

# Mindfulness for Coaches

AN EXPERIENTIAL GUIDE



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## 9 Mindfulness, leadership and organisation development

While this book is predominantly aimed at professional coaches, much of what is discussed here applies just as much to leaders. Mindfulness, or its absence, impacts on the way we relate to ourselves and others in any context and it is increasingly being thought of as a significant leadership competency.

The context in which leaders are called upon to operate today is hugely demanding. Political and economic instability, constant market disruption, climate change, ever more rapidly increasing globalisation, the proliferation of data and communications media and the sheer overwhelm of input – all of that before even considering the other more functional aspects of the leadership task.

Trying to navigate these contexts, leaders sometimes find themselves in circumstances that can be described as paradoxical,<sup>1</sup> sometimes called upon to institute strategies that can appear to be intrinsically conflicted. For example, in 2010 the CEO of Unilever, Paul Polman, launched the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan. The plan aimed at doubling the size of the business by 2020 while simultaneously improving the health and well-being of more than a billion people *and* cutting the company's environmental impact in half. Those aims seems to conflict with one another. Polman's intention might seem to be paradoxical. But he argues that over the longer term, investments that are socially and environmentally beneficial lead to greater profits, whereas a single focus on short-term profits can fuel decisions that harm society as well as the environment. That may seem persuasive to many readers, but Polman has faced continuous challenge in executing this apparently paradoxical plan. Its inherent uncertainty and ambiguity have caused senior team leaders to feel high levels of anxiety and to fight amongst themselves over resource allocation.<sup>2</sup>

As well as often needing to contend with paradox, leaders today are frequently embedded in an unprecedentedly diverse range of relational networks<sup>3</sup> – often spread over multiple locations and time zones. The capacity to communicate and to work well with diverse others has never been greater. Not only that, as organisations grow larger and change happens faster, leaders increasingly find themselves working within systems that are deeply and inherently complex rather than 'simply' complicated.<sup>4</sup>

Under such circumstances, leaders today are called on to develop the capacities for relating and working well with others and coping – indeed thriving – in situations where they lack the capacity to engineer or control outcomes. To do all of this, they need to be personally resilient, able to collaborate, and capable of navigating and making decisions in conditions of high complexity.

Mindfulness training, we have found, can really help. In fact, we'd say, it should be considered an essential element in any programme of leadership development.

To assess the value of mindfulness training in leadership development, in 2015/16 Michael, along with Megan Reitz and other colleagues at Ashridge Executive Education at Hult International Business School, undertook a research project looking into the effects of an eight-week Mindful Leader training programme conducted with senior business leaders.<sup>5</sup>

The project explored how mindfulness practice supports the development of key leadership capacities required for the 21st century. Specifically, the team set out to examine how eight weeks of mindfulness training, in a form not unlike that outlined in the first four chapters of this book, would impact leaders' capacities for collaboration, resilience and deciding in complexity. Crucially, whereas the Mindfulness for Coaches course focuses on the impact of mindfulness on the coaching context – as well as the coaches' life – the Mindful Leader programme focused on the context of leadership today. Michael brought an expertise in teaching mindfulness to senior executives to the programme, Megan brought her many years' experience of leadership development – as well her personal mindfulness practice.

A cohort of 57 senior leaders was recruited and divided into two groups: an experiment group and a control group. Both groups attended the eight-week Mindful Leader programme at Ashridge. Before the training began, both groups – all 57 participants – were measured using a range of psychometric and other tests. Then the experiment group was given the training. Once that had happened, both groups were measured again. The experiment group's results were now available to compare with the control group's results – before the control group received the training. That gave the researchers an insight into some of the measurable effects of the training.

By way of those measurements, participants undertook a customised Mindful Leader 360 – a diagnostic report that lets people compare their perception of themselves with that of their boss, their peers and people who report to them. In this case, the 360 focused on the leaders' apparent capacities for collaboration, resilience, care and concern for self and others, perspective taking and agility in complexity.

The participants also completed a set of psychometric measures designed to assess their empathic tendencies;<sup>6</sup> their levels of anxiety;<sup>7</sup> their personal resilience;<sup>8</sup> their working memory capacity;<sup>9</sup> and their overall mindfulness.<sup>10</sup>

Besides these 'quantitative' measures, the researchers gathered a large amount of 'qualitative' data. Whenever the course participants met in small

groups during the training, to discuss amongst themselves aspects of the course and their personal practice, they were given voice-recorders. The final small group conference calls were also recorded. In this way the researchers gathered 27 hours of data which were transcribed and then meticulously coded and analysed to get a sense of the participants' experiences of the course and of the outcomes they were finding in their own lives.

The training took place at Ashridge Business School and participants attended three half-days and a full-day session held at fortnightly intervals. They also took part in small-group conference-calls with one of the teachers at week eight.

Leaders typically come to a business school like Ashridge in search of more effective cognitive tools and skills. They are smart, high-achieving people who expect to be taught something, to grasp it intellectually, challenge it or accept it, and then – if they agree with it – quickly put it into practice. That works well with some of the tools and models they would typically learn at a business school. But mindfulness training isn't like that. It's not something you can simply hear, grasp and apply. It's a skill that needs to be cultivated over time. It takes persistent and patient training.

Several key challenges stood out for Michael and Megan as they tried to cajole the busy executives to confront, observe and befriend the contents of their own minds. In particular, they had to try to overcome some of the deeply ingrained myths and misunderstandings around mindfulness that pervade our culture today.

Identifying mindfulness with meditation – as many people do these days – several of the leaders came along expecting that by learning to meditate they would somehow be able to stop or empty their minds – at least for a time. But as mindfulness practitioners know, that's not likely to happen.

Very, very occasionally, unusually gifted novice meditators find they can still their minds to the point where thinking drops away for sustained periods while they're meditating. But that is very rare. More importantly, it is also not the intention of the practice. With mindfulness meditation, the intention is to help people to discover the nature of their minds and to see something of how their habitual mental processes shape their perceptions and their actions.

The aim of a mindfulness course isn't to completely silence the mind. Rather, it's intended to help people come into a warmer and more resourceful relationship with their own minds, with others and with the world around them. It aims to help them to develop greater choicefulness in how they respond to what they find.

It takes much patient repetition, deep enquiry and a constant inventiveness with metaphor to get these points across to time-poor, hard-pressed executives who constantly think they're failing because they find that their minds are so busy when they sit and meditate.

Mindfulness, as any attentive reader will know by now, isn't the same as meditation. It's a state of mind that meditation can help to cultivate. But that issue takes a while to settle on a course. It can take a while for participants to

experience mindfulness as a quality of awareness that can arise amid daily activity if they prepare the ground for it by meditating.

And of course, mindfulness isn't about getting skilled in following your breath. As Michael found himself repeating often in the class, that is an uninteresting skill. 'I went to a top-flight business school for 20 hours over 4 sessions and I learned how to follow my breath really closely . . .' In and of itself, that wouldn't be a particularly interesting outcome. But becoming better at managing your mind and your mental states, better at handling your personal and working relationships, and better able to make clear decisions in the turmoil of complexity – that's worth investing in.

Time and again – especially in the earlier part of the course – Michael and Megan found themselves having to gently shepherd the participants back to a kinder and more allowing attitude towards their own experience, as they judged themselves to be failing in their efforts to master the workings of their own minds.

The participants were asked to do 20 minutes of home practice for each day that the course ran and to log their practice daily. The researchers collected these practice logs and correlated the amount of time people spent practicing with the changes that showed up in the quantitative measures described above.

The research suggests that the programme was in fact effective in developing the leaders' capacities for resilience, collaboration and deciding in complexity. Crucially, the data shows that this effect was reliant on the extent of home practice undertaken. Simply attending the programme, not accounting for levels of home practice, significantly enhanced self-report assessments of resilience

– as measured by both the 360 and the Ashridge Resilience Questionnaire. It also improved the element in the overall mindfulness inventory that measured participants' ability to describe their internal experiences, as well as the total score on that inventory. Similarly, mindfulness training alone – again, without accounting for mindfulness practice – did not impact any of the measures of empathy.

However, when the researchers accounted for the level of formal meditation practice, the data told a different story.

The real benefits of the Mindful Leader programme depended on the amount of formal mindfulness practice that participants undertook over the eight-week period.

The more mindfulness practice an individual undertook, the greater the improvement in their scores on many of the measures including:

- resilience as measured by both the self-report 360 and the Ashridge Resilience Questionnaire
- collaboration as measured by the self-report 360
- agility in complexity as measured by the self-report 360
- all characteristics of mindfulness as measured by the mindfulness inventory; and

- the empathic tendencies of ‘fantasy’ (the ability to transpose oneself imaginatively into the feelings of others) and ‘perspective taking’ (the ability to adopt the psychological viewpoint of others). The more the leaders practiced, the more likely they were to experience a reduction in personal distress in the presence of another’s suffering, as measured by the empathy index used in the study.

Although mindfulness practice predicted changes to four of the five resilience scales used, it did *not* predict changes in empathic concern, as the researchers had expected. Nor were there significant impacts on others’ perceptions in the 360. Unexpectedly, neither mindfulness training nor practice impacted working memory, as measured by the OSPAN. Nor did they impact anxiety. There is much that can be said about these few unexpected outcomes, and they will be discussed at greater length in a paper that the team has yet to publish.

For now, though, we will focus on the positive outcomes that were discovered and, crucially, on the fact that those who reported that they undertook the assigned formal mindfulness practices for ten minutes or more per day, showed significant increases in some of the key measures in comparison to those who practiced less than ten minutes.

There is some benefit, it seems, in simply attending an eight-week Mindful Leader programme. It can, the data suggests, increase one’s self-perception of resilience. But once people practice for more than ten minutes a day several other desirable factors improve – and the more people practice, the more they improve.

The qualitative data supports this. Here, the most widely reported impact was also on personal resilience.

Participants frequently reported an increased capacity for self-awareness and self-management, especially around emotional regulation, perspective taking and the ability to ‘reframe’ potentially difficult or stressful situations both at home and at work.

They reported enhanced sleep, reduced stress levels and improved work-life balance, as well as increased confidence in the face of difficult situations.

They reported an increased ability to focus, to remain calm under pressure and an enhanced adaptability/agility through a decreased attachment to positions or views. All of that seemed to enable better decision making. ‘I find it easier to evaluate the different options more rationally and calmly’, one of the participants reported, ‘and I probably base fewer decisions on prejudice and prior experience.’

When it came to the impact on collaboration, participants frequently referred to increased empathy through a deeper appreciation of others’ state and position.

‘I tend to talk at a thousand miles an hour’, one of them said.

I have an agenda that is thirty points long, and I have been *exhausting* to be around when we’ve got a lot to do. And I’ve made a conscious effort

to slow down, and take the time to, not so much just focus on the task, but recognise there's a person in front of me, and they're having their own experience of this stuff.

When it comes to leading in conditions of complexity, participants described an increased ability to focus, to remain calm under pressure and an enhanced adaptability, or agility, through a decreased attachment to positions or views.

'It's helped me with clarity: I get rid of the other stuff in my mind that's going on or that's there and I can focus more and make better decisions.'

Some participants related their improved ability to deal with complex and dynamic circumstances to their enhanced resilience, which shows how these themes are intertwined.

Data from the 12 week follow up survey suggested that these impacts last. When asked the extent to which the programme had developed their capacity to some, a great or a very great extent, 93 per cent of participants recognised they had experienced impacts in relation to their resilience and 85 per cent spoke of impacts in terms of leading in complexity, and the same for collaboration.

Based on what they learned from exploring the qualitative data in depth, the research team formulated a theory of mindful leadership (see Figure 9.1).

This highlights three higher order 'meta-capacities' developed by participants through regular mindfulness practice:

- metacognition – the ability, at crucial times, to step out of the fast-flowing steam of their experience and come away from the 'automatic pilot' of familiar, habitual reactions
- curiosity – towards their own experience, others and the world around them including a movement *towards*, rather than away from difficulty
- allowing – the non-judgemental aspect of mindfulness. Allowing what is the case to be the case and meeting all experience with warmth and kindness

Between them these three capacities create space for mindful leaders to respond, rather than react, to events. This space, in turn, enables a range of cognitive and emotional skills which are vital for successful leadership today:

- focus – participants reported greater focus and clarity of thought which helped with making better decisions and being fully present during key activities
- emotional regulation – making a more conscious choice about how to respond to a situation rather than allowing emotions to dictate an automatic reaction
- perspective taking – participants explained how the space created through the meta-capacities enabled them to see a situation from multiple angles or views, which in turn enhanced the quality of decision making

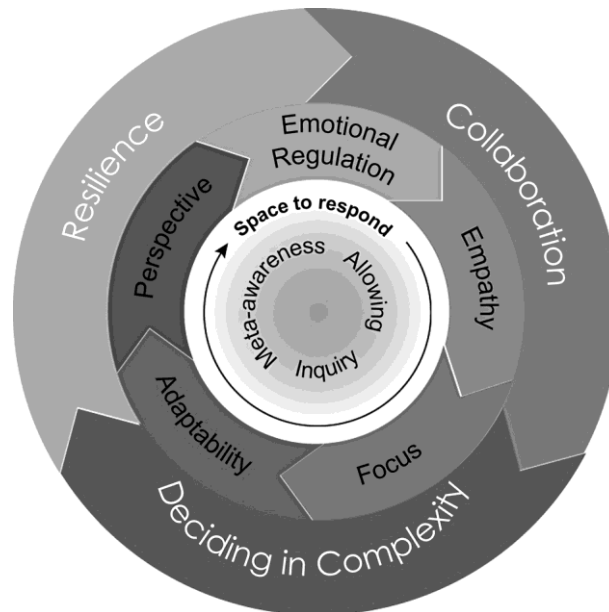


Figure 9.1 A theory of mindful leadership  
From *The Mindful Leader*<sup>5</sup>

- empathy – participants reported an improvement in their ability to consider other peoples’ experience and a desire to focus more on others
- adaptability – participants spoke of adapting to difficult situations and changing their automatic response to a situation

These enhanced cognitive and emotional skills in turn result in improved resilience, collaboration and the capacity to decide in complexity.

One thing that became clear from the small-group recordings, however, is the fact that finding even ten minutes to practice every day was often experienced as challenging by the busy senior executives.

We live in a world where many people want, and often expect, instant results. But no new skill or capacity is ever developed without application and practice. What this research reminds us of is that mindfulness is not a ‘quick fix’ or an intellectual exercise – it requires practice over a sustained period for the benefits to be fully realised.

But, in as little as eight weeks, tangible and meaningful change is possible. As one participant summed up,

Mindfulness is not a ‘silver bullet’ solution as many books and courses would have one believe. Seen in context, as a gradual increase in awareness of these aspects in one’s life, it is however essential and a great help in



interacting with collaborators, managing a team, decision making and putting things in perspective.<sup>5</sup>

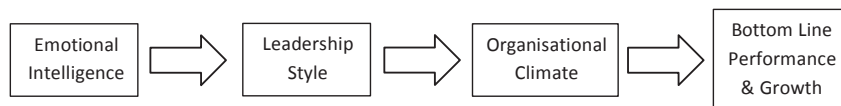
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### **Mindfulness and emotional intelligence**

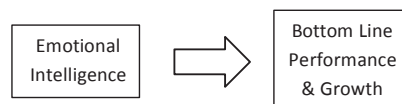
For Mark, the route into mindfulness started back in 2002 with leadership and organisation development. Having been employed to enable a cultural transformation programme in a large retail business, one of his first tasks was to define the culture and behaviours required from the organisation's top 250 leaders. That led him to a consideration of emotional intelligence (EQ) and the work of Daniel Goleman.<sup>11</sup>

It's now common knowledge that IQ is not enough for outstanding individual, team or organisational performance and growth. But while this is known conceptually, the means to develop EQ in an accelerated and tangible way has remained relatively elusive. It's not uncommon to see organisations, with intellectually bright leadership teams, constructing stellar strategies but lacking the EQ to engage large numbers of people to deliver those strategies effectively. In organisation systems terms, this is the equivalent of an individual having a great idea in their head but being unable to put it into action through their body. And even where their body is mobilised, it is often done in a way that pays little attention to the long term well-being or sustainability of that body. We often hear about strategies falling short because they fail to 'engage hearts and minds', but when so much emphasis continues to be placed on intellect alone, it's hardly surprising that hearts, and the discretionary effort that goes with them, remain untapped.

There are different models of EQ and employee engagement but one from the Hay Group that has significantly shaped organisational life globally can be represented as follows:



EQ impacts the way leaders lead and the climate they create for others to be at their best. This, and levels of discretionary effort, then have a significant impact on bottom line performance. Happy and engaged employees create happy and engaged customers who become advocates for the business and support its growth through repeat business and advocacy. This of course leads to happy shareholders. We can simplify the model as follows:



In *Working with Emotional Intelligence*,<sup>11</sup> Goleman cites a variety of evidence in support of his assertion that higher levels of EQ in leaders and organisations leads to higher levels of performance and growth. If one accepts the assertion, then the really crucial question is – ‘how do we tangibly and systematically increase levels of EQ in leaders and organisations?’

Back in 2004 this was a question Mark was asking. Having designed a leadership model based on EQ and begun an organisational dialogue about moving that from an aspirational model to it being embodied in the organisation, something significant happened. A failed IT transformation programme wiped millions off the bottom line, budgets were slashed and suddenly the organisation agenda changed.

At this point another question arose for Mark – ‘If I’m really interested in the question of how to transform organisations shouldn’t I start with transforming myself?’

This question arose from his reading of Goleman’s *Destructive Emotions*,<sup>12</sup> which outlined early neuroscientific research using brain imaging technology with Tibetan Buddhist monks. The research implied that, at will, these

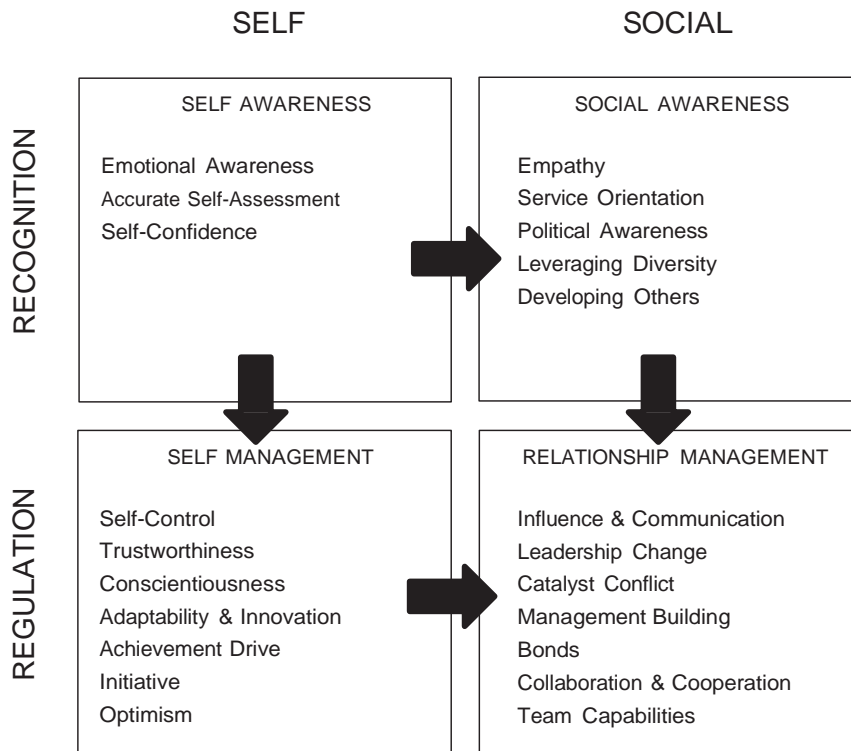


Figure 9.2 Goleman’s model of emotional intelligence

Adapted from Daniel Goleman, *Working With Emotional Intelligence*<sup>11</sup>

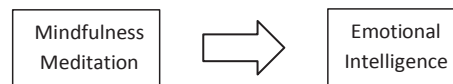
advanced meditators could access and affect the emotional control centres of their brains. To understand why this was significant let's take a closer look at EQ.

Prior to Goleman's work, most leadership competency models predominantly focused on social awareness and relationship management competencies – externally observable behaviours in the social domain of organisational life. In some cases there may even have been acknowledgement of some aspects of self-management, typically achievement drive. Goleman's model gave greater significance to the 'inner' domains and their impact on the 'outer'/social domains. In particular, the causal arrows tell a very compelling story. In order to reliably demonstrate social intelligences (bottom right quadrant) one must have social awareness and the capacity to self-manage.

Goleman's model also drew attention to the top left quadrant. It suggested that we cannot really understand others if we don't first understand ourselves. And we cannot hope to manage ourselves effectively if we don't first understand ourselves.

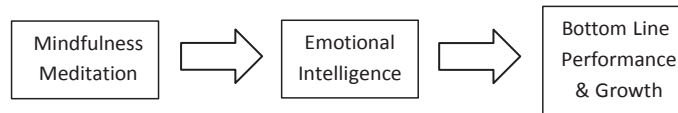
So the key to EQ seems to lie in self awareness, and specifically emotional awareness – the ability to know the emotions that are arising within us moment by moment. What seemed apparent from *Destructive Emotions* was that if you want to accelerate self awareness and understand yourself and your inner emotional landscape better, one of the best ways to learn that might be to meditate.

With this hunch and a working hypothesis, summarised in the model below, in 2005 Mark began a 12 month experiment in Dharamsala, India – using himself as a laboratory.



What Mark found were many of the mindfulness practices outlined in Chapters 1–4. Like most new mindfulness practitioners, he began to discover for himself that simply paying attention in a particular way enabled new levels of self-awareness to arise naturally. With practice it became possible to develop a quality of attention that enabled a capacity to see thoughts, feelings, sensations and impulses more clearly. By developing these new meta-cognitive skills and greater *emotional awareness* it allowed more space for creative, adaptive response rather than unconscious, automatic reaction – it enabled better *self-management*. In addition, by practicing the attitudinal qualities of mindfulness in daily practice, Mark also began to discover a more *empathic* way of relating to experience – both his own and others – and through practices like LKM and Just Like Me, other methods for developing *empathy* and attunement to others arose. In this way Mark found the answer to his question about how to tangibly and systematically increase levels of EQ in leaders and organisations.

There is now data that highlights the potential impact of mindfulness on levels of EQ<sup>13</sup> and we can complete a simple yet powerful model that is beginning to shape the business world:

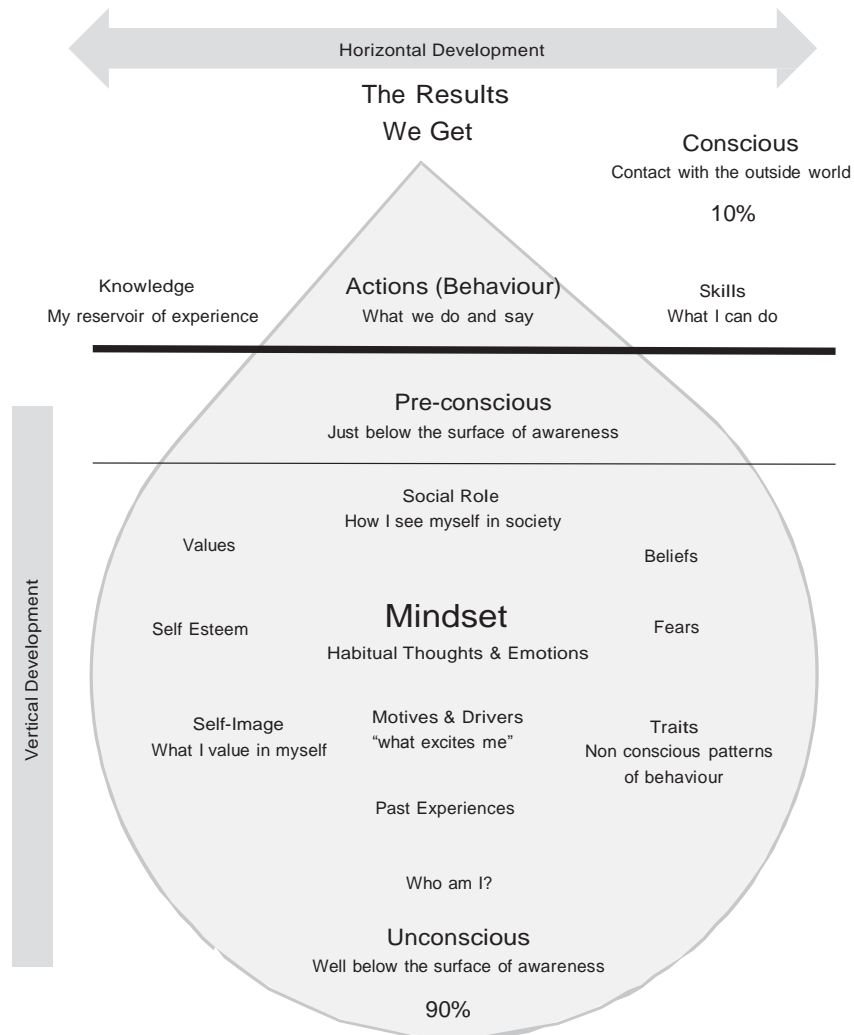


Organisations have broadly come to accept the second half of the equation and many build this into their organisation development strategy by measuring EQ to guide recruitment and internal progression. However, most have singularly failed to identify a systematic way to increase levels of EQ to a meaningful degree in their existing leadership populations. That's not to say that experiential learning has no impact on emotional competencies or that coaches can't help leaders develop EQ. But how do you train empathy and service orientation? You can teach empathic listening and customer service skills, but how do you train an *inner* orientation to attune deeply to others or to want to serve other people? Organisations often recruit for it but how do you develop it? Similarly, how do you develop initiative and adaptability? And most importantly, how do you develop emotional awareness and self-management? In this respect the limitations of most traditional learning are revealed in Figure 9.3.

Most traditional training and development takes place well above the water line – simply adding new knowledge and skills. This can be referred to as horizontal development. There's nothing inherently wrong with it but it only really engages a fraction of our potential. Robust experiential learning and coaching often takes the learner below the water line – surfacing and then working with pre-conscious material and, given the right conditions of safety, unconscious material well below the surface of awareness. In surfacing and then examining unconscious material, deeper transformational change can occur. But this type of vertical development depends on the presence of a coach or facilitator for the learning to occur.

Mindfulness is different. With regular practice, the mindfulness practitioner develops their own method and ability to access and work with material below the immediate surface of awareness. When we sit with ourselves we can become familiar with the habitual patterns of thought and emotion that drive our behaviour – and the results these bring. We can also touch deeper truths: our values and what we hold most dear. That enables us to act more in alignment with our values and to live and work with greater authenticity, ease and flow.

This isn't to say that mindfulness training requires no guidance – quite the opposite. People often learn about these matters from observing their embodiment in the teachers they learn from. But through their guidance, mindfulness teachers equip practitioners with the skills to navigate their own



*Figure 9.3* The behavioural iceberg

Adapted from Selfridge and Sokolik <sup>14</sup> and French and Bell <sup>15</sup>

minds and they empower them to guide transformational change in themselves. This is change ‘from the inside out’.

### **Mindfulness and vertical development**

Nick Petrie, author of *The How-To of Vertical Leadership Development*, suggests that there are few practices that produce as many benefits as mindfulness.

From a vertical perspective, the regular practice of turning inward and observing one's own thoughts helps leaders observe the constant process of their own meaning-making. Stick with it long enough and you start to notice that who you think 'you' are is mainly just a story you are constructing and reconstructing moment to moment.<sup>16</sup>

For the last 60 years, much of leadership development has focused on what happens in a leader's head, he says. Commentators like Dan Siegel, he adds, tell us that the mind is 'embodied', not just 'enskulled', and the implication of this for leadership development is that if we want to help adults develop and evolve, the most direct path may be through the body, not the head.

Mindfulness is not simply about training the mind in the obvious sense of the word. Certainly it can increase awareness of cognition, but it also increases awareness at an embodied level, enabling practitioners to access aspects of themselves of which they were previously unaware. As Kabat-Zinn clarifies,

In Asian languages, the word for mind and the word for heart are the same word. So when we hear the word mindfulness, we have to inwardly also hear heartfulness in order to grasp it even as a concept, and especially as a way of being.<sup>17</sup>

So mindfulness is also heartfulness. It has a tonal quality of warmth, openness, and whole-heartedness and it reminds us that, as a quality of presence and a way of being, mindfulness comes from lower down in our body, not something purely in our head.

### ***Vertical development for a VUCA world***

'A new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels.'<sup>18</sup>

It's now 70 years since Einstein made this appeal and it's as true today as it was then. As he also said: 'You cannot solve a problem from the same consciousness that created it. You must learn to see the world anew'.

Today we face unprecedented global challenges – exponential growth in population, declining resources, climate change, species extinction, global pandemics and major economic disruptions. At the same time unprecedented opportunities are also emerging – the accelerating rate of technological progress and knowledge access, an energy revolution, nanotechnology, biotechnology, an increasing rate of interdependence and conscious capitalism (more on that later).

And where are leaders in all of this? Increasingly we experience living and working in a VUCA world: one that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Everything is inter-connected and no one can predict what big changes are coming next. Leaders who are equal to the task are those who can

deal with ambiguity, notice key patterns, and look at the world through multiple stakeholder perspectives.

How can we future-proof leadership capability to work in this way? Eigel and Kuhnert make the following suggestion:

‘The future of our organisations depends on successfully identifying and developing all leaders to higher [developmental levels] – to a place of greater authenticity – so that they can respond effectively to the increasingly complex demands of our times.’<sup>19</sup>

In the 1950s, Jean Piaget showed that as children grow, the way they think advances through predictable stages. At each higher stage they can think in more sophisticated ways and deal with increasingly difficult problems. But developmental stages do not stop at childhood. In the 1960s, psychologists like Loevinger and Graves began to focus on how adults develop from the baby’s narrow, self-centred view of the world to the mature wisdom and powerful action of exemplary adults. They showed that we can identify several different ways of adult meaning-making. Each world view or stage is more comprehensive, differentiated and effective in dealing with the complexities of life than its predecessors.

Researchers like Torbert, Kegan, Cook-Greuter and Joiner have since been instrumental in bringing this into the world of work and leadership. They make a distinction between vertical and horizontal development. Horizontal development is the accumulation of new knowledge, skills and competencies. Vertical development, on the other hand, involves a complete transformation in the individual’s overall view of reality that transforms what they think, feel and do.

As Petrie puts it, ‘If horizontal development is about transferring information to the leader, vertical development is about transformation of the leader.’<sup>20</sup> Rather than just adding software into a leader’s existing ‘operating system’, vertical development is an inside out transformation that upgrades the operating system itself. As we upgrade, or mature, vertically we expand our capacity for understanding ourselves and our experiences – we see the world with different eyes.

Vertical development is often described in terms of stages, waves, levels of development or ‘action-logics’.

In Torbert’s framework<sup>21</sup> there are eight action-logics that represent how people organise and interpret reality (see Figure 9.4). These include what we see as the purpose of life, what needs we act upon, what ends we move toward, our emotions and our experience of being, and how we think about ourselves and the world. Each involves the reorganisation of meaning making, perspective, self-identity, and our overall way of knowing.

In Kegan’s model of adult development<sup>22</sup> those at stage 3, The Socialised Mind, shape their thinking and actions based on what they believe is expected by others – they could be described as followers. At stage 4, The Self-Authoring Mind, people use their own inner belief system as a compass to decide what is right or wrong and how to act – they could be described as

self-directed leaders. Those at stage 5, The Self Transforming Mind, can look at their own beliefs and see them as limited or partial, can hold more contradictions in their mind and no longer feel the need to gravitate toward polarised thinking. Clearly someone at stage 4 will have a greater ability to lead in unknown environments where there are less certain answers or no one to ask for direction than someone at stage 3. Likewise, someone at stage 5 can handle even more complex and ambiguous environments.

Using a climbing metaphor, Cook-Greuter describes how vertical development is like having a higher vantage point on a mountain,

At each turn of the path up the mountain I can see more of the territory I have already traversed . . . The closer I get to the summit, the easier it becomes to see behind to the shadow side and uncover formerly hidden aspects of the territory. Finally at the top, I can see beyond my particular mountain to other ranges and further horizons. The more I can see, the wiser, more timely, more systematic and informed my actions and decisions are likely to be.<sup>23</sup>

Each stage represents a centre of gravity from which the individual sees the world. What they think, how they feel, and what actions they take are influenced by this. With each new vertical transformation, what the individual was once subject to and could not see can now be seen as object and therefore worked with. At the next stage the previous assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and self-images come into view.

As Brown<sup>24</sup> points out, later action-logics have been shown to correlate with increased leadership effectiveness. Leaders with post conventional action-logics tend to think more strategically, collaborate more, seek out feedback more often, resolve conflicts better, make greater efforts to develop others, and are more likely to redefine challenges so as to capitalise on connections across them. This increased leadership effectiveness comes from new capacities that arise as individuals develop into post-conventional meaning-making. These include increased cognitive functioning, strengthened personal and inter-personal awareness, increased understanding of emotions, and more accurate empathy.

At these very complex stages of development, many meta-cognitive and meta-emotional capacities arise . . . These include the ability to take a systems view and even a unitive view on reality; simultaneously hold and manage conflicting frames, perspectives and emotions; and deeply accept oneself, others, and the moment, without judgment. Such individuals also report deep access to intuition and perceive their rational mind as a tool, not as the principal way to understand reality. They appear to heavily tolerate uncertainty and even collaboratively engage with ambiguity to create. Finally, they experience frequent 'flow' and 'witnessing' states of consciousness.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 9.4 Torbert's framework of action logics

Adapted from Rooke and Torbert.<sup>25</sup> Percentages of the adult population for each stage from Cook-Greuter.<sup>23, 26</sup> Material on the Ironist drawn from Cook-Greuter<sup>25, 26</sup> and Torbert<sup>27</sup>

	<i>Action Logic</i>	<i>Main Focus</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>% Adult Pop</i>	<i>Effect as Leaders</i>
Pre-Conv	1. Opportunist	Own immediate needs, opportunity, self-protection	Self-oriented so will win at all cost.	Sales or emergencies	4.3	Significantly less effective at implementing organizational strategies.
Conventional Stages of Consciousness	2. Diplomat	Socially-expected behaviour, approval	Wants to belong so avoids conflict. Won't give tough feedback or make difficult decisions.	Team player	11.3	
	3. Expert	Expertise, procedure, and efficiency	Operates from expertise and seeks efficiency. Influences through facts but lacks emotional intelligence	Specialist	36.5	
	4. Achiever	Delivery of results, effectiveness, goals, success within system	Achieves strategic goals through teams but may inhibit innovation	Management	29.7	

Postconventional: General Systems Stages of Consciousness	5. Individualist	Self in relationship to system; interaction with system	Creates new structures to address gaps between strategy and performance. Unconventional / ignores rules so may irritate others.	Consulting roles	11.3	Consistent capacity to innovate and transform organizations.
	6. Strategist	Linking theory and principles with practice; dynamic systems interactions	Generates organizational and personal transformations. Challenges existing norms, highly collaborative, combines vision with pragmatism	Transformational leader	4.9	
Postconventional: Unitive Stages of Consciousness	7. Alchemist	Interplay of awareness, thought, action, and effects; transforming self and others	Generates social transformations. Reinvents organizations in historically significant ways	Leading society-wide transformations	1.5	
	8. Ironist	Being; experience moment to moment arising of consciousness	Institutionalizes developmental processes through “liberating disciplines.” True visionary	Catalysing deep development of individuals and collectives	0.5	

And this is vital, because leaders who have access to post-conventional meaning-making systems are better able to respond to complex, ambiguous, and sophisticated challenges. As leaders and organisations wrestle with being competitive in a VUCA world, more and more leaders need to be agile enough to deliver transformation and change in complex and ambiguous environments.

Given the small proportion of leaders at post-conventional stages (about 15 per cent as Torbert suggests), how best can we support leaders in developing beyond conventional stages of meaning making? As Cooke-Greuter notes,

Development in its deepest meaning refers to transformations of consciousness. Because acquisition of knowledge is part of horizontal growth, learning about developmental theories is not sufficient to help people to transform. Only specific long-term practices, self-reflection, action inquiry, and dialogue as well as living in the company of others further along on the developmental path has been shown to be effective.<sup>23</sup>

As one of our mindful coaches observed:

If I work with people in the Individualist stage they are very successful – accountants, lawyers, engineers . . . they easily run large outlets of about one hundred thousand people . . . then suddenly their disciplines, mind-sets and linear, empirical thinking runs into its limit . . . and they say ‘how do I get to Strategist or Magician?’ . . . Well mindfulness is a pretty good practice . . . If people don’t have a centre and know the centre in themselves where they can go to contain the anxiety from running very large outlets with multinational and very difficult situations, if they allow the anxiety and the system to influence their processes, it takes them out and they don’t last long. But if they know their centre, they’ve got a place, a refuge if you like, or a secure place that is reliable in terms of its contribution, they do brilliantly. It’s very practical in that sense – it’s a combination of developmental stages and mindfulness.

Sol Davidson

Following his survey of experts in this field Petrie recommends the following practices in support of vertical development:

- 1 Heat experiences
  - Giving assignments to the least qualified person.
  - Create ‘heat seeking leaders’.
  - Create a culture of developmental risk taking.
  - Uncover your immunity to change.
  - Manufacture heat in the Classroom.
- 2 Colliding perspectives
  - Replace ‘bad’ action learning with peer coaching.
  - Frame-breaking experiences: spend a day in your customer’s rice paddy.

- Develop a systems perspective: the organisational workshop.
  - Step into another worldview: deep listening.
  - Hold two opposing ideas in your mind: polarity thinking.
- 3 Elevated sense making:
- Learn from the gurus: use stage maps.
  - Coach with a vertical lens.
  - Make sense with a late-stage mentor.
  - Facilitate vertical development for the executive team.
  - Copy Google and Buddha: teach mindfulness and meditation.

And ‘most thought provoking’ – change your body, re-pattern your mind<sup>14</sup>

Further research exploring the explicit links between mindfulness and vertical development is needed. However, you may already have noticed that many of the capacities associated with post-conventional development stages have been highlighted elsewhere in the book as being actively cultivated through mindfulness practice. These include metacognitive skills, personal and interpersonal awareness, increased understanding of emotions, empathy, the capacity to deeply accept oneself, others, and the moment without judgement, deep access to intuition, the capacity to tolerate uncertainty, to experience frequent states of ‘flow’ and ‘witness consciousness.’ The Mindful Leader programme that Michael and Megan Reitz created, taught and researched alongside colleagues at Ashridge Business School showed these kinds of outcomes.

If we go back to core definitions, we remember that mindfulness is an *outcome* as well as a process – it’s the conscious awareness that arises from paying attention in a particular way. If, as Cooke-Greuter suggests, ‘Development in its deepest meaning refers to transformations of consciousness’ then mindfulness practice certainly offers a potent means for doing so.

A number of commentators suggest that vertical development is fast becoming one of the most important trends in leadership development. As McGuire and Rhodes suggest,

Organisations have grown skilled at developing individual leader competencies, but have mostly ignored the challenge of transforming their leader’s mind-set from one level to the next. Today’s horizontal development within a mind-set must give way to the vertical development of bigger minds.<sup>28</sup>

What’s clear is that coaches continue to have a significant part to play in this by ‘coaching through a vertical lens’. But if we wish to support leaders to develop and grow vertically it isn’t enough to know about developmental stages theoretically – we need to understand it experientially. In this respect, mindfulness offers much to both leaders and coaches alike.

## **Conscious capitalism**

Leaders at later stages of development have always had the capacity to create systems that serve a pro-social purpose. Given the challenges we face today we should perhaps not be surprised that new business models are emerging that operate from this perspective. One such model is *Conscious Capitalism*<sup>29</sup>, offered as an alternative to traditional capitalism and as a blueprint for the future. John Mackey, CEO of Whole Foods Market and Raj Sisodia propose an organisational model based on four core tenets: higher purpose, stakeholder integration, conscious leadership and conscious culture. But this isn't a model simply for 'nice' business – it's based on sustainable high performance. Their research suggests that conscious businesses out-perform the overall stock market by a ratio of 10:1 over a fifteen year period.

### ***Higher purpose***

The first tenet of conscious capitalism is that business has the potential to have a higher purpose than merely maximising profits. Every conscious business has a higher purpose which addresses questions like: Why is the world better because we are here? This acts as a magnet to attract the right team members, customers, suppliers, and investors and aligns the ecosystem, getting everybody pointing in the same direction and moving together in harmony.

Once purpose and values have been articulated, it's important that leaders embody them and talk about them with customers, team members, suppliers and investors. They must also be integrated into processes like recruitment, appraisal, research and development and strategic planning, and be at the forefront of decision making. When purpose and values are clear, leadership teams can be highly responsive to opportunities, making quicker and bolder decisions rather than knee jerk reactions to changes in the competitive environment.

### ***Stakeholder integration***

The second tenet is based on the awareness of an interdependent stakeholder eco-system, and the intention to create value for all stakeholders. Traditional business models often treat stakeholders other than investors as the means to maximising profit. But without consistent customer satisfaction, team member happiness and supplier and community support, short term profits are unsustainable. The best way to maximise long term profits is to create value for the entire interdependent system.

Management's responsibility is to hire the right people, train them well, and ensure that those team members flourish . . . The team member's job is to satisfy and delight customers . . . Management helps the team

members experience happiness, team members help the customers achieve happiness, the customers help the investors achieve happiness, and when . . . profits . . . are re-invested . . . you get a virtuous circle.<sup>29</sup>

p. 72

### ***Conscious culture***

Mackey and Sisodia suggest that conscious cultures have seven core characteristics:

- 1 *Trust* – high levels internally and externally.
- 2 *Accountability* – team members are truly accountable to each other and customers.
- 3 *Caring* – genuine care for all stakeholders.
- 4 *Transparency* – strategic plans and financial information are widely discussed.
- 5 *Integrity* – strict adherence to doing what is ethically right.
- 6 *Loyalty* – stakeholders are more understanding with each other about short term blips.
- 7 *Egalitarianism* – no class system to separate leaders from team members.

They also point to a particular kind of management approach that fosters *intrinsic* motivation (autonomy, mastery and purpose) in team members, as well as promoting decentralisation, empowerment and innovation.

### ***Conscious leadership***

Conscious leaders are perhaps the most important element in the equation as they create and shape conscious businesses,

Conscious leaders abundantly display many of the qualities we most admire in exemplary human beings. They usually find great joy and beauty in their work and in the opportunity to serve, lead and help shape a better future . . . Conscious leaders commonly have high . . . emotional, spiritual and systems intelligence. They also have an orientation toward servant leadership, high integrity, and a great capacity for love and care . . . They are keenly self-aware and recognise their own deepest motivations and convictions.<sup>29</sup>

p. 183

But how can leaders develop themselves to become more conscious? A simple answer is regular mindfulness practice but let's explore that in more detail.

*Following higher purpose*

For Mackey and Sosidia the starting point is setting an intention to become a conscious leader and inquiring into your life purpose. ‘Your inner heart knows’ they say,

it is whispering to you right now . . . Quiet your mind, listen attentively to your inner heart and follow its guidance. Our inner heart will always be our best guide in life if we can develop enough self-awareness to be able to hear it and the courage to follow it.<sup>29</sup>

p. 196

Regular mindfulness practice helps with both these things. It helps us grow our self-awareness so we know when we are following our hearts and when we’ve lost our way. It also helps us learn how to deal with fear. ‘Contemplative practices that teach us how to quiet our minds’ the authors suggest ‘can also help us overcome fear.’ (p. 197).<sup>29</sup>

*Developing emotional intelligence*

As we’ve previously seen, through regular mindfulness practice we can create a more intentional life in accordance with our feelings, values, aspirations and ideals, rather than simply reacting to things and following impulses and desires.

Becoming more aware of our emotions, Mackey and Sosidia suggest, we begin to realise that many of them, such as envy, resentment, greed, bitterness, malice, anger, and hatred, are life stultifying. Whereas emotions such as love, generosity, gratitude, compassion and forgiveness are expansive and life-enhancing. ‘We need to consciously cultivate life-enhancing emotions and learn to neutralise life-stultifying emotions when we become aware of their presence’, they say, ‘this is the essence of personal mastery and emotional intelligence.’ (p. 201).<sup>29</sup>

*Developing Systems Intelligence (SYQ)*

Conscious leaders see more clearly the larger systems of which they are a part. They can feel the system as they go, sensing misalignment in a way that anticipates issues, sometimes before these have even had a chance to take hold. Leaders can develop SYQ by practicing thinking in terms of the stakeholder system but as Mackey and Sisodia note,

The exercises that develop EQ . . . can also help develop our SYQ. Slowing our minds down is essential . . . the less speedy but attentive mind is more capable of being in the here and now, noticing things and the relationship between them, and seeing the larger system.<sup>29</sup>

p. 203

Mackey and Sisodia are explicit about the role of meditation practice in developing conscious leaders and point to Buddhist insight meditation as a way to integrate this into regular working lives,

Contemplative practices such as meditation . . . are very valuable in helping an individual develop into a more conscious leader. They require setting time aside to be by ourselves, which is critical for self-awareness, as well as for helping us to centre ourselves, become aware of our feelings, and slow down the mind . . . The most important thing we can do is practice regularly. We can't just have a theoretical understanding of meditation – it's the practice that makes the difference.<sup>29</sup>

p. 212

### **Resonant leadership**

Resonant leadership is a term first coined by Richard Boyatzis, professor of organisational behaviour at the Weatherhead School of Management and Annie McKee, former Global Director of Management Development for The Hay Group. It describes the way in which great leaders attune to themselves, and then in turn to their people, in order to draw out and amplify what is best in themselves and others. As we saw in Chapter 7, Dan Siegel suggests that the neural integration<sup>30</sup> that arises from mindfulness training significantly increases our capacity for this.

For Boyatzis and McKee, mindfulness is a key leadership competency. They describe it as 'the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences *inside the self* – body, mind, heart, spirit – and to pay full attention to what is happening *around us* – people, the natural world, our surroundings and events'.<sup>31</sup> For them, it all starts with self awareness. This enables you to choose how best to respond to people and situations and allows you to be authentic and consistent. We trust and follow people whose behaviour, beliefs and values are aligned. Mindfulness enables us to make better choices because our perceptions are clearer, we notice things that would normally pass us by and we gain access to deeper insight and wisdom.

In *Becoming a Resonant Leader*<sup>32</sup>, McKee *et al.* outline three contemporary myths about leadership. The first is that 'smart is good enough'. As we've seen, leaders with higher emotional and social intelligence are more effective because they manage themselves more effectively in the face of stress and ambiguity and are better at inspiring others by being more attuned to them. Key to this is emotional self awareness – the ability to recognise emotions as they happen and understand their effects on oneself and others. Interestingly, a neurobiological study published by Creswell *et al.* showed evidence that mindfulness training increased levels of emotional self awareness and the ability to manage negative feelings.<sup>33</sup> People who frequently lose their temper don't make good leaders – nor do those who freeze under pressure. Leaders



are constantly being watched by their people so it's important they're able to monitor and manage their own emotional states.

This leads us to the second myth that 'mood doesn't matter'. Leader's emotions are contagious – we're wired to constantly tune into the emotional state of those around us and that affects what we think, feel and do. The way people perceive their leaders' states has a direct impact on them. In a study by Wager *et al.*<sup>34</sup> they found that employees who worked under unfavourably perceived supervisors exhibited markedly higher blood pressure and other physical signs of distress. When people are fearful, anxious or angry it arouses their sympathetic nervous system and they shut-down, fight back or want to run away. Often they feel frazzled and don't perform at their best. By contrast, when they are optimistic, energised and excited they think more clearly and creatively, are more resilient and perform better.

The third myth is that 'great leaders can thrive on constant pressure'. Unending responsibilities, constant pressure and 24/7 availability can often lead to what McKee *et al.* call 'power stress', and causes leaders to fall into 'sacrifice syndrome' – a vicious cycle of stress and sacrifice that can result in mental and physical distress, diminished effectiveness and burnout. That then spreads through emotional contagion as stressed leaders spread dissonance throughout their teams and organisations. To counter this McKee *et al.* suggest that leaders need to understand the crucial role that *renewal* plays in sustaining effectiveness. They suggest that through mindfulness practice, leaders can counteract sacrifice syndrome and actively cultivate renewal. They also point to research linking mindfulness practice to increased cognitive flexibility, creativity and problem solving skills.<sup>35</sup>

### **Mindful leadership – what's in a name?**

When we refer to an emotionally intelligent leader, a resonant leader, a conscious leader, a post-conventional leader or even an adaptive leader we're describing leadership phenomena that are very similar – leaders with differentiated capabilities that enable them to operate at higher levels of performance in a world that is constantly changing.

Of course there are specific nuances to each, but essentially we are describing leaders who are deeply attuned to themselves and the world around them, in a way that enables them to accurately read and respond to subtle changes in their internal and external environment. As a species, this capacity to adapt to our changing environment has always been central to our survival and at its best, to our growth and ability to flourish. Our suggestion is that in today's VUCA world, our ability to actively cultivate these capacities is central to flourishing at an individual and organisational level. If leaders or organisations wish to optimise the way they function and gain long term advantage, these leadership qualities will become necessity. As mindfulness increasingly moves into the mainstream we offer the following description of a mindful leader:

A mindful leader consciously engages in regular formal mindfulness practice as a systematic way to cultivate emotional and systems intelligence.

Mindful leaders understand themselves and others at a deeper level and operate from this awareness. They operate in a more conscious and purposeful way; are better able to see, feel and transform the systems of which they are a part; and they seek to enable others to do the same. They engage in development to post-conventional stages and are adaptive to the changing environment around them, rather than simply reacting to it.

Through regular mindfulness practice, mindful leaders actively cultivate the meta-capacities of metacognition, curiosity and allow and create greater space for adaptive responses. These meta-capacities enable focus, emotional regulation, perspective taking, empathy and adaptability, which in turn result in improved resilience, collaboration and the capacity to lead in complexity. By actively cultivating their mind and their way of being, mindful leaders create the conditions for growth and flourishing to arise in themselves and those around them.

### **The mindful organisation and a mindful nation**

In 2015, the UK Government's Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group (MAPPG) concluded in its Mindful Nation UK report that while there is still much research to be done, mindfulness is already a promising innovation in the workplace context with an early but rapidly evolving evidence base.

In 2016, the Mindfulness Initiative, secretariat to the MAPPG, set up a working group from a range of private sector organisations including EY, GE, HSBC and Jaguar Landrover, supported by a panel of leading mindfulness trainers and academics. In its recent report<sup>36</sup> the Mindfulness Initiative confirm that there are a number of potential organisational benefits to mindfulness training including:

- well-being and resilience;
- relationships and collaboration; and
- performance (including leadership, creativity and innovation).

Since the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK is mental ill health, accounting for 70 million sick days every year,<sup>37</sup> it's perhaps not surprising that the most obvious organisational benefit relates to well-being and resilience. Since a number of randomised controlled trials of workplace mindfulness-based training courses have found positive effects on burnout, well-being and stress,<sup>38</sup> this represents a significant organisational opportunity.

But a focus on addressing dis-ease, whilst important, potentially underestimates the benefits mindfulness training offers in supporting organisational performance, growth and flow. In terms of relationships and collaboration, 45 workplace mindfulness research studies have linked mindfulness to improved

relationships at work, supporting collaboration and improving employees' resilience in the face of challenges.<sup>39, 40</sup>

In terms of leadership, Michael and Megan's research at Ashridge Business School points to the future in equipping leaders for a VUCA world, while other research has found that leaders' mindfulness improved staff engagement and job performance.<sup>41</sup> In terms of creativity and innovation, recent research suggests that there is a 'direct relation between mindfulness and creativity'<sup>42</sup> likely to be supported through improved focus, idea generation and flexible thinking.

Another aspect outlined by the Mindfulness Initiative is 'organisational mindfulness' a form of organisational transformation that comes about by way of collective mindfulness.

Workplace mindfulness is possible not only for individuals, but within and across teams of people . . . When mindfulness becomes a shared social practice in an organisation, and permeates routines, processes and practices between people and across teams, then the organisation as a whole becomes more resilient and performs more sustainably.<sup>43</sup>

In line with the original Mindful Nation UK report, the Mindfulness Initiative continue to highlight the importance of identifying suitably qualified mindfulness training providers and measuring outcomes in order to build a solid evidence base. They also make helpful recommendations in terms of embedding mindfulness at an organisational level, with case studies from a variety of organisations including Capital One, GSK and EY.

We feel sure that with a focus on these three things the idea of the mindful workplace will increasingly become a reality amongst progressive employers. And as the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group continue to make recommendations for the criminal justice, healthcare and education sectors we feel sure that the idea of a Mindful Nation will also move closer to becoming a reality in the UK.

Given what we know about mindfulness and its capacity to support growth and flourishing that has to be a good thing for us all.

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