

Role of Mindfulness and Emotional Intelligence in Business Ethics Education

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Abstract. This research looks at how mindfulness can contribute to business ethics education in MBA programmes. Mediation analysis was used to measure the influence of mindfulness on the participants' performance in business ethics related courses and to quantify the influence of emotional intelligence which is a mediating variable. The effectiveness of mindfulness was evaluated using a Randomised Controlled Trial on participants of Executive MBA programmes. Half the participants were assigned to the intervention group and the other half placed on the waiting list for the next programme and used as the control group. Statistical analysis revealed that the increase in performance in business ethics related courses through mindfulness as also direct increase through emotional intelligence were significant. 40% of the enhancement of performance came through emotional intelligence while the remaining 60% came directly from mindfulness.

Keywords: business ethics, business ethics education, mindfulness, EQ.

1. Introduction

Why do intelligent executives sometimes take unethical decisions? Crookedness or hubris could be the main reasons; but there could be more to such bad decisions, i.e., a lack of understanding of the emotions behind their reactions (Finkelstein *et al.* 2013). In recognition of this possibility, a branch of research with contributions from psychology, organisation science, education science, and related fields of knowledge has attracted the attention of business ethics education scholars and practitioners under the heading of “mindfulness” that can attempt to examine and clarify the significance, structures, as well as causes of such decisions. In the context of business ethics education, this interdisciplinary strand of research recognises that the brain that decides how to use additive manufacturing and remote wireless tracking is the same brain that categorises sights and sounds and recalls episodic and semantic information. It is becoming evident that mindfulness approaches are not just New Age speak and that the psychological assertions in the field of mindfulness can be grounded within the context of cutting-edge neurobiological theories and findings (Farias & Wikholm 2016). With origins in early Eastern contemplative traditions, mindfulness is an

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innate condition of consciousness (Germer 2013). Specifically, in the ancient Buddhist tradition a unified mental experience is made up of numerous factors of which one important factor is mindfulness (Desbordes *et al.* 2015). This factor enhances attentional stability and clarity and uses these abilities in the introspective examination of conscious states to pursue the fundamental issues concerning consciousness itself (Lutz 2015). Sri Lankan Buddhist scholar Nyanaponika Thera (2014) defines mindfulness as “the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us at the successive moments of perception”. Mindfulness is keeping one’s consciousness alive to the present reality (Amaro & Singh 2022). In the sphere of Eastern wisdom and that of Western knowledge, mindfulness can be considered an enhanced attention to and receptive awareness of the present that includes acceptance and non-judgement (Kabat-Zinn 2013).

Mindfulness is being increasingly used as an alternative therapy in the West. This is a remarkable development as this is the first time Western science and Eastern wisdom are together in alleviation of human suffering. Evidence is emerging that mindfulness leads to sustainable consumer behaviour (Asthana 2022a). In industry, mindfulness can help avoiding catastrophic accidents in low-probability high-risk situations (Asthana & Charan 2023).

It has been argued that business ethics education should be expanded to incorporate knowledge of the human brain's inner workings, exposing managers to the subconscious psychological processes that drive biased judgement (Burrell *et al.* 2022). Scientific studies on mindfulness have shown that it has the ability to teach pupils how to become more aware, to learn about themselves, and to gain insight that will lead to more moral decision-making (Asthana 2022b; Lampe & Engleman-Lampe 2012). While theoretical case for impact of mindfulness on ethics is strong, the empirical evidence has been scant (Asthana 2023a,b). This empirical research seeks to fill this gap to some extent by not only providing evidence of influence of mindfulness on business ethics but also quantifying its direct effect and indirect effect through emotional intelligence.

2. Mediation by Emotional Intelligence

The concept of Emotional intelligence can be traced back to the theory of multiple intelligences (Asadollahfam *et al.* 2012). It was presented as a set of skills hypothesised to contribute to the accurate appraisal, expression and effective regulation of emotion in oneself and in others and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in life (Mayer *et al.* 2016). Emotional intelligence (abbreviated as EI or EQ) is now widely known outside the academia. Daniel Goleman(2020) argues that a group of skills and abilities – those dealing with people and emotions – has been largely overlooked. Goleman emphasised in particular about the significance of recognising one’s own emotional life, regulating one’s feelings,

understanding other people's emotions, working with others, and having empathy for others. The author explains how to improve these abilities. With its hopeful message, the book turned out to be an international sensation that spent over a year on the New York Times bestseller list and sold millions of copies around the world. It is perhaps the best-selling social science book of all time (Stephens 2021). Goleman argues that if we foster emotional intelligence as carefully as we promote cognitive intelligence, the world would be a better place.

Impact of Mindfulness on EQ

There is reason to believe that mindfulness increases emotional intelligence. Research in neuroscience has revealed that mindfulness causes an activation shift in the prefrontal cortex leading to a greater emotional balance (Kabat-Zinn 2012). There are correlations between mindfulness and components of emotional intelligence. Higher levels of mindfulness are affiliated with more adaptive emotional functioning, operationalised as EQ. According to Hill & Updegraff (2012) "individuals with mindfulness tendencies are less emotionally reactive" (p. 83). In a study of 96 undergraduate students of a large US university these researchers discovered that "mindfulness is related to effective emotion regulation" (p. 87). In a meta-analytic review of 17 empirical studies which contained 19 samples, a positive relationship between mindfulness and EQ was discovered (Miao *et al.* 2018). In a systemic review of 10 mostly recent studies relating to healthcare professionals, similar results were found (Jiménez-Picón *et al.* 2021).

Impact of EQ on Business Ethics Education

Rational logical thought is not the only path to solving business problems (Culham 2013 p. 2). Emotional intelligence could be taught in business schools as a foundation of ethics justified by philosophical, scientific and practical reasons (p. 8). In a study of Accountancy students in Indonesia, Pasek *et al.* (2021) found that while religiosity had no effect on ethical behaviour of students, emotional intelligence had a significant positive effect.

Based on the literature cited in the previous two sections the following hypotheses are posited:

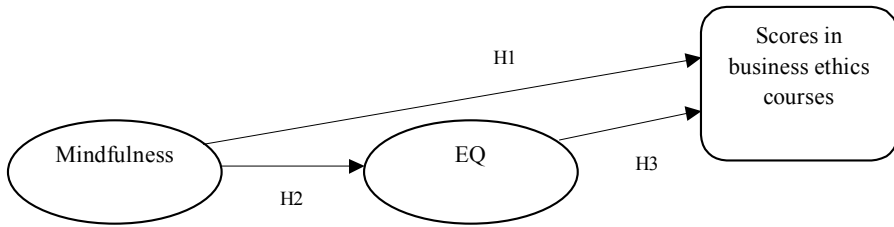
H1: Mindfulness will be positively related to scores in business ethics courses.

H2: Mindfulness will be positively related to EQ.

H3: EQ will mediate the relation between mindfulness and scores in business ethics courses.

These hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Mediation model of role of EQ on business ethics education



3. Methods

Sample

The effectiveness of mindfulness in increasing EQ and performance in business ethics related courses was evaluated using a Randomised Controlled Trial on business students in Albania. All MBA students from the business schools in the country's capital, Tirana, were invited to participate. More than four hundred students applied out of which 310 completed the questionnaire for background information and initial assessment. The participants were informed of the assignment by automated email. Half were assigned to the intervention group and the other half placed on the waiting list for the next programme and used as the control group. From the control group, 5 students did not turn up for the final test. From the intervention group, 6 students discontinued intervention at various stages, while the rest continued with it and gave the final test. The detailed demographic information regarding the participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Baseline characteristics and scores

Demographics	Control group	Intervention group	Difference	p value
Gender: Female, %	39.3	36.9	2.4 ($\chi^2=0.241$)	.582
Marital status: Married, %	75.3	73.2	2.1 ($\chi^2=0.191$)	.671
Age in years, mean (sd)	35.3(6.6)	34.6(6.5)	0.7 ($t=1.58$)	.112
Work experience in months, mean (sd)	58.6(13.1)	57.4(12.8)	1.2 ($t=1.52$)	.131
N	150	149		

Intervention

Mindfulness programme lasted 20 weeks. The details are given in the Appendix.