

Mindfulness in Art-Making for Employee Well-Being: An Exploratory Study on Collage

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“ART WASHES AWAY FROM THE SOUL THE DUST OF EVERYDAY LIFE” - PABLO PICASSO

In his metaphor, Picasso offers a powerful observation on the important role that art can play in our lives, suggesting its unique ability in cleansing our souls from the mess of everyday life. Given the unique capabilities of art, this study aimed to explore its links to mindfulness and how it could be beneficial for the well-being in the workplace

Can mindfulness in the art-making help in cleansing our “souls” from the dust of everyday life and offer a longer-term ‘transformative impact’ for the well-being in the workplace?

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

“MINDFULNESS MEANS PAYING ATTENTION IN A PARTICULAR WAY; ON PURPOSE, IN THE PRESENT MOMENT AND NON-JUDGMENTALLY.”

- JON KABAT-ZINN

Many people spend a significant portion of their lives at work, and for many their overall well-being is associated with emotions and functioning in the workplace. Work can prove a contributing source of stress, potentially having a negative effect on workers mental health and well-being. One potential tool to overcome the effect of work stressors is mindfulness.

Mindfulness is thought to alter the way people think about stressors and has been associated with higher well-being and lower stress at work. Similarly, the use of art has long been considered a modality for healing but has been overshadowed by other workplace tools to reduce stress, often being labelled trivial and unnecessary.

Recently art interventions have been adopted in the medical field and have been shown effective for improving mental and physical health and increasing positive responses to treatment. This study, therefore, sought to explore the value of visual art-making, in the form of collage, and its relation to mindfulness and workplace well-being.

METHOD

In-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with five professionals who had previously taken part in an UnglueYou® Collage workshop to elicit their

perceptions and experiences of collage-making in relation to their well-being in the workplace, as well as exploring the link between art and mindfulness.



KEY FINDINGS

Analysis of participants accounts of the UnglueYou® collage workshop revealed twelve subthemes which were grouped into three overarching master themes. An interesting observation uncovered a mutual pattern of emotional and psychological states which most participants experienced both during and after the collage session. Those states are presented in the three master themes as three consecutive phases: The Early Phase, The Revealing Phase, and The After-Effect.

The findings indicate that engaging with visual art-making offers a variety of benefits and has the ability to cultivate a mindful state. The After-Effect phase highlights the variety of benefits that manifested in participants work lives ultimately leading to promoting their overall well-being at work.



The Early Phase



TIME OUT

Visual art-making initially perceived as fun and ‘time out’ from a busy life.

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

Engaging with visual art-making naturally attracts attention and invites focus to the present moment which helps in ‘blocking out’ intrusive thoughts about life cultivating a mindful state.

“I was just there in the moment, which isn’t very often, is it? It was quite mindful; when you’re there and you’re doing the task and you haven’t got anything else going in your head!” --JJ

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

The process enables a state of ‘flow’ which induces positive emotions and feelings of relaxation.



CONCLUSIONS

This study, with professionals who had taken part in the UnglueYou® collage, provided rich data revealing the value of art and mindfulness in the art for promoting the well-being by cleansing our minds and ‘souls’ from the ‘dust’ of everyday life. This contribution supports the use of art as a positive and promising workplace intervention with a unique ability to foster mindfulness using elements of fun and creativity which may be especially significant for the modern workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS GOING FORWARD

- **Adopting art-making as workplace intervention**
A creative and effective approach for employee well-being while acting as a useful tool for cultivating and sustaining a mindful state.
- **Qualified facilitators to guide the process**
Engaging with visual art-making can initially generate undesired emotions which may demand the help and guidance of experienced facilitators such as Andréa from UnglueYou® to release such emotions and shift them into more positive interpretations.
- **The importance of the set-up for implementing art-based interventions**
Organisations should carefully consider the importance of a safe physical space for employees to step into while taking part in an art-making process.
- **Research**
Further research is recommended to examine the different components of visual art-making that may be linked to mindfulness to offer greater insights and more evidence of the value of such interventions in the workplace.



The Revealing Phase



UNLOCKING THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND

Art introduces a way to delve into the unconscious mind using visuals tapping into a different part of the brain which results in invoking previously ignored, unconscious or hidden thoughts and emotions.

EXPLORATION OF UNDISCOVERED-SELF

Visual self-expression facilitates the exploration of ‘undiscovered-self’ which was hidden behind language barriers.

EMOTIONAL OUTLET

Art-making acts as a safe ‘emotional outlet’ to release undesired thoughts and emotions fostering a sense of relief.

SELF-REFLECTION AND FINDING MEANING

Enables self-reflection and finding meaning behind the revelations, with the help of a facilitator can help in guiding the process of reframing undesired emotions into more positive interpretations.

“It wasn’t until later when I started then looking at the photos and talking to Andréa [from UnglueYou®] that I suddenly realized why I was drawn to a photo.” --ZA



The After-Effect Phase



INCREASED AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Increased awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, and experiences leading to a better understanding of self and others in the workplace.

SENSE OF ACCEPTANCE AND RELIEF

Fosters a sense of acceptance and relief which may help in overcoming and ‘embracing’ one’s inner struggles that get illuminated during the process.

“The door is no longer shut, it’s open and I can walk in and out as I please. it’s almost kind of acceptance.” --ZA

SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT

Induces a sense of ‘empowerment’ and confidence in taking steps to cope with and overcome challenges that may arise at work.

SELF REGULATION

Enables a higher ability to consciously regulate and control one’s emotions and behaviours in response to stressors at work.

ONGOING IMPACT

The long-term effects may manifest in an ongoing awareness that may have a ‘transformative impact’ and a powerful agent for change as it engages thoughts and emotions and restores the flow.