Break it up: Exploring the Experiences of Implementers of the Wellbeing Break Initiative Pilot at the University of British Columbia

Cover Photo: UBC Wellbeing, https://wellbeing.ubc.ca/wellbeingbreak

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SEEDS Sustainability Program

Executive Summary

With the rise of sedentary behaviors across Canadian society, short wellbeing breaks are being implemented in work environments to help people recover cognitive capacity and reduce strain caused by continuous mental labour and uninterrupted sitting. In collaboration with the University of British Columbia's Office of Physical Activity, this research study analyzed the experiences of the people implementing wellbeing breaks into meetings and lectures across three university departments. Observations and interviews were conducted to gather data on the implementer's lived experience of the wellbeing break. Additionally, an autoethnographic exercise was conducted by the researchers to provide insight on the challenges of planning and running a break. Key themes were identified though several rounds of inductive and deductive coding of interview transcripts. Our findings inform potential refinement to UBCs Wellbeing Break Initiative Pilot that may aid further implementation across campus.

In general, the pilot was well-received by the implementers, who had integrated the break systematically into meetings, classes or as a stand-alone activity. Two main benefits of organizing systematic wellbeing breaks were identified. Firstly, the wellbeing breaks helped form more tight-knit communities through letting people interact in an informal and light-hearted setting. Secondly, the breaks helped create a more trusting and empathetic work environment where people were becoming more cognizant about people's wellbeing needs. The factors that influenced successful implementation were categorized across four dimensions. Some notable factors were support from deans, directors, faculty, and the implementers and participants themselves, tailoring the break to the audience and the context, streamlining implementation processes through e.g. expanding or refining supporting resources for both the implementers and participants, and having a supportive environment with strong wellbeing norms surrounding the scheme. Based on the implementer's experiences, we distilled a list of resource-specific and general implementation recommendations:

Resource Specific Recommendations:
- Create a **shared database** where implementers can share resources and discuss or share their experiences with certain wellbeing break exercises
- Provide implementers with an **expanded list of possible break options**, including suggestions on the contexts in which these breaks are most useful or effective.
- Consider providing implementers with **instructional videos** that outline how a particular break looks like in a classroom or meeting setting. This has already been done for physical activity breaks but could also be expanded to other forms of breaks too.
- Create a set of **accessible resources for participants** that outlines the benefits of wellbeing breaks, and which also includes instructions so that participants can continue to benefit from the breaks in their own time.

General Implementation Recommendations:
- Clearly **define the intention of the break** (intended outcomes) before starting out.
- Carefully choose the specific wellbeing break based on the group size and the familiarity of the audience.
- Consider focusing on breaks with a more **social/learning-based focus** as implementers regarded these as most enjoyable and beneficial for the participants.
- Make sure that future pilots are **well-timed** and aligned with lower-stress periods of the semester where students and staff have spare mental capacity.

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1. Introduction

In Canada's 'always-on' culture, lifestyles are dominated by screen-based 9-5 schedules and 'sofa-based' recreation. In turn, a widespread issue is the perpetuation and exacerbation of sedentary behavior in people's lives (Bauman et al., 2018). Sedentary behaviour is any awake behaviour utilizing less than 1.5 metabolic equivalents (MET) of energy expenditure; one MET being defined as your metabolic baseline or the energy you use when you are resting or sitting still (Lynch et al., 2022). Researchers have identified a clear negative correlation between sedentary behaviors and indicators for physical and mental wellbeing, including increased cardiometabolic risks and perceived quality of life (Parry and Straker, 2013; Gibson et al., 2017). These tendencies are clearly observable at UBC, with recent data showing that 85% of UBC students fall short of the sedentary behavior recommendations while 47% are considered to have low mental wellbeing (CCWS, 2021). Taking steps to counteract sedentary behaviors in human lifestyles remains crucial in the pursuit of improved societal wellbeing.

A range of studies provide definitive evidence on how taking small breaks from work improves physical (depending on the type of break) and mental indicators for wellbeing, providing subjects with cycles of recovery to offset the strain caused by mental labour and excessive and uninterrupted sitting (Lynch et al., 2022; Albulescu et al., 2022). In general, existing research on wellbeing breaks (WBB) adopts the 'break-taker' as its main unit of analysis. This includes establishing clear relationships between break-taking and physical-socio-psychological indicators, often in the context of optimizing 'break-taking' through manipulating variables such as break duration and/or mode of activity (Lynch et al., 2022; Lyuby et al, 2022). Other studies shift the focus onto the barriers that prevent individuals from taking breaks in a work/study environment, with findings ranging from workplace culture to little appreciation of perceived benefits (Hargreaves et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2017). However, little attention has been devoted to exploring the experiences and

perspectives of those implementing WBBs. A paradigmatic example is the experience of university employees who are integrating these breaks into lectures, meetings, workshops, or gatherings that last longer than 60 minutes in an attempt to improve learning uptake, concentration and the general wellbeing of attendees (UBC Wellbeing, n.d.). Leveraging the experiences of WBB implementers will lead to a better understanding of the factors that facilitate or inhibit successful implementation of these schemes. With the interest in WBBs increasing, such inquiries are needed to understand in what capacity WBBs are successful and how they can be encouraged, implemented, and embraced. This is an inquiry that this research study will undertake.

In collaboration with The Physical Activity Office at UBC, we evaluated their newly implemented Wellbeing Break Initiative pilot (WBBIP), a commitment aimed at providing a wellbeing break every 60-minutes in seated meetings, classes, workshops, or gatherings (UBC, 2024). Breaks could include anything from a guided movement break, an opportunity for social connection, or a mindful moment. Three UBC groups implemented the pilot including one UBC Okanagan (UBC-O) department, one UBC Vancouver department and a UBC Vancouver teaching hospital department. Through employing a set of qualitative methods, we aimed to answer the following questions: *How did implementers of UBCs Wellbeing Break Initiative experience the process? What were the reported/experienced benefits? What factors served as barriers or facilitators for successful implementation?* Through our analysis, we aim to provide insight into potential refinements that may aid the initiative's long-term ability to facilitate wellbeing across the UBC campus.

2. Research Methodology and Methods

2.1.   Theoretical Framework

As mentioned, this study works in collaboration, and in partnership, with community partners from the University of British Columbia's Office of Physical Activity and SEEDS as part of the requirements for the RES 505: Qualitative Methods course at UBC. The idea is to engage in processes of co-learning and conduct research that benefits the community directly through applying the Community-Based Action Research (CBAR) framework (Wallerstein, 2006). Within our CBAR approach, we applied a phenomenological methodology and integrated the socioecological framework into our data collection and analysis. A phenomenological approach allowed us to explore the lived experiences of the staff and faculty who implemented the WBBIP and explore, describe, and analyze their meanings as it pertains to the implementation process (Marshall & Rossman, 2015, pg. 56). Capturing rich descriptions of the implementation and the settings in which they occur (Groenewald, 2004) allowed us to better understand the experiences of the implementers along with barriers and facilitators to successful implementation processes.

The socio-ecological framework was redefined by McLeroy et al. (1988) from an ecological systems theory originally suggested by Broffenbrenner (1977) to a framework to promote health-related behavior change (Scarneo et al., 2019). It is a multi-level theoretical framework used to understand the influence and interplay that different dimensional factors have on human behavior and health (Scarneo et al., 2019). Although the levels of influence leave some room for interpretation, they generally span an individual, a social, an organizational and an environmental dimension (Smith et al., 2016). The framework is avidly used within health sciences and has previously been applied to studies on occupational physical activity to understand the factors that influence sedentary behaviors (Smith et al., 2016). For this research study, we are applying the framework in a slightly different capacity, focusing on how the different dimensions affect the successful uptake of the wellbeing break, through

the eyes of the implementer (Figure 1). The framework also helped in the development of our
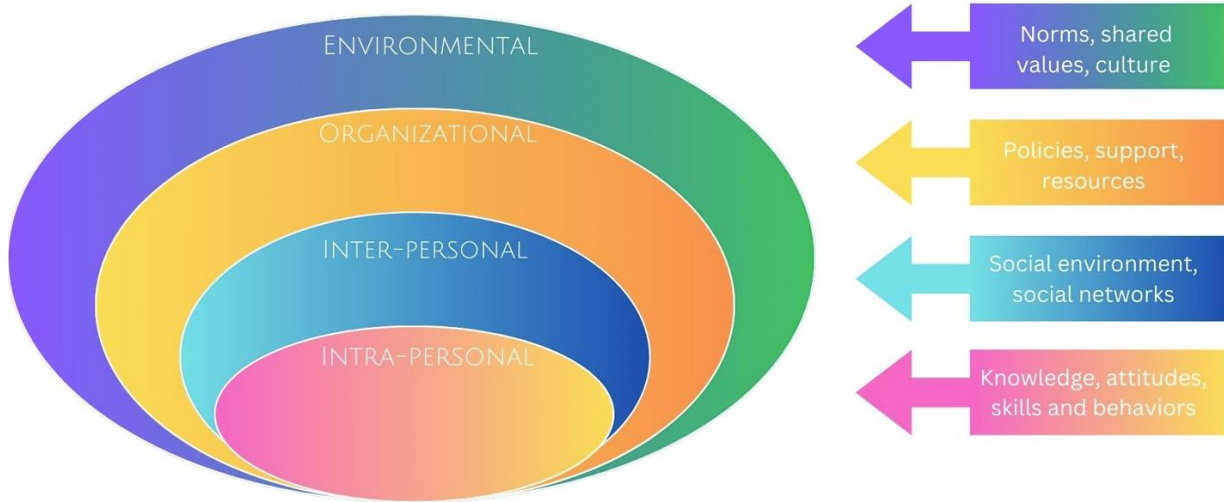
interview guide (See Appendix 1).

Figure 1: The socio-ecological framework typology. Adapted from Scarneo et al., 2019

2.2.   Data Collection

Our community partner provided us with contact information that we used to recruit interested

participants who are implementing the WBBIP for interviews. Qualitative data was gathered on; the

use of the implementation tools; support and resources needed; which activities are being chosen and

why; adherence to the initiative, wellbeing benefits, barriers and facilitators encountered in the

implementation process, and overall experiences of the pilot program.

We conducted two observation sessions: one with the faculty and staff of the UBC department

and one with the UBC hospital department. This enabled us to observe how the WBBIP is conducted

by implementers and how it is received by participants. Additionally, we undertook an

autoethnographic exercise where we (the research team) planned and executed a WBB in our

Qualitative Research class. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six implementers, all over

Zoom. An online format was chosen over an in-person format as it enabled a *consistent* data gathering

process given that some implementers are located outside of Vancouver. Conversations were recorded

and transcribed through Zoom. All transcripts were saved on encrypted laptops and each transcript

had all identifiable information redacted. The RES 505 course received Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) approval from UBC under ethics ID: **H23-02311** .

The transcribed data was analyzed through the use of both inductive and deductive thematic analysis, guided by the socioecological framework. Deductive themes included intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, and environmental factors and are based on the typology defined by the socioecological framework. Both researchers listened to the recordings to familiarize themselves with the data and compared each recording to the transcript, correcting the transcript and adding context where necessary. For example, one participant was very enthusiastic about continuing with the breaks but joked "Yeah yeah, no, I'm done" in the interview so (*joking*) was added to the end of the sentence in the transcript to indicate the context of the statement. Each corrected transcript was then sent back to the interviewees for member checking to ensure they accurately represented their intended meanings. Finally, each researcher coded every transcript for the interviews we had conducted. Identified codes were compared, contrasted, discussed and categorized into themes that appropriately represented the overall findings.

3. Results

Overall, six interviews were performed with both faculty and staff from the three departments: The interviewees included one faculty member from the UBC-O department; two staff at the UBC Vancouver department; and three staff from the UBC Vancouver hospital department.

Codes, categories, and themes were grouped based on the key aspects of the research question; implementer experiences; perceived benefits of the sessions from the perspective of the implementer; and barriers and facilitators to implementation that were either experienced first-hand by the implementers or that they assumed *could* impact implementation. The key findings are summarized in the tables and visual summary below:

Table 1: Wellbeing break exercises

Type of break	Creative	Social	Physical	Meditative	Participant-led
Example	Origami Colouring/doodling	Check-ins Greetings Understanding and interpreting cues Easter-egg hunt	Move U crew	Meditation Breathing exercises	10 minutes of opportunity Free-time Nutrition break

Table 2: Benefits of wellbeing break

Physical Wellbeing	Mental Wellbeing	Relationship and Community Building
● Blood Flow ● Health of blood vessels	● Improved mental state (regain focus, reset/refresh) ● Improve productivity ● Improved mood ● Learn new skills	● Strengthen relationship with co-workers ● Meet and get to know new people ● Socialization ● Becoming more cognizant of other people's needs

Table 3: Barriers and facilitators to successful implementation of the wellbeing break

		Category	
		Facilitators	**Barriers**
Overarching Themes	**Intra-personal** *Knowledge, attitudes, mindset etc.*	● Implementer attitudes and knowledge (about wellbeing breaks) ● Participant attitudes and knowledge ● Spearheaders in positions of authority ● Faculty support ● Role modeling	● Assumptions about student wellbeing ● Coming up with ideas
	Interpersonal *Social dynamics,*	● Group dynamics (familiarity and size of group) ● Collaboration between implementers ● Spillover from eager participants	● Group dynamics (familiarity and size of group)
	Organizational *Community-level, policy*	● Consistent messaging ● Aligns with course topics ● Flexibility ● Low attendance ● Sharing experiences with other implementers ● Variation in the breaks ● Making it easy for people ● Length of break ● Timing of pilot ● Mandating	● Lack of time ● Workload ● Some meetings are too short ● Lack of faculty support for implementation of breaks into classes ● Meetings not mandated
	Environmental *Social and cultural norms*	● Creating culture of wellbeing	● Lack of faculty buy-in for implementation into classes
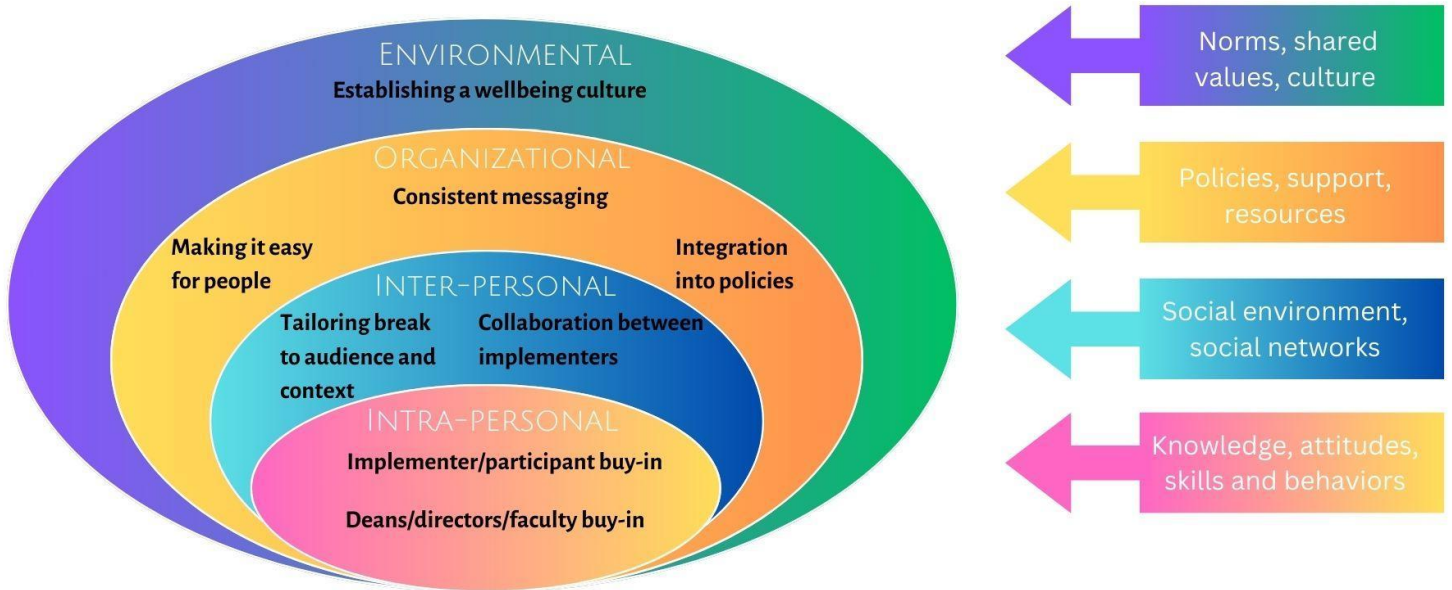
Figure 2. Visual Summary of facilitators to successful implementation of the wellbeing break

4. Discussion

4.1.   General Experiences and Break-Setup

Overall, every implementer reported a positive experience with the WBBIP process, expressing considerable enthusiasm towards the possible popularization and diffusion of the program. In general, they were happy with the level of support and resources they were provided with by pilot developers, although several smaller refinements for improved uptake were suggested (discussed later). The settings in which the breaks were implemented ranged from staff meetings, faculty/student meetings, to classes/seminars. The frequency with which the implementers performed the breaks ranged from once a month to once per day. The large difference in break frequency was largely a

product of whether the breaks were applied in classes or not as for some implementers the breaks were only applied in staff meetings, which only takes place every other week. Although the break is primarily recommended for any meeting or class that exceeds one hour, some breaks were implemented in a slightly different capacity. For the implementers who worked at the hospital, the break took shape more as a periodic social gathering rather than as an interlude to a meeting or class. These breaks would then be significantly longer than the intended length of five minutes, lasting up to 30 minutes.

4.1.1. Break Formats

Through our interviews and observations, we gained insight into the different types of breaks that were implemented. In general, the breaks spanned several categories, ranging from creative, social, physical, meditative or participant-led. Implementers generally experimented with a wide range of activities during the pilot.

> *What we want to do right now is get as much exposure as possible to the activities that we can [use] (…) and then we'll continue along the veins that work best.*
>
> *– Implementer 4, UBC staff*

Adopting a trial and error-based approach to break-testing led to implementer insights with regards to the break's different levels of effectiveness. The implementers pointed out that breaks focusing on peer socialization and/or learning a new skill were particularly effective.

> *I would say the biggest thing is giving people the opportunity to socialize. So as I said we can often be very isolated [at work]. (…) So if you can bring people away from that you can see how their mood changes from the beginning to the end of the event.*
>
> *– Implementer 5, hospital staff*
>
> *So, I think a lot of people like to learn something new. That was the case for [the] origami [activity] because it's something that they learn that's interesting and isn't just about whatever I would say.*
>
> *– Implementer 6, hospital staff*

While the most effective format will depend on the context and group dynamics (discussed in detail later), implementers across the board underlined the efficacy of breaks that were more interactive in nature. This is an important insight when designing, planning and optimizing the breaks.

4.2.   Effects of the Wellbeing Break

A range of positive effects of the wellbeing breaks from the perspective of the implementers were identified on both a participant and an implementer level. Since the physical and mental benefits of wellbeing breaks are already well-documented in the literature, this section focuses specifically on the social and communal impacts. Nonetheless, the implementers generally experienced (through observation and interaction with the participants) that the break helped improve the general mood, made participants feel less stressed and more relaxed, and improved focus and productivity (after the break). These findings are all consistent with the literature. However, this section groups effects into two larger themes: Community Building and Fostering Compassion and Empathy.

4.2.1. Community Building

During the interviews, the implementers highlighted how the wellbeing breaks helped form more tight-knit communities through bringing together staff in an interactive, informal and social setting. By observing a wellbeing break undertaken during a staff meeting, this is something we got to witness first-hand:

> *On a wet and grey Tuesday morning, staff members were listening carefully and patiently as their monthly staff meeting jumped from one agenda item to another. Although people were engaging with the material, asking clarifying comments and follow-up questions, the atmosphere in the room remained somewhat heavy, perhaps shaped by the somewhat repetitive, although necessary, nature of administrative meetings. As one agenda item came to an end, a woman of average height, with brown hair and wearing a purple jumper took the stage. She outlined and explained the break to the people in the room, a non-verbal communication exercise where participants had to draw a picture on a piece of paper based on what the women drew in the air with her finger. As soon as the activity started, the change to the mood and overall atmosphere was palpable. The somewhat heavy atmosphere was quickly replaced with smiling, laughing, and chattering between participants, as they focused on converting the women's gesticulation into shapes and forms on their paper. A quick glance over at the implementer showed her in all smiles, entertaining the crowd and making faces as she carefully traced the unknown motive in the air with her fingertip. As the activity came to an end, the final image was revealed: A landscape with a house, a meadow, and a sun in the upper-right corner. The participants started comparing their drawings and more laughter ensued as some people had gotten it completely wrong. Five minutes was all it took to turn the mood in the room on its head.*

> *– SS's Observation of a WBB session*

The above vignette displays both the individual and the social effects that WBBs exhibit. It takes people out of the repetitiveness of the workday, providing them with a short moment of relief where they are allowed to focus on something completely different. Throughout a workday there may be limited time to interact with colleagues in non-work-related manners, due to the hectic nature of the 9-5 lifestyle. In this case, the break enabled people to participate in a fun activity and share a laugh with each other. Importantly, it is likely these more informal and light-hearted forms of interaction that facilitate stronger and more supportive communities. Smiling, laughing, and joking around brings people together and helps form closer and deeper interpersonal relationships between colleagues. As one participant said:

> *People who normally don't talk with each other in the workplace, were suddenly talking with each other and going, hey, (...) we like a lot of the same things and [then] connect on these things and they've continued those conversations since then.*

> *– Implementer 4, staff at UBC*

While the WBB helps to strengthen already existing social ties, another one of our observations showed that the break may also help form new social ties and relationships. At the hospital site, the break brought together people from the same department that rarely interact because of their different roles and jobs. Throughout the break, participants were exchanging names and getting to know members of their community that they had previously not interacted with.

4.2.2. Fostering Compassion and Empathy

Similarly, another important theme that was brought up by the implementers was how the WBB helped to create a more trusting and tight-knit environment where people were becoming more cognizant about people's wellbeing needs and generally helped foster more empathetic attitudes:

> *I noticed that it makes [the students] feel more comfortable to speak to me whether it's a health issue or whether it's a school issue or whatever. So I think that's a difference because then I know again that there's trust, there's care, there's authenticity, they feel connected.*

> *– Implementer 1, Faculty at UBC-O*

In this case, the break helped strengthen implementer-participant relationships through fostering a sense of trust. Additionally, being exposed to wellbeing breaks and engaging with the ideology that it represents seems to stimulate compassion as the parties involved become more emotionally aware:

> *It's forced me back into a place where I'm thinking about the needs of others more frequently. Especially in the lead up to these activities. So I go, okay, what would be impactful for everybody collectively as a team. And how do I be more cognizant of that going forward. And so that's kind of awakened that [thinking about other's needs] a little bit again in me personally.*
>
> *– Implementer 4, UBC staff*

Although these changes in attitudes focus on the implementer, one implementer noted that the parent of one of the participants had observed a difference in their behavior following participation in the wellbeing breaks. The implementer recounted a conversation with the parent saying:

> *(…) and she said, "You know I've noticed my daughter. She's been just. She was being nicer to her brother". And I'm going "Isn't that interesting?", because I'm going, you know,...we've been talking about grace and kindness in class,...and I'm just going, I'm wondering if that's because of this, right?...The thing is that it can't hurt. There's no way that it can hurt.*
>
> *- Implementer 1, faculty, UBC-O*

Hence, involvement with the breaks, both as an implementer and as a participant, could help strengthen certain attitudes that lead to more caring and supportive environments.

4.3. Factors Influencing Successful Implementation and Uptake

Based on the lived experiences of the implementers, certain factors were identified that either facilitates or hinders successful implementation and uptake of the wellbeing break pilot. In this section, these factors have been categorized based on our typology of the socio-ecological framework.

4.3.1. Theme 1: Intrapersonal Factors

4.3.1.1. Implementer/Participant Buy-In

One commonality between the implementers was that they were all personally interested in, and passionate about, wellbeing. Some of them had experience in the field and others had previous experience organizing similar schemes in the past.

> *I'm definitely an advocate for mental health and wellbeing and to have my employer support it so much is wonderful and I totally want to do what I can to support my workplace*
>
> *– Implementer 5, hospital staff*

Having this personal drive and understanding of the ideology behind the breaks means potential implementers are more likely to embrace the break. Additionally, it may also help in the planning and organization stage. As one implementer stated:

> *You know, some of the activities I've done before in the past so I know where the blind spots are. Like, [for the] first activity (connecting with your peers) we don't include (...) information that will cross people's boundaries and make people feel uncomfortable.*
>
> *– Implementer 4, hospital staff*

Possessing background knowledge lowers the threshold for implementation, but also ensures that breaks are implemented in an appropriate manner that maximizes the break's benefit. Although having knowledgeable and enthusiastic implementers is an advantage, it could, in some cases, be a disadvantage. Specifically, one implementer mentioned how people working in the health and wellness field could be *over-familiar* with wellbeing topics and so may assume that everyone else in their department are familiar too, and capable of managing these wellbeing activities in their own time. In turn, this could be a barrier for any systematic implementation.

In a similar manner, having receptive and enthusiastic participants is also key for successful uptake of the wellbeing break as it simplified the implementation process. One implementer noted:

> *They (participants) (...) were very approachable and open to implement the wellbeing break. And they were also like, "Oh, okay, what do we have this time? What kind of break did you come up [with] this time?" So I feel like they were quite engaged (...) and the implementation process was quite easy.*
>
> *– Implementer 3, UBC staff*

It should come as no surprise that having participants with the right frame of mind will increase uptake. On the contrary, if participants are uninformed and fail to see the point and/or benefit of these wellbeing breaks they are unlikely to be particularly effective. Facilitating and embedding an understanding of the benefits is hence incredibly important.

4.3.1.2.   Buy-In from Individuals in Positions of Authority

Implementers also discussed how successful uptake will depend on the extent to which certain individuals within the organization support the scheme. These included authority figures such as deans and directors, wellbeing ambassadors who serve as a helpful resource to implementers, and faculty as most of the sessions running over 60 minutes will be classes. As one participant noted:

> *Everything is appealing to the deans, directors and the faculty that we need to be role models for health and wellbeing.*
>
> *– Implementer 1, Faculty, UBC-O*

Ensuring that the benefit of this pilot is well understood by authority figures in the University remains crucial.

4.3.2. Theme 2: Interpersonal

4.3.2.1.   Tailoring Break to Audience and Context

Implementers alluded to the importance of tailoring the break based on group dynamics such as familiarity between participants and group size. For example, highly familiar, small groups may have been more receptive to certain activities:

> *We already have small meetings. So it's very private. It's very cozy. We know each other. So we can have those meditation/breathing exercises. I feel like if there would be different kinds of meetings where maybe you don't know the other person, I feel like the choice of the exercise would be different.*
>
> *– Implementer 3, UBC staff*

This experience was validated by our autoethnographic exercise where we took part in planning and executing a wellbeing break in order to better understand the underlying challenges. For the activity, we undertook a meditation session and experienced that the small class size and familiarity between participants made it a more comfortable exercise for the group to participate in. Understanding and reflecting on these group dynamics and consequently tailoring WBBs to accommodate the audience and the context of the break could therefore ensure more successful implementation.

4.3.2.2.   Collaboration Between Implementers

A minor point that was made by the implementers at hospital site was how collaboration in the planning stage was helpful to reduce the workload that organizing a break involves:

> *I think it's definitely easier (to implement breaks) when there's multiple people working to organize an event because like I said, my job is to [redacted] that sometimes I can't step away from work.*

> *– Implementer 6, hospital staff*

Although having a team of implementers, rather than an individual, may help successful implementation through reducing the burden of organization, this point must be seen somewhat in isolation. As mentioned, the hospital setting implemented the wellbeing break as a separate event rather than as an interlude to a meeting/class. In turn, these breaks were often longer and the activity more elaborate.

4.3.3. Theme 3: Organizational

4.3.3.1.   Making it Easy for People

In general, when talking about the policies, resources, and support needed for successful implementation, implementers largely converged around the need and importance of making it as easy as possible for implementers to plan and organize. Bypassing barriers such as time constraints were underlined as imperative. References were often made to the Move U crew which is a group of students that organize activity breaks in classes, and which can easily be booked through an online portal.

> *Anybody who works as staff in an academic unit will tell you that the more complicated it is and the more work is involved with it, the less likely faculty are to do it. So when I think about that sort of thing, I think stuff like the Move U crew. So if I can call the Move U crew and just say you come in and do it for me at this specific time, I don't have to think about it, somebody else will come in and do it for me and all I have to do is book it in there. Any way to simplify that or expand on that approach and that methodology in different venues. So maybe it's not just movement, maybe somebody comes in and does a different wellbeing activity too through student volunteers.*

> *– Implementer 4, UBC staff*

The Move U crew was largely portrayed as a great example of how easy implementing wellbeing breaks could be and the implementers found the variety of activities available and the flexibility in choice and style of activity to be helpful facilitators to implementation. The implementers discussed time constraints as a larger barrier to implementation, especially for faculty.

> *So, one thing that I'm aware of, though, is faculty instructors, and whether they're leading meetings or whatever are swamped right? They're so busy.*
>
> *– Implementer 1, Faculty, UBC-O*

> *Yes, there are staff meetings that go beyond an hour. Yes, there are other incidental sort of meetings that go beyond (...) but by and large, they're going to be classes. So if you don't have faculty on board implementing using these sorts of things, then it's just not going to be successful.*
>
> *– Implementer 4, UBC staff*

Faculty have very little control over their workload and so the only way to facilitate uptake is to ensure that the process of implementation is as streamlined as possible. This could include ensuring wellbeing break training opportunities, and/or ensuring that the scheme is introduced during lower stress periods of the semester where faculty, staff, and students have more capacity.

> *One thing that we've heard in our unit specifically (...) is that students in our graduate programs feel like when Thrive month (UBC mental health scheme that takes place in November) they feel like it's a little bit of an insult to them. It's quite interesting actually, it's not something I would have ever imagined but it's sort of at a very grueling point of our program. And it's leading up to the final exams for the core course sequence.. And so, they feel like that touch point for wellbeing is actually kind of a backhanded insult because they're at their lowest at that time, so they don't have time to be thinking about wellbeing and trying to like practice you know mandated breaks and all this other sort of stuff. Whereas when we sort of share this information from the outset of the program in September when everybody's, you know, bright-eyed, ready to go, happy and before they're in the thick of it, the uptake was much more positive.*
>
> *– Implementer 4, UBC staff*

Additionally, implementers mentioned that having a database of resources outlining the instructions and benefits for the break activities may also be helpful for participants to give them a resource to refer back to. These resources and considerations could contribute to making it easier for both implementers and participants to implement and benefit from the breaks.

4.3.3.2.   *Consistent Messaging*

Implementers also discussed the importance of consistent messaging surrounding the

wellbeing breaks including repeatedly hearing about the importance of implementing the breaks in

order to reinforce the uptake:

> *I want to see these tools be shared or like 10 min snippets at new faculty orientation, you know, in center for teaching and learning workshops, at our [event] that is coming up right? So, in places like that, where people can go "Oh, okay, you know, I'm hearing that, I can do that". And then we know that there's the resources so they can check back on it…And if it's on departmental meetings, if it's on the faculty meetings which happen less, but the departmental meetings typically happen once a month…And so I can keep reminding; Do you know about these resources? How are you doing on wellbeing breaks? You know, what about doing this? Because that's the way that they'll continually hear that message...*
>
> *– Implementer 1, Faculty, UBC-O*

One implementer noted that integrating the wellbeing breaks into policy documents such as the

strategic plan and into UBC Senate policies also remain important for promoting the uptake and

implementation of the breaks.

4.3.4.   Theme 4: Environmental

4.3.4.1.   *Establishing a Wellbeing Culture*

On an environmental level, the implementers discussed the importance of creating a supportive

culture for wellbeing breaks:

> *But in order to have your, you know, mind or your focus on what you're doing, you have to have a certain wellness and clarity and, how can I say it…an environment in which that can happen.*
>
> *– Implementer 2, hospital staff*

It's important to note that creating a supportive environment with the right norms cannot be achieved

without influences from the other dimensions of the framework. Hence, establishing a wellbeing

culture becomes both a facilitator of successful implementation *and* a product of the intra- and inter-

personal and organizational factors. You need supportive attitudes from participants and implementers

and you need to create support and resources that reduces the 'burden of organization'.

> *So, with anything like this, I think, attitude and understanding of what these sorts of things represent as a whole is fundamental to them being successful. So, like, when I came into this unit [redacted], the attitude towards wellbeing was absent at best, in fact the sentiment was a*

little bit more deleterious. You got to suffer to do a master's or a PhD and if you're not suffering, you're not doing it right. So, this was predominantly the attitude at the outset, (…) and since then we've had like year over year policy development and changes that have brought us to a place where I would say that we are now as far as UBC campus goes broadly speaking, probably one of the more leading departments on the wellbeing front. And so, having that historical advantage going into these sorts of things is a big importance. It's a boon. And so, I would say with that in mind, developing the culture for this is probably the most important thing cause if I was to try to do this back in 2018 the uptake would have been exactly 0%.

– Implementer 4, UBC staff

Collectively working across levels of the Socioecological Framework to consistently normalize and support the implementation of wellbeing breaks can ensure the successful integration of the initiative on a broader scale across campus.

5. Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations to this study remain, mostly thanks to the tight time frame in which the study was conducted within given the RES 505 course requirements. This meant there was no time to consult the participants on the common themes we identified, and whether these themes aligned with their own lived experiences. Although this could have implications for the validity of the findings, the study participants *did* have the opportunity to review and approve their final interview transcripts. A second important limitation is that all the implementers that were interviewed went into the pilot with strong pro-wellbeing attitudes, and sometimes also previous knowledge with running these breaks. As identified in the discussion, these attitudes are likely to have made the implementation process easier and these participants may therefore have represented best case scenarios. In turn, it is possible that certain barriers to implementation have been missed as we have not heard from implementers who are not already informed and convinced about the benefits of wellbeing breaks. This potentially reduces the generalizability of our findings, and we suggest that future research should focus on understanding the viewpoints and experiences of implementers who are not already embedded into a wellbeing

culture. Researching the different effects and optimal use cases for different forms of breaks, would also be useful given how implementers found certain breaks (notably those focusing on peer socialization and learning a new skill) particularly effective.

6. Recommendations

Based on the above discussion of implementer experiences, including points made that were not included, we have formulated a set of concrete recommendations aimed at improving the wellbeing break initiative. We believe these refinements will improve the program's chances of successful uptake across the UBC campus. The recommendations have been grouped into two broader categories. The resource specific recommendations refer to refinements to the wellbeing break's support and resource package. The general implementation recommendations provide general tips and principles for the overall implementation process.

Resource specific recommendations

- Create a **shared database** where implementers can share resources, and discuss or post their experiences with certain wellbeing break exercises.

- Provide implementers with an **expanded list of possible break options**, including suggestions on the contexts in which these breaks are most useful or effective.

- Consider providing implementers with **instructional videos** that outlines how a particular break looks like in a classroom or meeting setting. This has already been done for physical activity breaks, but could be expanded to other forms of breaks too.

- Create a set of **accessible resources for participants** that outlines the benefits of wellbeing breaks, and which also includes instructions so that participants can continue to benefit from the breaks in their own time.

General implementation recommendations

- Clearly **define the intention of the break** (intended outcomes) before starting out.

- Carefully choose the specific wellbeing break based on the group size and the familiarity of the audience.

- Consider focusing on breaks with a more **social/learning-based focus** as implementers regarded these as most enjoyable and beneficial for the participants.

- Make sure that future pilots are **well-timed** and aligned with lower-stress periods of the semester where students and staff have spare mental capacity.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has investigated how implementers of UBC's Wellbeing Break Initiative Pilot experienced the process, what they reported as the benefits, and the factors that helped and hindered successful implementation. Through conducting a series of interviews, we were able to explore the lived experiences of the implementers. In general, the pilot was well-received by the implementers who were already highly knowledgeable about wellbeing matters and the importance and benefit of having wellbeing breaks. Through analyzing implementer experiences two main benefits of organizing systematic wellbeing breaks were identified. Firstly, the wellbeing breaks helped form more tight-knit communities through letting people interact in an informal and light/hearted setting. Secondly, the breaks helped create a more trusting and empathetic work environment where people were becoming more cognizant about people's wellbeing needs. The factors that influenced successful implementation were categorized according to the four dimensions of the socio-ecological framework and included implementer, participant and dean/director/faculty buy-in, tailoring the break to the audience and the context, making it easy for people (to implement) through expanding and refining the available resources, and having a supportive environment with strong wellbeing norms surrounding the scheme. Based on the experiences of the implementers we distilled a list of recommendations that can aid the

long-term success of the wellbeing break at UBC. In order to continue the evaluation of the wellbeing break pilot, future research could involve focusing more explicitly on implementers who possess less background knowledge and pro-wellbeing attitudes, as well as studying the relative effectiveness and optimum use-cases for different forms of wellbeing breaks.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction:

Hi, welcome, my name is _____, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed today.

Today, we are interested in learning more about your experiences implementing the Wellbeing Break Initiative pilot program. In particular, we are hoping to hear about the use of the implementation tools; any support and resources that may be needed; which activities are being chosen and why; adherence to the initiative, any wellbeing benefits or drawbacks, and overall experiences of the pilot program. We want to reiterate our role as independent researchers, we have not been affiliated with designing or implementing the Wellbeing Break program and so please feel free to speak honestly.

As a reminder, you have the right to not answer any of the questions and to end the interview at any time. Any identifying information about you will be removed from the transcript and will not be included in any of the final materials. Identifying information about your organization will be included in materials that are sent to the UBC Physical Activity Office to facilitate their follow up and support but will be removed from any wider publications.

With your consent, I would like to record this session through Zoom, do I have your consent to start the recording?

(Choose store to cloud/store locally)

Questions:

General. *This first question aims to better understand the general experience of implementing the Wellbeing Break and the settings where the Wellbeing Breaks are being implemented.*
1. Can you tell me about where you have implemented the Wellbeing Break and with who?
2. Can you walk me through what a typical implementation session of the Wellbeing Break looks like when you implement them?

Subject 1: Activities. *This set of questions aims to understand what kind of activities you chose for the wellbeing break and what influenced your choices.*
1. Which activity or activities have you used for the Wellbeing Break?
   a. *If not already covered:* Do you use the same activity for each break or do you use different activities for different breaks?

2. Are there any activities you use more than others? Can you tell me a bit about why?

Subject 2: Resources and implementation support. *This set of questions aims to understand which resources and implementation tools you have used, what the experience of using them was like for you, and any additional resources and supports you think would facilitate the implementation of Wellbeing Breaks.*
1. How useful have you found the implementation resources that you have been provided with?
    a. E.g. different break options (physical activity, mindful moment, guided/self-guided
2. Are there any additional resources or supports you would find helpful?

Subject 3: Effects of the break (benefits or detriments). *This set of questions aims to understand the impacts, if any, you noticed of the Wellbeing Breaks in yourself or your group.*
1. Did you notice any changes in yourself or your group after the implementation of the break? If so, what kind of changes did you notice?
    a. *Potential prompt:* Were there any noticeable benefits or detriments?
    b. What breaks worked the best
2. In your experience, how did the participants respond or react to the Wellbeing Break?

Subject 4: Adherence to the initiative. *This next set of questions aims to understand how easy or difficult you found it to implement the Wellbeing Break and any factors that might have facilitated or made it harder to implement the breaks.*
1. How often have you implemented the wellbeing break?
2. How did you find the process of implementing Wellbeing Breaks?
    a. *Could use as prompts if they need them:* Have you encountered any difficulties in the process of implementing Wellbeing Breaks? On the contrary, have you found anything makes it easier to implement the wellbeing break?
3. Are Wellbeing Breaks something you will continue with after the end of this Pilot?

Subject 5: Overall Experience
1. As an implementer, how would you describe your overall experience of implementing the Wellbeing Break?
2. Do you have any suggestions for the team on how to implement this program across campus?
3. Is there anything else we didn't discuss that you would like to share with me regarding the implementation of the Wellbeing Break Initiative?

Conclusion:
That is all the questions I have, thank you so much for your time in meeting with me today. Once I have transcribed this interview, I would like to send it back to you to check and make sure the information is correct, would that be alright? As a reminder, if you have any questions you can reach out to our research team through email and we would be happy to answer them.

Appendix for researchers:
Example prompts to use in the interview:

- Can you give me an example of _____? (something they talked about)
- I heard you say _____, can you tell me more about that?
- I want to make sure I'm understanding, it sounds like _____, is that accurate?

We may have covered this question in previous answers but is there anything you want to add or reiterate for this question? *Then give the next question*