

MINDFUL OF AUTHORITY

Mindful of Authority:
Exploring the practice of meditation, mindfulness, and leadership with commissioned Canadian
police officers

by

Les Sylven
B.A., University of Calgary, 1988
M.A., Royal Roads University, 2011

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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We acknowledge and respect the ɫəkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the
university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical
relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Police leaders in Canada are facing a daunting series of new challenges that will require significant personal resources to address. In addition to ensuring their organizations are evolving to meet greater community expectations, they must also address a crisis of wellness occurring inside many of their organizations. Mindfulness, meditation, and other related contemplative practices appear to benefit leaders in other professions; however, little is known about how these mental practices may, or may not, be helpful for police leaders. Accordingly, this exploratory qualitative study set out to answer the research question, “How might meditation and mindfulness practice support police leaders in Canada?” Guided by a reflective thematic analysis approach, data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 11 Canadian Commissioned Officers who have regular meditation practices were analyzed and the results are presented in three manuscripts. The first manuscript examines the specific practices these Officers engaged in and why they began meditating. The second explores their perceptions of how meditation influences their leadership. The third investigates how participants believe meditation and mindfulness training should be introduced into their large Canadian police service. This dissertation concludes with a summary of the findings across the manuscripts, as well as the potential study limitations and areas for future research. Although this study extends aspects of the literature on mindful leadership into policing, and provides practical suggestions for introducing mindfulness to police organizations, it also identifies the need for significantly more research to understand if mindful leadership could become a catalyst for police reform.

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Dedication

To the two Carolyns:

Carolyn L. Crippen, PhD, 1943 - 2020

Carolyn S. Moore, 1942 - 2020

Chapter One—Introduction

In 2023, Canadian police managers are facing a daunting series of new challenges. In addition to ensuring their organizations meet their traditional law enforcement mandates, they must also ensure their organizations can effectively respond to the evolving safety expectations of their communities. Many of these expectations are deeply embedded within complex social and public health issues such as people experiencing homelessness, drug addiction, and mental health crises (Griffiths & Dubord, 2023; Taylor et al., 2022).

Canadian police managers are also leading their organizations during a time of reduced positivity toward the police (Ruddell, 2022). This lack of public support has been attributed to high-profile police involved deaths in the United States and Canada, the actions of police during the global pandemic, and findings from public inquiries that continue to identify the failures of the Canadian justice system for women, Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized communities. The result is police leaders must ensure re-building public trust is a top organizational priority (Roach, 2022; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2022; Wood, 2022).

Another urgent leadership challenge exists inside Canadian police organizations. Over the past five years, much more has become known about the depth and breadth of trauma and stress carried by police employees and other public safety professionals (Carleton et al., 2018; Carleton et al., 2020; Heber et al., 2023; Papazoglou et al., 2021). This has led some to conclude a wellness crisis is occurring inside Canadian police agencies that has direct implications for community safety (Jackson & Theroux, 2023). Accordingly, Canadian police leaders are also being urged to make the mental well-being of individuals in their workplaces a constant high priority (Edwards, 2023; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2022; Thompson & Tam-Seto, 2023).

It follows that to effectively address these new challenges, police leaders must ensure they, and their employees, have the personal resources needed to meet their shifting mandates, foster better community relationships, and improve their mental health and well-being. Identifying exactly which programs and practices might be best to build these personal resources has been a topic of recent discussion in Canada (Reid, 2023; Taylor, 2023). This dissertation explores one practice that has become increasingly popular in the modern workplace (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017; Shahbaz & Parker, 2021). This is the practice of meditation and mindfulness.

This introductory chapter begins with a review of several studies that have explored meditation and mindfulness practice within the context of the workplace, leadership, and policing. Next, the overarching research question and sub-questions that guided this dissertation inquiry are presented. A brief summary of the methodology is then provided, followed by an introduction to each of the three stand-alone research articles that are the foundation of this dissertation. This chapter then concludes with a short overview of the complete structure of the dissertation.

Workplace and Police Mindfulness Research

In recent years, several management scholars have attempted to synthesize the growing literature on mindfulness in the workplace. Good et al., (2016), defining mindfulness as “receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experiences” (p. 117), analyzed multiple studies that explored mindfulness as a temporary mental state, an enduring dispositional trait, a type of practice such as meditation, and a specific training intervention. They highlighted evidence that mindfulness appears to positively influence cognition, emotion, behaviour, and physiology, which in turn can lead to the workplace mindfulness outcomes of enhanced job performance, relationships, and well-being.

Several years later, Donaldson-Feilder et al. (2019) conducted a systematic literature review that specifically focused on mindfulness-based training interventions (MBIs) for leaders. They reported MBIs may improve some aspects of a leaders' well-being, resilience, and leadership capability. They also identified that due to the variation of mindfulness training interventions examined in their review, there was a lack of clarity on which type of interventions, in which workplaces, might be most helpful.

A recent systematic review of the literature on mindfulness and leadership was conducted by Urrila (2022). Viewed from the lens of leader development, Urrila concluded mindfulness practice appeared to positively influence various leader developmental outcomes. Some of these outcomes were considered essential (such as personal well-being and productivity), while others were considered transformative (such as positive relationships with others and inner growth).

A further meta-analysis of leader mindfulness research was conducted by Zhou et al. (2022). Drawing upon Good et al.'s (2016) framework of workplace mindfulness outcomes, they quantitatively synthesized articles published between 1998 and 2022. They concluded evidence appeared to support the positive influence of leader mindfulness on leader performance, relationships, and well-being, as well as the performance and well-being of the leaders' followers.

In each of these systematic reviews, as well as others (Shahbaz & Parker, 2021), the authors cautioned that much more empirical research is needed. In particular, the need for exploring the outcomes of mindfulness practice in different workplace contexts was identified as critical.

Within the workplace context of policing, empirical research on mindfulness has also steadily increased over the past ten years (Stephenson, 2022; Withrow et al., 2023). Early studies

with police officers participating in MBIs reported reduced aggression, burnout, and sleep disturbances in these police officers, as well as increased dispositional trait mindfulness, resilience, and emotional regulation (Bergman et al., 2016; Christopher et al., 2016; Eddy et al., 2021; Kaplan et al., 2017). Recent randomized controlled trial studies of MBIs for police employees also suggested mindfulness practice may improve the quality of life and well-being for police officers (Grupe et al., 2021a; Fitzhugh et al., 2023; Trombka et al., 2021).

Even further, Grupe et al. (2021b) have argued that in addition to the potential health and well-being benefits, mindfulness training and practice could be a catalyst for police reform:

This is the true potential of mindfulness for policing in the 21st century: not only that it can potentially lower stress and make individual police officers more resilient to trauma, but that it can contribute to widespread cultural changes in the policing institution that are needed to reimagine the profession, save lives, and bring greater justice to communities that have historically been marginalized by the criminal justice system. (p. 127)

What is lacking in these previously mentioned studies is any empirical research that examines the outcomes of meditation and mindfulness practice within the context of police leadership. More specifically, there is a need to explore how these mental practices might support Canadian police managers as they lead their organizations through the daunting challenges described earlier. The purpose of this dissertation study is to begin to fill this gap in the academic literature and to provide Canadian police managers with concrete examples of how mindfulness might support their practice of leadership.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

I began this study by developing the overarching research question, “How might meditation and mindfulness practice support police leaders in Canada?” After further reflection

and discussion with other researchers and police leaders, I also developed three research sub-questions, each of which became the subject of a stand-alone research paper. These were:

1. What types of meditation and mindfulness practices are currently used by some Canadian commissioned police officers and why did they begin their practices?
2. How might the practice of meditation influence the practice of leadership for some Canadian commissioned police officers?
3. What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?

Brief Methodological Overview

In order to best answer the research question and sub-questions, I recruited volunteer research participants from a large Canadian police service. In total, 11 respondents met the study criteria of being current police managers (also known as Commissioned Police Officers), and regular meditation practitioners (Frizzel et al., 2014). Additionally, as I sought to gather and interpret the perceptions and experiences of these police leaders, an exploratory qualitative methodology appeared to be a good fit (Yin, 2016; Klenke, 2019). The specific methods used to gather data from the research participants included online semi-structured interviews and online follow-up focus groups.

To answer the first research sub-question, data were analyzed using a conventional qualitative content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As the second and third research sub-questions were more open-ended and required much deeper analysis and interpretation, reflexive thematic analysis as envisioned by Braun et al. (2022b) was used to develop the study results. Each of these methods are described in greater detail in the methodology sections of each research paper.

Introduction to the Research Papers

As the two-fold purpose of this study is to begin to fill a gap in the academic literature and provide Canadian police managers with concrete examples of how mindfulness practice might support their practice of leadership, a dissertation format that could suit both goals was needed. Accordingly, a manuscript-style format was selected to meet academic requirements and provide broader access for the police community. This dissertation by manuscript approach is also consistent with findings by Anderson et al. (2022) who wrote, “This manuscript-style trend also demonstrates the contextual nature of genre and what types of writing are deemed appropriate and preferred in specific times and communities” (p. 609).

Paper One—Mindful of Authority: A snapshot of the meditation and contemplative practices of some Canadian Commissioned Police Officers.

This first paper answers the research question “What types of meditation and mindfulness practices are currently used by some Canadian commissioned police officers and why did they begin their practices?” The question was important to answer first, as prior to the current study, no known empirical research had been published on Canadian police officers’ use of these contemplative practices.

This paper introduces the study participants, their general understandings of what constitutes meditation and mindfulness practice, and what led them to start a regular meditation practice. In the results and discussion section of this first paper, I provide several initial suggestions for police leaders to consider when introducing meditation and mindfulness training into their organizations. This first paper was published in a special wellness edition of the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* on February 23, 2023.

Paper Two—Mindful Police Leadership: How the practice of meditation and mindfulness influences the practice of leadership for some Canadian Commissioned Police Officers.

The second paper answers the research sub-question, “How might the practice of meditation influence the practice of leadership for some Canadian commissioned police officers?” It begins by introducing the police leadership challenges identified at the beginning of this introductory chapter. A brief statement of my positionality as a long-term meditation practitioner and formal police leader is then provided, followed by a canvass of some of the previous research on mindfulness in the workplace and mindful leadership (Marturano, 2015).

After a description of the specific interpretive method used to analyze the interview and focus group data (Braun et al., 2022) in this paper, eight distinct themes are presented. I then argue these results extend the literature on mindful leadership from other workplace contexts into the realm of Canadian police leadership, and that meditation and mindfulness could be beneficial practices for Canadian police managers to adopt as they navigate the daunting leadership challenges ahead. This paper is presently under final review for publication in the *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*.

Paper Three—Barriers and Bridges: Exploring the introduction of meditation and mindfulness practice into Canadian policing.

The third and final paper answers the research sub-question, “What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?” Focusing specifically on the call for police leaders to do much more for the well-being of their employees (Edwards, 2023; Jackson & Theroux, 2023; Thompson & Tam-Seto, 2023, this paper outlines six unique themes, developed from the perceptions of study participants, that are potential barriers or bridges to the successful introduction of meditation and mindfulness

training. I argue that this third paper is also a valuable contribution to the literature as it is one of the first to provide detailed practical considerations for police leaders, and leaders from other professions, to contemplate if they intend to introduce these mental practices into their organizations. This paper has also been submitted to *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* and is presently under review for consideration in a future journal edition.

Dissertation Structure Overview

As mentioned previously, following this introductory chapter, each stand-alone research paper is presented as a separate chapter. Following the research papers, the dissertation report concludes with a brief final chapter that summarizes the key results and conclusions across the full study. The concluding chapter also summarizes the study limitations and areas for future research identified during this dissertation research project.

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Chapter Two

Paper One—Mindful of Authority: A snapshot of the meditation and contemplative practices of some Canadian Commissioned Police Officers

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Abstract

Research into the benefits of mindfulness training, meditation, and other contemplative practices for the workplace has grown dramatically. Within the context of Canadian policing, the wellness benefits of these mental practices are beginning to be understood. However, little is known about Canadian police officers' current use of these practices. This information is important for future research exploring the effects of these practices over time, and for police agencies considering introducing mindfulness or meditation training programs into their organizations. This article shares initial findings from a broader, yet unpublished, qualitative study of a cohort of Commissioned Officers from a large Canadian police service who self-identified as having regular meditation practices. Invitations to participate in a study exploring the perceived influence of meditation on leadership were e-mailed to all 605 Commissioned Officers. Of the 13 individuals who responded, 11 met the study criteria. Qualitative content analysis of the data yielded the following results: Commissioned Officers in a wide variety of roles in this police service are engaged in a broad spectrum of contemplative practices; each participant engaged in multiple practices; and the most common reason for beginning to practice meditation was to assist in recovery from a psychological or physical injury. These findings suggest that police organizations introduce a variety of mental training practices early in officers' service to ensure their career is more positive, resilient, and rewarding.

Key Words: Mindfulness meditation in policing; contemplative practice; reasons for beginning meditation; Canadian police officer wellness.

Mindful of authority: A snapshot of the meditation and contemplative practices of some Canadian Commissioned Police Officers.

Research on the potential benefits of mindfulness, meditation, and other forms of contemplative practice for the workplace has grown exponentially in the last decade (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Good et al., 2016; Shahbaz & Parker, 2021). In Canada, where calls have been made to do more to understand and support the mental wellness of first responders (Carleton et al., 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Krakauer et al., 2020; Rinkoff, 2022; Tam-Seto, 2022), the benefits of meditation and mindfulness training for enhancing the well-being of police officers is beginning to be understood (Stevenson, 2022). However, little is known about Canadian police officers' current use of meditation and other related contemplative practices.

This information is important for at least two reasons. First, establishing an initial understanding of the varieties of meditation currently used by some Canadian police personnel is needed for any future research that explores changes in the use of these mental practices over time. Second, if police organizations intend to effectively introduce mindfulness and meditation training programs into their own agencies it would be valuable to understand why some police officers begin to practice meditation.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to this baseline of understanding by sharing preliminary findings from a larger exploratory qualitative leadership study of Commissioned Officers in a large Canadian police service who self-identified as having regular meditation practices. For clarity, Commissioned Officers are comprised of the six most senior ranks in the police agency, from Inspector to the head of the police service.

While the broader, yet unpublished, study explores perceptions of how meditation might influence the practice of leadership in this police agency, this report provides an early snapshot

of the study's participants, the varieties of meditation and contemplative practices they employ, and the reasons they began to meditate. We begin by providing the conceptualizations of mindfulness, meditation, and contemplative practice that were used to guide this study, as well as a brief background on some of the primary research involving mindfulness-based interventions within the context of policing.

Study Definitions of Mindfulness, Meditation, and Contemplative Practices

As is the case with the terms “leadership,” “management,” and “organizational culture,” there are multiple definitions of the terms “mindfulness,” “meditation,” and “contemplative practice.” To this end, researchers have argued that the lack of clarity around mindfulness definitions is problematic, leading to ubiquitous usage and potential misinformation around the topic (van Dam et al., 2018). While an analysis of these multiple definitions is beyond the scope of this article, for clarity, the following conceptualizations of mindfulness, meditation, and contemplative practice informed this study.

Mindfulness has been defined as a state of consciousness characterized by “an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). It is understood that everyone possesses a basic ability to be mindful, and that mindfulness as both a mental state and an enduring dispositional trait can be enhanced by regularly engaging in mindfulness training such as meditation and related contemplative practices (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017).

Meditation as defined by Walsh and Shapiro (2006) is frequently used in psychological research and guided this study. They proposed that meditation is “a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under

greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration” (pp. 228–229).

Contemplative practice is often characterized more broadly than meditation practice. In this study, we drew upon Edwards et al.’s (2017) understanding of contemplative practice as “any activity undertaken regularly with the intention of quieting the mind and developing deep concentration, calm, and awareness of the present moment” (p. 1).

Finally, with respect to what constitutes a regular meditation practice, the definition from a study exploring the influence of meditation practice on the leadership development of managers was adopted (Frizzel et al., 2017). These researchers defined regular meditation practice as training at least three times per week, for at least three months. In this article, the terms mindfulness practice and meditation practice are used interchangeably. As will be outlined in the methods sections, these definitions were specifically used by the researcher to aid in the selection of study participants and to categorize the various practices and reasons given for beginning a meditation practice.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions and Policing Research

A valuable research method for exploring the outcomes of mindfulness and meditation practice is to examine any changes that may occur in individuals following a defined mindfulness-based training program or intervention (MBI). The first established mindfulness-based intervention program was mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), created by Kabat-Zin et al. (1985) for the treatment of chronic pain. This 8-week group training program includes meditation, gentle yoga, sensory awareness, and psychoeducation training and has been considered the gold standard for MBI research (Bartlett et al., 2019).

MBSR and other variant MBIs appear to be effective in enhancing the health and well-being of participants as diverse as teachers, nurses, bio-tech employees, and service centre employees (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017). Beyond individual professions, MBIs are also extensively used in the interdisciplinary field of leadership studies, demonstrating similar results, while the authors caution that further research is still necessary (Bartlett et al., 2019; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Urrila, 2022).

Interest in MBIs in the context of Canadian policing has recently begun to grow (Stevenson, 2022). In the United States, initial pilot and feasibility studies using mindfulness-based resiliency training (MBRT) reported benefits for high-risk professionals, including police, particularly related to reduced aggression, burnout, and sleep disturbance, and increased dispositional mindfulness, resilience, and emotional regulation (Bergman et al., 2016; Christopher et al., 2016; 2018; Eddy et al., 2021; Kaplan et al., 2017).

More recently, international research on MBIs within the context of high-risk professions has advanced to include several randomized controlled trials (RCTs). In Brazil, Trombka et al. (2018) are examining the outcomes of mindfulness-based health promotion (MBHP) training with active Brazilian police officers ($n = 160$), exploring the differences in burnout and quality-of-life measures between program participants and a waitlist control group.

In Australia, Joyce et al. (2019) examined the wellness outcomes of Australian fire and hazardous material workers who participated in the Resilience@Work [RAW] Mindfulness Program. Comparing co-workers who did not participate in the online program with those who did, the intervention group scored higher on measures of adaptive resilience over time.

In the United Kingdom, Fitzhugh et al. (2019) contrasted well-being outcomes of police professionals who used the online MBIs Headspace and Mindfit Cop against those of a waitlist

control group. Measures related to well-being, life satisfaction, resilience, and performance showed improvement for the MBI participants over the waitlisted group.

Finally, in the United States, Grupe et al. (2021) conducted an RCT involving police officers ($n = 114$) from three Midwestern U.S. agencies that examined changes in psychological and biological measures after a modified MBRT intervention. Combining the measurement of psychometric instruments and distress-related biomarkers, researchers found greater improvements in mental health symptoms and sleep quality, as well as a lower cortisol awakening response among the MBI participants than in the waitlist control group.

Although this study is not based on intervention methodology, this evidence suggests mindfulness, meditation, and other contemplative practices are important areas of exploration within the context of police professional well-being.

Methods

On March 18, 2021, following formal institutional approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board and the police service's Human Resources Research Board, an "Invitation to Participate" was sent to all 605 Commissioned Officers via their work e-mail fan out list. After reviewing the study details and informed consent information, e-mail recipients were instructed to contact the researcher directly if they were interested in participating in a telephone screening interview, followed by confidentially discussing their meditation and leadership practices in a semi-structured interview and focus group.

Screening Interviews and Participant Selection

Inclusion criteria for the study included holding the rank of a Commissioned Officer, having a regular meditation practice (Frizzel et al., 2017), and being willing to participate in an individual interview and follow-up focus group. When individuals contacted the researcher, a

date and time to conduct a brief initial telephone screening was established. During these confidential screening interviews, the researcher read from a script which repeated the study details, informed consent information, and confirmed the respondents' willingness to continue.

Screening included a series of questions related to the participant's demographics and meditation practices. These scripted questions included: "How long have you practiced meditation?"; "What types of meditation do you practice?"; and "How often do you practice meditation each week?" Respondents who met the inclusion criteria were invited to take part in an online recorded semi-structured interview with the researcher.

It is important to note that, prior to beginning the screening interviews, one respondent e-mailed the researcher asking for additional information. She asked whether her regular practice of yoga fit this study's definition of a mindfulness practice. In response, she was provided with the study's definitions of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and meditation (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006) and was invited to continue with a screening interview. None of the other respondents asked for additional clarity or information, nor were they provided with the study's definitions in advance. This was done intentionally to capture the respondents' unique understandings of what they believe constitutes meditation practice, without any prior suggestions from the researcher.

Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

Participants were e-mailed copies of the potential interview questions in advance, and all interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams video conferencing platform. During each interview, the specific prompt related to their meditation practice was simply "Tell me about your practice of meditation." If participants had difficulty answering this request, follow-up prompts included: "When did you begin meditation and why?"; "What type(s) of meditation do you

practice?"; "How did you learn meditation?"; and "How often do you practice meditation and for how long?"

Each interview was later transcribed and reviewed by the researcher. Participants received a copy of their transcript and were asked to contact the researcher if they felt any corrections were required. Two participants suggested minor changes, including correcting the abbreviations of educational programs and specialized police units, and correcting dates for specific events in their careers. These changes were made by the researcher.

After the interview stage, participants were invited to join an online follow-up focus group interview at a later date to discuss the full study's preliminary findings. This final data collection phase was undertaken to determine whether any additional data could be gleaned collectively from the participants. A total of three focus groups were hosted, which included eight of the eleven study participants.

Participants

Of the 605 Commissioned Officers who were sent an invitation, 13 individuals contacted the researcher and asked to participate. After preliminary screening phone calls, two individuals did not meet the basic study inclusion criteria. One of these individuals had received a copy of the invitation from a Commissioned Officer but was not yet at that rank, while a second initial respondent did not meet the study definition of regular meditation practice (Frizzel et al., 2017). Accordingly, the final number of study participants was 11 for a response rate of approximately 2% of the total population of Commissioned Officers. A descriptive summary of the demographics of the study participants follows.

Demographics of Study Participants (n = 11)

The age range of the participants was 45 to 57 years, with a mean age of 49.6 years. Participants self-identified their gender as either male (6) or female (5). Race or ethnicity were reported as White (8), Metis (1), South Asian (1) and Black (1).

Length of service in the police agency varied between 19 and 30 years, with a mean of 24.5 years. Participants reported they had been in formal leadership roles (defined as their first promotion in rank) between 10 and 21 years, with a mean of 15.5 years. The ranks of participants were almost exclusively Inspectors (10), with one Superintendent.

Finally, participants were serving in a wide variety of roles including Unit Commander (2), District Commander (2), Operational Support (2), Major Crimes Section (1), Workplace Health and Wellness (1), Integrated Proceeds of Crime Unit (1), Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (1), and Executive Officer to a senior executive (1).

Data Analysis Methods

Data were analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically, information gathered during the screening interviews and semi-structured interviews concerning the types of meditation practiced and reasons for beginning meditation were analyzed and organized by the researcher into codes, categories, and frequencies. Preliminary findings are presented below.

Results**Varieties of Meditation Practiced**

A broad spectrum of contemplative practices was identified, with each study participant engaging in at least two different types of practice. The most commonly cited categories of practices were breath awareness exercises (8) and yoga classes (8). The use of trademarked

technology or app-based meditations such as Headspace™, Oura Ring™, or Insight Meditation™ were also frequently reported (5). Several participants (4) reported using a mantra (either sound or word) during their meditation practice, while the same number reported engaging in positive visualization practices (4).

Additional practices mentioned by at least two participants included gratitude practice, martial arts practice, gardening, nature walking, dog walking and using meta-cognitive processing techniques to gain awareness of problematic thought patterns. Finally, practices described by one participant included listening to music, long distance running, and religious prayer (see Table I).

Reasons for Beginning Meditation Practice

Much like the varieties of practice, participants' reasons for originally starting to meditate were varied, and often more than one reason was given. These responses were organized into categories. The most frequent explanation was that participants were introduced to meditation while receiving treatment for an operational stress injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other work-related psychological trauma (5). Several officers indicated they were introduced to meditation during a yoga class (4). Recovering from a physical injury was also identified as a reason for starting a meditation practice (2).

Less common reasons provided included learning meditation through martial arts (2), being encouraged by a partner or spouse to try it (2), and simply hearing about meditation and wanting to formally give it a try (2). Starting meditation as part of a religious upbringing was mentioned by one participant.

Discussion

Responses

With respect to the response rate, analysis of a recent U.S. online national study ($n = 1861$) suggested that 23% of the public engaged in some type of contemplative practice (Lekhak et al., 2022). With this statistic in mind, the response rate of approximately 2 % of all Commissioned Officers was very low. Potential limitations to this study that may have influenced willingness to participate include: a request from a researcher outside of the police service; a single recruitment e-mail; and a research design that required far greater engagement than simply anonymously completing an online survey.

Accordingly, due to the low response rate and the nature of qualitative research (Hays & McKibben, 2021), these results cannot be generalized beyond the 11 participants who contacted the researcher to discuss their meditation practices. Based on previously described findings by Lekhak et al. (2022) that 23% of the public engage in some type of contemplative practice, we can broadly speculate that among the Commissioned Officers who did not reply, there may be others who engage in some type of contemplative practice. A recommendation for future research is to disseminate an anonymous online survey inquiring about mindfulness, meditation, and contemplative practices to all Commissioned Officers in order to better understand prevalence and interest.

However, based on those who did participate, Commissioned Officers working in a variety of operational and administrative assignments indicated they practice meditation. The representation of five women (45.4%) in this study was higher than the overall gender distribution of approximately 25% women within the police service. Although participants were predominantly White, the voices of individuals from other racial backgrounds were heard in the

study. The remaining demographics relating to age, years of police service, and years of formal leadership experience were consistent with those in the Commissioned Officers ranks.

Varieties of Practice

Insight regarding the participants' understanding of what constitutes meditation was another interesting result of the study. The wide variety of responses provided, such as dog walking, gardening, martial arts, running, and prayer, indicates that many of the participants interpret meditation practice broadly. Although meditation in this study was defined as self-regulation training that brings mental processes under greater voluntary control (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006), contemplative practice, as more broadly defined by Edwards et al. (2017), could be a more accurate description of how the Commissioned Officers who participated in this study understood meditation.

The finding that each participant did more than one type of practice was also interesting. Using the analogy of physical exercise, just as individuals may do a variety of exercises to stay physically well (i.e., cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility training), each of these participants did a variety of practices to stay mentally well (i.e., breathing, gratitude, and yoga). Accordingly, a suggestion from these results is that police organizations offer their employees a wide variety of contemplative practices when introducing mindfulness or meditation training programs.

Reasons for Beginning a Meditation Practice

What led these participants to start meditating was also varied, with respondents often providing several reasons. However, the finding that most study participants reported being introduced to meditation while recovering from psychological or physical injury is a significant finding concerning the wellness of police officers. Continuing with the exercise analogy, this is akin to starting to exercise only after experiencing a significant injury or disease.

Fortunately, information on the preventive benefits of meditation and mindfulness for police well-being is gaining traction in Canada (Stevenson, 2022). With this in mind, another suggestion from the results of this study is that police organizations incorporate these training programs early in an employee's service. This proactive introduction may go a long way in ensuring officers enjoy a long, resilient, and rewarding career.

Conclusion

This article provided a snapshot of the use of mindfulness meditation and related contemplative practices by some Commissioned Officers in a large Canadian police organization in March 2021. Although based on a small number of participants, and therefore not generalizable to all Commissioned Officers in the police service, it is valuable information regarding the characteristics of some Canadian Commissioned Officers who practice meditation, how they practice, and why they began. In addition to assisting future police wellness researchers, this information could be useful for police agencies to consider when proactively introducing mindfulness or meditation training programs into their organizations. Unlike the experiences of many of this study's participants, it is hoped this introduction takes place long before a diagnosis of mental or physical injury occurs.

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Table 1*Varieties of Meditation and Contemplative Practices Employed by Study Participants (n = 11)*

Category of Practice	Number of Participants
Breath Awareness	8
Yoga Classes	8
App or Technology	5
Mantra (Sound or Word)	4
Visualization	4
Gratitude	2
Martial Arts	2
Gardening	2
Dog Walking	2
Meta-Cognitive Processing	2
Listening to Music	1
Long-Distance Running	1
Religious Prayer	1

Chapter Three

Paper Two—Mindful Police Leadership: How the practice of meditation and mindfulness influences the practice of leadership for some Canadian Commissioned Police Officers.

Permissions

A revised version of this article has been submitted to the Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being and is under consideration for publication in December 2023.

Abstract

Canadian police managers are facing a series of daunting new challenges that will require significant personal resources to address. Mindfulness training, meditation, and other related contemplative practices appear to benefit leaders in other professions; however, little is known about how these practices may, or may not, be helpful for police leaders. This article adds to this knowledge by sharing results from an exploratory qualitative study that asked senior police leaders who self-identified as regular meditators to discuss how their practices might influence their leadership. Guided by a reflective thematic analysis approach and utilizing NVivo™ Qualitative Data Analysis Software, data from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 11 Commissioned Officers from a large Canadian police service were analyzed for themes. Broadly organized by influence on job performance, relationships, and well-being, eight distinct themes were developed: enhanced calmness and self-control; better clarity and decision making; improved focus and efficiency; enhanced presence with others; improved conflict resolution practices; greater compassion and empathy; reduced harmful stress; and enhanced resilience and work/life integration. These results extend the literature on mindful leadership from other workplace contexts into the realm of police leadership and suggest that meditation and mindfulness are beneficial practices for some Canadian police managers to adopt when navigating the daunting challenges that lay ahead.

Key Words: Meditation and contemplative practice; mindful police leadership; Canadian commissioned police officers; reflexive thematic analysis

Mindful Police Leadership: How the practice of meditation and mindfulness influences the practice of leadership for some Canadian commissioned police officers.

In 2023, Canadian police managers are facing a series of daunting new challenges. For example, no longer simply responsible for performing their traditional federal, provincial, and municipal law enforcement mandates, today's police leaders must ensure their organizations are also actively involved in meeting the evolving safety expectations of their communities. These expectations are high, even though the foundation of many of these safety needs are not directly related to traditional police work and are embedded in increasingly complex social and public health problems such as people experiencing homelessness, drug addiction, and mental health crises (Griffiths & Dubord, 2023; Taylor et al., 2022).

Another new challenge for Canadian police managers is they are leading their organizations during a time of reduced positive perceptions of the police (Ruddell, 2022). This has been attributed to high-profile police involved deaths in the United States and Canada, the role of the police during the global pandemic, and the findings from public inquiries that continue to identify the failures of the justice system for women, Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized communities. The result is that for many Canadians, relationships with the police are strained, and police leaders must ensure re-building trust is a high organizational priority (Roach, 2022; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2022; Wood, 2022).

A further significant challenge facing police managers exists inside their own organizations. In the past five years, much more has become known about the depth and breadth of trauma and stress carried by police employees and other public safety professionals (Carleton et al., 2018; Carleton et al., 2020; Heber et al., 2023; Papazoglou et al., 2021). Canadian police leaders are being urged to make the mental well-being of individuals in their workplaces a

constant high priority (Edwards, 2023; Jackson & Theroux, 2023; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2022; Thompson & Tam-Seto, 2023).

It follows that to effectively address these significant challenges, police managers must ensure they have the personal resources to perform their roles, foster positive relationships, and maintain their own well-being. Growing research suggests that engaging in mindfulness training, meditation, and other contemplative practices can benefit leaders in non-police workplaces (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Urrila, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). Research that seeks to understand how these practices may, or may not, support Canadian police leaders, however, has not been undertaken.

The purpose of this article is to add to this understanding by sharing results from an exploratory qualitative study that asked a cohort of Canadian police managers who self-identified as regular meditators to discuss their meditation and leadership practices. More specifically, the primary research question guiding this inquiry was, “How might the practice of meditation influence the practice of leadership for some Canadian commissioned police officers?”

I begin this article by canvassing recent research on mindfulness and meditation for leaders in other workplace settings. This is followed by a description of the definitions and methodology used in this study, and a presentation of the key thematic results and supporting quotes. A discussion of how this study’s results compare to the cited literature on mindful leadership, and the implications of the results when viewed alongside the challenges facing Canadian police leaders then occurs. The article concludes with the study’s potential limitations and suggestions for future research.

Positionality Statement

My positionality in relation to this research is that I have several decades of first-hand experience as police officer in Canada, serving with three different police agencies in numerous assignments, from the rank of police recruit to police chief. Although I served in the police organization in this study, it was over 25 years ago, and none of the participants were known to me before this inquiry. I also have several decades of experience as a regular meditation practitioner in a variety of different formal and informal practices. My police leadership and meditation experience, combined with my understanding of the academic literature on both subjects informed decisions throughout this study, however the quest to understand, interpret and communicate the lived experiences of others was the purpose of this study.

Workplace Mindfulness and Mindful Leadership

Recognizing a surge occurring in mindfulness research, Good et al., (2016) set out to systematically integrate findings from previous empirical studies to create a framework for workplace mindfulness research. Defining mindfulness as “receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experiences” (p. 117), they analyzed studies that explored mindfulness as a temporary mental state, an enduring dispositional trait, a type of practice such as meditation, and a specific training intervention or program. From this, they highlighted evidence that mindfulness appears to positively influence cognition, emotion, behaviour, and physiology, which can enhance workplace outcomes such as job performance, relationships, and well-being. None of the studies in their review occurred specifically within the context of police leadership.

Several years later, Donaldson-Feilder et al. (2019) conducted a systematic literature review focused on mindfulness and meditation interventions for leaders. Analysing 19 empirical studies published between 2000 and 2015, they reported evidence that mindfulness and

meditation interventions may improve some aspects of a leaders' own well-being, resilience, and leadership capability. They also identified that due to the diversity of mindfulness and meditation training interventions studied by researchers, there was a lack of clarity on which type of interventions, in which workplaces, might be most helpful. As with the analysis conducted by Good et al. (2016), none of the studies reviewed occurred specifically within the context of police leadership.

One of the author's referenced by Donaldson-Feilder et al. (2019) was Janice Marturano (2015), founder and director of the Institute for Mindful Leadership, and an early advocate for positioning mindfulness at the centre of effective leadership. Based on her experience researching, developing, and implementing mindfulness practice in the corporate environment, Marturano argued that regular meditation will develop mindful leaders who "embody leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion in the service of others" (p. 11).

A more recent systematic review of the literature on mindfulness and leadership was conducted by Urrila (2022) who analysed 30 empirical studies published from 2009-2020. Viewed from the lens of leader development, Urrila defined leader-specific mindfulness practice as: "(1) a holistic leader self-development approach in which (2) a leader engages in raising present-moment awareness of their experience as a leader (3) with the intention to improve the lives of themselves and others" (pp. 2-3). This review concluded that based on the studies analysed, mindfulness practice appeared to positively impact various leader developmental outcomes; some considered essential, such as personal well-being and productivity, while others considered transformative, such as positive relationships with others and inner growth. This review did not appear to include any studies specifically exploring leader-specific mindfulness practice for policing.

A final example comes from a meta-analysis of leader mindfulness research conducted by Zhou et al. (2022) who drew upon Good et al.'s (2016) framework of workplace mindfulness outcomes, to quantitatively synthesize 46 articles published between 1998 and 2022. They concluded that evidence appeared to support the positive influence of leader mindfulness on leader performance, relationships, and well-being, as well as the performance and well-being of the leaders' followers. They cautioned however, that due to the small sample sizes used in many of the studies they reviewed, future researchers should not generalize these results to all workplace contexts. As with the three other systematic review studies, policing did not appear to be the specific workplace context in any mindful leadership research.

Study Definitions

Although mindfulness training, meditation, and other contemplative practices have existed as part of spiritual traditions for thousands of years, interest in the secular use of mindfulness for the workplace has grown exponentially in the past two decades (Bartlett et al., 2019; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Eby et al., 2019; Good et al., 2016; Urrila, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). With this growth, researchers have identified the potential for misinformation due to the lack of definitional clarity in some mindfulness studies, and recommend future researchers explicitly state which definitions are being utilized (Shabaz & Parker, 2021; van Dam et al., 2018). Accordingly, the following conceptualizations of mindfulness, meditation, contemplative practice, and regular meditation practice were used in this study.

Mindfulness

For the purposes of this study, mindfulness was defined as a state of consciousness characterized by “an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). It is understood that everyone possesses a basic ability to

be mindful, and that mindfulness as a temporary mental state, and an enduring dispositional trait, can be enhanced by regularly engaging in mindfulness training such as meditation and other related contemplative practices (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017).

Meditation

From the multiple definitions of meditation, Walsh and Shapiro's (2006) definition is often used in psychological research (Breedvelt et al., 2019; Ganesan et al., 2022; Matko & Sedlmeier, 2019) and was selected for this study. They proposed meditation is "a family of self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration" (pp. 228–229).

Regular Meditation Practice

With respect to what constitutes regular meditation practice, the definition from a phenomenological study exploring the influence of meditation on the leadership development of several managers was adopted (Frizzel et al., 2016). Regular meditation practice is understood as training at least three times per week, for at least 3 months.

Contemplative Practice

Contemplative practice is often characterized more broadly than meditation practice. In this study, we drew upon Edwards et al.'s (2017) understanding of contemplative practice as "any activity undertaken regularly with the intention of quieting the mind and developing deep concentration, calm, and awareness of the present moment" (p. 1). For the purposes of this article, mindfulness training, mindfulness practice, and meditation are used interchangeably.

Method

As the aim of this study was to deeply explore the “how” and “why” of police leadership practice with a small number of participants, an open exploratory qualitative methodology appeared to be a good fit (Yin, 2016; Klenke, 2019). More specifically, the methods of semi-structured interviewing, followed up with focus group discussions, were used to gather in-depth responses from participants. In this section, the details of this approach are outlined, including a description of the participant invitation, selection, and data collection processes. The rationale for using a specific data analysis method, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022b), and the specific steps undertaken to develop key themes and results are also presented.

Participant Invitation and Selection

On March 18, 2021, following written institutional approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board and the police service’s Human Resources Research Board, an “Invitation to Participate” was emailed to all 605 Commissioned Officers in the police service. Email recipients were asked to contact me if they were a Commissioned Police Officer who regularly practiced meditation and wished to confidentially discuss their meditation and leadership practices in semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Additional information in the invitation included details on ethical approval, informed consent, and the contact information for the researcher.

A total of 13 individuals contacted me and offered to participate. Eleven respondents met the study inclusion criteria of holding the rank of a Commissioned Officer and having a regular meditation practice of at least three times a week for at least three months (Frizzel et al., 2016; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006) and were invited to participate in the study.

Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews occurred between April 9, 2021, and June 24, 2021. All interviews were conducted and recorded on the Microsoft Teams video conferencing platform. The interviews were conversational in tone and often became deeply personal. They varied in length from 2 hours and 11 minutes to 3 hours and 9 minutes, with a mean of 2 hours and 22 minutes. Participants were later invited to join online follow-up focus group interviews to discuss the full study's preliminary findings. In total, three online focus groups, which included eight of the eleven study participants were hosted between June 15, 2022, and July 5, 2022.

Data Analysis Process

Thematic Analysis

Each transcript was reviewed in detail, denaturalized (Oliver et al., 2005), and loaded on NVivo™ Qualitative Data Analysis Software. Data analysis was then guided by a version of thematic analysis. Clarke and Braun (2017) broadly define thematic analysis (TA) as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data” (p. 297). They explain, “The aim of TA is not simply to summarize the data content, but to identify, and interpret key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question” (p. 297). Similarly, Clarke and Braun emphasize capturing explicit and implicit meanings of the data, and the consistent use of reflexive processes such as critical reflection, memoing, and journaling research decisions.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The specific version of TA followed in this study was reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2022a). A hallmark of this approach is the premise that in a qualitative study,

a researcher's subjectivity is a valuable analytic resource to be highlighted and used, not diminished, or eliminated (Gough & Madill, 2012).

Braun et al. (2022a) suggested that reflexive thematic analysis should be viewed as a starting point for the journey of data analysis, not a detailed road map that must be followed precisely. In this study, however, their six phases of analysis (Braun et al., 2022b) were adhered to quite closely. These phases were: familiarisation with the entire data set; coding the smallest units of data related to the research question; initial theme generation by clustering codes into meaningful patterns; reviewing and developing these initial themes; further refining, defining, and naming the themes; and producing the research report. In this study, all of these phases were conducted using NVivo™ Qualitative Data Analysis Software.

Results

One of the most significant overarching results was that every participant ($n = 11$) perceived meditation positively influenced their practice of leadership in several ways. Drawing again on Good et al.'s (2016) conceptualization of the potential workplace outcomes of mindfulness, these perceptions were broadly organized into three categories: influence on job performance; influence on relationships; and influence on well-being. In total, eight themes were developed and are described in the following section.

Influence on Job Performance

Participants in this study were assigned to a wide variety of roles and responsibilities in this large Canadian police service (Sylvén, 2023). Regardless of their assignment, the belief in the positive impact of meditation practice on their day-to-day job performance was held by all. Within this first broad category, three significant performance related themes were developed:

meditation enhanced calmness and emotional self-control; created better clarity and decision making; and improved focus and efficiency.

Enhanced Calmness and Emotional Self-Control

The ability to remain calm and maintain emotional self-control was identified by several participants as a significant performance related challenge for Commissioned Officers, and they credited their meditation practice with enhancing this skill. One participant, using the metaphor of a circus performer, explained:

I find management is putting yourself constantly, on a very tight rope, in difficult situations. There's going to be an emotional component. There's going to be anxiety, but you're also doing it, like most acrobats in a circus, in front of a very large crowd. And the higher you are in management and leadership, the more exposed you are. So that tight rope could lead to some very disastrous results if you're not perfectly balanced. So, to me, meditation has influenced my leadership by keeping me balanced on that tight rope.

He went on to disclose that although he felt his emotional control was not as strong as others, his practice of meditation helped him be less reactive:

And if by meditating myself, I can bring myself to get a little bit more control, because I do have a bit of a temper sometimes. I'm very passionate and I need to work probably twice as hard as somebody who would have a cooler temper to try and maintain control of my emotions. In that way, meditation has really helped me.

Enhanced calmness attributed to meditation practice was also reported by those who felt they already possessed strong emotional control. One participant, who attributed his high level of self-control to a lengthy assignment as a member of a high-risk Emergency Response Team (ERT) explained:

My hair is never on fire. You know? I don't lose control. As ERT members like, we've been through the fires and, you're able to deal with things calmly and never panic, but with meditation also comes that acceptance of what is. Something's happened? Okay, well, let's deal with it in a practical, sort of calm way.

Another participant felt his meditation practice enhanced his long and short-term ability to remain calm in challenging situations. He suggested, "Look, this is going to help your resilience when you deal with the shit that happens. But it will also help you stay calm while it's actually happening."

Finally, one participant described the specific practice he undertakes to stay calm and confident during challenging situations. He explained, " When I'm about to face a very challenging conflict, I'll do the power pose. For two minutes, and just breathe. To prepare myself to be more confident and calmer." The same participant qualified the extent to which this practice helps by adding, "I would say that I become a little calmer ... but not 100% calmer!"

Better Clarity and Decision Making

A second performance related challenge raised by some participants was the ability to make clear and correct decisions. Several officers credited meditation with improving this critical skill. As one participant explained:

When I'm meditating is when I get those thoughts of "Wow! What about this?" As you know with meditation, sometimes your mind takes over, but it brings me down rabbit holes that I find I'm most creative, and I'm most accurate in my assessment of things.

The same participant contrasted his decision making now, with his decision making before beginning a regular meditation practice by adding, "It also aids in digesting information. And so, when you receive the various issues that are being presented, the challenges, the

decisions that have to be made, I think that compared to pre-meditation, I would have been more reactive."

The influence of meditation on decision making was particularly clear to one participant who concluded, "I think at the end of the day, it comes down to you have a better ability to either make decisions, or to work through problems." Linking directly to the practice of police leadership he added:

So, it will help you stay focused, and then it will help you make decisions. When all seems lost and you have to make those hard decisions, it helps focus you and you'll find that clarity a little bit easier by doing it. Oh, and by the way, when you're a leader, that's what you need to be able to do, is find that clarity.

The influence of meditation on high-risk decision making was viewed through a more strategic lens by one participant who suggested, "The management side of me says, this is the foundation that helps you manage risk. Because if you're on the red line all the time, you're either risk averse, or you're not making proper decisions." He went on to add, "So, how it effects ... obviously, if you make better decisions, that has a humongous impact on every aspect of our jobs, and every person, and the community that we deal with."

Improved Focus and Efficiency

A third performance related challenge shared by several participants was the ability to maintain focus and efficiency while engaged in the many tasks required of Commissioned Officers. Meditation practice reportedly improved this skill for several participants. For example, one participant believed that regular meditation results in deeper focus on important issues. He explained, "I think what it allows you to do is to have a broader perspective, and rather than focus on the present issues, it allows you to focus on what maybe the core issues are."

Navigating the competing demands placed on Commissioned Officers was another reason given for practicing meditation to improve focus and efficiency. As one participant explained about her yoga practice:

And as you know, being an Officer, there's so much, there's so much stuff going on in the head, at any given time . . . So, if I can be efficient in my yoga practice, knowing that it is going to make me more efficient during my day and give me that clarity of mind, for me, it's an investment of time that is well worth it.

This perception of enhanced efficiency was also echoed by another participant who said, "So the fact that my meditation practice and the yoga I do calms me, helps me be in the moment and not think too much about everything all the time, that helps me act more efficiently at work." Finally, one participant was very specific about the timing of his meditation practice to enhance his focus. He explained, "I started realizing that for me personally, meditating in the morning is great for focus and productivity."

Influence on Relationships

Participants often mentioned how meditation enhanced the quality of their workplace relationships. Three themes developed in this second broad category were: meditation enhanced presence for others; improved conflict resolution practices; and builds greater compassion and empathy.

Enhanced Presence for Others

As described earlier by participants, the workloads and demands placed on Commissioned Officers are significant. Yet, the importance of being fully present in the moment and undistracted for others was mentioned as a critically important relationship skill by some participants. As one participant stressed:

I remember a Police Chaplain telling me once, that it's about presence. Sometimes it's not about words, it's about presence. And being deliberately present. So, I think that's one of the biggest challenges in police leadership these days is understanding the context of where people are at.

The benefit of meditation practice for developing enhanced presence was shared by another participant who explained, "The first thing that I would point to is ... the fact that if you have a practice of meditation, you have more of an awareness of self, and you're more in the present." Another participant placed similar importance on the connection between presence, relationships, and the practice of meditation when he said, "So, I would tell you that's probably where it helps me most with my leadership. Being as present as I can, in every moment, to ensure that I give my best to the people around me."

Finally, another Commissioned Officer highlighted how meditation, and the philosophy of yoga, motivated her to be more present in her workplace relationships:

It also helps me realize that people are important and that I'm trying more and more to be there, to listen to people, to walk around the office. This is because of not just the meditation but the yoga philosophy too, that I think is really important. That's not why I started practicing, but it makes me a better person, so it makes me a better leader.

Improved Conflict Resolution Practices

Another relationship challenge mentioned by several participants was the ability to effectively manage workplace conflict. Practicing humility and moving from judgment to curiosity with others were two strategies that were identified as important. Both were believed to be improved with meditation practice. For example, one participant shared her need for humility when engaged with workplace conflict. She explained, "I try to meditate to bring myself to a

more humbled place. And I struggle with that because I don't want a big ego. It doesn't lead me anywhere positive."

Another participant identified how greater mindfulness derived from meditation practice resulted in a shift in his approach to conflict resolution. He shared:

I'm finding now as a manager, particularly where I used to hate conflict, I was conflict avoidant etc., I didn't want to get into difficult conversations. Whereas now it's like ... I don't want to say fun, it's not fun. But it's interesting. I use the mindfulness component of this as a practice, I'm curious about it. I'm curious about where the people are, and what they're feeling, and why they're feeling it.

Another participant described an incident that occurred on a recent external assignment that highlighted the role meditation plays for her in managing workplace conflict. She explained:

I practiced meditation every day while I was there, but also working with the [police agency], they asked . . . "Where did you learn to get people together and have those hard conversations?" because unfortunately we had a situation that happened there. I said, "It's just part of meditation, and being who you are." And I truly believe that. They listened to me, and they said, "Can we bring you back?"

Greater Compassion and Empathy

A third way some participants perceived meditation influenced their workplace relationships was by increasing their compassion and empathy. This compassion was for themselves, the people they are leading, and the community at large. For example, understanding the need for self-compassion was described by one participant in this way:

You know, it's all well and good to stay on the diet when everything's calm! (laughs)

Whether it's the diet, or contemplation, or meditation, it gets challenging when the

pressures are on . . . and that's when you need it the most. So, just being kind to myself during those times, but also going "Hey, this would be a good time to do a walk or a meditation."

Another participant demonstrated his enhanced empathy and care for people at work by openly sharing what he knows about meditation practice with others to help them perform better. He explained:

I end up talking about meditation with a lot of people, so a by-product of that is that it's also an act of leadership of sharing good practices with people to better equip them. To survive the same pressures and frustrations that we all had to deal with within the organization.

The same participant shared how he feels the broader outcome of meditation practice, organizational mindfulness, was essential to building more compassionate and responsive police organizations:

We need to adapt on a number of fronts, and I see mindfulness as one of those things that is going to help this organization move forward, with changes in our practices, the way we approach police work, the way we approach our work as leaders. I think we need to re-think what we provide our employees.

Finally, another participant explained how increased mindfulness and compassion is critical to regaining the public's trust and to justly serve the most vulnerable in society:

I think in a time where public trust is wavering in the police, in many ways . . . I think that the more mindful our officers are, the more compassionate they present to people, the more we will build and re-build trust, especially with our most vulnerable communities.

Influence on Well-Being

The final broad category drawn from the experiences of participants was how meditation influenced their well-being. For several participants, this was the most important category, as they believed well-being was foundational to more than their careers. As one participant explained, "This is actually a technical skill that can be honed, that can be developed and has a broad effect in every aspect of your life." This broad category can be viewed through two themes: meditation reduced harmful stress; and meditation enhanced trauma resiliency and work/life integration.

Reduced Harmful Stress

Study participants frequently shared that operational and organizational workplace stress was significant in their workplace and was an important reason for practicing meditation. As one Officer explained:

Every employee, of every rank, and every category within the [police service], is faced with tremendous pressure. Whether it be stress or emotional control, I think providing our employees with useful tools like meditation . . . will allow us to be the best person we can be in those moments when the communities really need us.

The same participant went on to comment how reducing stress through meditation will have organizational benefits, including reducing the number of employees off-duty sick (ODS) and decreasing the frequency of poor leadership created by excessive stress:

I think it's going to have an impact towards stress management when it comes to ODS prevention, but also preventing regrettable incidents where our members get overstressed . . . or even when leaders get overwhelmed by pressures and by stress, and probably not react the way they would have wanted to in a difficult situation.

Another participant echoed these comments about her own practice of leadership and how meditation helped her manage job related stress:

So, I started the breathing exercises . . . and that helped me manage my stress . . . from thinking too much and questioning myself all the time. When you stop that, when you are just in the moment, when you calm yourself, then you're more able to do a good job.

Enhanced Trauma Resiliency and Work/Life Integration

The need to be resilient after witnessing and experiencing trauma associated with policing was frequently raised by participants. As one participant candidly shared:

Part of being more open to yoga and breathing practice, and everything else for me is I suffer from PTSD. I was diagnosed a couple years ago, plus the regular trauma of this job and everything else that I've done for many years. So, the breathing helps. It helps keep my crazy under control! (laughs).

Another participant shared a similar belief about the need for building resiliency practices like meditation early in a policing career:

This is all intertwined with resiliency and looking after yourself, self-maintenance, all the rest of it. We give our people a huge amount of tools to do their job, but if we introduce meditation at an entry-level stage, we would have one resilient population in terms of dealing with stress, not only with police work but the rest of the things that we deal with in society, right?

The need for resiliency was also viewed as essential for a successful work/life integration, particularly during the transition after arriving home. As one participant shared:

If your home life is good, because you've worked through some things, you're not as angry about things, you're able to move past hyper-vigilance through meditation, you'll

be better at home too. Because we do take things from work, and it comes to the house.

So, if we can do something to help us leave the work at work . . . you'll be better at home, and if you're better at home you'll be better at work. It just works that way.

To further bring home this point, one participant shared his perceptions about the importance of meditation by posing a series of questions to other police officers:

Another thing I would say as a selling point to members is this, "Hey, do you want to stay married? Do you want a successful relationship? Do you want your kids to like you? Do you want to have friends? You know, do you want to get along well with people? Do you want to be able to sleep at night? ... Well, this is part of what you're going to need to do. Start building your resiliency practices so that you don't wind up being another story."

Discussion

In this section, the study results will be contrasted with the previously described literature on meditation and mindfulness practice for leaders from other workplaces. The study results will then be examined alongside the three real-world challenges facing Canadian police managers introduced at the beginning of this paper. The section will conclude with the potential limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

Reviewed Literature and Study Results

When compared to the reviewed mindful leadership literature (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Marturano, 2015; Urrila, 2022; Zhou et al., 2022), the eight themes developed in this study appear consistent with many of the previous findings (See Table 1). For example, Donaldson-Feilder et al. concluded mindfulness and meditation interventions may improve some aspects of leader well-being, resilience, and leadership capability. In this study, the themes of reduced harmful stress, enhanced trauma resilience and work/life integration, enhanced calmness and

self-control, and improved conflict resolution practices align with Donaldson-Feilder et al.'s findings from non-police workplaces.

Urrila (2022) identified that leader-specific mindfulness practice appeared to positively impact essential leader development outcomes such as personal well-being and productivity, and transformative leader development outcomes such as forging positive relationships and inner growth. Themes developed in the current study that aligned with essential leader development outcomes included enhanced trauma resilience and improved focus and efficiency. Themes associated with transformative leader development outcomes included, enhanced presence for others, improved conflict resolution practices, greater work/life integration, and greater compassion and empathy.

Zhou et al. (2022) concluded that leader mindfulness appears to have a positive influence on leader performance, relationships, and well-being as well as the performance and well-being of the leader's followers. In this study, the themes of enhanced calmness and emotional self-control, better clarity and decision making, improved conflict resolution practices, and reduced harmful stress align with the findings of Zhou et al., although data on how these practices directly influenced follower's performance and well-being was not collected in the current study.

It is however, in the writing of Marturano (2015) that the closest connections can be made with the findings of this study. Her definition of a mindful leader as someone who "embodies leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion in the service of others" (p. 11) is closely aligned with enhanced presence for others, improved focus and efficiency, better clarity and decision making, and greater compassion and empathy.

In summary, the literature referenced from outside of policing suggested that mindfulness and meditation practice may have a positive influence on aspects of the practice of leadership for

some individuals. In this study, the themes developed from the perceptions and experiences of participants suggested this may also be the case for some Canadian commissioned police officers. Therefore, it is argued that this study begins to extend the findings from the referenced literature into the context of mindful police leadership.

Police Leadership Challenges and Study Results

When viewed alongside the policing challenges described at the outset of this article, specifically: meeting community safety needs and traditional law enforcement; strengthening public trust in policing; and prioritizing the well-being of police professionals, the themes developed in this study suggest practicing meditation and mindfulness will benefit police leaders as they address these new responsibilities (See Table 2).

Meeting Community Safety Needs and Traditional Law Enforcement

In 2023, Canadian police leaders are expected to ensure their organizations are as equally focused on meeting community safety needs as they are on meeting their traditional law enforcement mandates. This has not always been the case, as Griffiths and Dubord (2023) wrote:

In Canada, there has been a significant shift in the role of police influenced by the changing public safety, social, health and economic landscape. Current discourse suggests that police have a more prominent role in the context of broader community safety and well-being. This is especially true, with much of the day-to-day policing activities revolving around social and public health problems—or those committing “social crimes” due to health and social reasons. (p. 19)

At the heart of this challenge is the need for current and future police officers to embrace even greater collaboration with others working in social and public health organizations, and to hold a new vision of what it means to be a police leader. As Taylor et al. (2022) explained:

Policing today and in the years ahead must be as much about public health as it is about enforcing the law. And with this change in mission, also changed are the requisite character, skills, knowledge, and attitudes for those who are to be invested with unique powers and state authorities and to effectively lead a police organization today. (p. 102)

Many of the themes developed in the present study appear to support the necessary character, skills, and attitudes needed in this new vision of a Canadian police leader. For example, calmness, emotional self-control, and being present for others are essential characteristics for collaboration. Similarly, clarity in decision making, maintaining focus, and working efficiently are vital skills for police leaders managing competing law enforcement and community safety demands. Enhanced compassion and empathy for the community is also an attitude that is foundational to the vision of a modern collaborative police leader held by Taylor et al. (2022) and was specifically highlighted by study participants. Taken together, these themes suggest that the practice of meditation may benefit Canadian leaders as they work to ensure their organizations meet community safety needs and traditional law enforcement mandates.

Strengthening Public Trust in Policing

For many Canadians, trust, confidence, and support for their local police organizations was consistently positive between the years 2000 and 2019. After 2020, however, positive perceptions of the police dropped sharply in Canada, as well as the United States and the United Kingdom (Ruddell, 2022). Based on an analysis of Canadian public safety surveys, Ruddell concluded:

The death of George Floyd in police custody appears to be the primary driver in this loss of the public's trust and confidence. A secondary reason for this decrease may be a growing antipathy towards all government institutions after the onset of the pandemic and

making the police responsible for enforcing regulations that a significant proportion of the public perceives as illegitimate. (p. 51)

A deeper view of this change, however, is that Canada's colonial and patriarchal past has cemented a systemically racist justice system that has overpoliced and under protected women, Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized communities for decades (Roach, 2022). As Roach asserted, it is police misconduct brought on by implicit bias and systemic racism that has decreased public trust, confidence, and support for Canadian policing:

Overpolicing in the form of police misconduct attracts more publicity than successful investigations and prosecutions, where the police do often get it right. So, too, do well-publicized police failures with respect to serial killers. Still, well-publicized acts of overpolicing and police failure cannot be ignored because they influence how the police are perceived and the cooperation they receive. (p. 27)

Staying with the reasoning of Roach (2022), strengthening public trust will not be a quick fix. The outcomes of regular meditation practice identified in this study however, including enhanced presence for others, better clarity and decision making, and improved conflict resolution, are critical attributes for leaders to possess if they hope to build greater public trust with their communities. Similarly, greater compassion and empathy can only benefit current and future police leaders as they work toward addressing this second police leadership challenge.

Prioritizing the Well-Being of Police Professionals

It is within the challenge of prioritizing and supporting the well-being of individuals inside police organizations that mindfulness practice may have the most to offer. It has been argued that the profession of policing is experiencing a global mental health and wellness crisis (Edwards, 2023). Although police work has always been understood as stressful, dangerous, and

likely traumatizing, when coupled with a stoic organizational culture that can devalue seeking help, the frequency of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental illnesses inside police agencies and other Canadian public safety professions has become staggering (Carleton et al., 2018; Carleton et al., 2020; Heber et al., 2023; Papazoglou et al., 2021).

It is not an exaggeration to say that addressing this well-being challenge is critical to the future of Canadian policing and community safety. As Jackson and Theroux (2023) explained:

The mental health and wellness of the workforce is not a sector-specific issue; it is a human issue – one facing every single police service in Canada and, indeed, globally ... We recognize that you cannot have safe, healthy, and resilient communities without a safe, healthy, and resilient police workforce. Full stop. (p. S4)

The attitudes and behaviours that police leaders demonstrate inside their organizations has been highlighted as essential to addressing this challenge. As Edwards (2023) argued:

Police leaders can no longer afford to be passive participants in the declining mental health of those men and women who put service before self ... consciously or not, they play a pivotal role in creating the type of environment that either promotes or erodes mental and emotional safety. (pp. S50-S51)

Based on this study, engaging in meditation and mindfulness practices may benefit police leaders as they work to create psychologically safer police organizations. For example, it is argued that a leader's enhanced presence would increase an employee's sense of being heard and valued. Similarly, improved conflict resolution practices could result in employees feeling less stress when workplace disagreements arise. Further, a police leader with greater compassion and empathy for their employees would likely foster a psychologically safer police organization.

The experiences of study participants also suggested that a leader who engages in mindfulness practices will be supporting their own well-being. All police leaders begin as frontline police officers. When they are eventually assigned formal leadership responsibilities, they will be influenced by their own history of traumatic and difficult experiences. Having the ability to enhance their own calmness and emotional self-control, reduce their harmful stress, and enhance their resiliency and work/life integration through mindfulness practice could be vital for a police leader's well-being, which is necessary if they are to also prioritize the well-being of others.

Study Limitations and Suggested Areas for Future Research

This study begins to extend the referenced literature on mindful leadership into the realm of police leadership. It also suggests mindfulness and meditation practice could benefit Canadian police leaders as they address their most significant leadership challenges. There are, however, several study limitations and areas for future research that require highlighting.

Most notably, only Commissioned Officers who believed meditation positively influenced their practice of police leadership volunteered for this study. It is possible there are other Commissioned Officers within this police service that have practiced meditation and believe it had no influence, or a negative influence, on their leadership practice. This positivity bias in mindfulness studies has been identified by Britton (2019) who wrote that "Previous research has found that very few, if any, psychological or physiological processes are universally beneficial" (p. 159). Even further, some studies have concluded that the regular practice of meditation could be distressing for some individuals (Lindahl et al., 2017, Britton et al., 2021). However, these perceptions did not arise in this study.

A suggestion for future research then, is a brief confidential online survey that explores this study's results with all Commissioned Officers from this police agency. This survey would require significantly less investment of participant time and could provide an opportunity for individuals who practice meditation, but do not feel it positively influences their leadership practice, or who have had adverse experiences with the practice of meditation, to add their voices to the discussion.

Further, the participant inclusion criteria for this study were Commissioned Officers with a regular practice of meditation (Frizzel et al., 2017; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). As the percentage of Commissioned Officers in this police agency accounts for approximately 10% of all police officers in formal leadership roles, expanding the study to include non-commissioned officers and other leaders would deepen the understanding of how meditation practice may influence the practice of leadership at different ranks in the police organization.

Finally, this study sought to understand how meditation and mindfulness practice might influence the practice of leadership from the perspective of the leaders. As Zhou et al. (2022) report, leader mindfulness appears to also influence the performance and well-being of the leaders' followers. Future research within the context of policing that examines the perceptions of peers, followers, supervisors, and community members who regularly engage with a police leader who regularly practices meditation is an important next step.

Conclusion

The challenges facing Canadian police managers in the years ahead will require them to have significant personal resources. Research into mindfulness training and meditation has suggested these practices can benefit leaders in other workplace contexts; however, until this study, little was known about how these mental practices might benefit police leaders. Results

from this study describe how some Canadian commissioned police officers believe regular meditation positively influences their practice of leadership by enhancing their performance, improving their relationships, and supporting their well-being. Therefore, this study begins to extend the cited literature on mindful leadership from other workplace contexts into the profession of police leadership.

Based on the discussions that occurred with these police leaders, adopting a mindfulness, meditation, or contemplative practice could benefit other Canadian police leaders while they address the pressing challenges of meeting community safety needs, strengthening public trust, and prioritizing the well-being of police professionals. Although this study has limitations and further research is warranted, a regular meditation practice is something that all current and future Canadian police leaders should begin to deeply contemplate.

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Tables

Table 1
Comparison of Study Themes With Cited Mindful Leadership Literature

Study Themes	Mindful Leadership Literature
Job Performance	Job Performance
Enhanced calmness and emotional self-control	Donaldson-Fielder et al. (2019)
Better clarity and decision making	Zhou et al. (2022), Marturano (2015)
Improved focus and efficiency	Urrila (2022), Marturano (2015)
Relationships	Relationships
Enhanced presence for others	Urrila (2022), Marturano (2015)
Improved conflict resolution practices	Donaldson-Fielder et al. (2019), Zhou et al. (2022)
Greater compassion and empathy	Urrila (2022), Marturano (2015)
Well-being	Well-being
Reduced harmful stress	Donaldson-Fielder et al. (2019), Zhou et al. (2022)
Enhanced trauma resiliency and work/life integration	Donaldson-Fielder et al. (2019), Urrila (2022)

Table 2
Comparison of Study Themes With Identified Police Leadership Challenges

Study Themes	Canadian Police Leadership Challenges
Job Performance	Job Performance
Enhanced calmness and emotional self-control	Community safety, workplace well-being
Better clarity and decision making	Community safety, strengthening public trust
Improved focus and efficiency	Community safety
Relationships	Relationships
Enhanced presence for others	Community safety, strengthening public trust, workplace well-being
Improved conflict resolution practices	Rebuilding public trust, workplace well-being
Greater compassion and empathy	Community safety, strengthening public trust, workplace well-being
Well-being	Well-being
Reduced harmful stress	Workplace well-being
Enhanced trauma resiliency and work/life integration	Workplace well-being

Chapter Four

Paper Three—Barriers and Bridges: Exploring the introduction of meditation and mindfulness practice into Canadian policing.

Permissions

A revised version of this article has been submitted to the Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being and is under consideration for publication.

Abstract

Canadian police organizations are under significant pressure to enhance the health and wellness of their employees. Growing research suggests training in meditation and mindfulness contributes to the well-being of police personnel and may even be a catalyst for police reform. Limited research, however, has been conducted that seeks to understand how these practices should be introduced into police organizations. This article adds to this understanding by sharing results from a unique exploratory qualitative study that asked 11 Commissioned Officers with regular meditation practices what organizational factors they believed need to be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into their large Canadian police service. Using semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and guided by a reflexive thematic analysis approach, six themes were developed. These can be viewed as barriers (invincibility and stigma; overworked and overstressed; and checkbox cynicism) and bridges (credible champions; the whole person perspective; and the philosophy of servant leadership) to the successful introduction of meditation and mindfulness practice. This study is a valuable contribution to the literature as it is one of the first to record and interpret the experiences and perceptions of mindfulness practicing senior police leaders. It also provides practical considerations for police leaders, and leaders from other professions, who intend to introduce these mental practices into their organizations.

Key Words: Canadian police leadership; police employee well-being; introducing meditation and mindfulness to policing; servant leadership.

Barriers and Bridges: Exploring the introduction of meditation and mindfulness practice into Canadian policing.

In 2023, Canadian police organizations are under significant pressure to enhance the health and well-being of their employees (Edwards, 2023; Jackson & Theroux, 2023; Thompson & Tam-Seto, 2023). This call to action has grown stronger over the past five years as emerging research has led to a better understanding of the depth and breadth of trauma and stress carried by police and other public safety professionals (Carleton et al., 2018; Heber et al., 2023; Papazoglou et al., 2021; Ricciardelli et al., 2018).

A variety of interconnected occupational factors are reportedly driving this crisis in police employee wellness. Ricciardelli and Johnstone (2022) identified chronic workload and burnout, work-life imbalance, poor perceptions of leadership, and the stigma associated with seeking mental health treatment as major contributors to the situation. Similarly, Reid (2023) highlighted staff shortages, low morale, high levels of fatigue, and the existential threat to Canadian policing due to diminished public trust as driving factors. Regardless of the reasons, it is a serious problem that extends beyond police organizations, and directly impacts Canadian society. As Jackson and Theroux (2023) explained:

The mental health and wellness of the workforce is not a sector-specific issue; it is a human issue — one facing every single police service in Canada and, indeed, globally ... We recognize that you cannot have safe, healthy, and resilient communities without a safe, healthy, and resilient police workforce. Full stop. (p. S4)

Exactly which evidence-based programs should be introduced to build safe, healthy, and resilient police workforces is up for discussion. For example, in February 2023, the Canadian-based *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being* published a special issue focused on ideas

from around the world that promote first responder wellness (Taylor, 2023). Articles in the journal edition included: leadership interventions for alcohol abuse in police and public safety organizations (Rinkoff, 2023); peer-led workplace reintegration programs following significant injury or illness (Jones et al., 2023); mental health stigma and help-seeking intentions in police employees (Grupe, 2023); and the use of meditation and other contemplative practices by Canadian police officers (Sylvén, 2023).

This study focused on the introduction of meditation and mindfulness training for Canadian police organizations. Much like the growing interest in mindfulness for the workplace (Dhiman, 2021; Reina et al., 2022; Urrila, 2022b), interest in mindfulness for the well-being of police employees is also on the rise (Fleischmann et al., 2022; Stephenson, 2022; Withrow et al., 2023). However, a gap currently exists in the literature on how best to introduce these practices into police organizations.

The purpose of this article is to add to the literature by sharing results from a unique exploratory qualitative study which asked 11 Canadian police managers, who self-identified as regular meditators, how mindfulness practice could be effectively introduced into policing. More precisely, the research question guiding my inquiry was, “What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?”

I begin this article by sharing a statement on my positionality in relation to this interpretive qualitative research, and by identifying the definitions of mindfulness and meditation practice that guided this study. A review of selected empirical research on the potential outcomes of mindfulness and meditation training interventions for policing is then provided for background, as well as a description of the methodology I employed in this study. Next, the

themes are presented, which includes illustrative quotes from the study participants. A discussion then ensues in which each theme is examined against aspects of the extant literature. The practical implications of each theme are also considered, as well as suggested areas for future research, and potential limitations of this study.

Positionality Statement

Rowe (2014) broadly defined positionality as “the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study — the community, the organization, or the participant group” (p. 1). Foote and Bartell (2011) explained why this is important in qualitative research: “The positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes” (p. 46). Therefore, providing a statement of researcher positionality upfront assists readers with assessing the value of a study (Holmes, 2020).

I believe the most pertinent aspects of my positionality in this study are my experience as a police officer and long-term regular meditation practitioner. More specifically, I possess over 30 years of experience as police officer in Canada. During this time, I served with three different police agencies, in numerous assignments, from the rank of police recruit to police chief.

I also have several decades of experience as a regular meditation practitioner who has utilized a wide variety of formal and informal practices. From this, I believe that maintaining a regular, long-term, practice of meditation was highly beneficial to my career as police officer. Specifically, due to the enhanced awareness and attention that comes from engaging in these practices, I feel meditation positively influenced my job performance, workplace relationships, and well-being (Sylven, 2021).

Taken together, my policing and meditation background, combined with my examination of the academic literature on both subjects, informed the research decisions and interpretations I made throughout this study. Although I openly acknowledge my personal experiences with the effectiveness of regular meditation practice for police leadership, the quest to identify and interpret the experiences of others was always the central purpose of this study.

Study Definitions

Mindfulness training and meditation practice have been foundational to many spiritual traditions for thousands of years, however interest in the secular use of mindfulness for the workplace has grown exponentially in the past three decades (Bartlett et al., 2019; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2019; Eby et al., 2019; Good et al., 2016). With this growth, researchers have identified the importance of definitional clarity in mindfulness studies (Shabaz & Parker, 2021; van Dam et al., 2018). Accordingly, the following definitions of mindfulness, meditation, contemplative practice, and regular meditation practice were used in this study.

Mindfulness

For this study, mindfulness was defined as a state of consciousness characterized by “an enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). It is understood that everyone possesses a basic ability to be mindful, and that mindfulness as a temporary mental state, and an enduring dispositional trait, can be strengthened by regularly engaging in mindfulness training such as meditation and other related contemplative practices (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017).

Meditation

From the multiple definitions of meditation, Walsh and Shapiro’s (2006) definition was selected for this study. They proposed meditation is “a family of self-regulation practices that

focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control and thereby foster general mental well-being and development and/or specific capacities such as calm, clarity, and concentration” (pp. 228–229).

Contemplative Practice

Contemplative practice is often characterized more broadly than meditation practice. In this study, we drew upon Edwards et al.’s (2017) understanding of contemplative practice as “any activity undertaken regularly with the intention of quieting the mind and developing deep concentration, calm, and awareness of the present moment” (p. 1).

Regular Meditation Practice

With respect to what constitutes regular meditation practice in this study, the definition from a previous phenomenological study exploring the influence of meditation on the leadership development of managers was adopted (Frizzel et al., 2016). They defined regular meditation practice as training at least three times per week, for at least three months. For the purposes of this article, mindfulness training, mindfulness practice, and meditation are used interchangeably.

Selected Empirical Research on Mindfulness and Meditation for Policing

Research into the health and wellness outcomes of mindfulness for police employees has developed significantly in the past five years (Fleischman et al., 2022; Stevenson, 2022; Withrow, 2022). Initially, pilot and feasibility studies were conducted which saw police participate in mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) training programs. These studies reported reduced aggression, burnout, and sleep disturbance in these police officers, as well as increased dispositional trait mindfulness, resilience, and emotional regulation (Bergman et al., 2016; Christopher et al., 2016; Eddy et al., 2021; Kaplan et al., 2017).

More recently, international research has reported positive outcomes from randomized control trial (RCT) studies of mindfulness-based training programs for police employees. In Brazil, Trombka et al. (2021) examined the outcomes of a mindfulness-based health promotion (MBHP) training program for active Brazilian police officers ($n = 170$). They reported greater improvements in quality of life, and reduced depression and anxiety symptoms in post intervention and six-month follow-up measurements of MBHP participants, when compared to the waitlist control group.

Similar findings have recently been reported in the United Kingdom. Fitzhugh et al. (2023) compared the well-being outcomes of police professionals who used the online MBIs *Headspace* and *Mindfit-Cop* against those of a waitlist control group. Measures related to well-being, life satisfaction, resilience, and performance showed greater improvement over 24 weeks for the MBI participants over the waitlisted group.

In the United States, Grupe et al. (2021a) conducted a RCT involving police officers ($n = 114$) from three Midwestern U.S. agencies that examined changes in psychological and biological measures after delivering an MBI program. Combining measurements from psychometric instruments and distress-related biomarkers, they reported improved mental health and sleep quality, as well as a lower cortisol awakening response among the MBI participants than in the waitlisted control group.

In a chapter written by Grupe et al. (2021b) for the book *Interventions, Training, and Technologies for Improved Police Well-Being and Performance*, the authors suggested factors for individuals to consider when introducing mindfulness training to police organizations. Based on lessons learned from their five-years of experience researching and teaching mindfulness to a Midwestern U.S. police agency, I believe their suggestions most applicable to this study

included: finding internal mindfulness champions; introducing a variety of voluntary mindfulness practices; taking a trauma-informed approach; and making a long-term commitment to the overall wellness of police employees.

In addition to the health and well-being focus of mindfulness training for police employees, Grupe et al. (2021b) also posited about the potential long-term benefits of mindfulness practice as a catalyst for police reform. They explained:

This is the true potential of mindfulness for policing in the 21st century: not only that it can potentially lower stress and make individual police officers more resilient to trauma, but that it can contribute to widespread cultural changes in the policing institution that are needed to reimagine the profession, save lives, and bring greater justice to communities that have historically been marginalized by the criminal justice system. (p. 127)

Grupe et al. (2021b) also added, “To realize this ambitious and transformative vision, it is critical to think deeply and carefully about how these practices are adapted, introduced, and delivered to police officers” (p. 128).

Each of the above cited researchers have articulated their study limitations and suggestions for future research—most notably the need for longitudinal measures to determine the sustained effectiveness of their interventions. Notwithstanding, it is clear that evidence exists to consider the introduction of mindfulness practice into Canadian policing to enhance the wellness of employees, and potentially become a catalyst for police reform. What is needed is more empirical research, such as this study, that explores how best to do so.

Method

As the purpose of this study was an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of a small number of individuals, an exploratory qualitative methodology appeared to be a good fit (Yin,

2016; Klenke, 2019). More specifically, semi-structured interviewing with individual participants, followed by focus group discussions were the two methods used to generate data with the study participants. In this section, details of this approach are outlined, including a description of the participant invitation, selection, and data collection processes. The rationale for using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022b), and the steps undertaken to develop the primary themes, are also presented.

Participant Invitation and Selection

On March 18, 2021, following written institutional approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board and the police service's Human Resources Research Board, an "Invitation to Participate" was emailed to all 605 Commissioned Officers in this large Canadian police service. Commissioned Officers in police organizations are those police officers who hold managerial positions and have obtained senior officer status, typically from the rank of Inspector to Chief or Commissioner (Statistics Canada, 2023). In the invitation, recipients were asked to contact me if they were a Commissioned Officer who regularly practiced meditation and wished to confidentially discuss their meditation and leadership practices in semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Additional information in the invitation included details on ethical approval, informed consent, and the contact information for the researcher. A total of 13 individuals contacted me and offered to participate. Eleven respondents met the study inclusion criteria of holding the rank of a Commissioned Officer and having a regular meditation practice of at least three times a week for at least three months (Frizzel et al., 2016; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006) and were invited to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews occurred between April 9, 2021, and June 24, 2021. They were conducted in English and recorded on the Microsoft Teams™ video conferencing platform. Each interview was conversational in tone and often became deeply personal. Although I had prepared and circulated a list of draft questions in advance, each discussion was guided by what I thought was most important to each participant.

The interviews varied in length from 2 hours and 11 minutes to 3 hours and 9 minutes, with a mean of 2 hours and 22 minutes. Following the interviews, participants were invited to join follow-up online focus groups where I solicited their perceptions of the study's preliminary findings. A total of three focus groups, which included eight of the eleven participants, were hosted and recorded on Microsoft Teams™ between June 15, 2022, and July 5, 2022.

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim from the audio recording. I then simultaneously reviewed each recording and transcript, denaturalizing the data for clarity and brevity (Oliver et al., 2005). The completed final transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo™ Qualitative Data Analysis Software. Data analysis was then guided by the specific version of thematic analysis described below.

Data Analysis Process

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Clarke and Braun (2017) broadly defined thematic analysis (TA) as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data” (p. 297). They explained, “The aim of TA is not simply to summarize the data content, but to identify, and interpret key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question” (p. 297). Similarly, Clarke and Braun emphasized capturing explicit and implicit

meanings of the data, and the consistent use of reflexive processes such as critical reflection, memoing, and journaling for all research decisions. Each of these reflexive processes were used in this study.

The specific version of TA followed in this study was Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as envisioned by Braun and Clarke (2019) and Braun et al. (2022a). RTA has been described as a purely qualitative approach that avoids any positivistic notions of data interpretation (Byrne, 2021). A hallmark of this analytical approach is the premise that a researcher's subjectivity is a valuable analytic resource to be highlighted, not diminished (Gough & Madill, 2012). Further, RTA is an interpretive method of analysis that triangulates the dataset, previous literature, and the resources and experiences of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Considering my positionality in relation to the research topic, as described earlier, I believed RTA was well suited to this study.

Braun et al. (2022b) identified six phases of analysis in RTA process, which I adhered to closely in this study. These phases were: familiarisation with the entire data set (the semi-structured interviews and focus groups transcripts); coding the smallest units of data related to the research question; initial theme generation by clustering codes into meaningful patterns; reviewing and developing these initial themes; further refining, defining, and naming the themes; and producing the research report. In this study, all of these phases were conducted and recorded on NVivo™ Qualitative Data Analysis Software.

Results

In total, I developed six themes that best answered the research question, "What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?" I view these themes as three barriers (invincibility and stigma;

overwork and overstress; and checkbox cynicism) and three bridges (credible champions; the whole person perspective; and the philosophy of servant leadership). Each theme is described below and supported by selected quotes from study participants.

The Barrier of Invincibility and Stigma

The first theme addresses a potential barrier to the introduction of mindfulness practice. It was based on the shared perception that invincibility and mental toughness are highly valued in this police organization, while mental health struggles are often ignored or stigmatized. As one participant explained:

I look at the people I'm working with right now, and there's a lot of work to do. That's why it's very important, crucial, for us to get meditation, gently, into policing so it becomes an activity that is normal ... because the way we are built as police officers, we need to show our suffering as a badge of honour. This needs to change.

The perception of valuing invincibility and ignoring mental health concerns was illustrated in a troubling story shared by another participant:

I had a group of people working for me and we investigated a horrendous fatal motor vehicle accident where three kids were killed. I ended up at the scene and it was probably the worst I'd ever seen. I remember coming back to the office, and at that time I was reporting to an Inspector, and I said, "I want to do a critical stress debrief with a mental health professional with these people." And he said, "No! Don't give them a fucking excuse to get off work!" I did it anyway.

This first theme was also developed from the words of a participant who argued, "As adrenaline junkies and macho people, meditation is a big barrier because the mindfulness side of things contradicts all of that and takes people to a place that they don't want to be." An additional

participant described how valuing invincibility can prevent police officers from recognizing they need help:

It's really hard to acknowledge we are injured somewhere when we're not even willing to accept that place exists. It's almost like being injured on a third arm that you don't accept you have. Until people actually see their mind is clearly attached to their body, presence, and well-being, it will be extremely difficult to have a conversation about this.

As another participant shared, the stigma associated with mental health challenges even exists at high levels of formal leadership in the organization, which could be a barrier to the introduction of mindfulness practice:

I think this really is tied into mental health stigma. I had an officer who I worked with, she's my boss actually, and we had conversations about her mental health, and she said, "If I open that door, I'm not sure I can close it."

The same participant added that admitting struggles with mental health is particularly difficult in specialized sections such as organized crime, national security, or homicide investigation units. He explained, "People are fearful of two things. One, if I open this floodgate I'm going to be destroyed. Two, I'm going to be delegitimized and people aren't going to trust me anymore and I'm going to be ruined."

The Barrier of Overworked and Overstressed

The second theme was that all employees are overworked, overstressed, and near the breaking point in this organization. As one participant explained:

I think there's a risk of introducing meditation in a way where the police officers are saying, "You say you care about my wellness, yet you're working me like a dog. You

only want me to be well so I can keep working, because right now I'm so close to breaking." These are the conversations that are happening right now.

Similarly, another individual commented on the heavy workload in their workplace as a barrier to meditation practice, in a very literal sense:

At least here, in terms of the challenges of introducing meditation, one is like, "How am I going to meditate when I'm rushing from call to call to call?" ... I just wonder about how to really introduce meditation when we're in such a state.

This perception was also reflected in another participant's description of their workplace, and the levels of stress leave they are experiencing:

Our unit has been significantly impacted with stress leave in the last four months. Yes, all these things that we're talking about, people would likely have benefited from these practices, but telling them when they're already stressed, "Go do this!" No. They need to hear it in other ways.

Another participant identified the lack of trust between ranks in the organization, brought on by the heavy workload, as a barrier to introducing mindfulness practice. They explained, "My concern is that there seems to be some trust elements that are challenging right now organizationally. Introducing meditation may have to overcome resistance at that level."

Finally, on a more personal level, one participant described how their own relationship with meditation, stress, and a heavy workload is a barrier to their own practice:

Right now, with the work volume and the pressures and stress going on, if I put it in my head that I am meditating to be a better cop, I would be less likely to do it. Because right now it's taking me everything to hold it together, so I am more inclined to do this practice for myself. Not for work.

The Barrier of Checkbox Cynicism

A final barrier to successfully introducing mindfulness practice was based on perceptions of the organization's previous track record with introducing new initiatives. More specifically, some participants worried the organization would create a mandatory online, one-time, mindfulness training course. This course would be viewed cynically as just another checkbox that every employee must tick for the employer's benefit. As one participant bluntly explained:

If this turns into some mandatory online course, people will just go straight to the exam and bullshit their way through it. There are so many courses like this in the police service where it's like "Oh checklist, checklist, okay yah, did it, did it, check, check." But this is so important, and I want people to be serious about it. If they're not going to be serious, don't bother. Don't bother.

Another participant bluntly shared his concern with the consequences of a checkbox approach to introducing meditation:

Well, the way this police service will probably implement meditation is they'll send you an email and say "Hey, go do this course" and no one's going to read the stupid fucking thing. So, one of my main issues is that if we put something in place, it cannot be just a ticking the box kind of thing.

Another participant simply said, "I just don't think this should be an online course. I think it should be led by a practitioner or someone who really knows what meditation is and someone who understands the police world too", while another participant explained:

If we're going to be serious about this, it can't be seen as a fad, we don't want meditation and mindfulness to be the new Keto diet. Meaning that everybody's heard about it, everybody's tried it for about two weeks, and then they move on.

The Bridge of Credible Champions

The remaining three themes can be viewed as bridges to the successful introduction of mindfulness practice. The first bridge leveraged the value placed on professional and personal credibility within policing. As one participant explained:

To me, people who champion meditation and mindfulness need to be true legitimate champions that are viewed as people who are credible in their positions. I think that would show people you can still succeed in high-performance, high-level things, and still be part of this.

One participant who spoke of the importance of using credible mindfulness champions, also stressed the need for the organization to defer to these experienced practitioners:

You need people who are high performers to say, "Yah I'm not just talking about this, I do this. I'm here, and I'm in this position." So, it has to be led by the right people, people who have experience. And sometimes the organization just goes and picks anyone. They need to listen to the people who have the experience to advise them.

Another participant stressed the need for credible champions to be located at the highest levels of the organization. They argued, "To be successful, I am totally convinced we would need support from the very top of this organization. These people send the message that they are trying to put people first. Well, this is totally in line with that."

With respect to introducing meditation training to male police employees, one participant stressed the particular importance of credible champions:

I know one person who's amazing because he's a male and he would be able to influence other men. Because I'm sorry to say this, but in policing, they are the ones who need to change. The women don't need to, the men really need to change.

This perception was shared by another participant who viewed his role as a male police leader and meditation practitioner as important for other male officers who are considering meditation:

Would I say that I'm a role model? Absolutely not. However, I do recognize that in my current role, I am looked at often. So, I can normalize things like going to yoga and meditating, which I know a lot of a lot of people, men in particular, are going to be like "Ah, that's all that spiritual mumbo jumbo stuff."

Finally, the importance of credible mindfulness champions who are male, and also white, was brought up by a focus group participant who is neither of these. She explained:

I'm going to try to, I want to be diplomatically correct, ok? I'm quite happy to see two white males here, and I'll tell you why. Because of my background, people are like, "You? You are a police officer?" So, although sad to say, I think it gives a lot of credibility to meditation to have many white male practitioners. Because unfortunately, when you look at things, they are regarded as the people that have the solutions.

The Bridge of the Whole Person Perspective

A second thematic bridge is to understand, and plainly communicate, the positive benefits of meditation practice to the whole person, not just as an employee. As one participant explained:

As police officers, we're often very analytical. The whole, "What's in it for me?" and "How will I personally benefit from it?" and "If I'm going to invest time in this, what is it going to give me?" I think that that has to be made clear. It can't be just theoretical.

A similar perception was shared by another participant who argued for communicating about mindfulness practice clearly and pragmatically:

Make the links for people, like actually spell it out for them. Even to the community, “We are giving our people these tools to help them do things. And these things relate to a better home life, and by relating to a better home life, they also relate to a better workplace.”

The same participant suggested simply telling others, “What we want to do is better tool and equip our employees to survive the harshness of police work, but also the pressures of everyday life, both within their personal life and everything else.”

Finally, another participant suggested explaining to police officers, “This is a technical skill that can be honed, that can be developed and has broad effect on every aspect of your life.”, while another suggested communicating to external stakeholders, “We know this is going to help our people be better. They’re going to be healthier. They’re going to do better in retirement. They’re going to do better at dealing with the stressors that we expect them to handle.”

The Bridge of the Philosophy of Servant Leadership

A final theme developed from the words of the study participants, is to introduce mindfulness training as a component of a larger leadership framework. In particular, the framework of servant leadership, with its focus on leaders first striving to meet the highest order needs of their followers (Greenleaf, 1997/2002), was specifically mentioned by three study participants, including one who stated, “Servant leadership is a great way to explain our ideals in police leadership.”

Within the context of introducing mindfulness, aligning with the philosophy of servant leadership means focusing on the needs of employees. More specifically, training in a wide variety of meditation techniques would be given, and numerous opportunities would be offered to learn them. As one participant explained:

I think a broad range of meditation options that are going to be as individualized as the people that are participating is necessary. That would be my suggestion. The approach needs to be as broad as possible, to be inclusive as we can.

Similarly, another participant explained, “We do have a responsibility to provide different opportunities for people. I think given how much variation there is within humanity, I’m not a believer that there is one single practice that will meet all needs.”

Another way introducing mindfulness practice that would be aligned with the ethos of servant leadership is to ensure police officers are provided with mindfulness training throughout their careers. As several participants suggested, this would be accomplished by introducing mindfulness practice early, and often. As one participant explained, “So I don’t really know about introducing it, other than introducing it repeatedly throughout their career and maybe you introduce it at times when it sticks.”

Similarly, several participants reflected on introducing mindfulness practice during basic police training. As one participant explained:

The police academy is a great place to start. We’ve always tried to give tools and set a certain mindset to assist our police officers and prepare them for the harshness that is going to come. The challenge of introducing it at the police academy is that people don’t yet really understand just how hard it’s going to be out there in the field. But this is something that should still be taught at the police academy.

Another participant felt strongly that mindfulness practices must be introduced at the police academy in order to meet the needs of new police officers:

We would say to people at the police academy, “Look you’re going to go through this career, and we have a goal that you find some skills and practices that help you solve the

problems of dealing with trauma, frustration, lack of control, those types of things on the job. So, these are some practices that have worked through the millennium.”

Referring again to meeting the needs of police officers later in their careers, several participants argued that mindfulness training and practice should be adaptable. As one participant explained:

The analogy I draw is this. Did I become a proficient shooter at the police academy? Yes. Did I become a really good shooter later when I was on the Emergency Response Team? Yes. So, there has to be a process where you're introduced to it, but then there's continuous learning throughout your career where it's buttressed or backstopped or adjusted based on change in practices and changes in learning needs.

Comparably, another participant drew a parallel between the personality testing that occurs throughout a police officer's career and mindfulness training:

You hear about personality tests? All kinds of personality tests that we do over the years. They put them in the supervisor course, in the manager course, the informant course, so they repeat stuff. So, why not have mindfulness as a subject that could be integrated in a lot of programs that we do? That could really fit.

Finally, introducing mindfulness practice to police employees within the larger philosophy of servant leadership was summed up best by one participant who explained:

If you have a healthier police officer, they're able to meet the needs of others rather than being in a position where they're suffering themselves. I think that's probably the biggest part of how I look at mindfulness for policing.

Discussion

Results from this study include six themes viewed as barriers and bridges in response to the research question, “What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?” In this section, these barrier themes (invincibility and stigma; overworked and overstressed; and checkbox cynicism) and bridge themes (credible champions; the whole person perspective; and the philosophy of servant leadership) are discussed in relation to what is currently known in the literature on these topics. The practical implications of the themes for police organizations are also included, as well as suggested areas for future research, and potential limitations of this study.

The Barrier of Invincibility and Stigma

The theme of invincibility and stigma appeared often in the perceptions of participants. Working as a public safety professional for any length of time, participants argued, requires effective resilience, coping, and sensemaking strategies. I was not surprised then, to hear aspects of the theme of invincibility repeatedly when listening to the stories of the study participants. The mindset that I will not waiver, stumble, or fail as a police officer, regardless of the situation, is instilled from the earliest moments of basic training, reinforced organizationally by co-workers and supervisors, and celebrated by the community in public award ceremonies (British Columbia Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2023).

I believe this mindset of invincibility helps officers engage with, and make sense of, the trauma and danger inherent in their work. However, as study participants shared, there are many occasions when a mindset of invincibility it is not effective. Anecdotally, the annual published report of one Canadian province identified cases of police officer misconduct and abuse of authority where a mindset of invincibility may have been present (British Columbia Office of the

Police Complaint Commissioner, 2022). However, much more empirical evidence is needed to establish with any certainty that an untempered mindset of invincibility leads to police officer misconduct.

What appears more certain in this theme, however, is that a culture of invincibility can reduce the expression of vulnerability and self-reflection. As reported by study participants, the absence of vulnerability in policing leads to stigma when seeking mental health support or engaging in activities that support mental well-being. This finding supports recent research by Grupe (2023) who surveyed 257 police employees from a mid-western U.S. city. He concluded that perceived stigma reduced help-seeking intentions due to “Police employees’ beliefs about what others might think if they sought out mental health support” (p. S36). This could be a significant occupational barrier for police officers who may want to openly participate in mindfulness practice to enhance their mental wellness.

The Barrier of Overworked and Overstressed

The second theme of Canadian police officers and public safety professionals feeling overworked and overstressed is well documented in the literature (Carleton et al., 2018; Ricciardelli et al., 2018; Ricciardelli & Johnston, 2022). What was unexpected was participants’ concerns that mindfulness training is only being introduced so overloaded police employees will be able to work even harder. Reflecting on this perspective further, I speculate that what is underneath this theme is police officers’ general feelings of being unsupported by their supervisors and leaders. This is consistent with the findings of other Canadian researchers, who have reported that many public safety personnel feel a lack of organizational support (Carleton et al., 2020).

A clear example of the lack of organizational support in this study was found in the previous theme, when a participant requested a mental health debriefing session after a fatal collision involving several children. Instead, the Inspector appeared more concerned with having enough “bodies” to work. The outcome of not feeling supported, I speculate, is resentment for being treated as just a “body” who is a means to an end, rather than a whole person dealing with significant overload and stress. Although this claim requires more empirical research to substantiate, it is logical that resentment could make some police officers suspicious or resistant to the idea of participating in mindfulness training. This is a practical implication that police leaders should consider.

The Barrier of Checkbox Cynicism

The third theme, checkbox cynicism, points to another barrier that could impede the introduction of mindfulness training. I argue that this theme is rooted in the power structure of police organizations. More specifically, police agencies in Canada are paramilitary organizations with clearly defined ranks and lines of authority. Even further, an officer’s power and authority within a police organization is always prominently displayed through the insignia found on their uniform.

Although rank structure and insignia help to quickly identify key decision makers during high-risk incidents, it can also enhance deference to authority in more complex, non-urgent situations (Herrington & Colvin, 2016). These non-urgent situations include the successful development and introduction of new organizational programs or initiatives. Hearing the comments of the study participants, they clearly forewarned that introducing a new initiative, particularly mindfulness, will not be successful if it is implemented as a top-down initiative, or is seen as another publicized metric to advance the organization’s reputation in the community.

Similarly, Brendel (2017) in his exploration of the introduction of mindfulness training to organizations cautioned, “Mindfulness is rooted in a philosophy and psychology of self-efficacy and proactive self-care. Imposing it on people in a top-down manner degrades the practice, and the people who might benefit from using it on their own volition” (p. 114). Further, Grupe et al. (2021b), expressed that introducing mindfulness training as a one-time course or program would result in perceptions that it was yet another example of their organization “checking off a box to meet public demands” (p. 130). The theme of checkbox cynicism appears to support the findings in both these studies and is a challenge to the introduction of mindfulness practice that police organizations should address.

The Bridge of Credible Champions

The importance of credible champions was also identified by Grupe et al. (2021b) in their experience introducing mindfulness to a U.S. police agency. They wrote, “It is critical to identify internal champions in a variety of roles, whose support and enthusiasm for this training is necessary for long term success” (p. 141). They also acknowledged the special role of credible police leaders, writing “We have been fortunate to identify several champions for this work in department leadership whose authority and decision-making ability is needed to support future training opportunities and integrate this training into the fabric of the department” (pp. 141-142). On this specific point, I believe the results from this study extend the findings of Grupe et al. from the U.S. policing context, into the Canadian policing context.

Further, one participant’s suggestion that identifying credible meditation champions who are white males was interesting. In the colonially rooted, hyper-masculine profession of policing, the current critical discourse identifies white male toxic hegemony as one of the most significant drivers of police organizational dysfunction (Pamminger, 2022; Roach, 2022; Silden, 2023).

Intentionally showcasing white male police leaders who practice meditation as exemplars for organizational change might seem paradoxical.

However, as the dominant demographic in Canadian policing (Statistics Canada, 2022), it is logical this group could hold significant influence over the successful introduction of any change or new program. Therefore, intentionally seeking out and highlighting individuals from the dominant demographic as credible champions could be important for the successful introduction of mindfulness training. Nevertheless, additional empirical research is needed to understand how, and exactly which, credible champions should be fostered.

The Bridge of the Whole Person Perspective

This theme can be viewed as a bridge to the barrier of overworked and overstressed. More specifically, the concern that mindfulness training is only being introduced to work employees harder may be assuaged by embracing the whole person perspective. The importance of the whole person perspective is found in other literature on police leadership. For example, Smith (2009) conducted research with training officers from U.K. police agencies and concluded that, “the negative aspects of operational police culture may stem from officers not being recognized and valued as whole people” (p. 7). Similarly, Smith et al. (2014) concluded that a wholistic approach that includes the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components of an individual should be considered when developing police officer resilience programs.

Study participants also shared that the benefits of mindfulness practice extend beyond the employee to the whole person. This idea is also reported in the literature (Bergman et al., 2016; Christopher et al., 2016; Eddy et al., 2021; Fitzhugh et al. (2023); Grupe et al. (2021a); Kaplan et al., 2017; Trombka et al. (2021). Similarly, Grupe et al. (2021b) wrote that police officers need to feel there is a long-term, meaningful commitment being made by their organization to their full

well-being. They reported police officers want evidence that “the organization is not just saying, “we care about wellness” because this is a trendy topic but rather because they are genuinely committed to supporting their employees in a meaningful way” (p. 130).

Results from this study also suggest the whole person perspective must be communicated clearly and openly to police officers. This notion was similarly reported by Hased (2021) during the introduction of mindfulness training to medical students in Australia. He argued, “The language needs to be simple, direct, and avoid terms from spiritual traditions that will likely be foreign to students, culturally inappropriate and treated with suspicion.” (p. 1915). Although referencing medical students, similar concerns are resonant for police agencies considering a whole person approach to implementing mindfulness training programs.

The Theme of the Philosophy of Servant Leadership

Of the three thematic bridges, I believe this final theme could be the most challenging and rewarding to implement. As Herrington and Colvin (2016) explained, police organizations often follow “Traditional bureaucratic, hierarchical, and leader-centric conceptualizations of leadership” (p. 8). This way of leading emphasises the needs of police leaders over employees. Inverting this power paradigm by adopting the philosophy of servant leadership would mean emphasizing the needs of the employees, particularly within the context of the timing, frequency, and variety of mindfulness training being offered.

Although the philosophy of servant leadership was identified favourably by several study participants, it is new to most Canadian police employees, and is only beginning to gain interest (Patterson 2019; Sylven & Crippen, 2018; Taylor et al., 2022). The need to introduce a new leadership philosophy in conjunction with a new wellness program has been recommended previously in Canada. In particular, Cohen et al. (2019), while exploring the culture of police

officer wellness, identified several promising programs. However, they cautioned, “Programs alone will not change the culture. The real change comes from a new approach to leadership and to developing positive, supportive relationships across the organization” (p. 225).

I believe the philosophy of servant leadership is one promising approach to leadership that could support the introduction of mindfulness. Further, results from research outside of policing has indicated that the practice of mindfulness will develop servant leadership behaviours. For example, Reb et al. (2014) in their studies of mindfulness for leaders argued:

Being fully present in an interaction with a subordinate may enable a supervisor to better recognize the needs of the other person, such as what kind of support that person requires. In this way, mindfulness may allow supervisors to engage in more effective leadership behaviours toward their subordinates. (p. 38).

Similarly, Verdorfer (2016) argued that mindfulness training can assist in the development of servant leadership behaviours, while more recently, Urrila (2022a), in her qualitative study of leaders ($n = 62$) who participated in mindfulness training, also reported servant leadership behaviours were developed through mindfulness training. She explained, “Leader mindfulness training and practice supported leaders in becoming more other-oriented as it tapped into genuine feeling of wanting to support their followers, instead of supporting followers because it was within their job description” (p. 229).

Finally, when considering the outcome of introducing mindfulness practice to police organizations, Grupe et al. (2021b) argued that the benefits go well beyond individual officers and fosters, “an organizational culture that is kinder, wiser, and more compassionate, with the ultimate goal of greater justice and well-being for all who come into contact with the system” (p.

143). In other words, introducing mindfulness training correctly has the potential to become a catalyst for police reform.

Similarly, Robert Greenleaf (1972/2012), in his description of identifying servant leadership in action wrote:

The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (p. 27)

Each of these authors, although writing almost 50 years apart, paint a picture of a more just and equitable future for policing, and the community, through the practice of servant leadership and mindfulness. Although more empirical evidence is required to establish a connection between servant leadership and mindfulness in Canadian policing, it is a promising idea worthy of further investigation.

Study Limitations and Suggested Future Research

There are several limitations to this qualitative study that could be overcome with additional research. First, the participants in this study were a small cohort ($n = 11$) of Commissioned Officers from one large Canadian police organization who self-identified as regular meditation practitioners (Frizzel et al., 2016; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Although this police organization is engaged in a wide variety of policing duties at all levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal) and has a distinct history and culture, it is only one police organization of many in Canada. Therefore, conducting a similar qualitative study with police leaders from other large Canadian police organizations is recommended, as it may result in the

development of similar or different thematic barriers and bridges for police organizations to consider.

Second, the interviews and focus groups conducted in this study were exploratory in nature and focused on answering the research question, “What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large agency?” As such, discussions were strategic in nature, and did not delve into administrative details such as the human and financial resource implications of introducing mindfulness practice. In the fiscally challenging environment of Canadian public safety, this would be an important focus for future study, as Fitzhugh et al. (2023) have demonstrated in their recent study of the cost-effectiveness of implementing mindfulness practice to police forces in England and Wales.

Lastly, although several study participants, and some police mindfulness researchers (Grupe et al., 2021b), have suggested police mindfulness practice could become a catalyst for future police reform, much more empirical research is necessary to firmly establish this connection. Although it may be intuitive that developing police leaders to “embody leadership presence by cultivating focus, clarity, creativity, and compassion in the service of others” (Marturano, 2015, p. 11) may eventually create a tipping point in Canadian police culture, future research is needed that delves more deeply into how the outcomes of mindfulness practice might begin to reduce the deep-seated injustices present in the Canadian justice system.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset of this article, Canadian police organizations are under pressure to take immediate steps that enhance the health and wellness of their employees. Previous research has suggested meditation and mindfulness practice can contribute to the wellness of police employees and may even be a catalyst for police reform. Until this study, however, there had

been no known empirical exploration of what must be considered when introducing these practices into Canadian police organizations.

Through the interpretive analysis of the experiences and perceptions of 11 Commissioned Officers who regularly practice meditation, the six themes developed in this study have clearly identified the barriers and bridges to introducing mindfulness practice. In light of this evidence, it is hoped that Canadian police organizations will now feel more confident in taking steps to introduce these practices into their organizations and begin to create healthier workplaces and more safe and just communities.

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Chapter Five: Conclusion

This study sought to answer the research question “How might meditation and mindfulness practice support police leaders in Canada?” by examining the perceptions and experiences of police leaders who have regular meditation, mindfulness, and contemplative practices. As demonstrated in the previous three chapters, this primary research question was answered by exploring three research sub-questions:

1. What types of meditation and mindfulness practices are currently used by some Canadian commissioned police officers and why did they begin their practices?
2. How might the practice of meditation influence the practice of leadership for some Canadian commissioned police officers?
3. What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?

This concluding chapter synthesizes the results and conclusions from the three research papers by following an analytical process adapted from the writings of Borton (1970) and Rolfe (2014). This simple, sequence-based, framework involves asking the succinct questions, “What?”, “So What?”, and “Now What?” when engaging in inquiry. Originally developed by Borton as a theoretical model for designing educational curriculum, Rolfe argued for its use as a model of reflexive practice. He explained:

Borton’s *What, So What, Now What* sequence of reflective education also functions very well as a framework for reflective *practice*. In particular, it steers the practitioner through the process of analysing, evaluating, and synthesising information and facts (What?) into meaningful and organised knowledge (So What?) and subsequently from knowledge to knowledgeable doing or wise action (Now What?). (p. 489)

These three reflective questions will be explored below by linking the three research papers' conclusions with their potential theoretical and practical implications.

What?

This first reflective question was primarily answered in chapter two of this dissertation. In the research paper "Mindful of Authority: A snapshot of the meditation and contemplative practices of some Canadian commissioned police officers" the spotlight was focused on the research participants. In particular, what roles they were assigned within the organization, what they defined as meditation, what practices they were engaged in, and what reasons they gave for beginning their practices were explored in this first paper.

Using a qualitative content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), it was learned study participants came from a wide variety of assignments in this large Canadian police service. They included a mix of frontline operational uniformed officers, specialized non-uniformed investigators, and officers assigned to administrative support roles. It was also learned that among this cohort, what was understood as meditation practice was varied, and potentially more closely aligned with what might be defined as contemplative practice (Edwards et al., 2017).

What was consistent across all officers, however, was they all engaged in more than one type of meditation practice. This could be analogous to how some people engage in a variety of exercises, such as strength training, cardiovascular, and flexibility exercises to stay physically healthy. Further, some consistency was noted in the reasons these participants gave for beginning their practices of meditation. Although a small cohort ($n = 11$), and not generalizable beyond these participants, it was learned that most of these participants began their practices to assist in recovery from a psychological or physical injury.

The significance of this first research paper, and its contribution to answering the “What?” question is twofold. Theoretically, it is one of the first empirical studies to capture what meditation and mindfulness practices are currently used by some Canadian commissioned police officers. This provides a valuable “snapshot” for any future empirical research that examines changes in the use of these mental practices over time. This paper is also one of the first to explore why some Canadian commissioned police officers begin to meditate. Practically, this information could be useful for police organizations to understand if they intend to introduce mindfulness and meditation training programs into their agencies. However, a deeper exploration into the organizational factors that police agencies should consider occurred in the third research paper.

So What?

This second reflective question was answered in chapter three. In the paper “Mindful Police Leadership: How the practice of meditation and mindfulness influences the practice of leadership for some Canadian commissioned police officers,” the study’s focus shifted from simply understanding the meditation practices of the participants (“What?”) to understanding how their practices might influence their leadership (“So What?”).

As articulated in paper two, employing a reflective thematic analysis approach (Braun et al., 2022), data from the individual semi-structured interviews and online focus groups were developed into eight unique themes, broadly organized as perceived influence on job performance, relationships, and well-being. These themes included the perceived influence of meditation practice on enhanced calmness and self-control; better clarity and decision making; improved focus and efficiency; enhanced presence with others; improved conflict resolution

practices; greater compassion and empathy; reduced harmful stress; and enhanced resilience and work/life integration.

The significance of this second paper, and its contributions to answering the “So What?” reflexive question are also theoretical and practical. Theoretically, these results begin to extend the literature on mindful leadership from other workplace contexts into the realm of Canadian police leadership. Practically, when viewed alongside the current leadership challenges facing police organizations, the themes developed in this study indicate that meditation and mindfulness practice might benefit some police leaders as they address these daunting challenges.

Now What?

The final reflective question was primarily answered in the research paper, “Barriers and Bridges: Exploring the introduction of meditation and mindfulness practice into Canadian policing.” Having first identified various aspects of the participants’ meditation practices (“What?”) and then interpreting how these practices may influence their leadership practice (“So What?”), the study concluded with an exploration of the participants’ perceptions regarding next steps (“Now What?”). More specifically, the third paper collected and interpreted responses to the research question, “What organizational factors should be considered when introducing mindfulness practice into a large Canadian police agency?”

Using a reflective thematic analysis approach (Braun et al., 2022), six themes were developed in this paper. These were envisaged as potential barriers (invincibility and stigma; overworked and overstressed; and checkbox cynicism) and bridges (credible champions; the whole person perspective; and the philosophy of servant leadership) to the successful introduction of meditation and mindfulness practice.

The significance of this final paper, and its contribution to answering the “Now What?” reflexive question is also theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the results from paper three begin to extend the literature on introducing mindfulness practice from other workplace contexts into the realm of Canadian policing. Practically, the results of this paper also build on the first research paper by providing more in-depth factors for police organizations to consider if they choose to introduce mindfulness training and practice into their organizations.

Finally, the “Now What?” reflexive question can be used to guide suggestions for future research. Based on the main limitations of this study (i.e., a small number of participants ($n = 11$); police leaders from only one Canadian police organization; and only exploring the outcomes of meditation practice from the perspective of leaders), several avenues exist. For example, expanding the study to include other positional leaders would deepen the understanding of how meditation may influence the practice of leadership at different ranks. Similarly, including participants from other Canadian police agencies may result in different themes in response to the research questions. Future research that examines the perceptions of peers, followers, supervisors, and community members who regularly engage with police leaders who practice meditation and mindfulness is also necessary. Doing so is an important step on the long journey to understanding if mindfulness could become a catalyst for police reform.

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