

# Acceptance and Commitment Training for Employees' Wellbeing: Results From a Randomized Controlled Trial

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## 1 CONTEXT

- The healthcare sector is a stressful work environment where more professionals suffer from mental health problems (Miche & Williams, 2003; Walsh & Walsh, 2001).
- The prevalence of depression among nurses is 9% while it varies between 4 and 7% within the general population. In 2005, nearly 20% of nurses reported that their mental health condition had impaired their ability to perform their job normally (Shields & Wilkins, 2006).
- These problems have individual and organizational consequences. In addition to decreasing the quality of life of professionals and the quality of care provided, they contribute to increase absenteeism, turnover rates, workplace accidents and medical errors (ASSTSAS, 2009).
- Recently, interventions have been offered within workplaces to help employees develop different abilities related to mindfulness. These interventions include Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012), which aims increase well-being by helping people develop their psychological flexibility.
- Studies on ACT interventions offered at work show that they seem to help reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout and improve satisfaction and psychological flexibility (ex.: Flaxman, Bond & Livheim, 2013). However, very few studies have been conducted with healthcare professionals and the contribution of the different ACT processes is still unclear.
- The objective of this project is to evaluate the effectiveness of an ACT-based intervention designed to help healthcare professionals cope with work-related stress. It also aims at exploring participants' experience and satisfaction level with focus groups.

## 2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Do participants randomly assigned to the ACT workshops show greater psychological flexibility (H1), psychological well-being (H2) and lower psychological distress (H3) at post-program than those in a wait-list-control group?

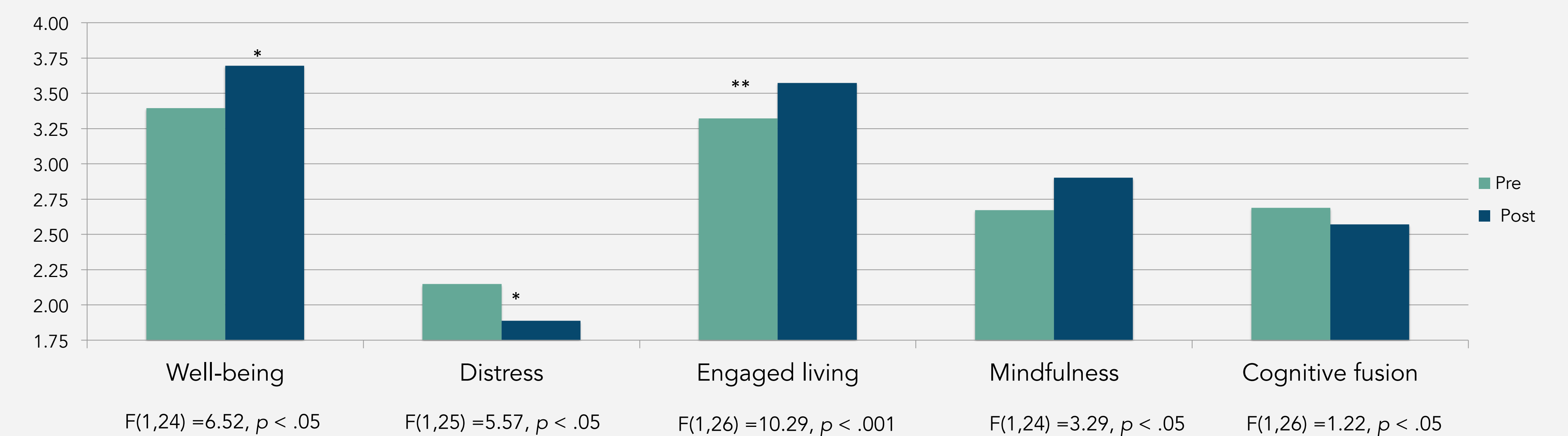
## 3 METHOD

- Participants:** Twenty-three (N=23) employees drawn from 2 public healthcare organizations in Quebec, Canada.
- Intervention:** Four 2 hours long workshops based on ACT were offered to employees. Participants taking part in the workshops were invited to :
  - ✓ Explore what really matters to them, the goals and values that give meaning to their lives;
  - ✓ Engage in actions allowing them to achieve their goals and live their values more fully;
  - ✓ Identify pitfalls that increase their stress and anxiety and implement effective strategies to sidestep these pitfalls;
  - ✓ Cultivate mindfulness.
- Research design:** A randomized controlled study design was used with a wait-list control group. Two focus groups were held 2 weeks after the workshops.
- Measures:**
  - ✓ **Psychological flexibility:** *Engaged Living Scale* (ELS) (Trompetter & al., 2013), *Mindfulness Process Questionnaire* (MPQ) (Erismann & Roemer, 2012) & *Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire* (CFQ) (Dionne & al., 2014)
  - ✓ **Psychological well-being:** *Échelle de bien-être psychologique au travail* (Gilbert, Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2011)
  - ✓ **Psychological distress:** *Échelle de détresse psychologique au travail* (Gilbert, Dagenais-Desmarais & Savoie, 2011)

## 4 RESULTS

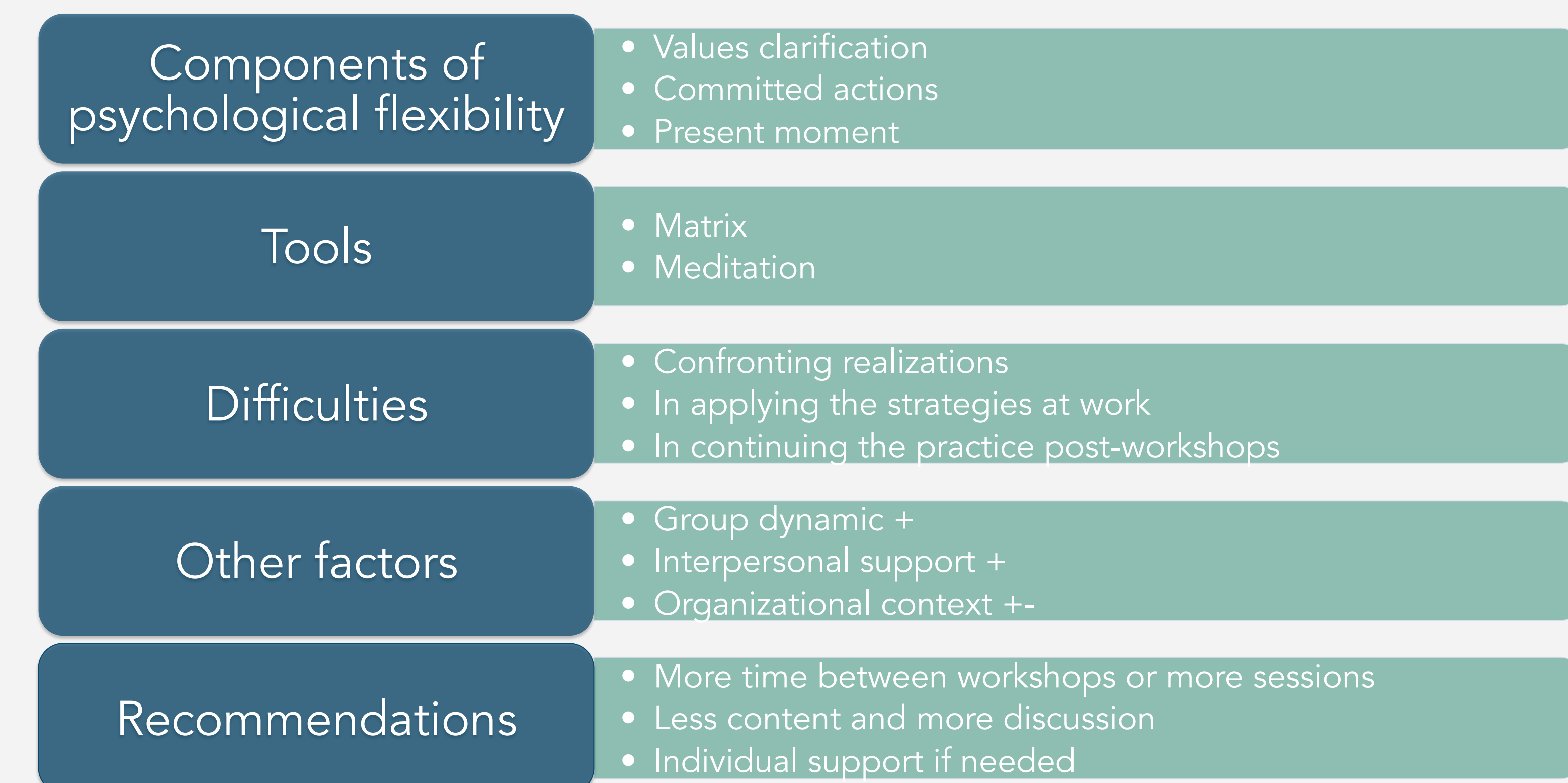
- QUANTITATIVE:** In order to test hypotheses 1,2 and 3, we ran analysis of variance (ANOVA) in which we examined the effect of randomization on mean levels of psychological well-being, psychological distress and psychological flexibility, controlling for baseline measures of each indicator.

Figure 1. Effects of randomization on psychological well-being, psychological distress and psychological flexibility.



Notes: \*p<.05, \*\*p<.001

- QUALITATIVE :** A thematic analysis of the focus groups revealed 5 major themes and several subthemes.



## 5 DISCUSSION

### Conclusions :

- Employees randomized to the intervention group reported greater psychological flexibility, well-being, and lower distress at post-program compared to the control condition.
- Zero-order correlations based on gain scores suggested that the changes in psychological well-being and distress were associated with changes in psychological flexibility.

### Limits :

- Small sample size
- Organizational context
- Self-reported measures
- Psychological flexibility measure