

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Goldsmiths, University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 17, Business and Management Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming the practice of trainers, educators and organisations through the development of a novel workplace psychological skills training approach and associated psychometric instruments		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Frank Bond	Senior Lecturer; Professor of Psychology and Management	2002 – present
David Bunce	Senior Lecturer	1995 – 2005
Jo Lloyd	Lecturer; Senior Lecturer	2011 – present
Nigel Guenole	Lecturer; Senior Lecturer	2008 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Bond and colleagues' research has led to the development of a novel workplace psychological skills training approach, and associated psychometric instruments, which has contributed to a compelling evidence base on psychological intervention with employees. This, in turn, has transformed the practice of: (1) a global community of specialist workplace trainers; (2) educators of trainee psychologists on Higher Education (HE) courses; and (3) a Swedish not-for-profit organisation offering free to use self-development apps.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p><b>General context:</b> Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), a strand of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), was originally developed for use on a one-to-one basis to support individuals seeking help in relation to their experiences of psychological distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, psychosis etc.). ACT works by enhancing individuals' 'psychological flexibility', which is defined as the ability to act for what one values, even in the presence of difficult thoughts and emotions, which in turn, has been shown to enhance wellbeing and behavioural effectiveness outcomes across a variety of clinical and non-clinical contexts. The first book on ACT, published by the originator Hayes, was released in 1999 and a growing body of literature supported its efficacy as a therapeutic intervention technology. However, at this point, ACT had not been tested in the workplace, which was surprising because earlier forms of CBT had been adapted for workplace use and had been shown to be highly effective at enhancing employee wellbeing and performance. Furthermore, the construct of psychological flexibility (the proposed mechanism of change in ACT) was underdeveloped and the psychometric instruments designed to measure it were often not demonstrating the necessary qualities of sound measurement tools.</p>		
<p><b>Developing an ACT workplace intervention model:</b> In response to the first lacuna, Bond and Bunce initiated a programme of research that tested the efficacy of ACT as a workplace psychological skills training approach. Using brief exercises and techniques, a group-based format and a delivery schedule involving sequenced, three-hour training blocks, their randomised controlled trial (RCT) in 2000 tested the efficacy of an ACT intervention that was less focused on addressing psychological distress (i.e., life limiting mental health issues) and more focused on workplace wellbeing (i.e., training professionals to adopt more helpful mindsets for achieving their work goals). Working with staff within a highly competitive media organisation, Bond and Bunce's RCT demonstrated that a workplace ACT intervention <i>did</i> enhance these</p>		

employees' wellbeing and performance, which had not previously been demonstrated using an RCT [R1]. Their findings served as the 'proof of concept' for dozens of subsequent ACT workplace intervention studies [R6] and formed a compelling research base for practitioners and trainers who went on to apply their validated intervention in professional programmes around the world. Bond then authored a book chapter [R2] that described the intervention programme in detail and contributed to multiple training protocols and manuals that are now used in the workplace and other non-clinical contexts.

**Developing and measuring psychological flexibility.** Bond and Bunce's RCT was unique in demonstrating the role of psychological flexibility as the psychological process by which their ACT workplace intervention improved wellbeing and performance [R1]. However, at the time of publication, the concept of psychological flexibility was underdeveloped, and the psychometric instrument used to measure its improvement lacked the rigour to satisfyingly assess the construct and thus the robustness of its claim to be a key mechanism of change for ACT. To further develop the concept, Bond's work refocused psychological flexibility away from simply a willingness to experience difficult thoughts and emotions, to recognising this skill as being needed *to allow* a person to pursue their meaningful values and goals [R3]. It was this recognition, facilitated by the ACT workplace training model, that so readily enabled the application of ACT beyond the clinical consulting room and crucially, allowed other practitioners to tailor Bond and Bunce's intervention to their own work context. By identifying and leading the effort to solve the conceptual and psychometric shortfalls of the existing measure of psychological flexibility, Bond and colleagues went on to design multiple, well-validated psychometric instruments. Amongst these is the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II) [R4], which has been the most extensively utilised measure of psychological flexibility in clinical, community, and workplace settings since publication in 2011 (having been cited 3021 times). A version of this measure designed specifically for the workplace, the Work-related Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (WAAQ) [R5], is also widely utilised (cited 155 times since 2013). These well-validated instruments have allowed researchers to robustly define, assess, and enhance their ACT and CBT interventions, with the knowledge that no other psychological mechanism of change has greater empirical support [R3].

**Summary.** Bond's reputation as a pioneer in workplace psychological skills training interventions is demonstrated through the 963 citations of his original research paper [R1], and is consistently sustained in his continued research programme [R2-R6]. This work has also resulted in a new understanding of psychological flexibility and ways to measure it rigorously. These achievements have facilitated a suite of training techniques that extends ACT's effectiveness from clinical settings, by tailoring its exercises so they improve the psychological health *and* performance of people through workplace training.

### 3. References to the research

- R1. Bond, F., & Bunce, D. (2000). Mediators of change in emotion-focused and problem-focused worksite stress management interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(1), 156-163.
- R2. Bond, F. W., & Hayes, S. C. (2002). ACT at work. In F. W. Bond & W. Dryden (Eds.), *Handbook of brief Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* (pp. 117-140). Chichester, England: Wiley.
- R3. Hayes, S. C., Luoma, J. B., Bond, F. W., Masuda, A., & Lillis, J. (2006). Acceptance and commitment therapy: Model, processes and outcomes. *Behaviour research and therapy*, 44(1), 1-25.
- R4. Bond, F., Hayes, S., Baer, R., Carpenter, K., Guenole, N., & Orcutt, H. et al. (2011). Preliminary Psychometric Properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II: A Revised Measure of Psychological Inflexibility and Experiential Avoidance. *Behavior Therapy*, 42(4), 676-688.

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R5. Bond, F. W., Lloyd, J., & Guenole, N. (2013). The work-related acceptance and action questionnaire: Initial psychometric findings and their implications for measuring psychological flexibility in specific contexts. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 86(3), 331-347.

R6. Macías, J., Valero-Aguayo, L., Bond, F. W., & Blanca, M. J. (2019). The efficacy of functional-analytic psychotherapy and acceptance and commitment therapy (FACT) for public employees. *Psicothema*, 31(1), 24-29.

\*All outputs available on request.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Bond and colleagues' research programme has produced both the evidence-based training approach for improving employee psychological skills, and the psychometric instruments needed to demonstrate how those improvements occur [R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6]. This work has impacted the practice of: (1) a global community of specialist ACT trainers focussed on improving the lives of people at work; (2) educators of trainee psychologists on HE courses who offer specialist training on workplace wellbeing; and (3) a Swedish not-for-profit organisation offering free to use self-development apps to create positive change in the lives of individual users.

**Impact 1. A global community of specialist ACT trainers.** Evidence of Bond and colleagues' efficacious ACT interventions in workplace settings has influenced the demand for, and practices of, specialist trainers who can help employees to develop psychological skills for managing the increasing challenges and complexities of their workplace settings. Indeed, Professor Steve Hayes, creator of ACT and a world leader in psychological service delivery, states that "Bunce and Bond's 2000 research paper, Mediators of change in emotion-focused and problem-focused worksite stress management interventions...opened the door to a workplace training approach that has had a significant impact on the world of work." Hayes continues: "His [Bond's] openness to sharing and training helped lead to a world community of ACT trainers. This includes scores who work with employees to improve wellbeing and performance." Speaking specifically to impact over the REF period, Hayes states "The main ACT association has grown 36% to about 9,500 members; the list of recognized trainers is up over 50%; there are now chapters in 27 countries in addition to the US and the UK and nearly every one of these has someone doing ACT in the workplace. His [Bond's] work on stress in the workplace, on measures of psychological flexibility, and on the relation of psychological flexibility processes to worker effectiveness has given ACT developers and trainers a clear target and a focus they did not have before. Organizational consultants around the world have been influenced as a result." [S1].

The world community of ACT trainers discussed by Hayes, consists of approximately 100 accredited ACT trainers, located in 17 countries, and who are listed on the Association for Contextual Behavioural Science (ACBS) website (September 2020) [S2a], where Bond's research papers, training protocols and psychometric instruments are recommended reading and resources for members [S2b, S2c, S2d].

Drawing on Bond and colleagues' research, practitioners and accredited ACT trainers, like Dr Frederik Livheim, CEO [Livskompass](#) and Clinical Psychologist at The Karolinska Institute (KI) in Stockholm, Sweden have formed consultancy businesses that have impacted thousands of individuals over this REF period, August 2013-2020. Livheim states "My work...[has] been heavily informed by Professor Frank Bond's research in this field; and, in particular, his work on psychological flexibility, and how he has evolved it to inform the use of ACT in the workplace and for employees. Through his work, I believe that I have been able to help thousands of people." Livheim describes how Bond's research has informed both his development of treatment protocols and his professional training activities in his consultancy work, over the last 10 years. Regarding protocol development, Livheim states "I created a detailed treatment protocol...named "ACT - to promote mental health, resilience and productivity" that works well

for adults in their roles as employees and in their other life settings.” Livheim also notes how this protocol has been modified to benefit other recipients: “Given the success of this protocol... I led a team that adapted it to target troubled youth, ages 12-20 years, titled, “ACT – Living life full out.” Regarding training, Livheim continues that his initial protocol, in turn, has been used “for training more than 2,000 professionals in ACT, in a group format. They have then used this training in their own clinical work, as well as to train other professionals in ACT. In Sweden alone, our records, and ongoing collaborations, lead my team to estimate, with some level of precision, that somewhere between 300,000-600,000 people have been trained, using this group-based format.” [S3].

The wider adoption of Bond’s ACT workplace training methods is further evidenced in a sample of reviews for his practitioner-oriented books, including *The Mindful and Effective Employee: A Training Programme for Maximising Wellbeing and Effectiveness using ACT Therapy* (Flaxman, Bond, & Livheim, 2013) and *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Stress Reduction: Using ACT to Manage Stress, Build Resilience and Create the Life you Want* (Livheim, Bond, Elk, & Hedensjo, 2018). Posted after 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013, readers note: “So far I have used it with one company with very positive results. They looked up to Bond and Flaxman’s research which impressed them.” (Amazon, reviewed in the UK 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013); “This was a really amazing book to learn more about how ACT can help employees and organizations...or just how mindfulness practices can help a different population.” (Amazon, reviewed in the United States, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019). [S4a, S4b, S4c, S4d].

**Impact 2. Educators of trainee psychologists on HE courses.** Industry interest in Bond and colleagues’ ACT workplace training methods and psychometric instruments has led to this work impacting the practices of HE educators of trainee psychologists. For example, Dr Paul Flaxman, Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Reader in Organisational Psychology at City, University of London, states that “Since 2014, Bond’s research into ACT and psychological flexibility has directly informed my teaching on the MSc curriculum.” Flaxman goes on to give specific examples of how Bond and colleagues’ research papers are used in the curriculum of City’s MSc in Organisational Psychology, stating that in their module entitled Employee Well-Being “students complete an exercise that involves closely examining Bond’s research articles on the measurement of psychological flexibility, both in a general sense (Bond et al., 2011) and more specifically in relation to flexibility at work (Bond et al., 2013)” and “Bond’s co-authored article with Hayes and others (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, & Lillis, 2006) is considered a major ‘positioning’ paper when teaching about ACT and psychological flexibility. This paper is on our core reading list.” Flaxman indicates the reach of this work when stating that “Each year, we have around 45 MSc students who utilise these publications as part of their training” and concludes “In sum, I can confirm that Bond’s research explicitly informs the training I offer to trainee psychologists” [S5].

**Impact 3. A Swedish not-for-profit organisation offering free to use self-development apps.** Since 2018, Bond has worked with 29k, a not-for-profit organisation based in Stockholm, who provide free to use personal growth training programmes to create ‘meaningful change’ in the lives of individual users. 29k have adopted Bond and colleague’s research on ACT training and psychological flexibility to form the core structure of several cutting-edge wellbeing and self-development apps that are being created and implemented. Indeed, CEO and co-founder of 29k, Erik Fernholm, states his appreciation “of the role that Professor Frank Bond has had in informing our ‘group-based’ training apps, including ones that draw heavily on his research into psychological flexibility and ACT. Indeed, this work has contributed to at least three of 29k’s modules on topics such as stress reduction, Covid-19 recovery, and coping with distress.” Fernholm continues “Bond’s research has given us a new and fundamental way of measuring and conceptualising psychological improvements for our courses, such as on stress reduction. It also has informed us regarding a lot of content choices, UX-design, and how we produce our content. In short, working with Bond has significantly increased the scientific rigour and quality of our courses.” [S6].

As a result of Bond's contributions, Fernholm describes how 29k have been able to have important real-world impact. In one major project, 29k implemented a wellbeing intervention for the Swedish government to "counteract rising sickness rates and promote a sustainable working life for all government sectors" [S7]. Fernholm states that "we have together been able to help the Swedish government implement a scalable, technically novel solution at a moment in time when so many of their employees are suffering." He continues "10% of the governmental organizations in Sweden have now signed up to the stress reduction course since we launched it three months ago—which shows unprecedented uptake." Furthermore, Fernholm notes that benefits of the apps go beyond the Swedish state: "As of January 2021, 29k's app has had 60,000 downloads, and the feedback from the stress reduction courses has had very high ratings for "lovability" (> 4.5 on a 5-point scale), and users highly recommend the course to their peers. Perhaps most satisfyingly, these users also report significantly improved relationships with their colleagues and decreased stress levels." [S6].

User reviews of the 29k apps from across the globe indicate their usefulness for helping people to reduce stress and live more meaningful lives. For example, the app "Grow, with others" has user reviews totalling well over 1000. Users note: "This app will guide you within to shed negative self talk and assist in unburdening your soul from deep wounds and giving back to yourself in a way that will make you feel whole." (App Store, reviewed 8<sup>th</sup> February 2020); "This app is exactly what I needed. With the stressors in my life, big and small, I need tools to help me cope." (App Store, reviewed 15<sup>th</sup> February 2020) [S8].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Confirmation on Bond and colleague's impact on workplace training and the subsequent growth of a community of specialist ACT trainers in this domain: Testimonial, Professor Steven Hayes, creator of ACT and world leader in psychological service delivery, University of Nevada, Reno.

S2. Data from ACBS website indicating the number of accredited ACT trainers and inclusion of Bond's research papers, training protocols and psychometric instruments in recommended reading and resource lists. Retrieved 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

S3. Confirmation on Bond and colleague's impact on the work of an accredited ACT trainer and his consultancy business: Testimonial, Dr Frederik Livheim, CEO [Livskompass](#) and Clinical Psychologist.

S4. Example reviews of Bond's training manuals posted after 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013 on Amazon. Retrieved 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

S5. Confirmation on Bond and colleague's impact on the content of a training course offered to trainee psychologists on a Higher Education programme: Testimonial, Dr Paul Flaxman, Chartered Occupational Psychologist and Reader in Organisational Psychology, City, University of London.

S6. Confirmation on Bond and colleague's impact on 29k's development of free self-development apps: Testimonial, Erik Fernholm, CEO and co-founder of 29k.

S7. Evidence of impact of 29K's stress management training programme being taken up by the Swedish Government (Partsrödet), Page from 29K's website on Swedish Government project.

S8. Example reviews of 29k app posted after 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013 on Apple App Store.