



Case Study

THE OFF-LOAD ROOM

Higher-education environment

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Note on anonymity

The organisations involved in these case studies are described by industry rather than by name. This is intentional and respects client confidentiality. If readers require further verification or context, they are welcome to contact me directly, and I will facilitate a connection with the relevant client where appropriate.

Operating context

This organization operates in a higher education setting with staff across academic, administrative, and service roles. These roles are characterized by sustained cognitive demand, emotional labor, and continuous interpersonal responsibility. Structural features of higher education—resource constraints, cyclical workload intensification, student-facing accountability, and administrative complexity—create conditions in which internal strain is both persistent and frequently normalized.

In such environments, strain is often internalized rather than externally expressed, particularly among middle-level staff and male employees, where cultural and institutional norms may inhibit help-seeking behavior.

A single group intervention was delivered as a structured, non-clinical experience. Participants rated mental load and body tension before and after the session on a one-to-five Likert-type scale. Evaluation focused exclusively on pre-post changes in these self-reported variables.

What changed

Across 16 participants:

- **Average mental load decreased from 3.44 to 2.50**
- **Average body tension decreased from 3.25 to 2.13**

On a five-point scale, changes of about one whole point represent substantial proportional shifts. These results indicate a measurable reduction in self-reported internal strain immediately following the intervention.

Where the relief concentrates

- **63% reduced mental load by at least one point**
- **75% reduced body tension by at least one point**

More notably:

- **About 31% reduced mental load by two points or more**
- **About 25% reduced body tension by two points or more**

On a five-point scale, two-point shifts represent significant categorical changes, often corresponding to movement from high-strain classifications into moderate or low-strain ranges.

Although the cohort is small, this downward redistribution at the upper end of the strain distribution is theoretically significant in higher education contexts, where cumulative overload is associated with burnout, disengagement, and relational strain.

Stability as an outcome

No participant reported worsening in either mental load or body tension. In occupational settings characterized by chronic demand and limited recovery capacity, the absence of deterioration following an intervention is itself a meaningful outcome, indicating containment rather than escalation of internal strain.

Interpretation and theoretical alignment

This case makes no claims regarding changes in performance, mood, or behavior. It measures only self-reported mental load and body tension.

The relevance of these findings lies in their alignment with established theoretical models. Cognitive load theory associates elevated internal load with reduced working memory capacity and executive functioning. Embodied cognition frameworks conceptualize bodily states, including muscular tension, as integral components of cognitive processing rather than peripheral correlates.

The observed reductions, therefore, occur in internal variables that peer-reviewed literature associates with functional limitation under sustained demand. The intervention demonstrates measurable change in these variables without extending claims beyond what is empirically assessed.