Workplace
Mindfulness –
the last frontier?

Two Wings of a
Bird – developing
compassion in
your employees

Delivering MDBI
at Aberystwyth
University

Research –
mindfulness
as a collective
practice
Information

This online journal is aimed at all those involved or hoping to be involved in spreading mindfulness and compassion into the workplace.

The journal, which will be published bi-annually, aims to offer inspiration, support, guidance and provocation, including through the sharing of case studies, research, updates, and creative expressions such as poetry.

More generally, this initiative, which also sees the launch of the International Summit for Mindfulness and Compassion at Work (first event, 25-26 May, Madrid), seeks to play a part in transforming our workplaces – and society in general – to be places where all can flourish.

The journal has been developed and is co-edited by Margaret Chapman-Clarke, registered psychologist, gestalt coach and emotional intelligence practitioner-researcher and author of Mindfulness in the Workplace (Kogan Page, 2016), and Liz Hall, coach and mindfulness teacher, author of Mindful Coaching (Kogan Page, 2013) and editor of Coaching at Work, with the support of highly experienced production editor Annie Cree.

The journal will be available for a modest fee to subscribers.

The website is www.theijmc.com (under construction). Twitter handle is @theijmcatwork, and we have a LinkedIn page under The International Journal for Mindfulness and Compassion at Work.

Particularly as this is the pilot issue, we welcome feedback, ideas and contributions. Please email us at:

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Liz Hall

Welcome! We're very excited, after all these months of hard work behind the scenes, to be finally sharing the first issue with you all.

When co-editor Margaret Chapman-Clarke suggested we launch a journal on mindfulness at work, I was highly enthusiastic. I too had been thinking that such a journal would fill a gaping hole in the literature. We felt – and this was borne out in our discussions with others- that a diverse open space is desperately needed specifically for mindfulness at work. An inspiring space where stories about practical applications of mindfulness at work can be shared and academic research interpreted for this context, for example.

I also saw the project as another opportunity to play a part in transforming more of our workplaces – and wider society – into places where creativity, positive wellbeing, love even, can flourish. And I saw in Margaret, and the members of our Editorial Advisory Board, fellow human beings also committed to enabling such a transformation. For me, it’s been vital that we’re explicit about the place of compassion within the mindfulness movement, and hence our journal’s title. If we’re not careful, the McMindfulness many fear will become widespread—mindfulness as attention training can be highly effective, but for me, at least, there is a higher vision. Mindfulness combined with compassion makes for powerful stuff, supporting individuals and businesses to be successful in terms of planet and living beings, not just profit.

I’m about to head off to the 1st International Summit for Mindfulness and Compassion at Work which Margaret and I have organised with one of the Ed Board members, Luis San Martin. We’ve been bowled over by the enthusiasm for the event, and look forward to sharing what arises, in the Autumn issue. And as I write this, I notice deep sadness at last night’s suicide bombing in Manchester. I simply had a desire to see a journal that would be inclusive, diverse and provided a space for different ways to extend compassion to those who wish to harm us.

I came to mindfulness much later than my co-founder and co-editor, Liz. My journey is different, my teachers different. My journey began in a workshop for psychologists in 2009. I don’t recall much of the ‘head stuff,’ but what I do remember is the feeling. Something shifted in my body. In a single moment of stillness, everything changed. It was an epiphany, one of those ‘remembered moments perceived as having a significant impact on a person’s life (Ellis et al. 2011). As Kristin Neff, pioneer of self-compassion puts it, ‘it is as if a door has been opened and my job is to walk through it, not knowing what I might find, or what might happen (in Ballard, 2011, p.x).

I didn’t know that nearly a decade later of researching, writing and speaking about the mindfulness at work phenomenon that I would be helping to bring this journal to life. For both Liz and I it has been a labour of love. It was synchronicity. This was made manifest by our respective books sitting side by side on our publisher’s website. I simply had a desire to see a journal that would be inclusive, diverse and provided a space for different ways of representing the meanings and ways of experiencing mindfulness and compassion at work.

I believe that this issue has been made possible through the generosity of those who share these values. Whose common humanity will ensure resilience in the face of atrocities such as that happened in Manchester and happening daily around the world, my thanks go to all who contributed. As Margaret Mead, the anthropologist once said: “Never doubt a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.” MCC

Members of the International Journal for Mindfulness and Compassion at Work’s Editorial Advisory Board

- Dr Eunice Aquilina, author of Embodying Authenticity
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- Prof David Sheffield, associate head of the Centre for Psychological Research at the University of Derby
- Dr Jutta Tobias, Cranfield University senior lecturer
- Emma Wardropper is a mindfulness teacher and psychotherapist

Margaret Chapman-Clarke

As I write this editorial piece for the first issue of the journal I feel a deep sense of sadness. I am about to travel to the first International Summit on Mindfulness and Compassion in Spain travelling from Manchester. It is a day after the bombing. I become aware of the impact that the loss of so many young lives will have for so, so many, for families, for our community, for our society and globally.

In times like these we are bought back to what is important, to appreciate the present moment and as best we can, to be free of judgement. It is difficult. We struggle to make sense of senseless acts. We find it hard to extend compassion to those who wish to harm us.

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Delegates discuss practical ways to introduce mindfulness into the workplace


One of the major themes at this year’s conference was on how mindfulness can be practically introduced into daily life. Highlighted challenges to doing so included perceived lack of time and resistance/scepticism.

Another theme arising at the conference was the wide variety of ways in which mindfulness can be introduced to the workforce, including highly cost effective methods for large workforces through seminars and mobile apps, to more in-depth tuition on a one to one or small group basis. However, most of the conference speakers agreed that although apps can work to introduce the topic of mindfulness, they’re not substantial enough to embed it into the workplace. Tim Munden, Unilever’s chief learning officer, said it was hard to get more than 7 per cent of the workforce to use mindfulness apps.

It was widely agreed that the benefits of mindfulness are most effective when it is practiced regularly and as part of a daily routine.

Parham Vasaiely from Jaguar Land Rover shared how and why mindfulness can be at its most effective when delivered and practised as part of a group, creating a positive feedback loop of wellbeing, innovation and ultimately, performance.

Other themes from the case studies showcased included around how mindfulness at work can be nurtured through appointing mindfulness champions within the organisation. Also helpful is leaders communicating clearly and openly about mindfulness offerings and how they benefit individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole. Having leadership buy-in is particularly key to getting on board those who fear taking advantage of mindful opportunities might be perceived as wasting company time.

Helen Wray, health and wellbeing business partner at Mars said that even if lots of mindfulness training is offered, without leaders on board it will just be a nice thing people get individual benefit from but doesn’t benefit the whole organisation. To get leaders on board, it was important to have data to share. Mars, for example, has data showing that 75 per cent of field sales representatives who undertook mindfulness training were still using the tools at least once a day six months later, and felt it improved their performance. Regular ‘energy surveys’ also convinced leaders that they needed to invest in increasing the resilience of their teams, and demonstrate the return on that investment.

Unilever’s Munden argued for mindfulness programmes being positioned as a wellbeing or leadership initiative to be given more credence. Unilever has introduced it into coaching sessions and encouraged leaders to adopt basic mindful practices such as staying away from phones during meetings.

Also highlighted through the case studies was how helpful it can be to create a mindful environment, or mindful spaces where people can reflect and practice, and to share some of the scientific and workplace based evidence demonstrating relevant benefits. These include creativity, according to Jonathan Trimble, CEO of media company 18 Feet and Rising. He added that demonstrating mindful employer values helps with the recruitment and retention of high calibre creative talent and new workforce entrants.

The conference was chaired by David Cox, VP mindfulness and wellbeing, Audible and Jamie Bristow, Director of the Mindfulness Initiative.

For more information go to: http://mindandmatterevents.com/
Royal Orthopaedic Hospital in Birmingham trains 100 staff in mindfulness

Stress management, slowing down, being better able to tune into the body, and improving practice – these are some of the benefits highlighted by staff participating in mindfulness training at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital (ROH) in Birmingham in the UK.

The Trust used charitable funds to bring in external provider Mindfulness Connected to train around 100 staff in mindfulness through a series of programmes rolled out towards the end of 2016. A case study on the initiative was presented at the Mind and Matter conference in London.

According to Mark Leonard, course leader for ROH’s mindfulness series, and course designer and lead practitioner for Mindfulness Connected, “As far as we are aware, this is the first study that tests the hypothesis that a mindfulness programme, based on a model of mindfulness as a socially embodied process designed as an organisational change agent, has been tested with quantitative measures in a controlled trial.”

A short video on the initiative has been launched on YouTube. Leonard says on the video, “I was confident we could make this more of an organisational programme of development than a strategic approach to deal with stress-related problems.”

Dr Conny Blunt, anaesthetist at the ROH, says, “Our main intention was to bring the technique to the clinical areas around theatres – that’s where the service demands and stresses on the teams, and the individual are greatest, and where we felt that to be mindful would bring the greatest benefit to the Trust, and to the teams as well as to the patient.”

The new course designed for ROH, Mindfulness-Based Organisational Education, evolved from the six week “Frantic World” course developed for CVS vets to manage stress and enhance performance. The CVS course drew from and used Mark Williams’ and Danny Penman’s *Finding Peace in a Frantic World* as the course book offering a reduced dose MBCT in a self-help format.

Watch the video here: http://bit.ly/2q1opGr

Dr Sara Lazar, assistant professor at Harvard Medical School, highlighted benefits for both employees and employers, telling delegates that mindfulness training can help individuals learn. She told delegates that mindfulness can increase both sustained and selected attention, as well as neural efficiency. In just one week, she said, it could positively affect fluid intelligence, which broadly correlates to IQ.

Dr Lazar defined mindfulness as “disengaging from the everyday and paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, without judgement”. She said that research carried out at Harvard suggested that mindfulness had an even more profound effect on the brain than previously imagined. She said that it affects brain matter so that “50-year-olds who meditate had similar performance in their frontal cortex to 25-year-olds”.

Mind wandering is reduced in people who have taken part in an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction programme. Meanwhile, activity increased in the cerebellum area (linked to sensory performance) and the left hippocampus (associated with emotion regulation and learning).

Mindfulness leads to better learning and fewer stressed employees, says Harvard professor

The Harvard research suggests mindfulness has a more profound effect on the brain than previously imagined

These effects have implications where organisations and individuals want to increase learning capacity. In the participants, the amygdala, implicated in the ‘fight or flight’ reaction in stressful situations, shrank.
Different mindfulness practices have different ‘fingerprints,’ finds research

A study comparing four common meditations has revealed that although there is overlap too, they each have a different ‘fingerprint’ or effect, suggesting there may be times to choose one practice over another depending on the impact hoped for.

Typically, studies have looked at secular mindfulness programmes such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy without isolating the impact of specific practices. This study, however (Kok & Singer, 2016) compared the effects of the Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM); breathing meditation; the body scan, and observing-thought meditation.

The researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Germany found all four increased positive emotions (positivity of affect), energy and present moment focus, and decreased thought distraction. But there were differences too.

The research involved 229 adults undergoing a nine-month mental training programme, the ReSource Project, providing daily reports before and after meditation practice. Three cohorts were trained – each in a different order – in three modules: presence (including breathing meditation and the body scan); affect (including the LKM) and perspective (including ‘observing-thought’ meditation; ‘decentering’ allowing thoughts to come and go without identifying with them).

The study found LKM, (in which we typically direct kindness to ourselves, a loved one, someone ‘neutral’, someone with whom we have some ‘difficulty’ and to a wider group of beings) led to the greatest increase in feelings of warmth and positive thoughts about others. Meanwhile practising the LKM meant participants were less likely to have ruminative ‘negative’ and past-focused thoughts.

In addition, those participants who did the affect module first, before the preparatory presence module, showed a significantly smaller decrease in negative thoughts during meditation compared to the other groups, and also showed the highest increase in positivity of affect and the greatest increase in subjective warmth.

Other longitudinal studies comparing the impact of participating in LKM over an eight-week period (compared to a waitlist control) have found an increase in trait positive emotions (Fredrickson et al, 2008; Kok et al, 2013) and feelings of closeness to others (Kok et al, 2013) but not any change in ‘negative’ emotions.

According to Kok and Singer’s research, the body scan led to the greatest increase in interoceptive awareness (awareness of bodily sensations) and led to the greatest increase in meta-cognitive awareness (sometimes described as ‘being aware of being aware’).

● DOI:10.1007/s12672-016-0594-9

Roffey Park researches and promotes compassion at work

International leadership institute Roffey Park has developed a compassion at work psychometric tool and produced research highlighting the benefits of developing compassionate workplaces including boosted staff retention.

UK and Singapore-based Roffey Park’s report, Compassionate Leadership, highlights that compassionate workplaces:
● Foster engagement and strengthen staff retention  
● Lead to greater discretionary effort and improve productivity

Roffey has developed a half-day Compassion in the Workplace workshop for organisations. Its research identified five attributes a compassionate person exhibits:
● Being alive to the suffering of others
● Being non-judgmental
● Tolerating personal distress
● Being empathic
● Taking appropriate action

Its statistically robust Compassion at Work Index (CWI) provides a personalised report of how people see their level of compassion at work across these attributes, and offers practical tips to improve or enhance people’s approaches.
● How compassionate are you? Complete the CWI: http://bit.ly/2qJ6Tzp
Mindful Medics pilot: Mindfulness helps NHS healthcare professionals feel more resilient and productive

After just four weeks, healthcare professionals practising mindfulness and resilience techniques reported feeling more resilient and more productive at work, and better about their physical and mental health, according to feedback from participants undergoing the Mindful Medics Programme at Milton Keynes NHS Trust.

The findings were presented by Mindful Medics Programme founder Dr Reena Kotecha at the UK Physician Health Summit held on 29 March 2017 in London.

The Summit at De Vere West One, London, was hosted by the NHS General Practitioner Health Service (GPH) and the NHS Practitioner Health Programme (PHP) which seek to support the health of doctors through advice and early intervention in a confidential and understanding environment.

The event brought together clinicians delivering care and organisations offering support as well as medical and clinical directors and practitioners from all walks of medicine from around the UK to discuss the issues facing doctors who are unwell, the best approaches to support and treat them and how to reduce and prevent ill health in the medical workforce.

Doctors are well accustomed to giving care often at the expense of their own health and wellbeing. They work long and odd hours, regularly, under unrelenting pressure. Many encounter health problems particularly related to their mental health. However, many will tend to manage their own condition, self medicate or seek informal ‘corridor’ consultations from their colleagues.

There are a multitude of reasons for this, but as a result, problems related to a doctor’s health are often unrecognised and unreported, said Dr Kotecha, a physician with a specialist interest in the health and wellbeing of healthcare professionals.

Dr Kotecha said that healthcare professionals are now recognising the benefit of mindfulness and that “adopting such practices to look after one’s health and wellbeing in the current fast paced, pressured NHS is not only important, it is imperative.”

She led Summit delegates through informative and experiential mindfulness meditation session at the summit, including both informal and formal mindfulness practices such as mindful breathwork. She highlighted the need to “break auto-pilot along with the current climate of an ‘attention economy’.”

The Summit also explored topics including the need and economic case for physician health services; the services currently available; the issues for particular high incidence practitioner groups, and showcased both local and national strategies to support physician health.

Next year’s UK Physician Health Summit will be held on 18 April 2018

For more information on Mindful Medics, visit: www.mymindfulmind.co.uk

Make the most of mind wandering – it can help solve problems, suggests study

Mind wandering usually gets a bad press, written off as an attention-lapse, but it can help us solve problems.

If we engage our internal thoughts deliberately rather than engage in unintentional, spontaneous thought wandering, this can spark more effective processing in brain systems involved in cognitive control. Mind wandering can serve as a kind of deliberate mental rehearsal that allows us to consider future events and solve problems, according to research from the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences (MPI CBS) in Leipzig and the University of York in England.

Johannes Golchert, PhD student at MPI CBS and first author of the study, said, “We found that in people who often purposefully allow their minds to go off on a tangent the cortex is thicker in some prefrontal regions. Furthermore, we found that in people who intentionally mind wander, two main brain networks broadly overlap each other: the default-mode network, which is active when focusing on information from memory, and the fronto-parietal network, which stabilizes our focus and inhibits irrelevant stimuli as part of our cognitive control system.”

While both networks are strongly connected to each other, the control network can influence our thoughts, helping us focus on goals in a more stable manner. This can be seen as evidence that our mental control is not impaired when we deliberately allow our mind to wander.

“Mind wandering should not just be considered as something disturbing. If you’re able to control it to some extent, that is to say, suppress it when necessary and to let it run free when possible, then you can make the most of it,” said Golchert.
The social constructionist Kenneth Gergen continues to inspire me as I reflect upon the ways in which different groups stake their claim to particular ideas, knowledge or practices, in this instance mindfulness in the workplace. I first encountered his work as a way of explaining the different ways in which different discourse communities (academics, consultants, in-house people developers and leaders) talked about emotional intelligence (EI). This was before the term EI had translated into organisational discourse and leadership practice.

At the time I began studying, speaking and writing about ‘EQ’ (the popular shorthand for the broader field of EI) there was little awareness of what this concept meant within corporate settings, and only a handful of pioneering organisations were turning their attentions to ways in which they could develop ‘this thing called EQ’. Now, nearly two decades on it is a phrase that needs no explanation, we ‘know’ collectively, as practitioners engaged in enhancing personal and leadership excellence, what EI is. It’s now a territory in which the ‘pioneers have moved out and settlers moved in.’

“Words are not mirror-like reflections, but expressions of group convention. Various social groups possess preferred vocabularies, or ways of putting things, and these vocabularies reflect or defend their values, politics, and writing . . . they seem totally convincing, yet their very ‘reality’ is their danger, for each renders the believer heroic, and the non-believer a fool”

Gergen, 1991:119

Some proponents of classic mindfulness see the transition into the workplace as the ‘Wild West’ needing to be tamed. Here Margaret Chapman-Clarke argues that in this pioneering phase we need to be open, curious and creative and to see mindfulness as a rich mosaic, comprising different elements, which when integrated comprise a coherent whole. She sees the workplace not as the last, but new frontier to create organisations ‘fit to house the human spirit.’
Having been immersed in this emerging field for more than a decade my observations are that, far from standardization, calculability and control, those at the forefront of bringing an awareness-raising practice to people at work, in diverse and inclusive ways, are doing so mindful and with the utmost integrity.

Such interventions might look different, because workplace mindfulness practitioners apply their contextual intelligence, integrating ‘what works’ in mindfulness, suited to their particular environments (for a review see Chapman-Clarke, 2016). Indeed such adaptations are within the spirit of the original (secular) classic MBI, the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Kabat-Zinn has written that he did not intend that the original curriculum be prescriptive, but intended it as ‘a well-defined, systematic [client] centred approach … designed to be delivered in a flexible way’ (Chapman-Clarke, 2016:24).

What is workplace mindfulness?

To be mindful is to be consciously aware of something. In organisations, mindful training is a developmental pathway that leads to a ‘meta’ awareness of our thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations in order to develop an ‘in-the-present moment’ consciousness of all our experiences. MBIs enable us to move away from labelling our experiences in a judgemental way, as good, bad or indifferent, but to develop an attitude of curiosity and ‘beginner’s mind.’

Through a systematic engagement with our experience, as it is happening, when it is happening, we skilfully become able to ‘sit with’ our experiences and to notice the unique ways in which our minds work. And the more we do this, the more we are able to ‘wake up’; and make conscious choices in how to respond, rather than react to what the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world throws at us. We no longer become locked in what professor of leadership at Insead, Kets de Fries (2015) describes as the ‘prison of busyness’ but learn how to slow down and in this space, make wiser decisions about what is important to us.

In the context of leadership decision-making, this has immense implications for what and why organisations exist and the ways that they operate as an aggregate of individuals waking up to the impact of their actions.

The mindfulness continuum and mosaic

Who defines what ‘mindfulness is’ (and therefore the mindfulness territory) is shaped by a whole set of values that the practitioner brings to their work. Words, as Gergen observes, are not ‘mirror-like’ reflections of reality. They are defined, by someone, somewhere, and that someone holds a particular view of reality. No-one ‘owns’ mindfulness, our job as organisational practitioners is to work out what is ‘the truth’ in our specific context and to do so ethically and with integrity. This doesn’t mean that incorporating more didactic teaching: practising a ‘mindful moment’ or taking a three-minute breathing space after a difficult meeting, is reductionist, or any poorer in quality than sitting in the lotus position, in isolation on retreat, for three months. It’s simply different.

Mindfulness can be thought of as being along a continuum, practised for different purposes and intended outcomes; a continuum that starts, at one end (for some), as a spiritual practice and extends to a set of skills to cope with stress, for others. Mindfulness is a mosaic. A mosaic is comprised of a combination of different elements, which when put together create a coherent whole. As one of my peer-researchers in the mindfulness-in-
coaching research (MICR) observed:
“...may not be able to sit on my cushion for half an hour, but just stopping and noticing when I am getting bogged down in the story is invaluable ... it may not be reality at all ... it is just thoughts”


**Integrative mindfulness as the ‘reboot’ for emotional intelligence development**

With two and a half decades in executive education and a decade in moulding my mindfulness mosaic, the definition of mindfulness that I hold, as a work psychologist, is that it is an integrative intervention which is a ‘reboot’ for emotional intelligence development (Chapman-Clarke, 2017). What I mean by this is that mindfulness training and practice enable us to develop our ‘embodied EQ’ and hone what Claxton (2015) calls the ‘intelligence in the flesh’ and Aquilina (2016) as ‘embodying authenticity’. Scientists have long been exploring the concept of the embodied mind and neuro-imaging is now able to show the ways in which practising mindfulness impacts on the brain.

Through the concept of neuroplasticity, it’s not so much that mindfulness in the workplace is the last frontier to be tamed, but the ‘wild west’ contours of our minds. Mindfulness, at its heart and in essence, is about just that, calming our ‘tricky’ minds and creating a space for more considered, ethical and compassionate ways of being and doing both at work, in our families, communities and societies.

Russo-Alvarez (2010) wrote that between stimulus and response there is a space, and in that space is the opportunity for growth and freedom. My intention in this piece is to encourage a mindset of openness and curiosity, rather than criticism, during this pioneering phase in which we’re working out what works in the context of workplace mindfulness.

To invite other discourse communities, not to deride or diminish the work of those of us who care about people at work and champion workplace MBIs and who do so ethically, with integrity, authentically and above all, mindfully.

*Innovation in Mindfulness – Second Wave MBIs*

This journal and its contributors speak to a zeitgeist in the innovation of workplace MBIs. We are at the start of a second wave of secular mindfulness, in which practitioners and researchers in the ‘workplace territory’ do not need taming, but to be supported in their courage and intention to create new types of leadership and organisational cultures. Integrative, informed MBIs which reflect adaptation, without dilution; which hold true the foundations of mindfulness, silence, stillness and spaciousness (Kabat-Zinn, 2010); with the purpose, no matter what our social group or preferred vocabulary, of our collective intention becoming realised, that of making a difference in the world.

“Why is mindfulness so sought after in this moment, and so necessary? In part I would say, because the world and its institutions … [and leaders] are literally and metaphorically striving for authentic ways to live and to be and act in the world. We long for some degree of effective balance and wisdom that supports meaningful, embodied and significant work – the work of making a difference in the world”

(Kabat-Zinn, 2010:50)

*References*

- Russo-Alvarez, G. (2010) *American Journal of Pharmacy Education*, 74(8), Article 52 University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre
A workplace mindfulness movement without compassion at its heart is set to fail, argues Liz Hall

As the wave of mindfulness at work continues to swell amidst these challenging times, actively supporting employees to develop compassion, for others and for themselves, is not just a nice-to-have. It’s an imperative.

We arguably dwell in highly challenging VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous) times. Mental ill health is rife and seemingly on the rise, resulting in mounting pressure on employers to be more proactive in supporting employees’ wellbeing. I’m increasingly approached by employers anxious to put mindfulness interventions in place urgently to support staff under immense strain—one was reeling after two employees had committed suicide. And by individuals seeking coaching and/or mindfulness training because they’re at breaking point, Very few, if any, organisations and individuals are immune.

Already, many are lamenting what they see as the ‘McMindfulness’ phenomena in which mindfulness is seen as being co-opted by corporates solely as a superficial tool to increase productivity, or even as a sticking plaster for deep wounds in ‘toxic’ workplaces, leaving employers feeling somehow off the hook, and employees highly vulnerable. The UK’s Mindfulness Initiative highlighted concerns along these lines in its recent report: “Concerns are also raised that shallow, introductory mindfulness is being used as a way to sustain unscrupulous work practices, and cover up unsustainable workload” (Mindfulness Initiative, 2016).

Of course, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can be a highly appropriate response, and as we know, can deliver a whole host of benefits in addition to increased resilience. And a little mindfulness can go a long way, whetting the appetite of employees to investigate further even if their employer hasn’t the budget or inclination to offer a full evidence-informed intervention (Chapman-Clarke, 2016).

However, unless development of compassion—particularly self-compassion—is interwoven into Mindfulness-based Interventions (MBIs), I believe they are set to fail or at least to fall far short of fulfilling their potential not only to help people cope, but to thrive and flourish.

Definitions
Mindfulness refers to the ability to non-judgementally bring awareness to any experience, positive, negative or neutral, whereas self-compassion focuses on holding negative thoughts and emotions with kindness (Germer, 2009), and includes an action piece. One way to define compassion, although it’s more nuanced in reality, is “empathy with action.” And as Ricard (2016) says, “If compassion without wisdom is blind, compassion without action is hypocritical.”

With mindfulness, we practice being what it is. Mindfulness is about the nature and quality of our relationship to the present moment experience, self-compassion about the nature and quality of our relationship with the experiencer who is suffering (Germer, 2009). Neff & Davidson (2016) point out that there is somewhat of a paradox with self-compassion—accepting the experience as it is, but also wishing it could be different. As they say, when self-compassion “accompanies mindful awareness of a difficult experience, feelings of care and concern emerge for oneself...as well as a desire for the self to be free from suffering in the future.”

Two wings of a bird
In much of the literature on mindfulness, mindfulness and compassion are seen as going...
hand in hand, to be two sides of the same coin of awareness, of waking up. Although the constructs of mindfulness and compassion are both arguably drawn primarily from Buddhist psychology, there’s a history of contemplation and an emphasis on being compassionate in all the major religions. Many more mainstream mindfulness teachings also actively encourage the cultivation of compassion to self and others.

There’s a compelling case made in Tibetan Buddhism, however, for attending to both compassion and wisdom/ mindfulness, and for us to see these as inter-dependent and as balancing one another (e.g. Brach, 2003; Ricard, 2009; Siegel and Germer, 2012). Many Buddhist texts describe mindfulness and compassion as the two birds of the wing of enlightenment. In Tibetan Buddhism, the archetype of compassion is Chenrezig (pictured), who’s sometimes depicted as a being with a thousand arms and an eye on each palm which allow him to see and direct compassion to all beings.

**Natural progression?**

For me personally, ever since I started practising mindfulness, it has been interlinked with an aspiration to develop compassion for myself, and others- undoubtedly, this linkage has been fostered by my exposure to Buddhist teachings. However, it has also been fuelled by my own experience in my practice- the more I practise mindfulness, the more I feel kinder, more forgiving, more loving, more compassionate towards myself and fellow beings. Practising mindfulness can often lead naturally to the development of compassion. Research shows that mindfulness training increases self-compassion (e.g. Birnie, Speca and Carlson, 2010; Shapiro, Brown and Biegal, 2007) and compassion generally (e.g. Atkins and Parker, 2012); Lutz et al, 2008; Atkins, 2013).

Yet, most traditional MBSR and MBCT programmes, including workplace MBIs, don’t teach compassion development per se, and compassion doesn’t always arise when we practice mindfulness, and not for all of us. We can develop our ‘muscles’ of attentional control and centred awareness without actively seeking to cultivate compassion. A sniper can be very mindful. And of course, we can also have compassion without mindfulness such as when a mother instinctively rescues her child from their burning home. Without compassion, mindfulness is ‘attention training.’ Type-A, highly driven and competitive individuals can embrace mindfulness as a wonderful technique to help them become more attentive, more focused and higher-achieving at work, and without compassion, they can become even more competitive, and ruthless. This is one of the dangers of rolling out MBIs at work which focus primarily on enhancing performance, and which don’t have self-compassion (whether we call it this or something else) at their core.

On the other hand, if we try to be self-compassionate without the clarity of mindfulness, we can tip into self-indulgence. As Brach (2003) says, “If our heartfelt caring begins to bleed over into self-pity, giving rise to another story line- we tried so hard but didn’t get what we so dearly wanted- mindfulness enables us to see the trap we’re falling into.”

I’ve witnessed in myself and others that turning the spotlight of mindfulness inwards can light up all sorts of dark corners in our minds and hearts. Unless we set an intention to explore with kindness and care, we can end up becoming more acutely aware of what’s present yet continue to be highly self-critical. Our tough inner critics have a whole lot more material to work with!

As Brach (2003) says, “Instead of pushing away or judging our anger or despondency, compassion enables us to be softly and kindly present with our open wounds.”

**Connections**

Research highlights that developing compassion boosts connections with others. In organisations, compassion promotes healing and builds the quality of relationships, raising levels of trust and strengthening shared values of interconnectedness (Dutton, Lilius, and Kanov, 2007). Compassion works with affiliative brain systems (self-criticism works through threat systems) (e.g. Weng et al, 2013). Ricard (2016) views loving-kindness and compassion as the two faces of altruism with the difference lying only in their object-loving-kindness wants others to be happy and compassion focuses on eradicating suffering. These nuances aside, the Loving Kindness Meditation (LKM) is one that many engage in to increase empathy and compassion. Research (Kok and Singer, 2016) suggests that this is a good choice. Their research (see page 6 in this journal) comparing the effects of LKM; breathing meditation; the Body Scan, and ‘observing-thought meditation found that participants practising the LKM experienced the greatest increase in feelings of warmth and positive thoughts about others, and were less likely to have ruminative ‘negative’ and past-focused thoughts.

The good news is that rather than just hoping compassion will naturally arise, it is possible to train for compassion. Jazaieri et al (2013), for example, found that it’s possible through compassion cultivation training to improve in all three domains of compassion identified by Neff (2003a and 2003b)- compassion for others, receiving compassion from others, and self-compassion.

Compassion isn’t all about going softly-softly. It can be fierce. In a sense, it’s tough love. Goleman (2015) has shared that he was surprised by the Dalai Lama’s fierceness around compassion, saying his version of compassion is “more muscular than Sunday-school stereotypes of a benign but soft and flabby kindness”. The Dalai Lama views full disclosure as one application of compassion in the public sphere, and forceful action to right injustice of every kind.

“This distaste for injustice, coupled with taking initiative to expose and reform corrupt systems – be they the misdeeds of banks or corporations, politicians or religious officials – is the singular application of compassion I least expected in the Dalai Lama’s vision,” writes Goleman (2015).

Mindfulness alerts us when we’re doing or thinking things that are not beneficial for ourselves or others, and awareness in itself can be curative. However, compassion is a powerful agent of transformation of the mind. Gilbert
and Choden (2013) say, “Both mindfulness and compassion are vital to the process of growth and transformation, but while mindfulness is the servant of the awakening heart of compassion, it is the force of compassionate motivations that reorganizes the mind and sets in motion lasting change.”

**Times a’ changing**

“First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Finally, you win”

**Gandi**

But are organisations ready for compassion? When I wrote Mindful Coaching some years ago (Hall, 2013), I made a call on whether to include a whole chapter on compassion. It felt risky, yet I felt compelled to do so for the reasons I’ve laid out. But it was still early days. Going into organisations to deliver mindfulness programmes, if I mentioned the word ‘compassion,’ I was much more likely to hit resistance. For one HR director, the word held religious connotations rendering it inappropriate in a work setting; for a tough finance director, it was ‘mushy’ and ‘impractical’ to consider at work; for an internal coach, it was something we all try to be (compassionate) but definitely not something we dare talk about at work. And so on.

These days, I do still encounter people being resistant generally to the concept of compassion at work, but less so than before. The growth in openness and interest is in part due to the fast-growing evidence base.

Initially developed by clinical psychologist Paul Gilbert to work with clients with high shame and self-criticism, the application of Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) is being extended to those with depression, and with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, for example. As its evidence base builds, CFT is increasingly being offered as a trans-diagnostic healthcare option in some National Health Service hospitals in the United Kingdom. And just as the stamp of approval from the UK’s National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence for Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy helped to ‘legitimise’ mindfulness, the growing acceptance of CFT as a valid treatment option is legitimising compassion in non-religious quarters.

We’re seeing growing interest (e.g. Atkins and Parker, 2012; Anstiss, 2016), including in compassionate leadership such as through the Compassionate Mind Foundation. Compassion-focused Coaching is emerging too (e.g. Irons, Palmer, and Hall in Palmer and Parker, 2012; Anstiss, 2016), including in religious quarters.

The option is legitimising compassion in non-religious quarters, growing acceptance of CFT as a valid treatment option for combining them in training and practice. There’s increasingly a move in the mainstream towards viewing them as linked (following in the footsteps of teachings more than 2,500 years old). We’re currently surfing the crest of the popularity wave for mindfulness, and inevitably the wave will embark on its downward journey, as is always the case with anything ‘new.’ However, I believe we’re much more likely to achieve profound transformation of our workplaces, lives, selves and society, and for workplace mindfulness interventions to be sustainable, if compassion is placed firmly at the heart of MBIs at work and personal practice.

**Conclusion**

Mindfulness and compassion complement one another beautifully, and I believe both are crucial to ‘stickability’ of MBIs at work. There is a growing evidence base for both mindfulness and compassion, and increasingly for combining them in training and practice.

**Tips for easing into compassion development discussion and practice at work**

- *Think about the language you use: perhaps talk about ‘care’, ‘empathy with action’, ‘kindness’ if you foresee resistance to the word compassion*
- *Make a clear argument for the need for self-compassion for mindfulness to stick*
- *Highlight the evidence base for compassion at work*
- *Be aware that developing self-compassion is hard so proceed with caution*

...of our workplaces, lives, selves and society, and for workplace mindfulness interventions to be sustainable, if compassion is placed firmly at the heart of MBIs at work and personal practice.

**References**

Compassion has been defined as:
“a sensitivity to suffering in self and others with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it”
Germer & Siegel, 2012; Gilbert & Choden, 2013

Suffering is natural and common. Humans and other animals have evolved with the capacity to suffer as this has helped with survival. For instance, the suffering of thirst motivates us to find water, of hunger to eat, of loneliness to connect, of coldness to get warm and of fear to become safe. Suffering occurs in many places – in our homes and our neighbourhoods, in our schools and our workplaces.

In the workplace suffering arises from both work-related events and situations – for instance, work-related stress, redundancy, relocation, bullying, discrimination, accidents and injuries, occupational diseases, missing out on promotion, job insecurity, isolation, working unwanted hours, physical discomfort, verbal abuse from customers and assault. (Dutton et al, 2014; Lilias et al, 2012, Driver 2007, Ashford et al 1989, HSE) – as well as non-work events and situations (for instance, grieving and loss, financial difficulties, poor health, relationship breakdown, being a victim of crime and loneliness).

Suffering at work is costly to individuals, teams and organisations. Suffering individuals may perform work tasks less well and need time away from the workplace. Suffering can result in absence, staff turnover, disengagement, bad workplace reputation and difficulties with attracting and retaining talent (Zaslow 2002, Rosch 2001, EUOSH 2014).

Small acts of kindness
But just as suffering at work is natural and commonplace, so too is compassion at work. You see compassion at work in small acts of kindness, support and consideration for colleagues, in certain organisational policies and procedures, and in certain organisational functions and dedicated roles, such as occupational health, counselling services, worksite health promotion, the provision of
Compassion is not one thing. Rather, it is a complex, innate, motivational, interpersonal and behavioural system rooted in our ancient caring motivations. It depends on and is enabled by a range of skills and competencies, abilities and strengths including empathy, sympathy, generosity, openness, distress tolerance, commitment and courage. (Gilbert, 1989, 2005, 2009; Gilbert & Choden, 2013; Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010). It is a major enabler of friendly, co-operative, prosocial behaviour which in turn has helped drive human evolution and the development of human intelligence (Carter, 2014; Dunbar, 2007, 2010; Porges, 2007).

Indeed, without compassion you could argue that human beings would not have been able to come together in the many and varied co-operative alliances and enterprises that we do – including teams and organisations. Viewed like this, compassion can be considered to be at the very heart of organisations. It helps and enables groups of unrelated humans co-operate, flourish and thrive.

Compassion can be considered something which flows, eg, from others to you, from you to others, and between others – both individuals and groups. Compassion can also flow from one part of yourself to another, and this is called self-compassion.

The person receiving compassion from another may experience less suffering now and into the future. In the workplace compassion may help people feel safe (psychologically and physically), cared for, protected, listened to, heard, understood and re-assured. It can involve rescuing someone from a dangerous situation, helping them with task they are struggling with, helping them reduce their risk of poor health or injury or helping them find a new job. It might involve helping them with things they are dealing with outside of the workplace, and even providing material assistance in the form of goods or money, shelter, transportation, etc.

Compassion helps with healing and recovery (Brody, 1992; Bento, 1994; Doka, 1989), and helps communicate dignity and feelings of being valued (Clarke, 1987; Dutton, 2012; Forst, 2003; Frost et al., 2011). Depending on the motivation of the provider, wellbeing at work initiatives can also be considered to be manifestations of compassion at work.

Psychological health

Being compassionate towards one-self seems to contribute towards good psychological health, reduced levels of anxiety and depression (Neff, 2012), reduce physiological indicators of stress (Rockliff, Gilbert, McEwan, Lightman, & Glover, 2008), less rumination, less perfectionism, less fear of failure (Neff, 2003; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005), less suppression of unwanted thoughts and a greater willingness to accept negative emotions as valid and important (Leary et al., 2007; Neff, 2003).

It may be associated with such psychological strengths as happiness, optimism, wisdom, curiosity and exploration, personal initiative, and emotional intelligence (Heffernan, Griffin, McNulty, & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007). People with higher levels of self-compassion seem better able to cope with such adversities as academic failure (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005), divorce (Sbarra, Smith, & Mehl, 2012), childhood maltreatment (Vettesse, Dyer, Li, & Wekerle, 2011) and chronic pain (Costa & Pinto-Gouveia, 2011).

They may also be more likely to exhibit such health behaviours such as persistence with dietary changes (Adams & Leary, 2007), reducing smoking (Kelly, Zuroff, Foa, & Gilbert, 2009), seeking appropriate medical care (Terry & Leary, 2011) and physical activity (Magnus, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2010).

They may experience improved relationship functioning (Neff & Beretvas, 2012; Yarnell & Neff, 2012) and show more empathetic concern for others, altruism, perspective taking and forgiveness (Neff & Pommier, 2012).

The person who acts compassionately may benefit from living in harmony with their values, protection or maintenance of their self-concept as a caring person, as well as feelings of achievement and appreciation. They may enjoy the consequences of being helpful, along with feelings of meaning and job satisfaction (Graber and Mitcham 2004, Pearson 2006, Kim and Flascher 2007, Youngson 2008), a positive work identity (Moon et al., 2012) and perceptions of being a leader (Melwani et al., 2012).

Bearing witness

People witnessing compassion at work may also benefit, perhaps experiencing feelings of pride about the way that work colleagues are behaving (Dutton et al. 2007) along with the positive emotion of elevation (Haidt 2002). It has also been suggested (Condon & DeSteno, 2011) that when people witness compassionate action then punitive behaviours towards others may fall.

In addition to the above individual level benefits, work units, teams and organisations may benefit from compassionate at work by noticing improved levels of positive emotions such as pride and gratitude (Dutton et al., 2006), improved health and wellbeing, improved collective commitment, lower turnover rates (Grant et al., 2008; Lilius et al., 2008), improved levels of collaboration (Dutton et al., 2007), improved reputation and an improved ability to attract and retain needed human resources. Compassionate acts may also reduce costs that arise due to injuries, ill-health, sickness absence, and damage.

A deeper understanding

Compassion at work is truly multi-disciplinary subject, touching as it does upon leadership, management, organisational development, evolutionary biology, social neuroscience, economics, physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Research into compassion at work is growing. It has been studied in a wide range of different workplaces and sectors (e.g. banks, schools, airlines, call centres, healthcare organisations, care homes, universities, financial services, and criminal justice systems) and from a number of different perspectives, including enabling and inhibiting factors, correlations, impacts on different stakeholders, and relationship with leadership. (For comprehensive reviews, see Dutton et al., 2014 and Anstiss, 2016).

Much of the research to date has been descriptive and theoretical in nature. The field now needs to progress towards more rigorous and systematic model testing, single and multi-component interventional studies, and research into casual pathways and mechanisms.

Deepening our understanding of the benefits of compassion at work and how these can be realised forms part of the picture of how to increase levels of compassion in the world. Which is arguably one of the most important scientific tasks of our age.

Dr Tim Anstiss is a physician, coach, founder of the Academy of Health Coaching, and a member of The UMC’s editorial advisory board. He is the author of ‘Compassion at Work’ in The Wiley Handbook of the Psychology of Positivity and Strengths-based Approaches at Work (Wiley, 2016), Eds. Oades, LG et al.
Developing mindful leaders

Today’s leaders have much to contend with – and mindfulness can help them be more resilient, collaborative and to lead amidst complexity, new research reveals. Michael Chaskalson and Megan Reitz report

Leadership in the developed world today is arguably more challenging than at any time since the Second World War. Leaders must nowadays contend with political and economic instability; the threat of climate change; rapidly increasing globalization and just as rapidly increasing nationalism, and the proliferation of social media where their utterances and decisions can be instantly and widely broadcast.

Along with all this uncertainty, leaders are often embedded in hugely divergent relational networks and they are called upon to manage systems that are deeply complex, rather than ‘simply’ complicated. They must do this in the face of endless streams of incoming data: emails, calls, back-to-back meetings, messaging and so on.

This calls on them to develop and sustain their mental, emotional and physical resilience; their capacity for relating and working well with diverse others; and their abilities to thrive and take smart decisions in situations where they can’t control outcomes.

Advocates of mindfulness training say that it can help leaders manage these times better. Others scoff and call the approach a fad, saying there’s very little evidence directly supporting its application in organisational and leadership contexts.

Certainly, there has been, until now, scant robust research examining the actual impact of mindfulness training with organisational leaders. Despite the considerable research into its clinical efficacy, we have had little idea about whether, why and how mindfulness practice might impact leadership effectiveness.

Concerned about this lack of evidence, and wanting to understand how best to develop leaders, we engaged in a two-year research project at Ashridge Executive Education. We set out to discover the links between mindfulness practice and three specific capacities: resilience, collaboration and leading in complexity.

Our research sought answers to these questions:

- Does eight weeks of mindfulness training and practice impact leaders’ capacities for resilience, collaboration and leading in complexity?
- If it does, how does it?
- What are leaders’ experiences of practicing mindfulness?

What we did

We recruited a cross-sector group of 57 senior leaders who came to Ashridge to attend three half-day workshops every two weeks and one final full day workshop. There was different content for each of the sessions, but they broadly followed the same framework: tuition; practice and feedback around various mindfulness meditations and other exercises. There were specific discussions around the application of mindfulness to leadership contexts and we received feedback on home practice and assigned new home practice every time we met.

The programme was led by the authors of this article - Michael Chaskalson and Megan Reitz. Michael is a mindfulness teacher with more than 40 years of personal experience of mindfulness approaches, including significant experience of teaching in organisational and leadership contexts. Megan is a business school professor with extensive experience of facilitating leadership development programmes as well as a personal daily mindfulness practice.

Roughly half the group were designated as the experimental group. The other half were a control group. Both groups were tested using a range of psychometric measures examining their working memory capacity, their levels of empathy, resilience, anxiety
and overall mindfulness. The experimental group was tested before and after the training intervention. The control group was tested over the same period but without the training. They attended the training themselves once measurements had been completed.

Participants logged the number of minutes of practice they conducted every day throughout the eight-week period as well as their comments on the type of meditation and their experience of it.

Besides those quantitative measures, we collected and analysed more than 27 hours of recorded data, cataloguing the subjective experience of the participants throughout the programme. This included recordings of unfacilitated small group discussions regarding the experience of practice, one-to-one interviews and group discussions at the end of the programme.

What we found
1. Training alone has some effect on resilience and mindfulness
Undergoing an eight-week mindfulness training programme, without accounting for the level of home practice undertaken, significantly enhanced self-report assessments of the leadership capacity of resilience and some aspects of overall mindfulness – as measured by the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ, Baer et al. 2006, Baer et al. 2008). The results elsewhere were limited. But when we accounted for the level of formal daily meditation practice the participants undertook, a different story emerged, because…

2. Practice matters greatly: it improves resilience, collaboration and leading in complexity
It won’t surprise anyone who has a mindfulness practice that we found that the real benefits of the Mindful Leader programme depended on the amount of formal mindfulness practice that participants undertook.

The more they did, the greater the improvement in their scores on many of the measures.

Crucially, those who practiced for ten minutes or more per day showed significant increases in measures related to their resilience; their capacity to collaborate; their ability to be agile in conditions of complexity, and their overall mindfulness in comparison to those who practiced less than ten minutes.

The qualitative data lend support to the findings from the quantitative analysis. The most widely reported impact found in the qualitative data was also on personal resilience. One leader says:

“...In terms of resilience, there’s no question it’s helped me personally - it does help my stress in that you become aware of what your body’s doing at any one moment, and that’s very much a product of what’s going on in your thoughts and your emotional reactions to those.”

The most common themes reported in relation to collaboration referred to increased empathy through a heightened understanding of, and appreciation for, others’ state and position:

“I tend to talk at a thousand miles an hour, I have an agenda that is thirty points long, and I have been (laughing) exhausting to be around when we’ve got a lot to do. And I’ve really 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 the capacity to lead in conditions of complexity, the most common themes reported related to an increased capacity to focus; to remain calm under pressure; and an enhanced adaptability and agility through a decreased attachment to positions or views – all of which enabled better decision making.

“Previously I would have shied away from complexity. Now I approach problems - after taking a deep breath or 3! - with openness and curiosity. I approach problems/issues, rather than running away from them or ignoring them.”

3. The impact lasts
The post-programme survey administered approximately 12 weeks after the end of the programme showed that 93%, 85% and 85% of participants recognised they had experienced impact in relation to their resilience, capacity to lead in complexity and capacity for collaboration respectively (see Figure 1).

4. Three key ‘meta-capacities’ underlie the impact of mindfulness practice
Participants referred to three over-arching and fundamental abilities which seemed to underlie all other impacts.

a. Metacognition (the ability they discovered to choose at crucial times to observe, in the moment, what they were thinking, feeling and sensing),

b. Allowing (letting what is the case, be the case and approaching yourself, others and the world about you with a sense of wanting to bring about what is best for all concerned)

c. Curiosity in own and other’s experiences

They talked about how in varying combinations these capacities enabled them to experience a small ‘space’ in the flow of their experience, an opening that enabled choice and allowed them to respond rather than just react according to old habits and emotional patterns.

5. These three capacities helped to develop five cognitive and emotional skills
According to our participants’ accounts, as they developed the capacities described above, they began to experience and further develop a range of cognitive and emotional skills.

Figure 1: Post-programme impact
Five key skills, developed through mindfulness training and practice, stood out from the analysis:
- emotional regulation
- perspective taking
- empathy
- focus
- adaptability.

6. This led us to the development of a theory of mindful leadership
As described above, we found what appears to be a hierarchy in effects. Three ‘meta-capacities’ – meta-cognition, allowing and curiosity – enable the development of a sub-set of five key cognitive and emotional skills and these in turn impact the key leadership capacities under investigation.

When some combination of meta-cognition, curiosity and allowing are present, a small ‘space’ opens in the flow of experience where a more ‘choiceful’ response becomes possible and reactivity is reduced.

This enhanced choicefulness in turn seems to enable a set of key cognitive and emotional skills. These in turn result in improved resilience, collaboration and the capacity to lead in complexity.

This theory is described diagrammatically in Figure 2 above.

7. ‘Home practice’ was challenging but keeping to a routine helped
Finally, we discovered the tumultuous experiences our participants had in relation to their practice and developing a new skill and habit which ranged from thorough dislike and frustration to utter pleasure and excitement. By far the most common challenges were being ‘too busy’ to carve out the time necessary for meditation and ‘beating oneself up’.

These were seen by participants as particularly ironic given their aspiration of using mindfulness practice as a route to calmness and reduced stress. Conversely, adding meditation to a routine and being accepting that learning a new skill was going to have its ups and downs were critical supports:

“I think I feel so busy - I’m so busy at work and at home - that I’ve just accepted the fact that I feel so much better by spending some time meditating, and I now feel the benefit from it, that it’s in my list of things that I do.”

Some recommendations
For leaders who wish to learn and develop their mindfulness skills and for organisations that want to encourage mindfulness practice, we offer the following recommendations:
- You need to practice mindfulness over an extended period for it to have a significant impact on your leadership capacities.
- Attending a structured taught programme is probably the most helpful way of learning. Make sure the instructor running the programme is well-trained and supervised. An extended intervention, such as an ‘eight week mindfulness programme’, will have much more impact than a one-off workshop.
- Think about when and where you can practice for at least ten minutes every day and try to build this into a routine.
- Support and encouragement from family, friends and colleagues helps and ‘buddying up’ with someone else is useful.
- If you’re commissioning a training or want to support it in your workplace, it helps to allow a space for people to practice in the office which is quiet and private.
- ‘Informal’ practices such as mindful walking, running, swimming and even showering are all useful and often enjoyable activities. They are additions to formal meditation sessions and don’t stand as substitutes for that.
- If you are in an influential position in an organisation, and practice mindfulness, model mindful behaviour: give your attention to others, practice regularly and talk about it with others. Encourage other leaders to do the same.

Conclusion
Our research suggests that mindfulness training and practice can develop capacities important to leaders.

As one of our participants put it:
“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 ones’ life, it is however essential and a great help in interacting with collaborators, managing a team, decision making and putting things in perspective.”

References and further info
- To access the audio-guided meditations we used on our programme, go to: http://mbsr.co.uk/mp31.php
- For further information, see: http://mbsr.co.uk/leadership.php
Mindfulness for public sector change

Aberystwyth University has developed with the Welsh Government a “second wave” intervention to boost mindfulness, decision-making and behavioural change.

Rachel Lilley reports

In this article I describe the mindfulness, decision-making and behaviour change intervention (MDBI) we’ve developed and delivered as part of an ongoing research programme at Aberystwyth University, working largely with the Welsh Government. I give an outline of how and why the programme came about, what it was (and is) intending to achieve and how it developed. I include our research outcomes, both quantitative and qualitative and consider how it fits within the fast growing world of mindfulness based adaptations.

For the past four years researchers at Aberystwyth University, led mainly by myself and Professor Mark Whitehead have been developing, delivering and researching a mindfulness and behavioural insights based intervention targeted mainly at the public sector. Our interest in developing and delivering this course came out of work with and within government and NGOs as they attempt to integrate behavioural economics in the design, delivery and evaluation of projects and policy.

We began from a critical standpoint. Asking the question: what are the ethical dilemmas of using psychology and the behavioural sciences to inform and design policy and projects where the aim is to change behaviours? Who decides which behaviours are ‘good’? And are we in danger of manipulating people in ways that would challenge current ethical and moral understandings?

At the same time surely it’s good that people working on change-based projects use the best understandings and knowledge from the social sciences – but how could we ensure that this work is empowering rather than disempowering ethically co-produced rather than unethically “done to and top down?”

Mindfulness was our second starting point, specifically mindfulness as a method of inquiry into our own thoughts, feelings emotion and behaviour. Through a first person inquiry, using mindfulness, could we embed a first person understanding of behaviour change which would lead to more nuanced and ethically informed change based policy and projects, particularly with teams and organisations working on large complex problems such as climate change?

The course we’ve designed and delivered brings together mindfulness practice with decision-making and behavioural theory. It represents an integrative, or ‘second wave’ of mindfulness intervention that moves away from the standard Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and is adapted for specific workplace outcomes (see Chapman-Clarke, 2017; 2016).

Whilst MBCT/MBSR are seen as a ‘gold standard’, the impossibility of translating them directly into the workplace makes, and as Chapman-Clarke, (2016) argues, their evidence base less relevant. This area of work is already far more developed in the US, but is becoming much more visible in the UK and Europe.

Our work is pointing towards the idea that the best workplace mindfulness-
based interventions are not made up of a standardised curriculum, transferrable to any situation, but require what Chapman-Clarke (2016:23-24) describes as ‘adaptation without dilution.’ That is, such interventions need to be highly tailored to the context and the desired outcomes of the organisation.

**Design of the MDBI**

Both MBCT/SR and MDBI begin with an understanding and inquiry into the automatic ‘unconscious’ mind and its influence on how we interpret and behave in the world. However, the understanding of the unconscious and automatic mind in our tailored MDBI course is not orientated towards stress, rumination and anxiety, as in the standard, classic programmes. Instead, the focus is on how heuristics and cognitive biases affect work-based decision making, team working, organisational behaviours, stakeholder engagement, diversity and inclusion, and project design and delivery.

The MDBI follows the guidelines suggested in the programme developed by Mark Williams and Danny Penman in *Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, with participants doing formal practices of 15-20 minutes of meditation five to six times a week whilst integrating informal mindfulness practices into their everyday life. In our course the frame of understanding is (broadly) on the effects of biases, social norms, and context on behaviours and decision-making in the participant’s specific workplace.

In the area of public service delivery, we identified confirmation, optimism, status quo, and sunk-cost biases as particular barriers to effective working. It also considered how emotions affect our behaviours and our decisions. This is a crucial part of understanding how many of our decisions are orientated less by mental rationality and more because they ‘feel’ right.

The course uses mindful awareness in order to increase participants’ capacity to feel internal, physical states thus becoming more aware of the emotional states they embody. It also introduced relevant theories (such as, for example dual process theory, and cognitive bias work as discussed by Sunstein and Thaler (2009) in order to inquire into our understanding of how emotional states impact engagement, decision-making and bias.

This has particular relevance to the people we are working with who are designing interventions to facilitate behavioural shifts in others, who previously would focus on ‘educating and raising awareness’ as the main focus of their behaviour change work.

**Coaching**

As the interventions developed they included two one-to-one coaching sessions as well as group facilitation. Each group session lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and included:

- A group check-in (reflecting on experiences of personal practices);
- A mindfulness practice (e.g. body scan, sitting, walking meditation, breath, body, sounds and thoughts meditations);
- Pair and group reflection on the practice;
- Interactive group learning on relevant behaviour change theory (e.g. exploring habit formation, the nature of System 1 and System 2 thinking, and heuristics/biases) (Kahneman, 2011)

Between sessions, participants were given interactive course material. This included instructions for practice at home and work as well as written resources and links to videos such as ‘TED Talks’ and YouTube clips to illustrate and reinforce key teaching points. The coaching sessions were introduced in response to feedback that people were finding it useful personally but harder to translate the learning into their working practice. Allowing them to reflect more specifically on the wider implications of the practice improved and accelerated the impact of the course on their work context.

**Evaluation**

Given that we were exploring the extent to which mindfulness could provide a practical route to facilitating greater personal awareness of the forms of habitual, unconscious, and emotional drivers of behaviour (Lilley et al, 2014; Pykett, et al 2016; Karelaia and Reb, 2015), we measured the impact of the intervention as follows.

We surveyed participants at the beginning and end of our programmes in order to consider what effect the course had had on their awareness of key behavioural insights including habit formation and change; the autopilot functions of the brain; the effect of the surrounding environments on behaviour; the role of emotions in shaping behaviour; the impacts of values and belief systems on behaviour, and the behavioural impacts of social norms (Pykett et al, 2017). Our surveys revealed statistically significant increases at the 95% confidence level in participants’ awareness of key behavioural insights between when they commenced the programme and when they completed it.

**Impact of the MDBI on mindfulness**

We also used the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ, Baer et al. 2006) to measure specific effects related to mindfulness. The results showed a statistically significant increase in mean scores in mindfulness trait at the 95% confidence level from before to after the programme.

What this survey was unable to show was the extent to which increased awareness of...
behavioural insights was specifically affected by mindfulness practices. In order to gather some insight into this aspect of the course we gathered qualitative data through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with selected participants. This data revealed a strong sense that learning and experiencing behavioural insights through mindfulness practices had indeed enhanced participants’ awareness of their behavioural tendencies.

As one policy-maker in the Welsh Government observed, “[the course] raises your own awareness of perhaps your own personal prejudices and reactions when dealing with others. […] A course like this facilitates the ability to be able to think along a different line than the one you might be automatically inclined to fall into. At times, obviously what I am thinking is the obstacle to being able to pursue policy effectively” (Welsh Government Participant 1, interview 2014).

This policy-maker was better able to acknowledge their prejudices, reactive states, and automatic responses. Significantly, this awareness of both their professional and personal biases enabled them to think about policy situations in new and creative ways. Another participant observed, “I think there was a logical link there [between mindfulness and behaviour change] in the sense that very often the mindfulness was enabling us as individuals to sort of get a better understanding of the way that all this sort of extra thought, or all these extra thoughts and biases, etc., would come into the mind. (Welsh Government Participant 2, interview 2015).

Here it seemed that mindfulness practices facilitated self-reflection into the cognitive and more intuitive, emotional drivers of human behaviour. Lessons could be learned about decision-making and how it could be changed. One participant, noted: “I guess it looks at how you can both meet in the middle so that you understand how your emotions will guide your decision-making and that we have emotional biases that exist kind of permanently and behavioural science shows what general biases we have but mindfulness is strongest in looking at the context and the moods that you’re in and so a particular state that you’re in”

Implications for practice
Our research suggests that mindfulness-based behavioural learning generates new ways for people to relate to their behaviours and become more open to considering how unconscious biases and heuristics impact their decisions and engagement with others. Since starting our research we have come across many others who have seen the potential for using mindfulness to address and challenge unconscious bias (Lee, 2016). Our intention is to continue to contribute to, and observe the development of this (albeit so far) emerging area of work and the potential this offers for moving mindfulness out of the field of wellbeing and translating into transformative workplace practices.

Our surveys revealed statistically significant increases at the 95% confidence level in participants’ awareness of key behavioural insights between when they commenced the programme and when they completed it

References
A unique higher education mindfulness programme in the ‘wilds’ of Wales sees Heather Fish stake a small claim within the ‘Wild West’ of workplace mindfulness.

Currently there is a drive to tame and bring to order what Willem Kuyken and others call the ‘Wild West’ of mindfulness: the frontier of the workplace.

The 2015 Mindfulness All Party Parliamentary Group (MAPPG) publication The Mindful Nation UK Report commented that, in the workplace: “the proliferation of programmes has outstripped the research evidence base, which, although promising, remains patchy.” (MAPPG, 2015: 39).

As a result, 2016 saw the publication of The Business Case for Mindfulness in the Workplace, and in January 2017 the Workplace Mindfulness Masterclass training series was launched by Oxford and Bangor Universities.

Meanwhile, throughout these years, I’ve been quietly running a small 20 credit Mindfulness in the Workplace module in Higher Education (HE) in the UK, at levels 4 and 7, which has engaged students from companies of all sizes and sectors. I conducted a small-scale study into the longer-term effects of the module in 2016.

In this article, I perhaps stake my claim to a little part of the ‘Wild West’ terrain of workplace mindfulness, and tell the story of how I got here.
The module
This module was the first of its kind in the UK, with a focus on mindfulness and ‘pure’ work-based learning within an HE context. It came into being as part of the Elevate Cymru project, funded by the European Social Fund between 2012 and 2015.

The course took place over three months, on one day per month. With an emphasis on research, including neuroscientific findings, mindfulness practice occupied a distinct part of each day. Informal practices such as the mindful minute (Chaskalson, 2011) were shared first and longer formal practices, such as the body scan and sitting meditation, were introduced on Day 2. Guided meditations were made available on the University’s Moodle - Virtual Learning Environment - site. Assessment was through written assignments, one a literature review relating research to the learner’s workplace, and the other a reflective review of the learner’s experiences of mindfulness practice and any perceived impact on their wellbeing and performance. The “attitudinal foundations” (MAPPG: 63) of compassion, non-judgement and non-striving as an integral part of mindfulness practice were integrated into the fabric of the learning.

Most importantly, as the sole teacher, my role was to embody these qualities and to strike a balance between open-hearted encouragement of each human being, and applying cool and fair appraisal in the academic assessment process. Perhaps this challenge is elegantly summed up by McCown, et al (2011: 92) who identify the areas of “authenticity, authority and friendship” as central to the function of the mindfulness teacher.

Methodologically, the research was mixed methods including a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews and underpinned by an autoethnographic inquiry into my experience as a researcher. Autoethnography, with its focus on the self within the wider cultural landscape, seemed a useful methodological approach to include in parallel to more traditional methods. The aspect of personal bias as an ‘insider- researcher’ (Costley et al, 2010) and the issue of “power relations” (Stroh, 2000: 196) inherent in the teacher-student relationship can be further investigated through autoethnographic scrutiny.

The list of autoethnographic labels by Ellis and Bohner (2000: 739-740) includes “ethnographic poetics” and “first person accounts” and these were explored in the research. Validity within this methodology is seen as the usefulness of the story, and the narrator’s credibility, the writing of which is “lifelike, believable and possible.” (Ellis, et al., 2011: online). Mindfulness teachers are required by the Good Practice Guidelines to have their own personal meditation practice, and although an under-researched area (Chapman-Clarke, 2016) poetry is a key mechanism for teaching some mindfulness themes (Black, 2009). Hence, an element of found poetry crept into the methodological mix.

Results of research
It’s important to acknowledge the small-scale nature of the research, that a figure of 40% responded to the online questionnaire and out of these, 52% identified themselves to be interviewed. Only 4% of respondents stated that they had not continued with their practice, whilst 96% identified a long-term, and on-going, continuation of practice since the course ended. Demographically, this was a largely female group, with the average age between 35 and 45 years, mostly but not exclusively from micro-businesses. Overwhelmingly, respondents identified an improvement in wellbeing as a result of practice. A note of caution is required as at times other practices, such as yoga and coaching, and further mindfulness training had been involved for a minority of respondents. Others however were very clear that their sense of wellbeing was derived from mindfulness practice directly related to the work-based learning programme. There was a correlation to anxiety, worry, stress and depression lifting as a result of practice, and a sense of being more “in control” and “I am not at the mercy of what is happening around me any more.”

In terms of wellbeing, the impact of even informal practice was significant, with a variety of interviewees describing having: “more control of my emotions; I feel that I don’t lose control”; “I had a massive gain during the time of the course and I was determined to keep it”; “Instead of blowing up, I am more mindful of what is happening and take myself away”; “I don’t let the overwhelm, overwhelm me” and “It’s giving myself the permission to be kinder to myself.”

Another area was a feeling that life was easier, after a period of practice: “The problems of the past seemed to fall away and I felt lighter. It’s like a burden that you are carrying and you don’t realise it is so heavy.” Another spoke of becoming aware of a feeling of anxiety only when it had lifted: “That background anxiety isn’t there now, and I am able to deal with things. You don’t realise how much energy and how much of your life that takes up. And that is a big deal, isn’t it?”

The impact on performance at work was more challenging to quantify, and lay largely in an increased awareness enabling more skilful actions to be taken. This is in relation to regrouping by seeking a brief quiet space in which to practice, and then acting in a calmer, more responsive way. There’s a connection also to interviewees observing that their decision-making capabilities were enhanced to some degree.

One business-owner described how their practice led them to take the bold decision to “sack some lucrative clients” as they were highly demanding and causing “a negative impact” on the team. “In one sense, I have willingly lost clients because of mindfulness, but other things have come along, and work is a happier place to be.” This element of improved decision-making as a result of mindfulness reflects the findings of Pykett, Lilley et al (2016) that mindfulness practice can inform more skilful decision-making.

The poetry
Poetry is fundamental to the teaching of the MBSR course, and was a part of the Mindfulness in the Workplace course. At the start of this project I was interested in including an element of autoethnographic poetics, whatever form that might take. The final question of the interviews was designed to evoke words from interviewees, after placing them in a brief state of mindful awareness through a grounding exercise involving the body and the breath. I then asked what words came to mind when reflecting on mindfulness, and the workplace.

Initially, I captured the words which were most often cited in a word cloud graphic. Then the urge towards poetry built up strongly in me, and the following poem is a co-creation with the interviewees, using the words they shared and weaving them into a structure shaped by words of my own. Speedy (2005: 287) discusses “found” poetry, where the words used have been located in a particular context.

As I created the conditions which allowed the words to emerge, it is perhaps more of an emergent, co-creative poetry rooted in trust. My words are in black, and the words of the interviewees are in the colours which
so we do not fool ourselves into believing our behaviour is fine, when it isn’t. The results of this research are heartening in many ways, and the poem encapsulates this. Here, not in the Wild West but in the wilds of west Wales, our module promotes good practice, awareness and a deep self-kindness, adding to the body of research as well as impacting on the lives of the students, their workplaces and families.

References


Here, in the present,
Just ‘being’
In the deep sky space
Of tranquility,
A richness is found.

Floating, weightless,
As through air or in water.
Freedom sings in the heart of stillness.
Peacefulness and community Resound.

Unburdened by challenge,
Happiness is growth, without effort.
Ease and warmth, sincere as Buddha.
Comfort, like chocolate, and in control,
A layering of purposefulness, peace of mind, fulfilment:
This textured state of Awareness.

In the core of calm lies kindness.
This is the balance of being.

Conclusion

What led me to learning mindfulness, to teaching it in and for the workplace, was experiencing a toxic environment at work and being helpless to effect any real change. The resulting stress and loss of confidence was my motivator for initially learning the practice, and then I realised that mindfulness was a fine way of promoting a gentle self-awareness

emerged in their responses. These are allocated in a random way although shaped into verses. The words in purple (happiness, calm, kindness) are the three most used words.

www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095


www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095
Mindfulness may be no longer a 'nice-to-have' but a 'must have' (Rydlund, 2016), including in coaching. We're certainly observing more and more coaches incorporating mindfulness into their practice. But what is the evidence base for this?

In this article I present findings from my research with coaches who practise mindfulness into how this impacts on their work. Impact of mindfulness for coaches includes enhanced presence, attentiveness, self-awareness and self-regulation, acceptance and self-care. I also look at other research, with implications for coaching.

Other research
We can arguably translate evidence from empirical work within therapeutic practice, to help us understand potential application in the coaching context.

For example, studies with therapists highlight how mindfulness enhances attention, self-awareness, presence, attunement, self-care (e.g. Keane, 2013); empathy, resilience and stress management (e.g. Hopkins & Proeve, 2013), and compassion (e.g. Aggs & Bambling, 2010), all of which can be relevant and helpful in coaching both for the coach and client.

In terms of evidence for a practitioner’s mindfulness practice impacting on client outcomes, the view is mixed (Escuriex & Labbe, 2011). Variables make coherent comparison of these studies difficult, so further research is needed using alliance and outcome measures, observer ratings, audio recordings (Bruce et al, 2010) and mindfulness measures.

When it comes to integrating mindfulness into coaching work, Germer et al (2005)’s proposal of three pathways can work for coaching too:

- The mindful practitioner (personal mindfulness practice to cultivate enhanced presence, attentiveness, openness)
- Mindfulness-informed practice (use of a theoretical framework, concepts and ideas from mindfulness, such as acceptance, impermanence)
- Mindfulness-based practice (explicitly teaching mindfulness skills to clients)

In his review of the literature on mindfulness in coaching Virgili (2013) argues mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) is a theoretically coherent and empirically supported change methodology in accordance with evidence-based coaching.

Historically there has been little research looking at the impact of mindfulness training on coaches' practice (Chapman-Clarke, 2016), with some exceptions including Hall (2013).

However, specific coaching models exist such as Sensory Awareness Mindfulness Training in Coaching (SAMT) (Collard & Walsh, 2008), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Coaching (MBCC) (Collard & McMahon 2012), FEEL/FELT model and Mindful Compassionate Coaching approach (Hall, 2013, 2015),
Septet model (Silbee, 2010), Mindfulness in Coaching Research (MICR) (Chapman, 2014). Hall (2013) suggests engaging in regular mindfulness practice can help coaches develop empathy, compassion, clarity and wisdom, helping coaches become more present with and attuned to clients.

My own research sought to help fill some of the gaps in research into mindfulness in coaching.

Mindfulness in coaching study

The research approach

I adopted a qualitative approach, interviewing five UK-based coaches experienced in integrating mindfulness into coaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by Skype, audio recorded and transcribed. The overarching question asked was: What are coaches' experiences of using mindfulness in their practice?

The interview data were themed in relation to the research question using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), from a social constructionist framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The coaches were all female, with seven-15 years' coaching experience in contexts including personal, business, and leadership/executive and coach training ranging from Certificate to Post Graduate Certificate level.

All had a daily or almost daily mindfulness practice (with length of practice ranging from 18 months to 45 years), and had undertaken various mindfulness trainings including MBSR, MBCT, yoga, Buddhist training and retreats, and one had a mindfulness teacher trainer qualification.

Length of experience in integrating mindfulness into coaching ranged from one-13 years' experience.

Themes

The interview data revealed five themes (Figure 1 above):

- Practitioner embodying mindfulness
- Mindfulness and practitioner qualities
- Mindfulness as an intervention with clients
- Challenges, issues and concerns
- Mindfulness as transformation / spiritual path

Theme 1: Practitioner embodying mindfulness

All coaches described how mindfulness is embodied into their 'way of being,' into the 'self' as coach, an experiential, somatic inner knowing, felt sense.

‘...a way in which I am in my practice...it's kind of part of who I am’

(Participant 4)

Four reported integrating mindfulness in an idiosyncratic or intuitive way, three describing theoretical accommodation between mindfulness and their coaching approach, for example Gestalt (in the moment, body and breath aware).

‘With NLP (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory, gustatory), in terms of anchoring things...it felt very much like mindfulness to me...then the psychosynthesis training had all the meditative elements as well’

(Participant 2)

Theme 2: Mindfulness enhancing practitioner qualities

Six positive impacts were identified of mindfulness on participants' presence, attunement, self-awareness and self-regulation, acceptance and self-care, many being acknowledged coaching competencies (European Mentoring & Coaching Council, International Coach Federation, World Association of Business Coaches). For example, using mindfulness tools such as breath and body awareness to remain present and aware of potential counter-transference, being attuned to the client, assisting self-management when triggered by client material.

‘...it translates into just tuning in, an attunement...where you're picking up what's going on for the other person somatically, emotionally...and sometimes transpersonally...then I out it and it's actually something that moves the client on’

(Participant 1)

‘I've been able to manage what's going on in my personal world much, much, much better...a way of taking care of myself so that I'm cleaner in the work’

(Participant 2)

Theme 3: Mindfulness as intervention

When introducing mindfulness to clients, coaches varied as to how implicit or explicit they are with clients, gauging their openness to it, offering some research around the benefits. Coaches teach clients practices including 'the mindful minute' (Chaskalson, in Hall, 2013), breath awareness,
body scan, loving kindness meditation, ‘mindful journaling’ and inner dialogue. Possible contraindications were identified for clients with current depression or dissociation. Four discussed a positive impact on clients, however one stated how some in the corporate setting were less comfortable. Nevertheless Brendel & Stamell (2016) argue that the synergy of executive coaching and mindfulness meditation is compelling, helping leaders become more self-aware, grounded, emotionally intelligent and effective.

“People come back and say… it’s been really brilliant to help them to have a better awareness and understanding of themselves… the client experiences have been fantastic” (Participant 4)

Theme 4: Challenges, issues and concerns
Challenges were raised regarding some clients’ general misunderstanding or aversion to mindfulness and lack of commitment to practice:

“I sometimes present it like that… ‘it’s a bit woo woo, but it works’… but actually they love it… often you feel like you’re helping someone experience the sense of inner calm and peace perhaps for the first time in a long time” (Participant 4)

Concerns were expressed about the level of training and experience of coaches teaching mindfulness, stating the need to walk the talk with a regular personal practice. Also about mindfulness becoming diluted with commercialisation, being presented as a panacea for all ills and potential misuse in the increasing volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) environments (Mack & Khare, 2015):

“… the demands of the environment is pushing people, and mindfulness practice is excellent … in managing stress, but … rather than looking at the leadership practice, management practice… the fact that the organisation is actually pushing the individual into doing something they shouldn’t be expected to do. ‘yes you’re working 12 hour days but we do give you half an hour to meditate” (Participant 1)

These concerns reflect criticisms of McMindfulness (Purser & Loy, 2013), though Hall (2015) and Chapman-Clarke (2017) identify the need to equip people to cope with the VUCA world, in addition to creating more compassionate and mindful organisations and ultimately a more ethical and mindful society.

Theme 5: Mindfulness as transformation/spiritual path
Two participants explored how mindfulness invites an opening up to spirituality for themselves and the client, for example becoming more in tune with nature and with spirituality, coaching the whole self, including spiritual, emotional and thinking dimensions, enhanced intuition:

“intuition plus… something good blankets us both… there’s a moment of change without either of us having to do… or say anything… it’s a shared something’s happening here that is transforming us both… alchemical” (Participant 1)

All participants were positive about mindfulness becoming more mainstream, two of them discussing its potential for transformation of individuals and ultimately society:

“…mindfulness… enables that potential for transformation within the individual and potential for really wide transformation… helps us get in touch with our values… altruism… we’re naturally empathic… compassionate… it helps us… get more in touch with that… help the client identify their values and act accordingly… their actions, their goals or whatever will shift… it’s potentially massive for society.” (Participant gave an example of a corporate organisation, Unilever) (Participant 5)

Implications for practice
Coaches identified positive impacts of mindfulness on their presence, attunement, self-awareness and self-regulation, acceptance and self-care. These findings are similar to studies with therapists learning mindfulness, ‘mindful practitioners’ (Germer et al, 2005), however this study with coaches experienced in mindfulness, also investigated ‘mindfulness-informed’ and ‘mindfulness-based’ practices, corroborating the pathway of integration identified by Germer et al (2005).

Future mixed methods research with diverse populations of coaches and clients, utilising mindfulness measures, reflective diaries, short and long term client outcome measures would enrich the developing evidence base for mindfulness in coaching.

1. Integrating mindfulness training into coach training and professional development has three potential benefits:
• assisting with development of qualities which may enhance client outcomes
• providing coaches with empirically supported mindfulness tools to teach clients to manage stress and enhance wellbeing
• assisting with coaches’ self-care and wellbeing

2. Developing an evidence-based integrative model of coaching and mindfulness would
Complement mindfulness-based interventions such as MBSR and MBCT, in accordance with the positivist drive for standardisation, however currently many
practitioners use mindfulness idiosyncratically. Chapman-Clarke (2016 and this issue) calls for an integrative approach, contextualised for the practitioner’s specific setting.

3. Germer et al’s (2005) pathway of integration provides a framework for mindfulness training programmes for coaches

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**References**

As is the case with many vets, there had come a point in senior veterinary surgeon Chris Ridge’s life where things started to fall apart. His experience wasn’t unusual at all.

You need to be an A* student to get into veterinary school, needing even better grades to study veterinary science than to study medicine. Would-be vets set themselves very high standards to make the grades, and if successful, they gain an extraordinary breadth of knowledge of physiology, aetiology and treatment of disease across different phyla and families of animals.

Yet when they get out into the field they have to also deal with all sorts of emotional strains including putting animals down and dealing with the animal owner’s emotional response. They have to run a small business without any management training. Dealing with high levels of stress becomes a badge of honour and not surprisingly many vets burn out. And, of course, they have access to all kinds of mood altering drugs and lethal substances.

In Chris’ case, he started to explore the world of meditation and ended up going to a couple of Buddhist retreats. Meditation got him through difficult times and helped to rebuild his life.

I first met Chris when he introduced himself to me after a talk I gave at Buddhafield festival in 2010 in the UK on how Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), a secular form of mindfulness based on cognitive behaviourism, was changing the landscape in health and wellbeing.

A year on I received a call: “Hello, I spoke to someone a year ago about teaching mindfulness to vets.” It was Chris, a senior veterinary surgeon at CVS Vets, one of the UK’s largest corporate providers of veterinary services.

Soon we had embarked on designing and rolling out a mindfulness-based intervention...
which was to not only reduce stress levels and increase mindfulness, but also to increase staff engagement, and boost the perception of the brand of the company. This was despite the intervention being shortened and adapted from the standard eight-week MBCT programme. And by the end of the intervention, the word stress was no longer a taboo.

Design and implementation
Over the next six months or so, myself and colleague Marina Grazier attended three one day meetings in Oxford with people from CVS Vets, HR director Helen Wiseman; Sean Gilgallon, national head of health and safety, and Chris came from three corners of the country.

The time was needed for Marina Grazier and I to get to understand CVS’ needs and also it was important to explore issues sensitively and confidentially. Talking about stress, for example, was taboo. And yet we had to make a strong case for mindfulness for staff, find the most cost effective way of delivering an effective training, and think strategically about how we were going to go about gaining support in the organisation.

Marina and I then needed to tell a compelling story. We needed to explain the science behind mindfulness as a therapy and link that with management science. We agreed that we would come to the next CVS conference to network, give a talk and lead an introductory workshop as the next step.

Origins
Going back to 2008, when the Oxford Mindfulness Centre (OMC) was established, we started to think about how we could adapt mindfulness to the workplace. We set up the Mindfulness in the Workplace Project and Professor Mark Williams, OMC director, asked me to be the project champion.

Over the next couple of years, we explored this idea in a string of meetings but we were struggling. A standard eight-week MBCT course might work as therapy but was not always going to be practical or appropriate in the workplace - both in terms of time and teaching method. However, the standard course was the only format proven to work in trials.

Then Danny Penman approached Prof. Williams to write a book to make mindfulness accessible to a much wider audience. No one could be sure of the effectiveness of the format- a book with CDs for self-directed learning, so it was with great excitement that we all watched this book shoot straight to the top of best seller lists, where it has stayed ever since. Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World gave us lots of great material. First, we taught students using the book as a course guide. Then we adapted it for CVS.

We reduced the course to six hour long classes running over six weeks and taught theory with Powerpoint presentations to give a meditation course the look and feel of workplace training. Frontloading a mindfulness course with theory followed by short, guided meditations overturned widely held assumptions about the importance
organising a mindfulness course represents a significant cost to an employer. It took a great deal of work to argue the case for providing these courses even with support from internal champions, including Helen, CVS’s HR director. We needed to show that this new short course actually worked. Following a successful pilot in Exeter, things went quiet. We had to go back to attendees to collect feedback as qualitative evidence to argue the case for a next round of courses. We got the go ahead and a year after the first courses were completed and things had gone well, this taboo was broken for CVS?

Perhaps more significantly, dialogue across CVS and the industry took place. When the idea of mindfulness courses were first presented at the annual CVS group conference, where we introduced the idea of mindfulness courses for staff, admitting that stress was a problem was taboo. Of course there are many reasons why awareness of mental health is increasing but was it merely coincidence that soon after the first courses were completed and things had gone well, this taboo was broken for CVS?

The results, Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1 and 2, were very encouraging. There were statistically significant reductions in stress and increased mindfulness by the end of the course, although we didn’t carry out a follow up to see how long these benefits were maintained.

A bigger picture

These results were very encouraging but what was the real value to CVS of running these courses? Many people who attended them clearly benefited, particularly those who were experiencing high levels of stress. Shifts in the measures of stress and mindfulness were comparable with the clinical MBCT programme but took only 25% of the time. Staff from different practices enjoyed meeting at classes during the course and building connections across the organisation, but perhaps what counted most to the CVS Board was the effect running these programmes had on the company image.

Most veterinary practices are small businesses and vets are trained to be animal health practitioners, not managers. It makes sense to bring small practices together to centralise administrative functions but this doesn’t make it easy for vets as they can feel they are losing their sense of identity, being swallowed up by a corporate giant when they are forced to “sell out” to remain competitive.

The fact that CVS started to provide mindfulness courses for staff changed perceptions. One owner of a medium sized group of practices we met at the Society of Practicing Veterinary Surgeons’ Congress said she now would consider selling her group to CVS as it was investing in staff wellbeing. The executive director, Brian Pound, greeted me with a big smile after we had given workshops and Marina had led 600 delegates through a raisin eating ceremony. This was good PR worth its weight in gold – or at least the value of CVS shares.

Perhaps more significantly, dialogue across CVS and the industry took place. When the idea of mindfulness courses were first presented at the annual CVS group conference, where we introduced the idea of mindfulness courses for staff, admitting that stress was a problem was taboo. Of course there are many reasons why awareness of mental health is increasing but was it merely coincidence that soon after the first courses were completed and things had gone well, this taboo was broken for CVS?

So, mindfulness courses for CVS went down well. Nearly ten percent of CVS staff, nearly 300 people in total, attended a course and our small study indicated they had a positive impact on wellbeing. Sean trained to teach the “Frantic World” course but has been too busy to run any as he’s been tied up with work with new acquisitions and writing his Masters, in which I understand he’s included discussion on the benefits of mindfulness and health and safety. The taboo around stress was broken; courses may have had a positive impact on staff engagement and the perception of the company improved across the industry.
In this regular Insights from research section, we invite leading thinkers in the field to share their reflections on research and highlight what they deem to be significant, offering ‘thought pieces’ to challenge assumptions, expand on existing thinking and offer practitioners original insights.

This issue: Jutta Tobias and Alison Carter, both members of the Journal’s editorial advisory board, focus on collective mindfulness, arguing that mindfulness needs to permeate an organization’s routines, as well as its micro- and macro-culture, and that we need to become more eclectic and open-minded in using the whole spectrum of mindfulness scholarship.

In this article, we explore how mindfulness practice does not have to mean meditation; mindfulness as a collective practice, and implications for mindfulness researchers and practitioners.

Mindfulness does not have to mean meditation

Mindfulness is not a trait that some have and others don’t; it’s something that individuals and teams at work can practise every day. It can be made available to anyone open to learning and practising mindfulness.

Much mindfulness research is concerned with meditation, often using breathing as an anchor to develop awareness of sensations, emotions, thoughts, and physical reactions, including through exercises such as mindful eating or scanning the body. Other methods to raise mindfulness include proactively and consciously considering objects, stimuli, or situations before taking action, as well as manipulating the context or work environment. For example, Papies et al (2012) induced mindfulness by showing people pictures and instructing them to consider the content – as well as the transience – of their reactions to the pictures they viewed. This is important: mindfulness practice should not be confused with meditation, for (at least) three reasons:

- Leading mindfulness scholars argue that becoming mindful does not necessarily require meditative practice. Harvard University psychology professor Ellen Langer has researched and taught mindfulness for more than 25 years using non-meditative methods. There is equally rigorous research on acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), using acceptance and mindfulness strategies to improve the human condition.
- Increasingly, researchers find that meditation-focused mindfulness has similar outcomes to other activities that lower stress. Leading management thinkers are even starting to call for an end to “the meditation madness”. While we might not go that far, we would like point out an often under-discussed aspect of mindfulness practice: it is not exclusively an individual phenomenon, and the social or collective dimensions of mindfulness are critically important to those interested in bringing mindfulness to their whole organisation.
- Dr Jutta Tobias (the first-named author of this article) defines organisational mindfulness for practitioners (The Mindfulness Initiative’s report, Building the Case for Mindfulness, October 2016) as “a shared social practice in an organisation” and added that, beyond meditation, mindfulness can be generated through non-meditative individual and social practices. Collective mindfulness is not typically about individuals meditating in teams, yet when teams routinely engage with each other mindfully, organisational transformation becomes a reality.

Mindfulness as a collective practice

This insight is based on a recently published seminal scientific paper that we believe will help understanding of the mindfulness field, and avoid missing the relevant innovative perspectives, different levels of analysis, and narratives that are distinct from meditation-focused mindfulness alone.

The paper in question is published in a highly-rated scholarly journal, the Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, in 2016. The paper was written by three leading management scholars based in the US: Kathleen Sutcliffe, Bloomberg distinguished professor of business and medicine in Carey Business School at Johns Hopkins University who has a long track record of researching how organizations can be designed to be more reliable and resilient; Timothy Vogus, associate professor of management in Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University, who studies the managerial practices and organizational processes that strengthen safety culture and unleash mindful organising; and Erick Dane, associate professor of management (organizational behavior) at Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Business at Rice University and an expert on cognition in the workplace. In their paper they propose that the mindfulness literature can be split in two:

- intra-psychically focused contemplation, and
- socio-cognitive oriented research on the processes and practices that produce wellbeing and performance outcomes at the collective level.

The paper’s authors demonstrate that mindfulness is a multi-level construct, can be validly and reliably measured across individual and collective levels, and is induced through meditation and non-meditative (or in-situ) practices. In-situ practices are those mindfulness practices that are specifically placed within the context experienced in the
moment by the mindfulness practitioner. The authors argue that we need more research that pays specific attention to multiple levels of mindfulness. This is, on the one hand, because the current evidence base on collective mindfulness is largely based on observational and case study research and, on the other hand, because context matters much more for making mindfulness practice sustainable than many mindfulness enthusiasts think it does.

As any manager or mindfulness practitioner knows, the context where a mindfulness training programme or intervention is introduced is critically important in making an initiative ‘stick’. Mindfulness meditation is not something that can be mandated by an employer: we need to draw on distinct perspectives, different levels of analysis, and diverse narratives in mindfulness research in order to get a grasp on the full potential of mindfulness for organisations. Collective mindfulness scholars have long argued that mindfulness needs to permeate an organization’s routines, as well as its micro- and macro- culture. Only then will an entire organisation become resilient with sustainable performance.

Based on the consideration here, we have created a comprehensive map of the mindfulness at work literature, as shown in Figure 1. This takes into account the four main domains we mentioned, depicted across a spectrum of mindfulness practice and level of analysis:

- The contemplative-focused literature often associated with Jon Kabat-Zinn
- The more socio-cognitively oriented literature created by Ellen Langer
- The ACT literature started by Stephen C. Hayes and
- The collective mindfulness research strand spearheaded by Karl Weick, Kathleen Sutcliffe, and Tim Vogus.

On the map the horizontal axis aligns with the practice through which mindfulness is generated, be that meditation or some other in-situ practice. The vertical axis shows the levels of analysis ranging from individual to collective.

What does this mean for mindfulness researchers and practitioners?

The science on mindfulness is richer and more multidimensional than the mindfulness/meditation debate might suggest, and it is more complicated. We need to enrich our collective understanding of mindfulness in particular by becoming more eclectic and open-minded in using the whole spectrum of mindfulness scholarship.

Research that bridges the gap between (exclusively) individual-focused work and focuses on collective processes is needed. So far it has been rare. A notable exception is a recently published investigation into the factors that generate individual and collective capacity for mindful behaviours among United States Navy Sea Air and Land (SEAL) commandos, despite the volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity individual soldiers and SEAL teams routinely face. The study discussed several in-situ ways to generate “mindfulness in action”: being comfortable with chaos at the individual level, for example, and a collective orientation of acceptance towards failure.

Let’s get to work. We still have many bridges to build for a truly comprehensive mapping of the mindfulness literature.

References

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Expressions

In this column, readers share the inspiration and impact arising from their own or others’ creative expressions. This issue: Ho Law reflects on his own artwork

Interaction 1997

( featured on the front cover of this issue)

This expression emerged and manifested when I was experimenting with paint for abstract painting in 1997. I noticed the interaction of the oil paints; the two colours (red and blue) merge together. I felt quite excited by it. It generated a sense of warmth and yet felt profound. The juxtaposition of warm red and cold cobalt blue, the Yin and Yang, the dark and light, the cold and the warmth, yet it evokes of a sense of oneness.

In my mind, I wandered into the cosmos, and thought about Jung’s idea of collective unconsciousness. There seemed to be constant flux – the flow of paint and colours, yet there is a sense of stillness – it is a painting.

The painting teaches me about how change is constant, and yet in the motion of our everyday life, we can still find a sense of equanimity. Like Rothko’s painting (for example, the Four Seasons four seasons murals), it provides a point of focus for meditation and mindfulness practice.
Book Review

The Compassionate Mind
Paul Gilbert
ISBN 978-1-84901-098-6

This is one of the most informative and useful books I have read. I particularly like Gilbert’s accessible and easy way of writing, almost as if he were chatting with you.

The book is written in two parts. Part one looks at the science behind compassion and Part two provides a range of exercises and activities for building a compassionate self. The book has leanings towards Buddhist thinking and is also grounded in science.

Gilbert starts in chapter 1 by inviting us to embark on a journey of compassion. He talks of modern life, overload, addictions and the impact of cultures and religions that define who we are. In chapter 2 he looks at the challenges of life and draws on scientific research around emotions and the emotional regulatory system as a way of understanding the importance and challenge of working with compassion. The section on ‘the curse of self’ really resonates from a coaching and supervision perspective as we are often working with values, behaviours and emotions that act to protect us but can also get in our way. Gilbert describes compassion as a way of getting back into the activity and suspending judgment. The notion of interdependency he describes aligns with Covey’s work and also the notion that we are all energetically connected.

I like the way Gilbert draws on broader themes of politics and religion in his work – the challenge of competing for positions of power and being ‘right’ in what we believe.

I liked the section about relationship with self and the idea that we have different actors in our heads; this is a great metaphor for how we might explore challenges with others in our lives. Gilbert goes on to explore self-compassion as the starting point for our compassionate journey; being able to be compassionate with ourselves for how we are feeling before moving on. I have worked with many coaches and clients exploring what it is like to hold compassion for how they are feeling and it has led to many useful insights.

Finally, Gilbert shares techniques for building compassion in self with themes we can readily use in coaching and supervision work – mindfulness, heart breathing, imagery, metaphor and techniques for changing our thinking. A thought provoking and accessible read and a highly useful resource.

Jan Brause is an executive coach and coach supervisor. She is also a member of the UMC editorial board.

Destiny colour1

This painting was developed in 2000 as a serious of three large abstract paintings entitled Colour 1 commissioned by a musician for his London Home.

I was using only three primary colours, red, blue and yellow.

In the process of painting, I noticed the colours seem to take on a quality of their own. Visually, they are pulling in different directions according to their own property (spirit). The warm red expands into the space, while the cold blue gravitates and sinks into the bottom right hand corner. The neutral (cold-ish) yellow located itself at a distance and created a balance between the Yin (blue) and the Yang (red). In my mind, I felt balanced. Again the painting evokes a sense of a sense of equanimity within me.

The painting teaches me about the sense of balance and letting go – things go according to their own inner quality (spirit or soul). So I re-named the painting Destiny.

Like Rothko’s painting and my abstract painting (Interaction 1997), it can offer space (visual reference) for meditation and mindfulness practice.