Why Scientific Research on the Impact of Vitality & Mindfulness Training is necessary and valuable
by Katharina Mullen

We need independent scientific research to assure that vitality and mindfulness training are safe and effective, and to ensure that approaches and services are relevant to people. Thus, finding the true benefits, respectively the draw backs of the options we have, comparing different possibilities, as well as finding truths and errors. By using empirical evidence, practicing logical reasoning and possessing a skeptical attitude scientific research fosters an impartiality that helps to improve existing approaches and to create better ones.

Common Sense

A lot of what we do in our daily lives is based on common sense, what we have learnt from others or what we have learnt through personal experience or observation. But sometimes common sense is not the best approach and sometimes there are conflicting theories about what is best or what works in a particular situation. Moreover, what works in one situation or for one condition might be ineffective in another.

Selective Attention

In the case of mindfulness training, common sense might tell us that we can easily test the effect of mindful living ourselves and experience that calming our mind to be completely in tune with reality is liberating. On the other hand, common sense might have a hard nut believing that we can change our physical brain by training our mind and vice versa. So, we need evidence and make sense out of our observations.

While our common sense is valuable and indispensable, nonscientific thinking can also lead to asking questions that are slanted in a particular direction because we might have an inclination to want something to be true or false. Our common sense can fall prey to selective attention and put emphasis on what is important to us instead of staying open and receptive to contraction and the surprise and joy of discovery.

Open-mindedness

In the case of vitality and mindfulness training, we meet three types of responses: passion about the possibilities, disbelief about the promises, open-mindedness wishing to understand more. One who has experienced the benefits of mindfulness training can easily spread one’s enthusiasm to others searching for solutions, yet should be aware not to overestimate the applicability or to exaggerate claims as to the effects in order to make mindfulness a panacea for every problem. Among those in disbelief we often find people who have a status motive to hammer on their authority or have an economic reason to stick to paradigms that work in their favor. But even authorities should be questioned. And even logical reasoning requires a struggle: emotions are not evidence, feelings are not facts, and subjective beliefs are not substantive beliefs.
Controlled and Peer-Reviewed

Scientific and critical thinking require that one reject blind faith, authority, revelation, and subjective human feelings as a basis for reliable belief and knowledge. Open-mindedness is what we are looking for when subjecting our observations and beliefs to scientifically sound research. It is carefully organized, controlled and peer-reviewed research that enables researchers to test and compare different theories and approaches, explore different methods and learn from other people’s experience. It also enables them to rule out or at least consider external factors which might influence their results.

Statistical Significance

Research will be more valuable if the findings can be recorded numerically and then statistically analyzed in order to determine whether the findings are significant (i.e. the extent to which it can be claimed with a specified degree of certainty that they are not just due to chance). In the case of mindfulness, the statistical significance has been established for many issues, which nourishes enthusiasm. Yet, we also need to keep our skepticism awake to initiate more research in order to establish whether these results can be repeated by different research teams and in different populations. Correlation is a measure of association that tests whether a relationship exists between two variables. To further insight, we need more research results showing to what degree a cause-effect relationship is probable. We must keep in mind that it is never possible to prove causality, but we can advance a lot in proving the statistical significance of the correlation between mindfulness training and changes in concentration, rumination, memory, empathy, open-mindedness and even in the clinical effects of mindfulness on physical or emotional functioning.

Solid Ground

As professionals and business owners we are especially looking for statistically significant research because we cannot afford to take uncalculated risks and jeopardize our budgets. We need as solid ground as possible to build our business case and obtain optimal results from our interventions. In the case of mindfulness, this is especially important as the approach is not integrated into the mainstream, although research on stress reduction through mindfulness has shown its effects during the last 40 years of research, starting with studies on stress reduction at University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Relevant, Safe and Effective

With the body of evidence steadily growing with more research done in the USA and Europe vitality and mindfulness training can hardly be classified as a hype. We are fortunate that with growing insight, we can develop more specific programs and integrate them with other effective approaches to enhance the quality of life and the relevance of performance.

We therefore need research on the impact of mindfulness training and practice to ensure approaches and services that are relevant, safe and effective. Thus, finding the true benefits as well as the draw backs of the options we have, comparing different possibilities, as well as finding truths and myths. By using empirical evidence, practicing logical reasoning and possessing a skeptical attitude scientific research fosters an impartiality that helps to improve existing approaches of mindfulness training and to create better ones.
Exciting Challenge

The endeavor to understand the human mind and brain presents one of the greatest challenges for science. Mindaware therefore contributes by

- disseminating scientific research results on vitality and mindfulness training and practice by facilitating access to scientific publications, much research has been done in the USA and therefore many sources originate there

- initiating scientific research regarding vitality and mindfulness training by finding relevant research questions and funding, especially in Belgium and The Netherlands

Hence, MINDaWARE invites to substitute selective attention with open-mindedness to enter into the exciting challenge of changing our mind and body. Yet do so based on statistically significant research results regarding the impact of vitality and mindfulness training and integrated practice – attending to mind and body. Thereby ensuring approaches and services that are relevant, safe and effective.