



Runners, Planks, and Perseverance: An Exploration of Verbal Interventions to Improve Task Persistence

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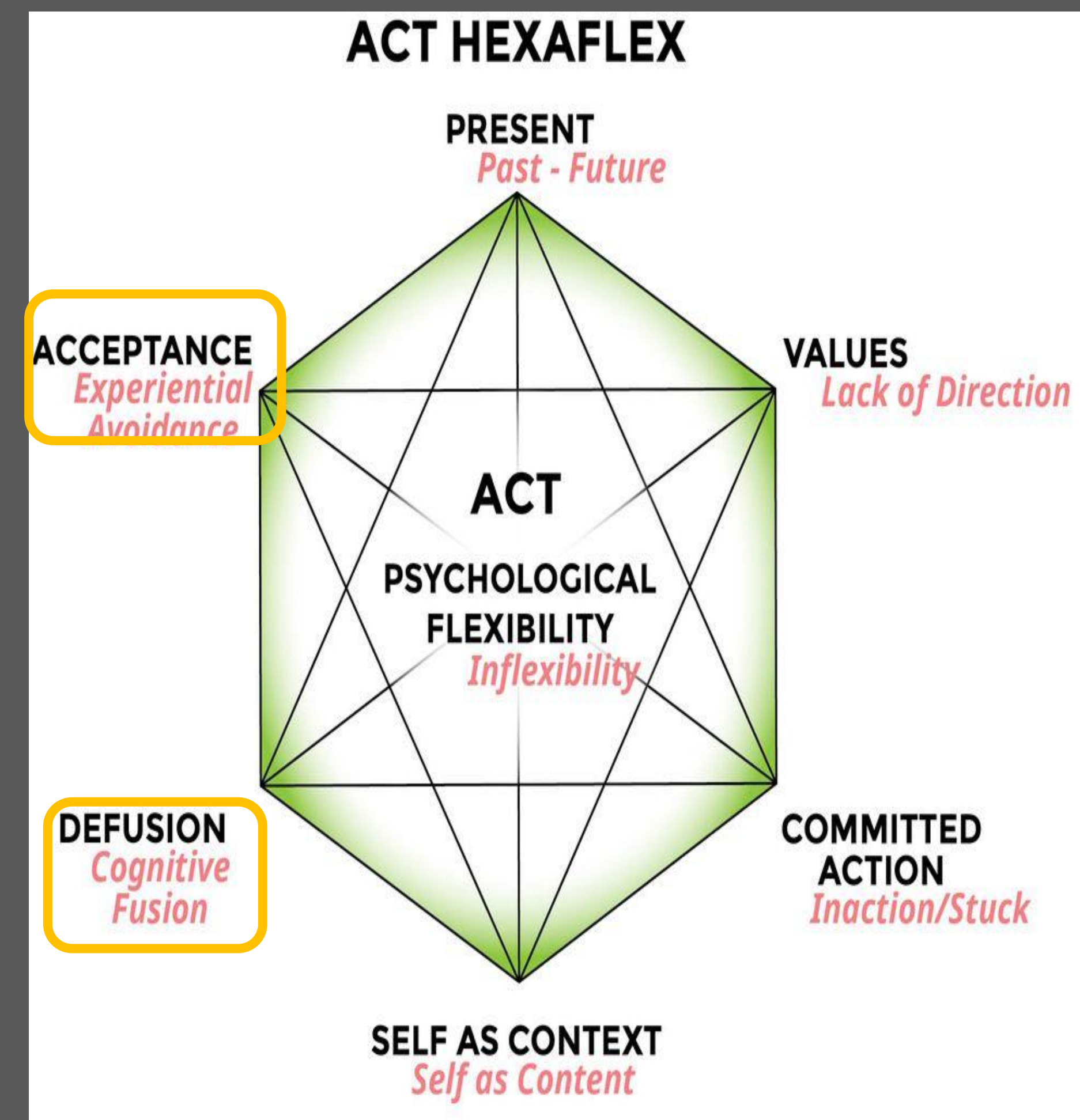
Introduction:

- Persevering through aversive events is central to achieving high athletic performance.
- The verbal behavior of runners plays a key role in their ability to persist under aversive conditions during competition and training.
 - Fusing with the thought “This hurts too much, I can’t do this” is likely to result in quitting.
- **Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT):**
 - *Acceptance* - Embracing the whole of one’s experience, even if parts of it may be aversive.
 - *Defusion* - Gaining distance from one’s thoughts by recognizing that they *are thoughts* rather than facts about oneself or the world.
 - “I am having the thought, ‘This hurts too much, I can’t do this’”.

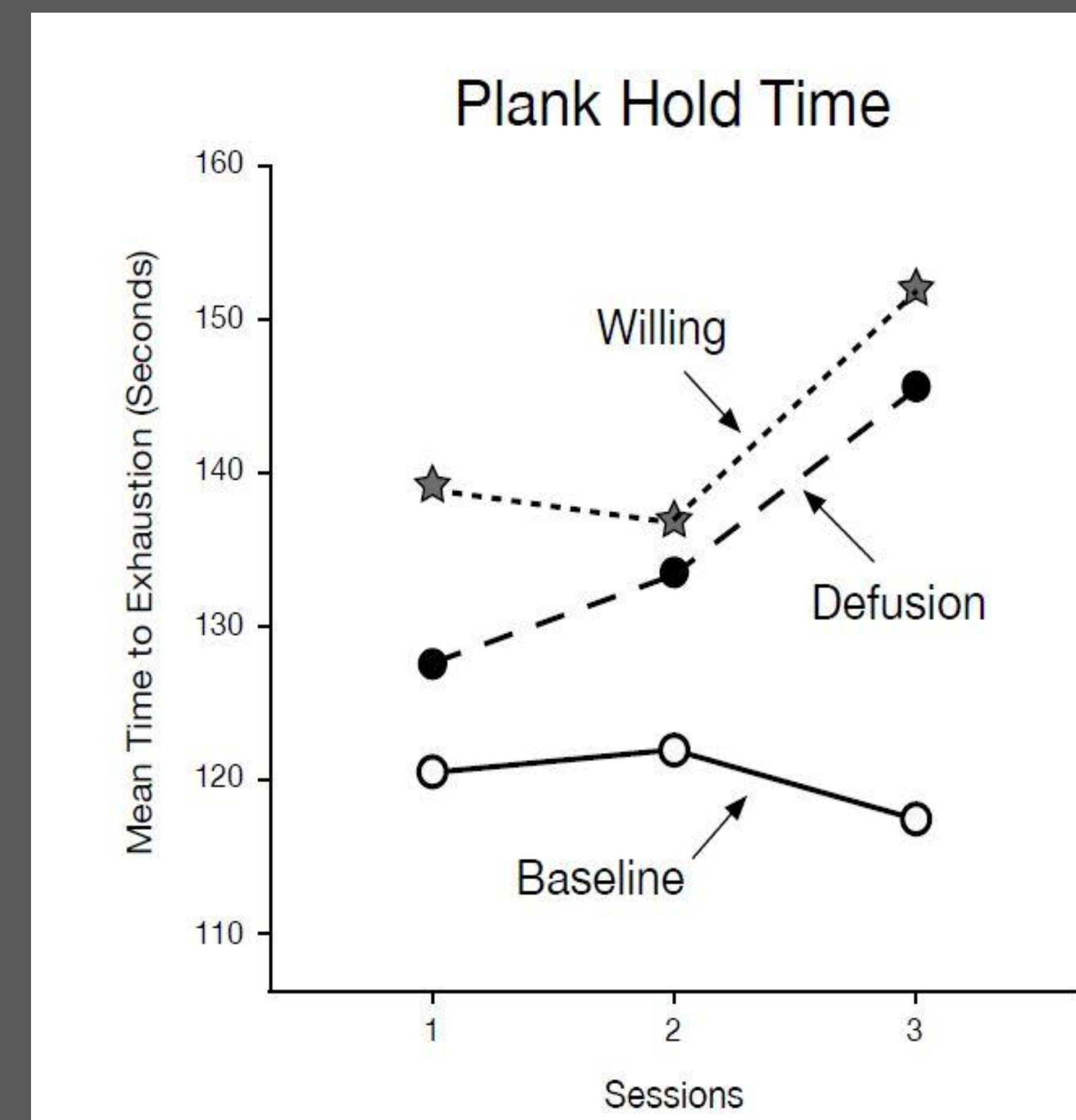
Methods

- Structure
 - Alternating treatments design, within subjects. 3 conditions:
 - (B) *Baseline* - Hold the plank for as long as you can.
 - (W) *Willingness* - “Are you willing to continue while experiencing what shows up?” asked on VT 25s schedule.
 - (D) *Defusion* - Sing what shows up to the tune of a song.
 - Participants: 3 classes of runners
 - Beginner
 - Amateur
 - Ultra
- Dependent Measure: Duration of forearm plank holds.
- Setting/Tools:
 - Conducted and recorded via Zoom with scripts
 - Participant on a yoga mat in a room in his/her house.

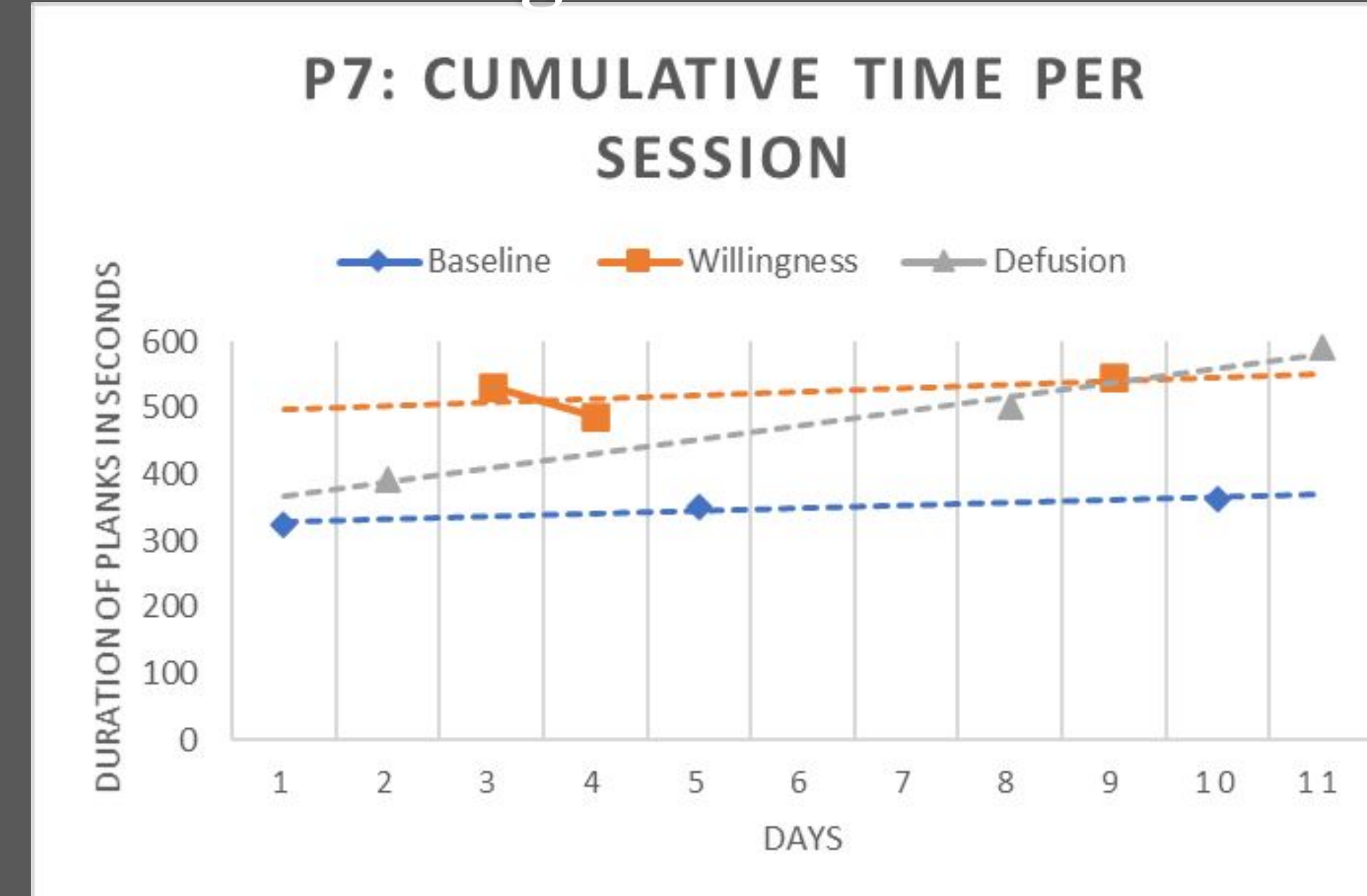
The ACT Hexaflex



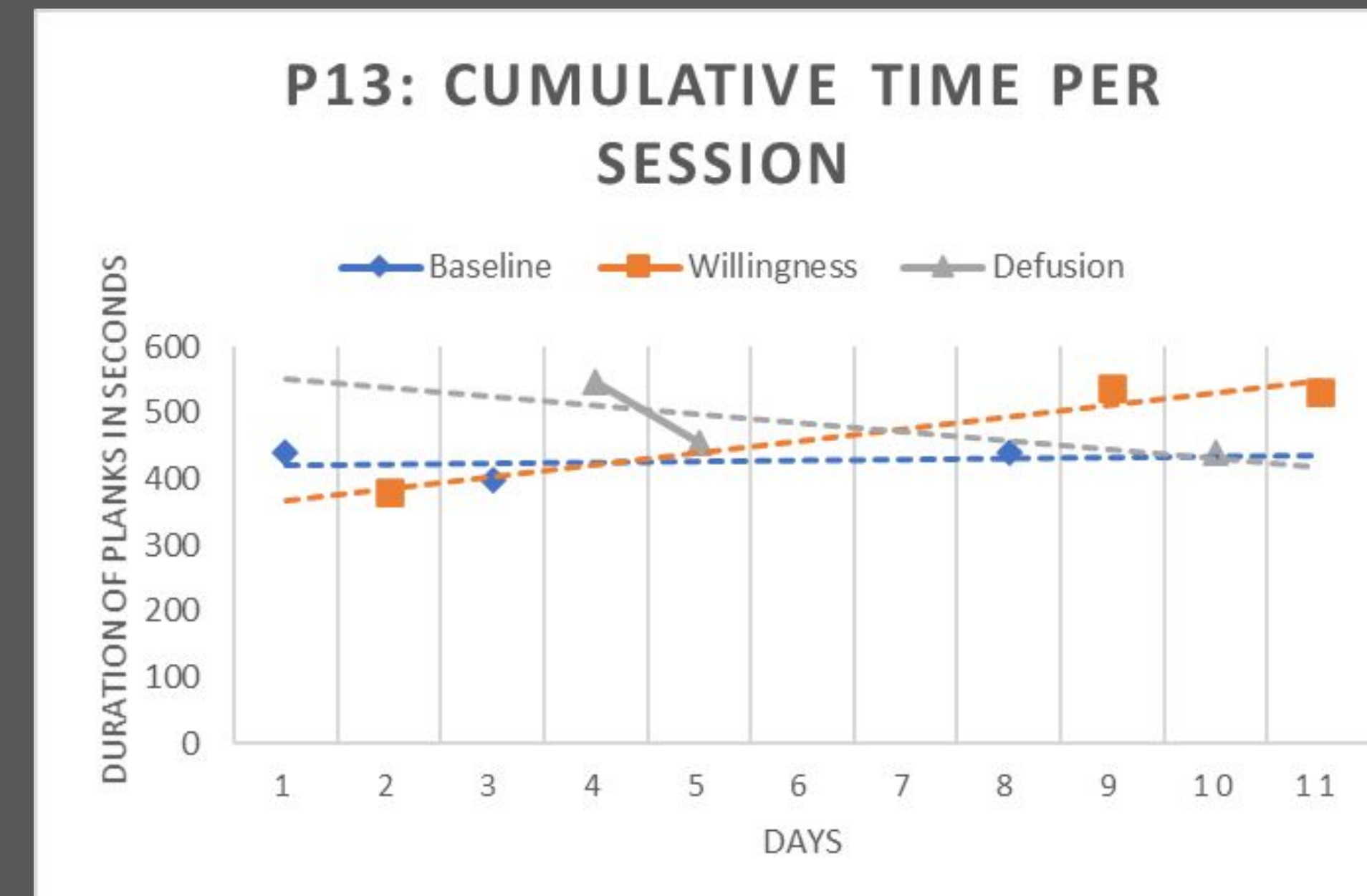
Mean Time to Exhaustion



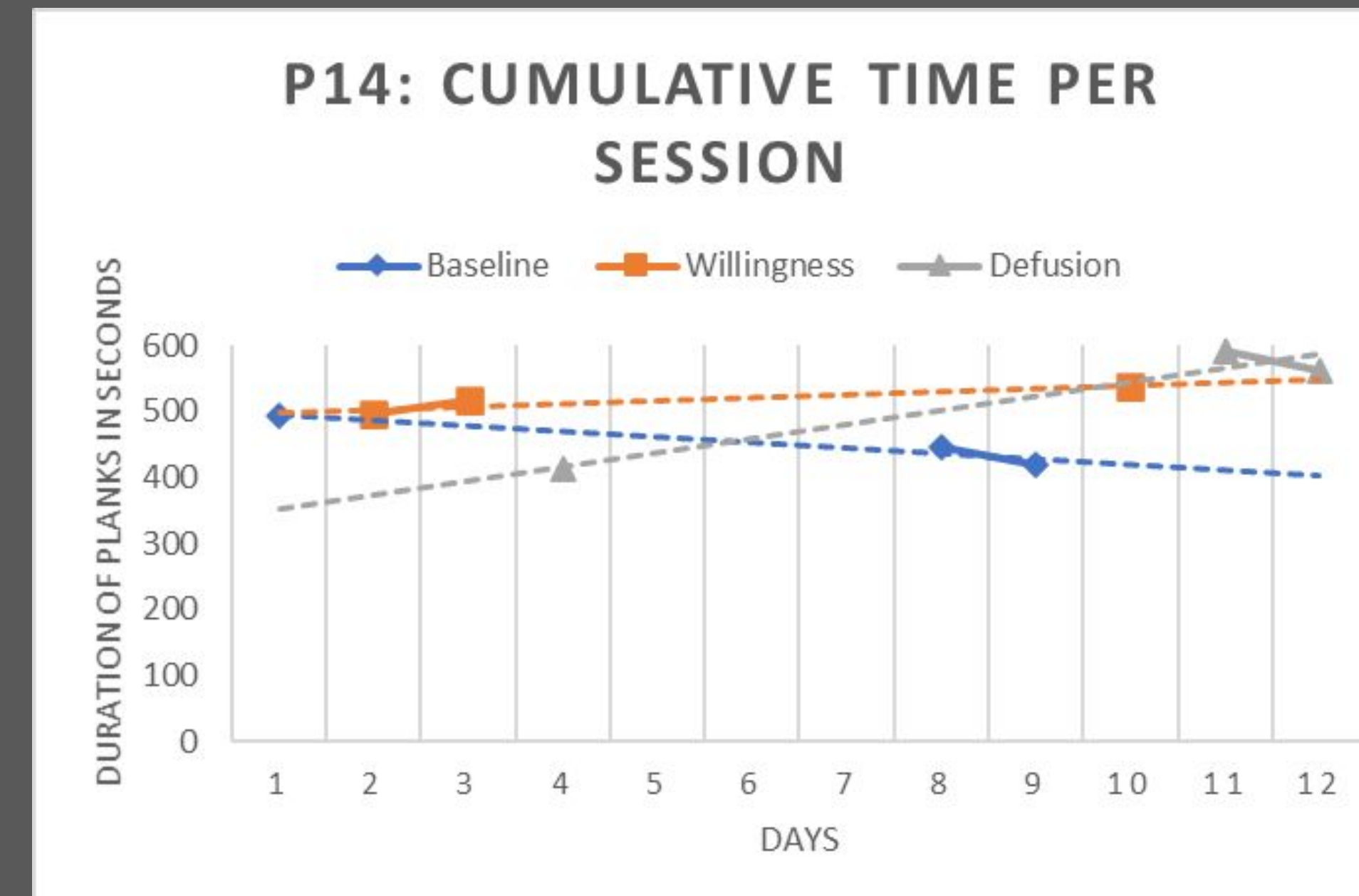
P7: Beginner Runner



P13: Amateur Runner



P14: Ultra Runner



Results

- Both Defusion and Willingness conditions show a significant improvement over the Baseline condition for all kinds of runners.
 - Beginners:
 - P7: W 151% D143%
 - P8: W 151% D 120%
 - P9: W 151 % D 129%
 - Amateurs:
 - P12: W 108%; D 109%
 - P13: W 114%; D113%
 - P15: W 98%; D 101%
 - Ultras:
 - All data series are close and fairly stable; (B) decreasing trend line; (D)/(W) all increasing trend lines

Discussion

- Suggests that defusion and acceptance strategies may be helpful in facilitating performance under aversive conditions.
- Validates/extends previous research on acceptance interventions for task persistence¹.

Future Research

- Uniformly covert or overt conditions
 - (W) was overt; (D) & (B) were not.
 - In competition settings, the verbal behavior of runners is likely to be exclusively covert
- Other athletic populations/contexts
- Other ACT components
 - i.e. Self as context.

References:

1. Leeming, E. M. (2016).
2. Encinias, A. J. (2021).