Exploring the restorative benefits and outcomes of spiritual retreats

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**3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS & KEY FINDINGS**

**RQ1: Does a spiritual retreat have a measurable and durable impact on participants’ mental state?**

RMS: Relaxed Mental State Scale measures an individual’s level of relaxation as opposed to mental fatigue (6 items scored positively: feeling refreshed, calm, thoughtful, tranquil, alert, positive; and 3 items scored in reverse: worn out, passive, sleepy). Rating scale 1 = not at all, 7 = completely.

![RMS scores](chart.png)

Even though RMS scores decreased slightly after the retreat, they were still significantly higher than before the retreat.

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<th>Time 1</th>
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**RQ2: Do different types of retreats elicit different restorative outcomes?**

Reflective retreat attendees reported higher perceived benefits on all subscales: spiritual, social, personal growth, learning and restorative benefits.

**RQ3: How do participants perceive the unfolding of the restorative process during the retreat?**

Qualitative data provided support for Kaplan & Kaplan’s (1989) four-step process:

1. **Cleansing the mind:** The escape is a time for fresh perspectives, reorienting and reorganizing moving forward in a more positive state of mind.
2. **Recovery of directed attention:** There was a strong sense of reality without stress, and the focus was on being in the moment. It was a sense of being more forward moving because the past had been left behind.
3. **Reflecting on immediate problems:** Because there was a different situation to normal environments, the individual involved in the event was not the same.
4. **Reflecting on priorities and the future:** The retreat was a time for fresh perspectives, reorienting and reorganizing moving forward in a more positive state of mind.

**RQ4: What factors of spiritual retreats lead to immediate and enduring restorative outcomes?**

Being mentally away, participating in spiritual activities and not engaging with information technology were predictive of both immediate and enduring restorative outcomes. The strongest predictors of enduring restorative outcomes were personal growth from the teaching sessions.

![Restorative processes](process.png)

**RQ5: Does the effect of stress after retreat impact on the persistence of restorative outcomes?**

RMS scores two weeks later. But if you are highly stressed at work, the restorative benefits gained at retreat will decline more quickly.

- Yes!
- No!

**4. SO WHAT? MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

**Recommendations for retreat facilitators / owners:**

- **Retreat centre should be situated within a scenic, quiet, natural setting.**
- **Encourage attendees to disconnect from information technology and work responsibilities.**
- **Create opportunities for at least 3 hours of relaxation and reflection each day.**
- **Do not provide too much input / content that requires attendees’ focused attention.**
- **Offer retreats for like-minded attendees or those in similar professional roles.**
- **Promote the many benefits gained from a retreat experience (restorative, social, learning, spiritual and personal growth).**