlined the MNU report as a necessary guideline for politicians and policymakers to follow. P2 also emphasised that the political system's growth is becoming more complex, ambiguous, urgent and fast paced. Mindfulness training was considered a constant, to match that complexity in the heat of the system. P2 compared the evolution and the rapid development of systems and technology to the slower evolutionary rate of human beings to meet that complexity. This had its own implications. Consequently, there is a requirement to equip politicians and policymakers with an understanding of the human brain and an understanding of neurophysiology of relatedness and embodied processes linked to decision-making. This new found understanding examined people's understanding of themselves and others, for example, P2 asserted, "*the knowledge of who we are*" and "*how we work*" and "*how decisions are implemented*" is an embodied process. P3 asserted, a core part of this embodied process is the development of capacities of heart and mind and cultivation of attitudes of compassion and friendliness and curiosity. P2 expressed psychological evidence and theories about how humans are predictively biased in the way they make bad decisions because the brain is soft wired to bad decision-making. Mindfulness was recognised as a method to predict and respond to those biases periodically. The assessment was that governments could make little nudges so that bad decisions become less frequent or part of human evolution.

Theme 6: Wellbeing Outcomes at Political level and Objectives for Public Policy

Mindfulness an input to achieving Wellbeing Outcomes

Mindfulness was viewed more as an input or a way to achieving wellbeing by P4. P4 was interested in wellbeing as a general outcome at a political level where the goal of public policy was wellbeing of the people. This approach led to the formation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) with a report produced on what would be the priorities for a spending review, targeted at wellbeing. The top priorities being, (a) treatment of people with mental health problems and, (b) prevention of mental health problems by better schooling and teaching of life skills. Links with mindfulness were through connections with David Clarke, Clinical Psychologist at Oxford. Following on from that was

a proposal to government that there should be a service within the National Health Service (NHS) called Improving Access to Psychological Therapy. MBCT at that time was already part of the offering in the NHS. P4 asserted, the idea behind the MNU report was a sensible course of action. P6 analyses policy and evaluation and measures wellbeing as a policy goal, similar to P4, and also recommended the MNU report for further enquiry.

P6 applied the theory that mindfulness was one of the building blocks of social and emotional skills that support and enable self-awareness and other social and emotional skills like self-expression, social relationships, problem solving and making a wider purposeful contribution. In this way it was linked to character & resilience as well as mental health. In some forms it can help improve performance in a range of ways by helping the management of stress and anxiety. It's the stress and anxiety management that has seen parliamentarians most clearly explain the effect their mindfulness practices consumed. It was very impressive to witness how cross party the impact of these mindfulness practices coexisted, even with some criticism of stressed out MPs that had taken the mindfulness classes.

What appeared fundamental was P6 identification with those in power from the right of politics, suggesting meditation generally seemed quite weak. In contrast, internationally, the United Arab Emirates Minister for Happiness & Positivity was strong on mindfulness and meditation. Ecuador had a Minister for the Good Life until recently, also strong on mindfulness. Kelly (2019) states that Bhutan measured 'general happiness' for the nation in contrast to Gross Domestic Product. India has a Ministry of Yoga that includes mindfulness, part of claiming back the yoga tradition and national identity. Wellbeing is broader than mindfulness but 'taking notice' is one of the five ways to (mental) wellbeing. P6 suspected there was literature around decision making in public policy, and separately on decision-making and mindfulness, but none together.

Chapter Five, Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This section will analyse the findings of the research in relation to the literature, previously established research and published reports and documents of the effect of practising mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making. The intention will be to explain the rationale of the findings. It will demonstrate that there have been some key findings from this research which are new to the field and require further study.

Assessment on the effect of decision-making within Parliament

A key finding from the study is that there is real motivation to assess the effects of mindfulness and decision-making in Parliament with the launch and formation of MAPPG and the MNU report (see Appendix 12). The MBCT programme is a key component in the field of mindfulness and offered to parliamentarians for their own mental health and emotional wellbeing. There was not any noticeable contrasting or dissenting views about the effect of mindfulness. However, there was insufficient detailed evidence of the effect decision-making had on MPs to make any sound judgement. One of the interviewees viewed mindfulness as an input and wellbeing as more of a general outcome. Quite noticeably the other interviewees didn't necessarily view mindfulness in the same way.

Another important observation from this study is the insight it provides on the approach to assessing effect by parliamentarians and other organisations working closely with politics and public policy. MI and MAPPG have set out clear policy targets they hoped to achieve within Parliament as documented in the MNU report and described in the literature. This is now up for review since previous targets were achieved. Insight into one of the policy targets include the effects of decision-making having the ability to develop human capacities of heart and mind. These human capacities commonly linked to a cultivation of attitudes such as self-compassion associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety (Barnard & Curry, 2011) and meditation having the ability of developing change over time in the brain's gray matter (Sustainability at Harvard, 2016).

Hussain (2015) suggest that Meta-cognition and mindfulness may strengthen and benefit each other. The interim report of MAPPG discusses the four key areas of public life and carried out an eight month inquiry into the potential for mindfulness training in these key areas of: health, education,

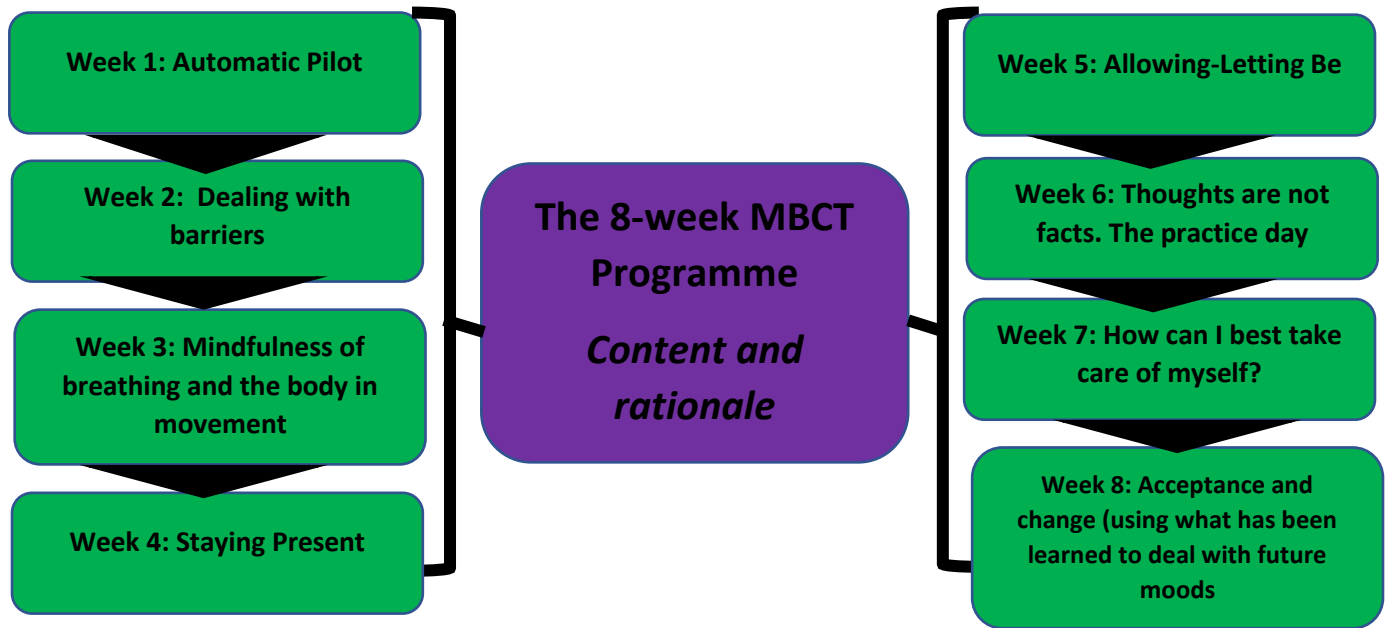
workplaces and the criminal justice system and cited that “mindfulness is a transformative practice leading to a deeper understanding of how to respond to situations wisely. MAPPG argue that the government should widen access to mindfulness training in key public services where it has the potential to be an effective low-cost intervention with a wide range of benefits as part of the pressing task of tackling the country’s mental health crisis (Mindfulness Initiative, 2015).

Methods and assessment on the effect of MBCT in Parliament

The study revealed that among the participant’s interviewed, the methods used to assess effect were in the form of publication reports from the MI, MNU and Karelaia & Reb’s (2014) paper on *mindfulness and decision-making*. Another tool utilised was the eight-week MBCT Programme for parliamentarians which had effective assessment practices in place, noticeably, the effects were more identifiable in those parliamentarians who went on to complete the full eight-week course. In many cases, the methods were researched and delivered by trained and qualified MBCT teachers from the OMC.

MBCT is a treatment programme that was specifically designed to address latent vulnerability in depression. Segal, Williams, & Teasdale (2002) assert that MBCT combines training in mindfulness meditation and interventions from cognitive therapy for acute depression, and is delivered in a group setting. In the MBCT programme, individuals meet together as a class (with a mindfulness teacher), two hours a week for eight weeks. Plus, one all-day session between weeks five and seven. The main work is [implemented] at home between classes. In terms of equipment, there is a set of CDs to accompany the programme, which is [used] to practise on your own at home, once a day, six days a week. In the classes, there is an opportunity to talk about experiences with the home practices, the obstacles that inevitably arise and how to deal with them skilfully (Mbct.co.uk, 2019).

Figure 1 The 8-week MBCT Programme

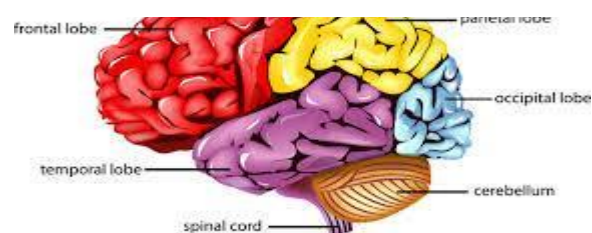


(Figure 1, author's own mapping, 2019)

Studies by Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, (2002) found that over the eight weeks of the MBCT programme, the practices facilitate: to become familiar with the workings of your mind; to notice the times when you are at risk of getting caught in old habits of mind that re-activate downward mood spirals; to explore ways of releasing yourself from those old habits and, if you choose, enter a different way of being. This may include: to put you in touch with a different way of knowing yourself and the world; to notice small beauties and pleasures in the world around you instead of living in your head; to be kind to yourself instead of wishing things were different all the time, or driving yourself to meet impossible goals; to find a way so you don't have to battle with yourself all the time; to accept yourself as you are, rather than judging yourself all the time (Mbct.co.uk, 2019). There is also emerging evidence from randomised controlled trials supporting the use of MBCT for health anxiety and for psychosis (Mindfulness initiative, 2015).

Another effect of mindfulness cited by the interviewees was the effect MBCT had on the brain and metacognition (Katy Thomas, 2019), (see illustration 1). Harvard researchers use brain scans to explore how 8-weeks of training in present-moment awareness might break the cycle of self-rumination (Powell, 2018).

Figure 2 The human brain by Katy Thomas, 2019



Demonstrable functional and structural changes in the prefrontal cortex, cingulate cortex, insula and hippocampus are similar to changes described in studies on traditional meditation practice (Gotink et al., 2016, p.32). Research using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) explored meditation's effect on the brains of clinically depressed patients before and after an eight-week course in MBCT, a group for whom studies have shown meditation to be effective. The MBCT combines Mindfulness with CBT, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) and other Cognitive Therapy and Psychotherapy areas. Taking effective tools from the world of Mindfulness and combining them with the best tools from CBT and REBT produces a powerful framework for helping and change. Clinical professor of psychiatry, Dan Siegel, (2016) argues that, the upstairs brain has many functions: good [ethical] decision making, control over emotions and body, flexibility, empathy, self-understanding, and moral reasoning.

Limitations of assessment effect

Limitations of the study were the time and resource constraints associated with a small MSc project. Methods such as Randomised Control Trials (RCT) or surveys of MPs were not feasible. However, the strength of the methods used to understand the perceptions of MPs and trainers were through semi-structured interviews within the context of a documentary analysis to establish context. For example: what practices occurred in Parliament, and why certain methods were activated. Political sensitivity was also a limitation of the study as it remained off limits to implement workplace observations of politicians practicing mindfulness and acquire further assessment of the effect of implementation of mindfulness in a working environment.

Benefits of assessment effect

Certain capacities developed during meditation are compassion and loving-kindness (see Appendix 8). These qualities might be considered integral to the decision-making process which seem to be the main drive for assessing effect when it comes to heart and mind capacities that relate to (self) and reactions toward (others). Yet, rarely associated with politics involve loving kindness and compassion, metacognition or self-regulation as discussed in the literature and findings chapter. There appears to be a growing body of evidence suggesting that self-compassion is an important predictor of well-being and resilience (Barnard & Curry, 2011; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012). Neff, (2003a, 2003b) proposes that self-compassion involves treating yourself with care and concern when considering personal inadequacies, mistakes, failures, and painful life situations. Tania Singer, one of the world's foremost experts on empathy argues that the meditation practice with the strongest evidence was 'loving kindness' and seemed conclusive. Jack Kornfield, Buddhist Practitioner and one of the key teachers to introduce Buddhist mindfulness practice to the West corroborates on the transforming power of self-compassion through mindfulness meditation. It offers a new paradigm for deep healing that lasts.

Sourcing sustainable funding for assessment of effect

In terms of assessing the effects of mindfulness, a key finding was that the MBCT programme is funded by another source and not by the UK Parliament. Yet surprisingly, the lack of urgency from Parliament to fund the MBCT programme contrasts with other parliaments and may put the programme in jeopardy in the future. This method contrasted with other parliaments that had managed to obtain sustainable funding from within their own parliaments. Approaches have been made by the OMC for Parliament to fund the programme and ensure its legacy is upheld in Parliament.

Sample analysis

The sample in this study was chosen through a theoretical sampling method. The decision to conduct a qualitative approach associated with an idealist perspective, incorporating a wide range of techniques including semi-structured-interviews was made to understand the experiences and practices of a sample located in their own social context. It was decided that idealist ontology was very important for this sort of study, which required the researcher to go through the following set of six steps (UoB), (1) preparing the data for analysis, (2) exploring the data, (3) analysing the data, (4) documenting the analysis, (5) interpreting the results, and (6) validating the analysis. Another useful

approach for further assessment could be explored through RCT's which might be viewed as the Gold standard. Exploration of the workplace in a new systematic review of empirical studies on mindfulness in an occupational setting, including peer-reviewed papers that report on data in relation to mindfulness, including correlational and [quantitative] studies might have proven just as effective for this study (Whatworkswellbeing.org, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented some new findings arising from the study which remained unreferenced in the literature, for example:

- current assessment practices
- tools and effective assessment of practicing mindfulness on compassion and metacognition
- benefits of assessing the effect of MBCT training in the UK parliament and up to 15 other parliaments.

These findings remain supported by very recent documents published in the field. This study also demonstrated that some findings from the study were in alignment with the literature, for instance, the difficulties in implementing assessment practices in participants owing to holistic approaches and political sensitivity.

Chapter Six, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

In conclusion, this study explored through implementation of empirical research and exploration of the wider literature, the effect of practicing mindfulness on politicians and their approach to decision-making, assessing the effect of the MBCT programme in the Houses of Parliament as a case study. A set of thorough semi-structured interviews with six key figures associated with MAPPG or wellbeing as a general outcome at a political level were applied. Prior to the empirical research, the researcher identified a number of gaps within the current literature, and thus, attempted to address both the gaps and the research questions presented to the participants. The research aims were in alignment with the APPG which was to review research evidence, current best practice, extent and success of implementation and potential developments in the application of mindfulness within a range of policy areas, and to develop policy recommendations for government based on these findings (Publications.parliament.uk, 2019).

Contrary to the limited literature and research on this topic, this study discovered that amongst the UK parliament researched, 250 politicians had engaged in MBCT training for their own personal benefit and demonstrated assessment of effect on decision-making processes, with a core group of around 30 politicians prioritising mindfulness as a policy goal implementation for Parliament. The study also revealed MBCT as an effective therapy or tool for assessment in the House of Commons as it incorporates elements of CBT with MBSR into an eight session group programme (Walter EB Sipe, et al., 2012).

Limitations

The limitations of my research included, (1) it being a small project consisting of 10,000 words, meant being very selective with the words chosen to best report and analyse my research findings, (2) some of the interviews could only be conducted via video technology opposed to face-to-face, (3) having a small amount of time to conduct my research due to full-time work and family commitments and, (4) the timing of the project with Brexit made things much more challenging in securing interviews with politicians, economists, MBCT teachers and members of MAPPG.

Academic recommendations:

- Further academic research into the effects of mindfulness on decision-making.
- Further funding for more teachers to be trained by OMC to teach MBCT in Parliament.
- Further evaluation and investigation into work-based practices in parliament to gather further detailed evidence on politician's pursuing mindfulness post MBCT training and those who chose not to pursue mindfulness further.

Policy Recommendations:

- Government departments should encourage the development of mindfulness programmes for staff in the public sector – in particular in health, education and criminal justice - to combat stress and improve organisational effectiveness.

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Appendix 4 – Metacognition

Metacognition is "cognition about cognition", "thinking about thinking", "knowing about knowing", becoming "aware of one's awareness" and higher-order thinking skills. The term comes from the root word meta, meaning "beyond", or "on top of". Metacognition can take many forms; it includes knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or problem-solving (En.wikipedia.org, 2019).

Dilwar Hussain, 2015) asserts that “Several researchers have theoretically related mindfulness with meta-cognition (Bishop et al., 2004; Teasdale, 1999; Teasdale et al., 2002; Wells, 2005). Many classic definitions of mindfulness implicitly refer meta-cognition in defining mindfulness. For example, Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) defined mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment”. This definition assumes that the state of mindfulness involves a metacognitive level of mind that is aware of the cognitions or contents of the mind.”

“Mindfulness includes at least two levels of cognition, that is, a lower level qualia occurring in the present moment such as perceptions and thoughts; and a higher level meta-cognition constituted by the awareness of the flowing qualia (Jankowski & Holas, 2014). In his meta-cognitive model of psychological disorder, Wells (2000) proposed that meta-cognition of the internal events such as thoughts was the basic feature of mindfulness and several meta-cognitive processes and skills were necessary for attaining a state of mindfulness. Several other researchers (such as Teasdale et al., 2002; Watkins, Teasdale, & Williams, 2000) also proposed that mindfulness facilitated meta-cognitive insights and significantly reduced risk of psychological disorders such as depression relapses. Although meta-cognitive therapy and mindfulness based cognitive therapy are different systems, they have many commonalities and strive for same goal.”

“Both foster a change in client’s relationship with their thoughts and emotions by facilitating detachment (Morck, 2009). In this connection, Teasdale et al. (2002, p. 285) posited that in the state of meta-cognitive awareness “thoughts are seen as passing events in the mind rather than as inherent aspects of self or as necessarily valid reflections of reality”. This state is very similar to the description of the mindfulness. Mindfulness activates and strengthens meta-cognitive mode of information processing and facilitates cognitive restructuring (Wells, 2002). Mindfulness facilitates cognitive restructuring by facilitating disengagement from an established stress appraisal and negative thought patterns and promoting adaptive appraisals and thought patterns.”

References

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Appendix 5 - Interview questions

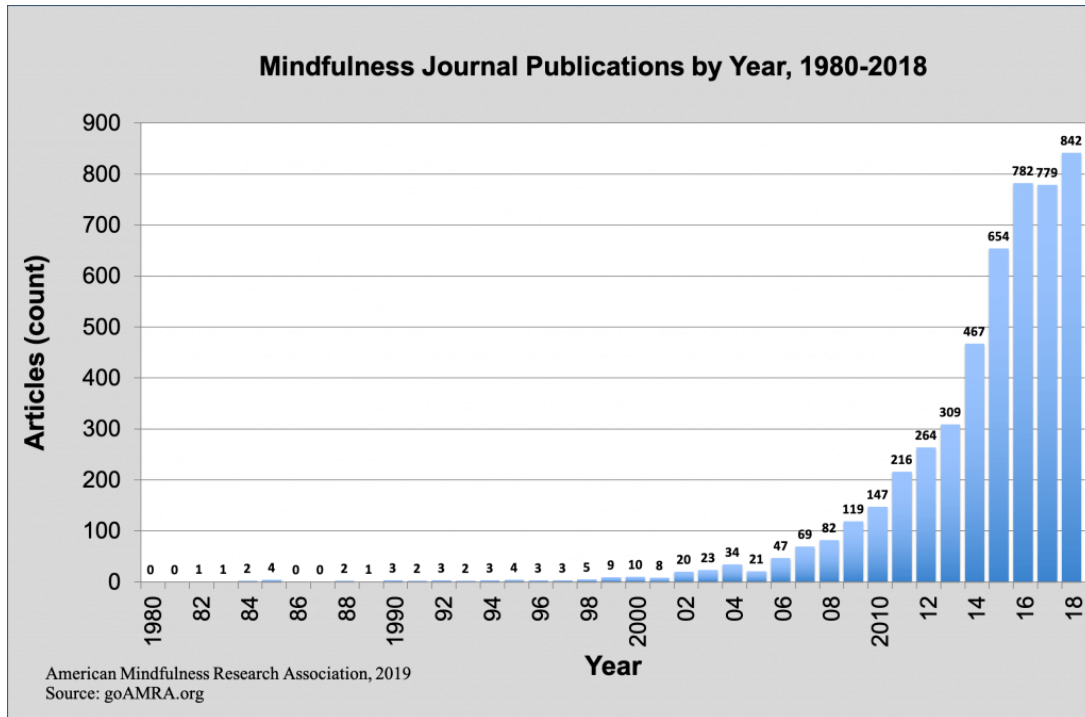
1. Politicians who practice Mindfulness for their own personal benefit as a result of MBCT/MBSR training. Do you think it has influenced their approach to decision-making?
2. Why might Integration of mindfulness in politics and public policy link to benefits of transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy level?
3. What organizational methods of implementation are in place to sustain the long-term benefits of integrating Mindfulness on the work of MPs?
4. What are the effects/policy goals of mindfulness-based interventions with seeking to address mental and physical health concerns in the four key areas of government: education, health, the workplace and the criminal justice system?
5.
 - a) What were the main reasons or goals behind producing the MAPPG report?
 - b) What were the main reasons or goals behind producing the Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy document?
 - c) How can my research add value to what has already been established?
6. In your opinion, a) How are politicians using mindfulness for their own benefit, (e.g. mental health and emotional wellbeing)? b) Is it making a difference during the current state of politics, e.g. Brexit and economic austerity?
7. Is there any evidence that supports a mindful politician has the capacity to make more effective and transformational decisions when writing policy?
8. Do you know of any MPs who have taken the MBCT/MBSR training and decided against pursuing mindfulness practice?
 - a) If so, why do you think they decided against pursuing mindfulness further?
 - b) Were there any notable cause and effects of their choices on their own personal wellbeing and approach to decision-making?
9. What are the benefits of MPs practicing mindfulness for their decision-making and for their own mental health?
10. Are there aspects of working in parliament that make mindfulness particularly important and/or hard to implement?
11. How best can we transform that abstract political narrative into a governmental agenda and put it effectively onto the political decision agenda, as a precise, objective and measurable goal that produces an impact on people's lives?
12. Has there been any reporting of presenteeism or absenteeism impacting on the wellbeing of politicians in parliament? If so, can we measure how days of work might affect the wider economy?
13. Why introduce wellbeing as an outcome at a political level and a goal for public policy?

Appendix 6 – Figure 1. The Transformative Potential of Mindful Consumption

Domain	Mindful Consumption Practice	Transformative Outcomes
Consumer well-being		
Health and addiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of triggers of unhealthy behaviour • Attention to bodily sensations and emotions aroused by consumption objects • Acceptance and compassion toward self and openness to feedback and behavioural change • Understanding of the impermanence of cravings separate from the self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to weaken detrimental habits and enhance experience: • Mindfulness-based smoking cessation program showed success rates nearly five times higher than another leading treatment program (Brewer et al. 2011). • Mindfulness is associated with lower rates of overeating (Bahl, Milne, Ross, and Chan 2013); mindful consumers eat slower, enjoy food more (Hong, Lishner, and Han 2014), attend more to satiety cues (Van De Veer, Van Herpen, and Van Trijp 2016). • Eating disorders result from disruptions of basic psychological needs (Ryan, Deci, and Grolnick 1995); mindfulness may help alleviate these condition
Family matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to needs of family members in relationship to self • Acceptance of self and others • Engagement of family members with full attention and an attitude of curiosity, nonjudgment, and compassion • Awareness of triggers and unhealthy pattern of relationships • Replacement of reactivity with curiosity, compassion, and openness to different perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced quality of time and experience with family; increased ability to make better decisions for well-being of family members: • Mindful parenting programs significantly improve family functioning and parenting satisfaction (Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenberg 2009). • Parents display improvements in parental attention, emotional awareness, and non-judgmental receptivity to their children’s articulation of thoughts and displays of emotion, as well as greater ability to regulate reactivity to child behaviour (Coatsworth et al. 2010).
Financial well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to body sensations and emotional response to financial decisions • Accept resource availability and spending patterns • Awareness of underlying motives and triggers to spend money or value material possessions in contrast to the transitory nature of the self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ability to make skillful financial decisions that are aligned with deeper values and facilitate well-being: • Mindfulness reduces focus on past and future financial contexts, which leads to less negative emotion; lowered negativity facilitates the ability to let go of sunk costs (Hafenbrack, Kinias, and Barsade 2014).
Materialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to self-talk and body sensations triggered in materialistic context • Acceptance of present experience of self that is not reliant on material goods for identity maintenance • Awareness of constructed sense of identity based on material goods • Understanding of the impermanent nature of self and emotions, which weakens the attachment to material pursuits needed to gain approval from self or others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased capacity to manage societal pressures to spend money or value possessions and greater ability to find ways to satisfy psychological needs at a deeper level: • Mindfulness is associated with higher self-esteem, greater satisfaction with own behaviour, and lower likelihood of being motivated by approval motives. Seeing the self as a construction of thoughts rather than an object to be evaluated should lead to less desire to seek approval from self or others (Brown and Ryan 2003). • Mindful consumers are less susceptible to marketing tactics (Pollock et al. 1998).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindful consumers are more likely to feel that they have enough financial wealth (Brown et al. 2009).
Societal Well-Being		
Multiculturalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to body sensations, emotions, and thoughts evoked by prejudices and stereotypes prior to behavior • Awareness of one's and others' biases • Compassion and openness toward one's biases about other groups and perspectives • Acceptance of different worldviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heightened ability to practice openness and tolerance toward other groups and perspectives: • Mindfulness meditation creates a state of mindfulness, which helps participants decrease automatically activated racially biased associations. • Mindfulness also lowers racial bias in a test of implicit bias (Lueke and Gibson 2015).
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to distracted thoughts and irritations in classroom settings • Acceptance of social and emotional frustrations from learning new concepts and interacting with educators and classmates • Awareness of resistance to challenging concepts and choice to stay open to learn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced resilience and confidence in the face of problem-solving, understanding challenging concepts, time management, and social and emotional tensions: • Mindfulness helps individuals engage with obstacles, regulate emotion during stress, and reduce negative thoughts and emotions (Barner and Barner 2011). • Attention and cognitive flexibility are positively associated with mindfulness meditation. Meditators perform significantly better than nonmeditators on tests of cognitive flexibility (Moore and Malinowski 2009)
Political engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to bodily sensations and reactive thoughts and biases • Openness to diverse perspectives • Awareness of self and political choices in alignment with self and values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater ability to process candidate and campaign information and act on political leanings: • Individuals with higher trait mindfulness display higher psychological flexibility and potential for taking action (Silberstein, Tirch, Leahy, and McGinn 2012). • Individuals engaged in spurring political change use mindfulness practices to prevent burnout (Gorski 2015)
Environmental Well-Being		
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts evoked by being in nature • Awareness of the beneficial effects of the environment on oneself and the way one's behaviour affects the environment • Awareness of the short-lived impact of material consumption on happiness • Openness to lifestyle changes and sustainability innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater ability to learn about, make, and sustain lifestyle changes that promote sustainability: • Mindful individuals are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviour (Amel, Manning, and Scott 2009). • Mindfulness helps facilitate compatibility between happiness and ecologically responsible behaviour (Brown and Kasser 2005; Jacob, Jovic, and Brinkerhoff 2009).

Appendix 7 – Benefits According to Research



Appendix 8 – Compassion and Loving Kindness

At an event in parliament in May 2019, a cross-party group published proposals for a new Compassion Act that would “enshrine in law the need for the UK government to protect people in the most vulnerable circumstances, to ensure the survival of future generations, and to work towards improving the wellbeing of all” (Compassioninpolitics.com, 2019).

Numerous studies have found that treating oneself compassionately when confronting personal suffering promotes mental health. For instance, greater self-compassion has consistently been associated with lower levels of depression and anxiety (see Barnard & Curry, 2011 for a review), (Positivepsychology.com, 2019, p.15). Background studies and literature reviews on mental health and meditation suggest that these practices, alone or in combination with other forms of therapy and treatment, enhance brain activities related to emotional regulation, stress management, and immune functions (Grossman and Van Dam, 2001). Loving-kindness meditation soothes the mind and reduces subjective feelings of suffering. Traditional Buddhist practices in different parts of the world consider this practice as a pathway for cultivating happiness, appreciation, satisfaction, and ultimate acceptance (Bodhi, 2005; Shen-Yen 2001). With loving-kindness, meditation comes a profound spiritual transformation and the urge to reflect on our positive emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Studies on how loving-kindness affect the brain showed that Tibetan monks who had over 10,000 hours of loving-kindness meditation practice had strangely secure neural circuits for self-understanding and empathy. They displayed a higher degree of self-contentment and inner joy than non-meditators or non-practitioners of loving-kindness meditation (PositivePsychology.com, 2019), (see Appendix 11). The sense of common humanity in self-compassion involves recognizing that humans are imperfect, that all people fail, make mistakes, and have serious life challenges. Self-compassion connects one’s own flawed condition to the shared human condition, so that features of the self are considered from a broad, inclusive perspective. (Positivepsychology.com, 2019, p.15). A number of studies have found associations between self-compassion and positive psychological qualities, such as happiness, optimism, wisdom, curiosity and exploration, personal initiative, and emotional intelligence (Heffernan, Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007), (Positivepsychology.com, 2019, p.15).

The ideology around compassion has the ability to bring both social justice and environmental justice together. There are endless facts and figures around poverty and austerity in the UK, and the shocking Institute for Fiscal Studies predict a 7% rise in child poverty by 2022. Compassion appears invisible in politics when it is a value that most people claim to aspire to. Perhaps, if nothing else, what this does undoubtedly present is its own evidence for practicing mindfulness (as we’ve seen) can promote self-compassion, loving kindness and empathy at the level of the human heart and mind, which unambiguously might significantly benefit politicians - to the right. Dr Davidson and Lutz, (Psychology Today, 2019) assert that; through mindfulness training, people can develop skills that promote happiness and compassion. ¹ Cultivation of empathy through ²compassion meditation affects brain regions that make a person more sympathetic to other peoples' mental states. Former PM,

¹ Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) brain imaging shows that positive emotions such as loving-kindness and compassion can be learned in the same way as playing a musical instrument or being proficient in a sport. The scans revealed that brain circuits used to detect emotions and feelings were dramatically changed in subjects who had extensive experience practicing compassion meditation.

² Compassion Meditation Boosts Neural Basis of Empathy. The boost in empathic accuracy was detected through both behavioural testing of the study participants and through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans of their brain activity.

David Cameron's Wellbeing Reform, stated that, progress as a country should be measured by how lives are improving [through compassion and empathy], and not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was an "incomplete way" of measuring the country's progress (Mulholland and Watt, 2010). It comprises three interacting components: self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification (Positivepsychology.com, 2019, p.15).

Appendix 9 – Books and materials used for Literature Review research

Author	Publications used for research
Shauna L. Shapiro, Hooria Jazaieri & Philippe R. Goldin	Mindfulness-based stress reduction effects on moral reasoning and decision-making publication used for my research
Bristow, J. (2015)	Mindful Nation UK report - Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group
Bristow, J. (2018)	Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy
Bache, I. and Reardon, L. (2016)	The Politics and Policy of Wellbeing: Understanding the Rise and Significance of a New Agenda
Bache, I. and Reardon, L. (2016)	The “Wicked Problem” of Wellbeing: Theorising the Prospects for Policy Change
Bache, I. and Reardon, L. and Anand, P. (2016)	Wellbeing as a Wicked Problem: Navigating the Arguments for the Role of Government
Bache, I., Reardon, L., Bartle, I., Flinders, M. and Marsden, G. (2015)	‘Symbolic Meta-Policy: (Not) Tackling Climate Change in the Transport Sector’
Bache, I. and Reardon, L. (2013)	‘An Idea Whose Time has Come? Explaining the Rise of Well-Being in British Politics’
Pavot, W. and Diener, E. (2004)	Findings on Subjective Well-Being: Applications to Public Policy, Clinical Interventions, and Education’
Natalie Karelaia Insead Jochen REB (2015)	Improving Decision Making through Mindfulness
Peter Huang (2015)	How Improving Decision-Making and Mindfulness Can Improve Legal Ethics and Professionalism
Jana L. Craft (2012)	A Review of the Empirical Ethical Decision-Making Literature: 2004-2011
Shauna L. Shapiro, Hooria Jazaieri & Philippe R. Goldin	Mindfulness-based stress reduction effects on moral reasoning and decision making
Dr Chris Cullen	The Westminster Programme
Tania Singer	Max Planck Institute
Jack Kornfield	The Evidence for Compassion
Jennifer Nadal & Matt Hawkins (2019)	Compassion in Politics www.compassioninpolitics.com/
James Scotland (2012)	Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms
Headspace	Mindfulness and Decision-Making: A brief based on Karelaia & Reb (2014)
Professor Terry Hyland (2016)	Critical Review of Mindful Nation UK

Appendix 10 – Social Media: Radio 4 FM Westminster Hour Broadcast and House of Commons Address

House of commons address:

- **Chris Ruane direct address to the Former PM, Theresa May**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8z21hgvxJg>
- **Chris Ruane, MP direct address to Andrea Leadsom, British Conservative politician serving as Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial.**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu4_jYXhj7k

Radio Broadcast:

- **The UK parliamentary mindfulness teaching programme was featured on Sunday's BBC Radio 4 Westminster Hour on May 19th, 2019.**
<https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/News/mindfulness-on-bbc-radio-4-westminster-hour-may-19th-2019>

Psychotherapist, Suzy Balbach announced during a Radio 4 Westminster Hour broadcast in May 2019, that politicians were struggling with the weight of decision-making and the pressures of public reaction to parliamentarians handling of Brexit and were under tremendous attack from the British public. Some MPs had received vicious hate mail about them being betrayers and traitors and did not compute with them as this was not what they went into public services to do". Thus, having to consider their own constituents, politics, ethics and morality. Labour's Lisa Nandy in the same interview felt under sieged due to the hostility of the current political climate and herself received death threats on a daily and weekly basis. Nandy revealed some of her colleagues were not coping with all the stress and seriously impacted on their mental health and wellbeing, with a number of politicians planning, and had already made plans to quit politics altogether. British Green Party, Caroline Lucas MP placed her own mental health and wellbeing ahead of anything else before approaching any decision-making by leaning on the skills she had gained through practicing mindfulness, which helped her through difficult times when she found herself struggling. Conservative MP Desmond Swain felt by having a routine, a [mindfulness] practice that adjusts stress levels and reduced them was very helpful (The Mindfulness Initiative, 2019).

Appendix 11 - 7 Proven Benefits

Repeating kind words to ourselves such as “*May you be well,*” “*May you be happy,*” “*May you be healthy,*” etc., infuse a deep sense of self-worth instantaneously. During loving-kindness meditation, all we need to do is commit to some dedicated moments of appreciation, gratitude, and encouragement, first to ourselves and then to others. Ackerman, E. C. (2019) suggest that this practice has a long-lasting impact on our mind and our body and kick-starts a ripple effect of positivity that is truly empowering (PositivePsychology.com, 2019). Some of the proven benefits of loving-kindness meditation include:

<p>1. Less self-criticism</p>	<p>There is hardly any space left for self-criticism and self-harm once we commit to loving-kindness meditation. The method quietens our inner critic and makes us more self-accepting than ever (Frederickson, 2001).</p>
<p>2. More positive emotions</p>	<p>Studies have shown that regular practice of loving-kindness meditation increases vagal tone, a physiological marker of subjective well-being. The positivity loving-kindness meditation generates inside, attracts positive energy from the outside, and improves the quality of life and life satisfaction permanently (Kok et al., 2013).</p>
<p>3. Lesser self-destructive thoughts</p>	<p>Research has shown that seven weeks of unfiltered LKM practice induces joy, gratitude, care, and hope. Individuals with suicidal tendencies and borderline personality traits showed a marked reduction in their self-harming impulses and manifested an overall decrease in the negative symptoms (Fredrickson, Coffey, Finkel, Cohn, Pek, 2008).</p>
<p>4. Reduced pain symptoms</p>	<p>Pilot studies on patients with chronic back pain and migraine showed that when they practiced loving-kindness meditation for brief periods of 2-5 minutes per day, they showed a remarkable reduction in the pain symptoms and could accomplish their daily tasks with more ease and comfort (Tonelli et al., 2014, Carson et al., 2005).</p>
<p>5. More resilience</p>	<p>A study on people with long-term PTSD showed that engaging in deep, meaningful compassion and self-love meditations reduced the trauma and flashback episodes. Control studies showed that groups that received loving-kindness meditation scripts during their sessions could resume work sooner than participants who received other</p>

	forms of guided instructions (Kearney et al., 2013).
6. Long-term benefits	Studies on the after-effects of loving-kindness meditation showed that individuals who attended the sessions felt positive and self-motivated for up to 15 months post-intervention. Compared with other meditation practices and self-help tools, loving-kindness reflection created more affection and empathy for strangers and social connections at work (Seppala and Gross, 2008).
7. Faster recovery	Clinical population such as people with schizophrenia and bipolar disorders manifested a marked reduction in negative symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions when they practiced loving-kindness meditation individually or in groups. Besides positivity and symptom reduction, the practice also improved their judgment towards others they live or work with (Johnson et al., 2011).

What is Loving-Kindness Meditation?

1. It is an all-inclusive method that works for all ages, personality patterns, and personal situations. There is no specific target population for this meditation.
2. Loving-kindness meditation requires no prior set up or arrangements. It is one of the most flexible forms of meditation that we can practice anywhere, at any time, and any pace.
3. It does not induce a sentimental feeling of goodwill; neither does it impose any obligation for goal fulfilment. The only thing the practitioner needs to focus is on the process.
4. The effect of loving-kindness meditation lasts for a lifetime. Regular practitioners find this meditation to be an excellent way for self-disclosure, motivation, and empathy – the basic positive emotions that create a healthy mind (Smith, 2015).

A Look at the Research

Background studies and literature reviews on mental health and meditation suggest that these practices, alone or in combination with other forms of therapy and treatment, enhance brain activities related to emotional regulation, stress management, and immune functions (Grossman and Van Dam, 2001).

Some neuroimaging studies indicated that compassion meditation (CM) and loving-kindness meditation (LKM) regulate the functioning of the limbic system, a brain site that is in charge of processing emotions and empathy. Studies have proved that LKM is equally useful for the clinical population and can be used as a part of extensive cognitive and behavioural retreats (Lutz et al., 2009).

Loving-kindness meditation soothes the mind and reduces subjective feelings of suffering. Traditional Buddhist practices in different parts of the world consider this practice as a pathway for cultivating happiness, appreciation, satisfaction, and ultimate acceptance (Bodhi, 2005; Shen-Yen 2001).

With loving-kindness meditation comes a profound spiritual transformation and the urge to reflect on our positive emotions (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Studies on how loving-kindness affect the brain showed that Tibetan monks who had over 10,000 hours of loving-kindness meditation practice had strangely secure neural circuits for self-understanding and empathy. They displayed a higher degree of self-contentment and inner joy than non-meditators or non-practitioners of loving-kindness meditation.

Further studies in this field showed that during loving-kindness meditation, insula and parietal juncture, brain sites that link perception and emotions, get activated faster than in other forms of meditative practices. Both these areas create the capacity to feel and vent out feelings in a desirable way, which explains why loving-kindness meditation lits up true happiness and self-satisfaction.

(PositivePsychology.com, 2019).

Appendix 12 – Publications

Mindful Nation UK (MNU) Report

MAPPG implemented an eight-month inquiry into the potential for mindfulness training in key areas of public life - health, education, workplaces and the criminal justice system and cited: “We find that mindfulness is a transformative practice, leading to a deeper understanding of how to respond to situations wisely. We believe that government should widen access to mindfulness training in key public services, where it has the potential to be an effective low-cost intervention with a wide range of benefits. We urge all political parties to consider our recommendations for inclusion in their manifestos for the 2015 General Election, as part of the pressing task of tackling the country’s mental health crisis” (Bristow, 2015, p.2).

https://cedar.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/schoolofpsychology/cedar/documents/mindfulness/Mindful_Nation_UK_January_2015.pdf

Mindfulness in Politics and Public Policy (MPPP) Paper

“A key factor in the popularity of mindfulness training in public life is the conviction of grassroots advocates seeking to pass on the benefits they have experienced through personal practice. In this manner, mindfulness training has found its way into the realm of government, with parliamentary programmes seeding ambition among politicians to research and employ its transformative potential at both interpersonal and policy levels. In a high-stakes, adversarial setting, mindfulness practice helps elected representatives to cope with specific challenges, and an inquiry by the UK Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group has contributed to the emergence of mindfulness training in numerous policy narratives. By developing a new kind of familiarity with their own inner lives, a growing number of politicians are finding a new way to approach political discourse, and a corresponding enthusiasm for policy that tackles society’s problems at the level of the human heart and mind” (Bristow, 2019, p.88).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.11.003>

Mindfulness and Decision-Making: A brief based on Karelaiia & Reb (2014)

Mindfulness, a secularised practice devised from ancient Buddhism and defined as “the intention to be present in the here and now, fully engaged in whatever is happening, free from distraction or judgement, with a soft and open mind” has been suggested to enhance the decision-making process, resulting in higher quality decisions that support personal and or organizational objectives. This briefing summaries research concerning the associations between mindfulness and decision-making. Russo and Schoemaker (2002) suggest that making a decision involves four stages (1) framing the decision, (2) gathering and processing information, (3) reaching a conclusion and implementation, and (4) learning from feedback. Mindfulness Training (MT) may support all stages of the decision-making process.

Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms

This paper explores the philosophical underpinnings of three major educational research paradigms: scientific, interpretive, and critical. The aim was to outline and explore the interrelationships between each paradigm's ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. This paper reveals and then discusses some of the underlying assumptions of educational research. Consequently, this paper is relevant to every English language teacher who is a reader of research Scotland, J. (2012).

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Bristow, J. (2019). *Mindfulness in politics and public policy*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.11.003>. The Mindfulness Initiative, United Kingdom.

Headspace (2014). *Mindfulness and Decision-Making: A brief based on Karelaia & Reb (2014)*.

Scotland, J. (2012). *Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms*. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n9p9>. Correspondence: James Scotland, Qatar University, Qatar. E-mail: scotland@qu.edu.qa.

Appendix 13 – List of Interviews

Participant 1 P1

Christopher Shaun Ruane, Welsh Labour Party politician, who is the Member of Parliament for the Vale of Clwyd.

Interview date: 29, September 2019

Participant 2 P2

Jamie Bristow, Director of the Mindfulness Initiative, Associate of the UK's Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group, author of the Mindful Nation UK. Report

Interview date: 23, September 2019

Participant 3 P3

Adrian Bethune, Teacher and Author: *Wellbeing in the Primary Classroom: A Practical Guide to Teaching Happiness*, Education Policy Co-Lead at Mindful Nation UK.

Interview date: 20, September 2019

Participant P4

Peter Richard Grenville Layard, Baron Layard FBA, British labour economist, currently working as programme director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics.

Interview date: 18, October 2019

Participant 5 P5

Dr Chris Cullen, MBCT Teacher and Trainer, The Oxford Mindfulness Centre, Insight Meditation retreats in the UK, US and mainland Europe. Has a psychotherapy practice in Oxford.

Interview date: 14, October 2019

Participant 6 P6

Nancy Hey, Executive Director at What Works Well Being Centre, Thrive: Public policy, constitution, coaching, emotions, OD, learning, wellbeing.

Interview date: 4, September 2019

Appendix 14 - Key Recommendations

Health

We recommend that:

1. MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) should be commissioned in the NHS in line with NICE guidelines so that it is available to the 580,000 adults⁸ each year who will be at risk of recurrent depression. As a first step, MBCT should be available to 15%⁹ of this group by 2020, a total of 87,000 each year. This should be conditional on standard outcome monitoring of the progress of those receiving help. 2. Funding should be made available through the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies training programme (IAPT) to train 100 MBCT teachers a year for the next five years to supply a total of 1,200¹⁰ MBCT teachers in the NHS by 2020 in order to fulfil recommendation one. 3. Those living with both a long-term physical health condition and a history of recurrent depression should be given access to MBCT, especially those people who do not want to take antidepressant medication. This will require assessment of mental health needs within physical health care services, and appropriate referral pathways being in place. 4. NICE should review the evidence for Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) in the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome, cancer and chronic pain when revising their treatment guidelines.

Education

We recommend that:

1. The Department for Education (DfE) should designate, as a first step, three teaching schools¹¹ to pioneer mindfulness teaching, co-ordinate and develop innovation, test models of replicability and scalability and disseminate best practice. 2. Given the DfE's interest in character and resilience (Character Education Grant programme), we propose a comparable Challenge Fund of £1 million a year to which schools can bid for the costs of training teachers in mindfulness.

Workplace

We recommend that:

1. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) should demonstrate leadership in working with employers to promote the use of mindfulness and develop an understanding of good practice. 2. We welcome the government's What Works Centre for Wellbeing, and urge it to commission, as a priority, pilot research studies on the role of mindfulness in the workplace, and to work with employers and university research centres to collaborate on high-quality studies to close the research gap. 3. Government departments should encourage the development of mindfulness programmes for staff in the public sector – in particular in health, education and criminal justice - to combat stress and improve organisational effectiveness. One initiative could be seed-funding for a pilot project in policing where we have encountered considerable interest.

4. The National Institute of Health Research should invite bids to research the use of mindfulness as an occupational health intervention and its effectiveness in addressing occupational mental health issues such as stress, work-related rumination, fatigue and disrupted sleep.

Criminal Justice System

We recommend that:

1. The NHS and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) should work together to ensure the urgent implementation of NICE's recommended Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) for recurrent depression within offender populations.
2. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and NOMS should fund a definitive randomised controlled trial of Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) amongst the UK's offender populations.

(The Mindfulness Initiative, 2015)