



# Paper

## Mindfulness in organisations

### Case Studies of Organisational Practice

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## Institute for Employment Studies

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# Introduction

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## Background to this report

Mindfulness is in the public consciousness whether via mobile apps, courses, press features and/or books for children and adults alike. In popular usage, 'mindfulness' often refers to meditation-based techniques, yet in scientific literature the idea includes far more than just contemplative practices. The concept of mindfulness is also now climbing up the agenda in organisations worried about the effect of constant unpredictable change on the wellbeing of employees.

The use of Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) is growing in many business sectors. Commercial providers claim it helps employees increase their resilience and wellbeing, enables more creative problem-solving, and enhances individual performance through more 'mindful behaviours'. Early research would seem to support some of these claims (eg Stanley and Jha, 2009; Ostafin and Kassman, 2012). The basic idea is that mindfulness can be used to help individuals pay attention to situations they encounter with the specific purpose of developing open-minded awareness. This allows them to gain access to the 'information contained in each moment' encouraging context-relevant interpretation which, in turn, enables better decision-making (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006). But questions remain about whether it is an entirely appropriate and helpful intervention for individuals within workplace settings and, if so, whether it has potential as a more strategic tool for supporting change.

This report builds on previous IES work on mindfulness including a well-attended briefing event in February 2015 for IES HR Research Network members, and an introductory paper on mindfulness at work (Hall, 2015). At the IES briefing event participants discussed the potential of mindfulness to change the way employees think, act and/or feel at work and participants expressed a desire for more detail on how companies implement mindfulness programmes, the results, and the lessons learned. This report is a direct response to that request from IES Network member companies.

The report draws on a number of sources to illustrate current, and outline future, practice:

- Key findings from a research literature rapid evidence review and corporate stakeholder interviews (October-December 2015).

- Interviews with key corporate informants (commissioners, co-ordinators and providers of mindfulness programmes as well as some programme participants) and desk research (November 2015-March 2016).
- ‘Top tips’ generated from a specially-convened, invitation-only knowledge-sharing event for 20 leaders in the mindfulness field (academic experts and early adopter corporate leaders, Managing Directors, Senior Executives and OD specialists), held on 28 April 2016.

## Research on workplace applications of mindfulness

In collaboration with Cranfield University School of Management, IES has been involved in a research project during 2015-6 that allowed us to explore mindfulness as a potential catalyst for strategic change, looking beyond meditation techniques for individuals. As part of our research we conducted a rapid evidence review. This brought together separate scientific threads on mindfulness at work and strategic change, which had not been done before.

The literature review found that most of the mindfulness literature to date has focused on wellbeing and stress reduction. Much less is known about mindfulness as an organisational development (OD) or change intervention.

### Review of literature

There has been a growing interdisciplinary interest by scholars in mindfulness in organisational settings as a complement to strategic change initiatives. However, this has not yet translated into empirical studies in workplace contexts (Dane, 2011; Dane and Brummel, 2013). In the mindfulness literature, two specific bodies of research have emerged: one focusing on the internal psychology of individual mindfulness (which can be positive, negative, or neutral) and the other on the social processes of collective mindfulness (Sutcliffe et al., forthcoming).

Three interrelated factors can be identified that lie behind the relatively new application of the concept of mindfulness to organisational and systematic change:

- First is a growing awareness of the evidence behind mindfulness as a technique that anybody can put to use, including organisational leaders/managers. There has also been a corresponding growth in focus on emotions and compassion within organisations (Sieben and Wettergren, 2010) which has made mindfulness increasingly acceptable in a workplace context. Growing research into emotions within organisations builds on that of US programmes on the creation of a culture of mindful awareness within organisations aiming to create health and resilience. In this

sense emotions can potentially enable a two-way link between top-down strategic change initiatives, and bottom-up employee transformation.

- Second is the increasing number of high-profile organisations such as Transport for London offering mindfulness programmes to those employees who have displayed symptoms of stress. Economic challenges have led to calls for organisations to develop strategies and employ coping mechanisms to address organisational distress and staff illness. MBIs have also been adopted in the corporate sector, with Google, eBay, Twitter and Facebook among a series of companies who promote the practice among their employees (Stone, 2014). Growing commercial business interests promoting particular forms of work-based mindfulness training have also played a role in the increasing popularity of MBIs as tools for employee wellbeing.
- A third factor is the growing recognition of the consequences of a lack of awareness, or 'mindlessness', in attempting to deal with organisational challenges (Aviles and Dent, 2015). This also chimes with the consequences of lack of empathy, lack of emotional intelligence (Goldman, 1996) and lack of emotional agility (David, 2016). Ashforth and Fried (1988) have argued that mindless behaviour by organisational members can adversely impact or impede on the success of positive organisational change. Organisations are often complex structures characterised by interconnected work environments with competing priorities. Challenging and uncertain circumstances necessitate the need for organisations to effectively respond to both planned and unplanned change. Managers must learn to recognise these interconnections and make intelligent decisions. It is with this need in mind that mindfulness has been put forward as a means for managers and employees alike to learn skills of self-regulation, attention and awareness (Brown, Ryan, and Creswell, 2007).

Recently in the UK there has also been growing interest in the potential application of mindfulness within government. This is evidenced by the provision of mindfulness training being offered to elected Members of Parliament and Members of the House of Lords in Westminster, and Assembly Members in the National Assembly for Wales. An All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) studied the benefits of bringing mindfulness into policy, supported by a coalition of Oxford, Exeter and Bangor universities (Lilley et al., 2014; Mindfulness Initiative, 2015).

The relevance of mindfulness for organisations in a context of complexity has been particularly highlighted in terms of High Reliability Organisations (HROs). Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2000) and Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) have explored HROs, where outcomes may be catastrophic if individuals and organisations behave mindlessly. Examples of HROs include nuclear power-generation plants (Bourrier, 2011), naval aircraft carriers (Rochlin, La Porte and Roberts, 1987), air traffic control systems (LaPorte, 1996), and space shuttles (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 1999). These types of workplace all operate, as writes Rochlin (cited in Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfield (1999)), in an environment 'rich with the potential for error, where the scale of consequences precludes

learning through experimentation, and where to avoid failures in the face of shifting sources of vulnerability, complex processes are used to manage complex technology’.

## **The potential of mindfulness for organisation ‘change readiness’**

In an extensive review of the literature on strategic change, Weick and Quinn (1999) made a contrast between ‘episodic’ and ‘continuous’ approaches, on the basis that there will be different understandings of what change is and what it is meant to do, based on differing perspectives within an organisation. Whilst observing a ‘flow of events’ from a macro-level distance might indicate repetition, routine and inertia with some more revolutionary elements; the view from ‘on the ground’ can suggest ‘on-going adaptation and adjustment’.

The emerging literature seems to provide a solid body of evidence that links mindfulness to multiple levels of change by operating at interpersonal and collective levels. It is argued that individuals, processes and policies interact in unforeseeable ways (Sutcliffe et al., forthcoming). Collective mindfulness shapes interactions in all directions, and is more than the sum of ‘individual’ mindfulness. The benefits of employees acting mindfully (at a collective level) are understood to be a collective capability to discern discriminatory detail about emerging issues, and to act swiftly in response to such details. Mindful leaders have a ‘snowball effect’ on their wider organisation, encouraging organisational ambidexterity creating alignment and adaptability at the same time. Mindful leaders are continuous learners, drawing on others at different organisation levels, and integrate everyone’s contributions. Others go further, arguing that mindfulness may mean re-examining conventional models of organisational learning (Aviles and Dent, 2015).

We also conducted corporate stakeholder interviews, giving a ‘future context’ and assessing the potential relevance of mindfulness. Stakeholders saw MBIs as a positive ‘future’ tool for building organisational readiness for change. Organisations are expected to be resilient and adaptable to the world’s growing complexity; there is a need for innovative or disruptive ways of working. Mindfulness is seen as useful because it mitigates ‘mindless’ behaviours and increases a self-reflexive awareness of other people’s experiences which can be trusted to solve problems in novel ways.

Our research findings suggest that mindfulness-based techniques could be applied at multiple levels simultaneously and flexibly. A multi-level approach would enable leaders and teams to genuinely develop a sustainable capacity for identifying and addressing difficult and unexpected challenges. By ‘multi-level’ we mean at individual, team and organisation (or whole system) levels. We argue that:

- MBI methods need to match the complexity and context-dependency of today’s organisational reality.



- Meditation is only one of many mindfulness-based tools useful for the workplace. Teaching meditation techniques alone is not enough to help individuals create a balanced and social attitude.
- For change-ready managers and leaders, mindfulness training at the individual leader level should include a wide range of mental fitness techniques. Adaptable, resilient, learning-orientated mindsets associated with individual mindful leaders can be taught.
- For sustainable health and performance across the organisation, mindfulness training needs to target change readiness through mindful working at the team level. This process can be started by delivering mindfulness training to entire workplace teams (including the team leader) and by including a range of team level mental fitness techniques. A team-based design and delivery format should create the platform from which teams develop the capabilities required to embrace increased volatility, transparency, and complexity.
- For an organisation whole system with the capacity for identifying and addressing difficult and unexpected challenges, mindfulness training needs to be backed up by an organisational learning culture. Organisational agility and resilience are not just the sum of agility and resilience at the individual and team levels. Corporate and HR systems (eg reward) also need to be capable of adaption.

## Structure of this report

That's the theory, but what is happening on the ground in organisations? Are early-adopter organisations of mindfulness using it as a strategic tool to promote 'change readiness' or is it purely an employee wellbeing initiative? In the first section, we present seven detailed case studies of practice to explore the purpose of their mindfulness programmes and the results achieved to date. In the second section, we offer our analysis and commentary based on the organisational cases. In addition, we share the top tips from experts in the field. A summary of the case studies is presented in Appendix 1.

## Case Studies

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The case study reports in this chapter present details of how Mindfulness-Based Interventions have been implemented in seven organisational settings. We contacted early-adopter organisations in four settings: Global Professional Services; Government; Financial Services; and UK Public Sector. In all four cases we interviewed the responsible learning or wellbeing leads responsible for the mindfulness programmes, and we were provided with programme design and marketing materials. In two cases we also interviewed other key personnel, including managers and employees, who had participated in mindfulness programmes, as well as the commissioners and suppliers of the programmes. We were also given access to internal and/or independent evaluation reports. The remaining three case studies were produced through desk research using publicly available sources. These additional three settings were: Military; Transport; and Technology.

Each case is presented here in the same format. We begin by giving some background information on each organisation and its rationale for introducing of mindfulness. We then examine the features of each programme in terms of target audience, programme design, format and scale of roll-out to date. Finally, we review the impact of each programme and the effects it has had both on individuals and organisations.

The case studies are:

- *Brain work-outs* - soft skills development at a Global Professional Services Firm
- *Creating mental agility* - team performance in the US Military
- *Achieving peak performance* - decision making at BlueBay Asset Management
- *Employee wellbeing* – pilot programmes at a UK Government Department
- *Integrating within courses* - project leadership skills across the UK public sector
- *Stress reduction* – positive mental health at Transport for London
- *Emotional Intelligence* – personal effectiveness at Google Inc.

The key features of the case studies are summarised in table format in Appendix 1.

# Case 1: Brain work-outs at a Global Professional Services Firm

## The context for mindfulness

This case study is an award-winning professional services firm with 27 offices in 16 countries. In recent years it has won industry awards for innovation and overall top firm.

With over 400 partners, 1,400 other professionals and 1,000 support staff working across 10 different time zones, the firm aims to respond to clients wherever and whenever needed. As in most firms operating in the professional services sector, a key metric is the number of billable hours staff work. The firm is described as having an innovative and entrepreneurial organisational culture with a profile of staff that value integrity and are typically intelligent, highly analytical, astute and driven.

Providing exceptional standards of customer service is the key to maintaining the firm's market positioning as a trusted advisor to local and global corporates, financial institutions and governments on areas including the management of large and complex international transactions and projects.

Mindfulness came to their attention through the personal experience of two senior staff who took part in traditional eight-week group Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) courses outside work. They were impressed by the evidence base and the powerful effects they witnessed. The Learning and Development Manager described to us the rationale for introducing mindfulness into the firm:

*'We perceived a real win-win for individuals and the organisation through the increase in emotional self-regulation which mindfulness practice achieves. We knew that, if our staff are "being present in the moment", recognising that they are about to enter a stressful situation and "putting the pause in" to control their response to situations, this would lead to better decision-making and better advice being given to clients. Ultimately our mindfulness programme is all about enhancing our effectiveness as corporate advisors. For individuals we knew that they would get something life-enhancing, offered within their working day.'*

## Approach to mindfulness

The concept of an adapted 'corporate' version of mindfulness was really important, and considerable care went into choosing a provider using the following criteria:

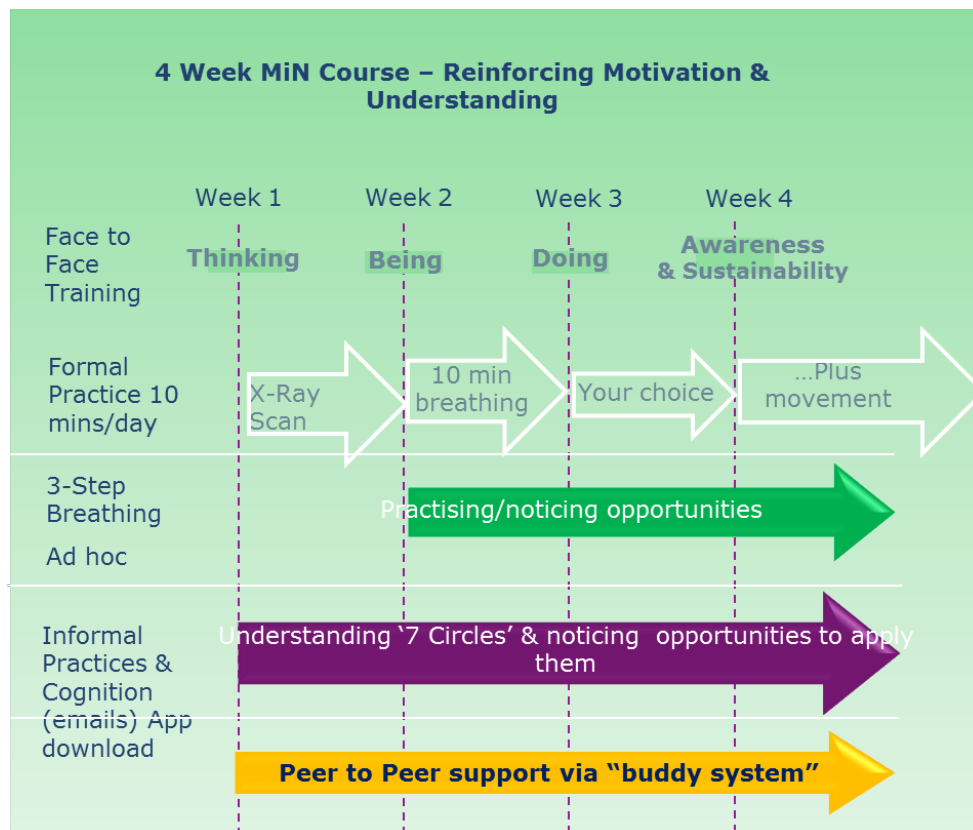
- an approach that suited a corporate environment where staff are sceptical when it comes to the 'fluffy stuff';
- objective measures of success incorporated;

- emphasis on promoting resilience and personal transformation;
- credibility of the provider company and individuals delivering the programme;
- clear link to research; and
- observation of provider(s) delivering sessions elsewhere.

## Implementation of mindfulness programme

One hundred and fifty staff completed the four-week programme (five cohorts of 30 per cohort). Sessions were 45 minutes long. The initial London-based cohorts were face-to-face with their facilitator and the other participants; one of the Australia-based cohorts ran with an online London facilitator. An app for on-going daily practice was provided, together with a daily email prompt to use it. Every fortnight, mindfulness face-to-face drop-in sessions were also trialled to encourage sustained practice among former participants, although attendance at drop-in sessions was variable. An overview of the programme structure is presented below.

**Figure 1: Overview of programme structure**



Source: Company documentation, 2016

Since mindfulness was being introduced as a secular practice, it was decided not to include meditation as part of the programme.

Mindfulness was promoted internally as a 'brain work-out', an approach grounded in neuro-science which allows people to increase their grey cell matter and neuro-plasticity, since that was thought most likely to engage with the analytical staff audience. The successful mindfulness programme in the US Marines were practical examples which they found also went down well.

Programmes have been open to all staff on a first-come, first-served basis. All have been over-subscribed with waiting lists in operation. Attendance so far has reflected a broad mix of levels and job roles.

The programme has been recognised by winning an industry training award as Best Programme 2014.

## Results

An internal evaluation by the firm was based on participant questionnaires completed before the mindfulness programme and repeated after completion of the programme. Results to date indicate:

- An increase from 35 per cent to 66 per cent of individuals reporting being more attentive throughout meetings (including client events).
- An increase from 15 per cent to 44 per cent of individuals reporting being able to sleep better after attending the programme, leading to more engagement in the office.
- An increase from 38 per cent to 67 per cent of individuals reporting being able to deal effectively with situations when pulled in different directions at any one time, leading to better prioritisation.
- An increase from 33 per cent to 66 per cent of individuals reporting looking after their own health and wellbeing after attending the programme.

Written comments from the firm's own evaluation of participants included: *'Excellent, unusual and practical benefit'*, *'Very practical, useful from the start'*, *'It was a great topic for the firm to address'*, *'Provided useful tools for life generally'* and *'Absolutely excellent'*.

The firm believes that the mindfulness programme may also be one of its most popular development offers ever in terms of three metrics: the highest number of applications received, the highest percentage of people who turn up at the first session and lowest level of dropping out during the period of the programme.

Mindfulness is described as 'a slow burn' in terms of impact on the workplace. Despite the good feedback from participants, and anecdotally from their managers and colleagues, the Learning and Development Manager was keen to explain to us that mindfulness is not for everyone. She says:

*'Mindfulness is a highly personal thing. There is a normal bell curve of responses: out of every group of 30 people, some will love it and choose to practise and work at it. Workplace applications are not a silver bullet or solution to everyone's woes. For those it works for it is truly transformational.'*

## Next steps

A global roll-out of the programme was under consideration through a continued partnership with Mindfulness at Work, their external provider.

The firm is also considering how best to embed mindfulness into a corporate programme for the most senior leaders.

In the meantime, the firm is planning a follow-up with participants to see if they are still practising mindfulness, and if any positive changes identified have been sustained over the subsequent six-, 12- and 24-month periods.

## Case 2: Creating ‘Mental Agility’ in the US military

### The context for mindfulness

In 2014, the US Army had a numerical strength of over one million troops, including reservists (Under Secretary of Defence (Comptroller), 2014); the US Marine Corps (USMC) had almost another 190,000 troops (Amos, 2014).

Modern warfare is distinguished by the prevalence of insurgent tactics; complexity and ambiguity of operations in urban areas; and an emphasis on operational decentralisation. To excel under such conditions, the best preparation is considered to be a fit mind characterised by mental agility, attentiveness, emotional intelligence and situational awareness. All troops increasingly need to possess a high degree of cognitive readiness: the mental, emotional, and interpersonal skills that allow them to make rapid decisions and act in complex, dynamic, and ambiguous environments. Being able to continuously ‘learn and adapt’ is the aim.

The US military already provides ‘stress inoculation training’, although this may actually undermine long-term resilience if a body does not return to its baseline after being stressed. This implies the need not just to reduce stress but also to promote stress resilience. By 2010, mental health rates were a concern with 17.3 per cent of soldiers found to be experiencing a mental health disorder of some kind.

The US military’s interest in mindfulness has two complementary aims:

- To optimise the performance of military units on operations by cultivating more situational awareness, mental agility, adaptability and psychological resilience (Stanley et al., 2011)
- To address mental health issues by creating ‘mental armour’ which enhances the capacity to bounce back from stressful experiences (Heydenfeldt, Herkenhoff and Coe, 2011).

### Approach to mindfulness-based training in US military

Most of the mindfulness-based work in US forces to date has focused on deployment and the underpinning belief that three things are crucial to combatants: mission essential knowledge and skills; physical fitness; and mind fitness. The military had previously devoted substantial resources to the first two categories, in terms of funding and time on the training schedule, so the focus on mind fitness training was designed to address an apparent deficiency in the third category.

Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training® (MMFT) blends:

1. mindfulness skills training, with
2. information and skills that promote stress resilience, and
3. concrete applications for the operational environment.

## Implementation of mindfulness programmes

The core MMFT programme comprised 24 hours spread over eight weeks, with (on average) weekly two-hour group sessions and a one-day silent workshop. The course also required up to 30 minutes of daily mindfulness practice outside of class using CDs specifically created by the instructor for each cohort. Recorded exercises lasted 10-30 minutes, and to accommodate military training schedules, sessions varied in terms of length, time of day and location. Participants also completed a 15-minute mid-point progress interview.

MMFT in the US military began in 2008. Since then, numerous variations have been implemented as part of a series of academic research studies including:

- Impact on unit performance of marines undertaking MMFT as part of their scheduled pre-deployment training before deploying to Iraq (Stanley & Jha, 2009).
- Impact on resilience mechanisms underlying recovery from stress in active-duty marines preparing for deployment.
- Impact on attentional performance lapses (ie mind wandering) from periods of persistent and intensive demands.
- Shorter courses of eight hours over eight weeks were tested because the full 24-hour MMFT course was considered too time intensive for roll-out.

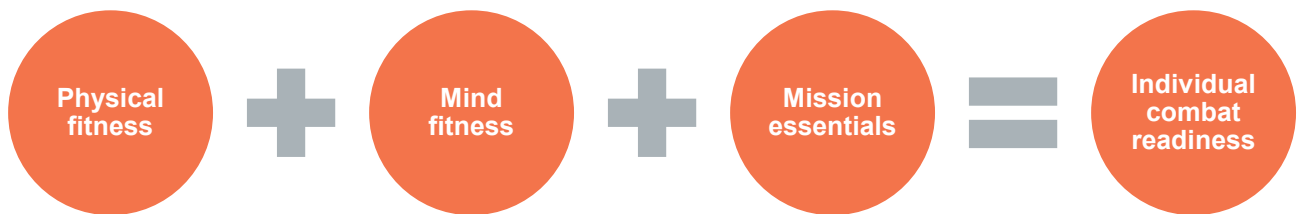
There have been challenges. Several marines were frustrated that delivery was not well coordinated with other training, creating the perception of less off-duty time. Some marines were resistant to the whole idea, and others said that, while they believed the training was beneficial, more time was needed during the duty day for them to practice.

## Results

An impact on personal performance was identified by academic researchers studying the impact of the programme. A model summarising Stanley and Jha's (2009) findings is represented overleaf:



**Figure 2: Mind Fitness for Combat Readiness in US Marine Corps**



*Source: Adapted from text in Stanley and Jha, 2009*

Marines (quoted in Stanley et al., 2011) described new skills in focusing their attention to support the body's and mind's self-regulation. Many marines also stated that their programme helped them work with difficult emotions and inappropriate coping behaviours they had developed after previous deployments. Specific comments included:

*'I learned the ability to concentrate on one task at a time as well as identifying emotions and thoughts that detract from concentration.'*

*'I learned the importance of allowing my body to "reset" itself.'*

*'What I liked most about this course was how much calmer I became.'*

More time practicing corresponded with a greater self-reported mindfulness and this, in turn, led to decreases in perceived stress. This emphasises the critical importance of motivating participants to practice regularly, and highlights the value of supporting practice in specific settings. In the later study on mind-wandering (Johnson et al., 2014), there were beneficial effects indicating enhanced recovery from stress.

The academic researchers also identified impacts on team performance. In one study, both leaders and team members reported improved team communication and unit cohesion. Leaders reported an improved ability to recognise emotions, which helped them to be more open to feedback from subordinates. Team members reported more leader awareness of others, which led to more effective task delegation and cooperative behaviour within the team. Comments from marines (quoted in Stanley et al., 2011) included:

*'This training helped me be a better leader. I know myself better now, my strengths and weaknesses. I am also better at reading my "warning signs" of when I am getting stressed out, when I need to back off and get collected again'.*

*'[The unit] was being more in control in chaotic situations.'*

Another researcher (Brewer, 2014) suggested that mind fitness training could also be helping troops to act ethically in a morally ambiguous and emotionally challenging operational environment.

There was a high-level response to the programme results. After publication of pilot findings in 2015, there was increased interest at the top of the hierarchy in mindfulness. Press coverage includes the following:

*'These results are a critical addition to our ever-evolving readiness and resiliency toolkit.'*

MG Walter Piatt, Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army in Europe (Miami University, 2015)

*'As we see the data supports it, it makes perfect sense that this is what we should be doing... It's like doing push-ups for the brain.'*

Melvin Spiese, US Marine Corps Major General (Watson, 2013)

## Case 3: Peak Performance at BlueBay Asset Management

### The context for mindfulness

BlueBay Asset Management LLP is a young firm founded in 2001. Operating within the financial services sector, BlueBay invests for its clients across the fixed income spectrum, from active long-only 'benchmark share' portfolios to hedge funds/private debt.

*With around 380 employees in its London office, the workforce comprises 55 per cent of 'millennials' (staff who didn't reach adulthood until after 2000). The organisation is said to be full of bright, confident and performance-driven people. Its latest employee survey showed an 89 per cent engagement score. The firm promotes a culture of innovation and collaboration, and the business model relies on attracting, retaining and motivating highly talented individuals. There is a focus on creating a working environment that positively contributes to a sense of belonging and wellbeing. But, as in other active asset management companies, people are increasingly being overwhelmed by volume of information, and it can be difficult to focus on what is most relevant at any given time. Natalie Benitez-Castellano, Head of HR at BlueBay is quoted in People Management magazine (Lewis, 2015) as saying: 'Clients rely on our technical insight and investment decision-making, so a key focus for us is enhanced performance through clearer thinking to produce the best outcomes for our clients. Mindfulness fits really well with that.'*

Mindfulness initially came about because an interim Talent Management Consultant, Elizabeth Newton, had used it as part of coaching programmes in the past. She highlighted the benefits of encouraging people to take a step back and think about their actions and decisions.

### Approach to mindfulness at BlueBay

A workplace-centric approach to mindfulness was considered crucial. The organisation selected an external provider, Mindfulness at Work, with prior experience of workplace applications in their sector.

Mindfulness was pitched as achieving a mental state of complete awareness purely in a 'business sense', highlighting the benefits that increased focus, calmness and concentration could bring in a high-pressure working environment. The science base underpinning mindfulness was a key part of the 'selling in', and the overall aim was described as enabling staff to achieve their peak performance.

## Implementation of mindfulness programme

BlueBay started with a one-hour introductory taster to gauge reactions. The firm decided that if enough people were definitely interested, then they would organise a formal course. The taster session was a success, with almost double the expected numbers.

Fifty staff went through courses during May-December 2015 with a further 20 staff starting a programme in November 2015. The course was flexible, so staff could pick it up in their own time. Each course comprised:

- One-hour group sessions each week run over four weeks by the external provider. Sessions included focused breathing exercises and using mindful listening tools.
- Ten minutes a day practice using a series of podcasts.
- Daily email prompts to encourage practice.
- Other online tools for staff to access on the intranet.
- Access to weekly optional 15-minute guided group sessions called 'Midday Monday Practice' after the courses ended. These were led by in-house practitioners and helped employees to further develop their skills.

The courses are voluntary, although staff commit to attending all four sessions. Staff interest however has been high with word-of-mouth leading to increasing numbers of staff asking for courses or drop-in sessions.

Courses attracted roughly equal numbers of male and female staff, and people from a wide range of roles including investment analysts and sales staff (who tend to be mobile) along with support staff such as accountants, lawyers and compliance specialists (who are office-based). There was also a mix in terms of seniority, including partners. The firm noted that younger staff tended to be the first to sign up, many having had previous experience with online applications such as Headspace. Completion levels for the courses were high, and there was good attendance at the optional drop-in sessions.

## Results

Results from the company's own pre- and post-course participant self-assessment surveys from the first 50 staff involved were presented to the firm's management committee. Highlights included staff:

- feeling more effective and organised;
- giving more attention to their work;

- less often operating on a short fuse; and
- being more focused in meetings.

The courses had a transformational effect on some individuals, with anecdotal reports from managers and colleagues indicating business benefits from the increased ability to focus by individuals (who are more composed and less distracted). A calmer approach to their lives in general at work and home was a welcome personal benefit described anecdotally by course participants. This was also seen in employee survey results.

Mindfulness courses, perceived as potentially risky before their introduction, are now considered by BlueBay to be low-risk with no apparent detrimental effects. Staff who decide the approach was not for them have still benefited from new relationships formed with staff in other roles and at different levels of seniority.

BlueBay are planning another mindfulness course.

## Case 4: Employee Wellbeing at UK Government Department

### The context for mindfulness

The Department is a government ministry with over 2,000 staff.

The initial mindfulness activity as a workplace intervention came about through a director's championing of it, having suffered an episode of depression, and having had a positive personal experience of mindfulness. For this individual, mindfulness prevented a recurrence of depression, and brought other personal benefits across every aspect of life, including in the workplace. The director embarked upon a 'personal journey' to get buy-in at all levels for mindfulness to promote the wellbeing of all employees. The director is now a qualified mindfulness teacher.

### Approach to mindfulness-based training

Most of the mindfulness-based work to date experimented with variations to traditional Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programmes to make them accessible for a non-clinical workplace setting. The primary aim was to promote individual staff members' wellbeing.

A series of pilot programmes were run and evaluated. This generated local evidence and experience which made a big difference to the credibility of mindfulness benefits within the Department. Activities began in 2013 and included:

- Introductory workshops for staff: around 1,200 people attended on-site workshops on mindfulness. Some workshops were specifically requested by directors for their teams. Other workshops were open to all staff.
- An employee wellbeing 'proof of concept' evaluated pilot during 2013: this compared the three delivery options: a self-directed, online course (twice daily, ten-minute guided sessions over eight weeks), a group, face-to-face course (two-hour weekly sessions for eight weeks with daily practice) and blended (an online course plus three face-to-face sessions). Regular drop-in, follow-up, 30-minute practice sessions were held for each option to help build a mindful culture, and support those who wanted to continue practice as a group.
- A talent management evaluated pilot during 2014: this involved a group of cross-government, civil servant 'fast-streamers' in a shorter course of six training sessions over three weeks commencing at the end of the working day. The idea was that a condensed version would be more accessible for full-time employees with busy schedules.

- A senior leaders' team pilot: this was delivered in-house as one full day of training with four weeks of personal practice, supported by an online programme/app. This was followed by a second day covering lessons 5-8 of the MBSR programme, with a further four weeks of personal practice. A half-day follow-up after four weeks was planned, but diary scheduling problems made it impractical.
- An annual mindfulness symposium to review the latest evidence and case studies to support the growth of a mindful organisation culture.

## Results

There was an impact on personal performance. One senior leader explained the results of attending mindfulness training as part of the senior leaders' pilot:

*'Sometimes the working environment can feel toxic and my energy would be low. Doing mindfulness was about me. There have been profound personal benefits. I am more content with my own values. I have taken control back. I still get down days but now I do something about it. All I do is ten minutes practice a day on the train travelling to work instead of reading my book plus one hour of me-time at work on a Friday. The confidence it gives me has helped my resilience at work.'*

Qualitative and quantitative measures were used to evaluate the proof of pilot concept; the impact on individuals was said to be overwhelmingly positive. The benefits are shown overleaf.

**Figure 3: Summary of the benefits of the mindfulness activity**

## Summary of benefits



Source: Duff, Hinder and Weatherly-Jones (2013), internal document produced with kind permission from the commissioning Government Department

Statistically significant changes for the proof of pilot participant group as a whole included: a perceived stress reduction; an improvement in satisfaction with life; improved wellbeing; a reduced sense of isolation; and being less likely to be overwhelmed by painful thoughts and feelings. Detailed qualitative interviews with 21 participants found that most had learned a mindfulness technique to help cope with their working lives. One person reported being able to avoid taking time off with stress as a result of using the mindfulness exercises.

The 'short option' undertaken by the fast streamers was independently evaluated and demonstrated a statistically significant increase in mindfulness and happiness. It seemed that even a brief period of training demonstrated results. Although not statistically significant, improved outcomes were also observed with regard to stress, health satisfaction, worthwhileness, life satisfaction and anxiety levels. In contrast there was little effect on resilience and a negative effect on engagement. One fast stream participant interviewed shared the results and also views on the importance of terminology:

*'It [the mindfulness programme] was brilliant but I think it is important to use the language of "focus and productivity" rather than "stress and health" when talking about the benefits of mindfulness in the workplace. It's about improving the way we work, better planning, prioritisation and productivity, and our own awareness of how we work. Mindfulness*



*encourages you to step outside your head and understand how your mind works to be able to recognise thought patterns, and use tools and techniques to help manage them proactively. The course has really helped me.'*

Across the organisation there was also a significant impact. One fast-stream participant described a chain of impact: becoming a more mindful leader could lead to better experience of the workplace for employees. In addition she advocated taking a whole team approach in future:

*'Mindfulness has improved the way I have worked with my team. I have also been keen to set an example in working mindfully rather than working by rules, which I know has created a better working environment for my staff as well. It would better though if the whole management team had had mindfulness training so that and the benefits of more mindful leaders could be experienced by other teams across the organisation. If everyone could be present in the moment it would also really pay dividends in improving the outcomes from management meetings.'*

The pilots' successes were explained by the Chair of the Department's staff health and wellbeing programme, in an email to this report's authors:

*'The successful spread of mindfulness is because of local champions and practitioners who create a ripple effect. Their enthusiasm is infectious. Organisation change can start bottom up. Anyone can light the fires and get the passion going.'*

It is hoped that the October 2015 launch of the Mindful Nation UK report (Mindfulness Initiative, 2015), which recommended all government departments develop mindfulness-based programmes for public sector employees to combat stress and improve organisational resilience, will result in additional impetus for mindfulness training becoming a mainstream staff wellbeing offer within the Department.

## Case 5: Integration in leadership training across government

### The context for mindfulness

The Government manages and delivers some of the most transformative projects in the country, including the National Crime Agency, the national cyber security programme and major NHS initiatives. In early 2015 the Cabinet Office launched the Project Leadership Programme (PLP), as part of a wider strategy to improve management quality in senior civil servant leaders working on large and complex schemes. The PLP is intended to train 1,500 staff across government over five years, and is being delivered by Cranfield School of Management, PA Consulting Group and the Project Academy.

The aim is a staff career path in project delivery work across government, attracting and retaining the best talent, and building world-class project leadership. The rationale of a mindfulness element in the programme is as a catalyst to help the senior leaders develop wiser decision-making, higher emotional intelligence, and more resilience. This builds on the lessons emerging from other programmes in government that have found that agile working (previously perceived as relevant to digital projects) can improve wider project delivery. In addition, reflective thinking helps leaders identify what aspects of their projects or organisations are holding them back; they can then articulate desirable organisational changes.

### Approach to mindfulness in PLP

From the outset the PLP designers wanted the mindfulness element to be clearly incorporated within the context of collective leadership. Mindfulness was a tool to prepare individuals for transforming their projects and their organisations. This is deliberately different from the common approaches within an individual leadership context. Participants were to apply mindfulness (and behaviour change) at multiple points or 'levels' within their organisations:

- within the individual;
- between individuals within teams; and
- between teams across the organisation.

Karl Weick's work was particularly significant in designing the PLP mindfulness elements needed to deliver organisation-level outcomes. Weick is widely acknowledged as a leading management scholar, and he outlined the principles of High Reliability Organisations (HROs) and Mindful Organising (MO). HROs are said to challenge 'mindlessness' through a focus on understanding the processes that foster effectiveness

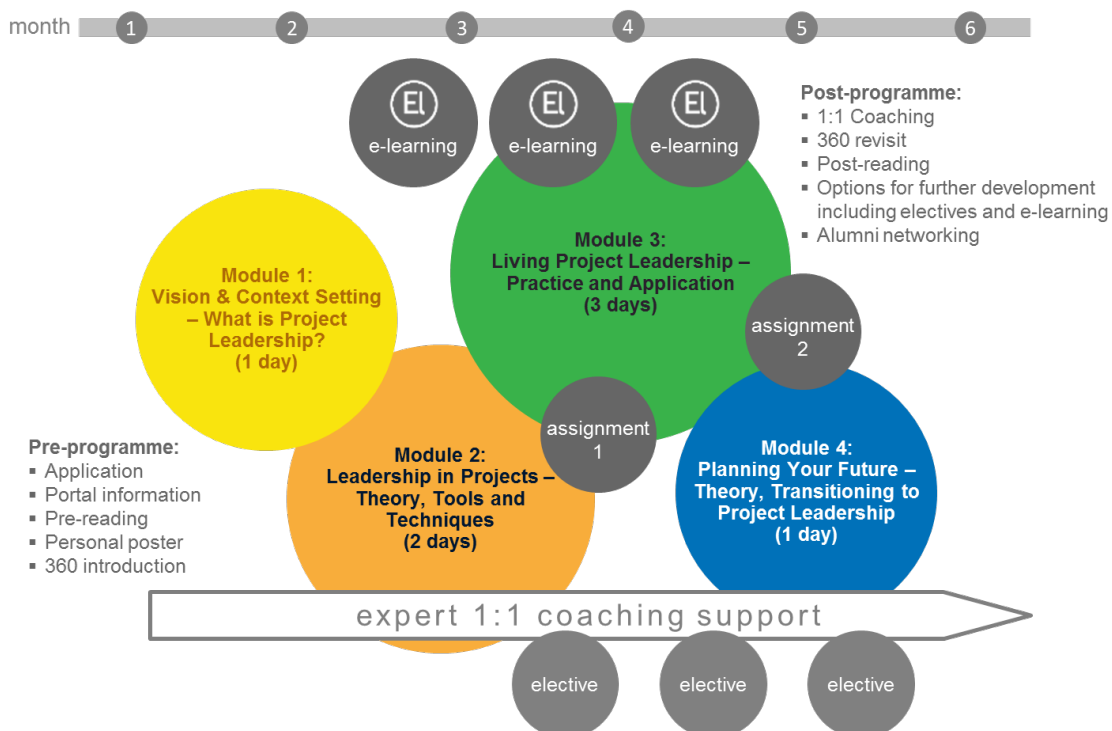
under trying conditions. MO focuses on successes achieved when people and teams consistently:

- pay attention to (operational) detail;
- obsess about failure;
- defer to expertise;
- are committed to resilience; and
- are reluctant to simplify.

## Implementation of mindfulness element

The core programme comprises four group-based, face-to-face core modules delivered over six months supplemented by three e-learning modules, three electives, and on-going expert one-to-one coaching support. The programme structure is shown as Figure 1 below.

**Figure 4: Overview of PLP Programme**



Source: Cranfield University © 2015

Mindfulness is integrated in two ways: firstly, the mindfulness e-learning module is delivered between the first and second modules, and focuses on developing emotional intelligence; secondly, the mindfulness half-day, face-to-face workshop during modules three and four focuses on developing resilience and improved decision-making.

Overcoming scepticism from those familiar with mindfulness for individual wellbeing that it could also be a tool for organisational performance was a challenge. The PLP delivery team addressed this by positioning mindfulness as a mechanism to impact performance at several levels: at the individual level; between individuals in teams; and across the organisation, in a sustainable and respectful way. Wellbeing is thus described as the beginning of a chain of impact with performance improvements at the end.

## Results

It is early days in terms of quantifiable results. Initial feedback collected by the programme organisers from participants in the first two cohorts has been positive. Specific comments emailed in after the e-learning module on mindfulness included:

*'I am not new to mindfulness, but I must admit I'd really only thought about it in relation to my personal life, so you've opened my mind to hope it can be applied in my working life.'*

*'I related to this very quickly and have already thought about the question to ask at my next team meeting, tomorrow!'*

One participant, a director at a government department, described a ripple effect or chain of impact leading to improved team performance and team working. This was a result of becoming a more mindful leader following attendance at an introductory workshop and on-going regular practise:

*'I am looking at how I can use mindfulness techniques and particularly considering this in relation to a mindful organisation... to help me create an innovative team work environment at work... This has been very helpful to us in creating a project branding and securing support for a strategically important corporate project. As a team we are also looking at how we use agile and lean techniques and are particularly keen that the work that we do is user-centric and uses volunteers to help us scope, shape and deliver the programme. The idea is to help people on their transition journey instead of fighting against their habitual behaviours. We want people to be excited about using our improved processes and tools and ultimately the new business management technology system that we will implement.'*

The delivery teams' planned success measures or evaluations were not available.

## Case 6: Stress Reduction at Transport for London

### The context for mindfulness

Transport for London (TfL) employs nearly 24,000 people many of whom, as transport workers, are vulnerable to mental health issues. For example, 'Person under Train' incidents can have long-lasting effects on drivers' mental wellbeing (Health & Safety Laboratory, 2004). Bus drivers must drive under time pressure whilst maintaining impeccable safety standards (Meijman and Kompier, 1998); and transport workers as a whole are at risk of assault and abuse, particularly when working alone.

Sickness was a major concern in 2003, threatening two of the organisation's key priorities, operations and customer service. An internal review found that mental health was one of the top two health issues affecting company employees; the other big issue was musculoskeletal problems. As part of a strategy to help staff deal with stress, TfL decided to offer stress reduction workshops, open to employees who met the referral criteria.

### Approach to mindfulness-based training at TfL

In 2004, bringing mindfulness into the workplace was 'a bit of a leap of faith'. According to one of the programme trainers (Cray, 2008):

*'Mindfulness interventions are used to raise client/patient powers of self-observation. Mindful attention enables clients (employees) to recognise their habitual emotional responses in dealing with the range of stress and general life issues. The insight achieved from mindful awareness helps clients make specific changes to limiting beliefs, negative thinking and emotional patterns affecting confidence and motivation.'*

Mindfulness was also used at TfL with condition pain-management groups, where patients can become over-focused on, and over-sensitised to, pain signals, so increasing a sense of disability. Recognising this through mindfulness exercise helps change focus, which is likely to decrease pain sensation, and increase a sense of what is possible.

### Implementation of programme

Since 2004, around 600 TfL employees have been through the programme, which is delivered in group-based, weekly, three-hour sessions for six weeks. The design and format follows tried and tested MBSR and incorporates cognitive behavioural therapy and other techniques as well as mindfulness. It aims to guide people in mastering their symptoms, help them understand the stress cycle (and how to interrupt it), and enable them to develop a healthier approach to life. TfL offers follow-up sessions after one month, with an option to come back any time if participants get into difficulty.

The metaphor used – and the programme name – is ‘Riding the Wave’, likening stress management to learning to surf. *‘You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf them effectively’*. The biggest challenge was dealing with myths and preconceptions, and TfL does not choose to use the word ‘meditation’, preferring to talk about ‘relaxation’.

According to a Mental Health Foundation (MHF) report (2010), the Head of Treatment Services at TfL was surprised about how big a part of their work it had become:

*‘It appears to be popular with employees because it isn’t therapy and it’s viewed as very practical programme. The workshops are seen as marking a real change in direction because they are aimed at teaching people life skills rather than purely being “a quick fix”.’*

Counsellors report positive experiences of running the workshops. They find there is no one ‘type’ of person best suited to mindfulness and that it can help anyone with symptoms of stress. The Head of Treatment Services, according to the same MHF report (2010), believes people are motivated because what the programme is teaching them is relevant and makes sense in their daily lives, both professionally and personally.

## Results

Measures reflected the programme’s goals in terms of reducing absence (a corporate indicator), and helping employees cope with stress (self-reported perceptions). Absence records for employees on the course showed that days off for stress, anxiety and depression fell by 71 per cent over the following three years, while absences for all conditions dropped by 50 per cent.

The organisation’s own internal qualitative evaluation is said to show that, immediately afterwards, nearly all employees said that they made changes to their lives. Some 80 per cent of participants reported improvements in their relationships, 79 per cent had improvements in their ability to relax, 64 per cent noticed improvements in sleep patterns, and 53 per cent had improvements in happiness at work. From an occupational health viewpoint, one attractive feature of TfL’s mindfulness was that colleagues kept improving on key measures for a long time after the intervention. According to the MHF report (2010):

The Head of Treatment Services at TfL said:

*‘On average, not only is there a significant improvement in the first year, but there are further slight improvements in years two and three, sustained much beyond intervention.’*

The Director at EJT Associates, a course provider, said:

*‘Participants learn that they have some control over their responses even if they can’t control the events themselves - what a customer says to them, for example... They start to realise that their thinking processes have an impact and that they can become more resilient.’*

*'It's not that we're telling them to be more mindful — they just seem to become more mindful as a result of doing the practices. The breakthroughs people have are sometimes quite extraordinary.'*

## Case 7: Emotional intelligence at Google Inc

### The context for mindfulness

Google is a multinational technology company based in California. With over 40 offices worldwide, Google currently employs over 57,000 staff as part of its Google and Motorola businesses. Like other such companies, Google has recently expanded its capacity and workforce, especially in its engineering centres. The stated policy at Google according to its website is *'Fast is better than slow'*.

*'Our atmosphere may be casual, but as new ideas emerge in a café line, at a team meeting or at the gym, they are traded, tested and put into practice with dizzying speed—and they may be the launch pad for a new project destined for worldwide use.'*

The emphasis on producing, and implementing, speedy innovation, and the implications for staff of such high-pressure working, has led to the need to invest in wellbeing and coping strategies for staff. Google is thought to have been more receptive to introducing workplace mindfulness for two reasons: firstly, the company likes to be seen as an 'early adopter' of change and innovation; and, secondly, because of the high profile of mindfulness within the Silicon Valley culture. Google has created a hugely appealing image as an employer (Harvard Business Review, 2015) and has been named (twice) as 'the best place to work in America' by Fortune magazine, in part thanks to its workplace and wellbeing investment.

### Approach to mindfulness in Google

Google pitches its mindfulness programmes as a personalised route to emotional intelligence, which helps people better understand their colleagues' motivations, boosts resilience to stress, and improves mental focus. Take-up was low when 'mindfulness' was first offered, as (perhaps) stress was seen as a 'badge of honour'. Since the description was changed to emphasise emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness, take-up has been high.

### Implementation of mindfulness at Google

Google offers employees more than a dozen mindfulness courses, but since 2007 the most popular is the 'Search Inside Yourself' (SIY) programme. SIY was developed by Google engineer, Chade-Meng Tan, and Daniel Goleman, a Stanford University neuroscientist and author of the book *Emotional Intelligence*. According to the SIY website (Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, 2016), the programme is a four-week programme that aims to blend mindfulness, emotional intelligence and neuroscience.



The SIY course is broken into three sequential portions, defined as:

- Attention skills training to bring the mind to a place that's calm and clear.
- Self-knowledge about yourself so that you can master your emotions.
- Creating mental habits so you don't have to think about it: it just comes naturally.

Alongside the formal learning SIY process, there are other ways in which Google has introduced mindfulness:

- Practice: manager training sessions are organised using Twitter, where managers have opportunities to practice skills.
- Creating physical space: a physical space that is reserved for mindfulness programmes that employees can use as they wish.
- Variety: Google offers a variety of teachers, techniques and habits to be explored.
- Encourage and support community: gPause is an internal Google online community where staff share information about books, resources, retreats etc.

The Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI) is a Google-owned, not-for-profit organisation, guided by a board including neuroscientist Dr Richard Davidson, which makes this available to other companies.

## Results

Participant self-reports collected by the company following SIY sessions run during 2014-15 with participants from 50 different organisations based in Australia are reported on the SIY website and include:

- 91 per cent increased ability to remain calm
- 85 per cent increased ability to connect with others
- 79 per cent increase in energy levels.

Karen May, Google's Vice President of People Development, is quoted in a business magazine (Fast Company, 2016) emphasising that one size does not fit all:

*'I never want to assume that what is relevant or helpful for one person will be relevant or helpful for another... this work is very individual and personal, and I don't want us to be prescriptive.'*

Whilst the SIY programme is Google's most popular training programme, and enjoys significant praise and publicity from high-profile external organisational clients, research on its long-term impacts has not been made available.

### **Next steps**

The SIYLI would like to expand its capacity to respond to the growing demand around the world for mindfulness programmes. The main barriers to programme expansion are a lack of experienced trainers, and the personalised approach demanded by SIY's founders.

# Issues for Organisations

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Please note that the organisational context and nature of the mindfulness interventions differ for each case. It is therefore difficult to draw firm conclusions that can be reliably extended to other organisational contexts. Instead, in this chapter we identify common issues arising from the case study organisations and we highlight the lessons they have learned along the way. We then present the top tips from experts in the field for organisations introducing mindfulness.

## Lessons learned from the case studies

Our case study organisations tended to focus on individual impacts rather than collective outcomes. Even so, the case studies show that it is possible to introduce mindfulness in a range of contexts. Common issues arising were the need to:

- ‘Sell’ the concept of mindfulness so it resonates with decision-makers.
- Use language acceptable to the intended audience.
- Have a rationale for the leaders/employees being chosen/targeted.
- Select a delivery format that fits the working patterns of employees.
- Provide on-going support for trained employees so they keep practicing their newly acquired mindfulness skills.

## ‘Selling in’ the concept

Mindfulness does not sell itself. The most well-known applications of mindfulness are in spiritual or clinical/therapeutic settings or as daily mobile ‘apps’, so there is a possible stigma or reluctance in considering mindfulness training beyond these areas. There is a need to deal with pre-conceptions of what mindfulness might be, as opposed to what it is, and to consider carefully the language used around it.

There needs to be a good fit with business goals and organisational culture, so it is worthwhile taking the time to find the right workplace ‘hooks’ to position or market any mindfulness training. Whether your introduction of mindfulness is ‘big bang’ or ‘softly-

softly’ you should take account of your target audience, the prevailing organisation culture, and attitudes to employee development or wellbeing.

When hiring external training providers, the advice from our interviewees is to ensure that the provider and individual trainers understand your business sector. That way, they will have credibility with your staff. An internal champion, or senior sponsor, is also important in talking about mindfulness and making it ‘okay’ for high performers. A passionate senior champion (as in the Government Department case) can drive organisational cultural change by linking to strategy, engaging stakeholders, securing resources and networking at all levels.

## Consider your use of language

The need to find the right ‘hooks’ links to a need to adjust your language to fit the purpose and organisational culture. At Google, when ‘mindfulness’ was first offered, take-up was said to be poor (since stress was a ‘badge of honour’) but when they changed the description to emphasise emotional intelligence and personal effectiveness, the same programme was oversubscribed. In other cases, TfL used the term ‘relaxation’ instead of ‘meditation’; the US military emphasised mindfulness’s ability to enhance team/unit effectiveness rather than be an individual psychological health treatment; and at the professional services firm mindfulness was a ‘brain work-out’ akin to a body work-out.

## Deciding which employees to target

Programmes were perceived as helpful to all categories and levels of employee in many of the case study organisations. That said, most of our case studies indicate that mindfulness techniques will work for some people but not for all, regardless of who is targeted. The advice from our interviewees was consistent in identifying that mindfulness is an individual matter, and you should not expect everyone to ‘get it’.

A note of caution was raised in the Government Department case. Open workshops for self-nominating employees may increase wellbeing and ability to cope for those individuals. However, if these results are isolated from improvements in the workplace environment or a mindful organisational culture, in some cases the results can negatively impact on employee engagement. This is similar to the potential effect from other training and is not unique to mindfulness training. It occurs when individuals feel frustrated in their attempts to transfer their learning or novel insights back into their workplace. For example if, through increased self-awareness or situational awareness, individuals identify a better way of working or innovations in the company’s products or services, but are not ‘allowed’ or not supported in implementing novel ideas, then disillusionment can quickly result.

Project leaders were targeted through the cross-government programme. Both these project leaders, and leaders at different levels in other cases, described a ripple effect or

chain of impact. By becoming a more mindful leader, they could produce better team-working, higher performance and improved employee experiences of the workplace. For organisation-level outcomes (eg improved job performance, better team working, greater innovation, improved employee experience and engagement) a focus on leaders might be worthwhile.

## Training Delivery Format

Mindfulness interventions and training designed with *context* in mind seem to have been successful in developing mindful behaviours relevant to specific workforces. For instance in the US Marine Corps case study mind-fitness training helped team/unit effectiveness and ‘warrior resistance’ among military personnel, whilst in the professional services firm case study initial indications are that mindfulness training is helping improve client management/advisory skills. Thus mindfulness training can be seen as a development method which can potentially be designed and deployed flexibly to suit a variety of organisational contexts and purposes.

A variety of delivery *formats* were trialled by the case study organisations, and while it is not possible to compare the effects of different formats on a like-for-like basis, it would appear that stress-reduction is a likely outcome whatever delivery format is used. Success in reducing stress, increasing personal resilience and improving the wellbeing of individual employees seems possible within the range of four to eight sessions and online formats inspired by an MBSR approach (where the focus is on what individuals can do, even in the face of an ongoing stressful work environment) as seen in the professional services firm, government department and financial services firm cases.

A mindfulness approach designed as a collective leadership process (where the focus is on what organisations can do) seems to work well when integrated within a programme that is not at the personal effectiveness/‘soft skills’ end of the leadership development spectrum as in the cross-government Project Leadership Programme. This suggests that mindfulness does not have to be offered as a stand-alone programme (although it can be).

## Supporting on-going practice

Sustained personal practice of mindfulness is important. Interventions need to incorporate ‘systematic practice’ as well as content delivery. At BlueBay Asset Management, on-going weekly practice is offered to help maintain the momentum; at the Government Department they are experimenting with monthly drop-in sessions.

If possible, time needs to be created during the working day for teams to practice together. Consideration should also be given to allocating a physical space for individual or groups to practice (as at Google); this is especially valuable if meditation is part of the programme.

## What industry experts say

We know from the literature that mindfulness can go beyond a wellbeing focus and become a catalyst for behaviour change and leadership development by positioning its use (a) for individuals, (b) between individuals within teams and (c) between teams across organisations.

This 'ABC' approach maximises the payoff to the organisation as well as to the individual participants in mindfulness programmes. Only in our cross-UK public sector case study was there an overt attempt to deliver mindfulness at all three levels. The Government Department also trialled some activities in support of achieving a 'mindful' organisation culture.

With this in mind, IES and Cranfield organised a knowledge-sharing event in London on 28 April 2016. At the event, guests discussed the barriers and enablers to shifting mindfulness from an individual to collective focus. Twenty experts in the field attended, including academics and mindfulness providers, as well as representatives from the oil and gas, engineering, banking, professional services, utilities, supply-chain management, government, management consulting, and entertainment sectors. Their barriers, enablers and 'top tips' are set out below.

### Barriers and enablers in implementing 'strategic change' mindfulness

- There is a lack of understanding of the term 'mindfulness', and what 'mindful' looks like in practice. The external narratives on the subject (and few directly applicable studies of mindfulness in the workplace) can make it difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, and spot the legitimate studies among those that may be overstating the benefits. A lack of understanding is compounded by a lack of employer networks to share information and best practice.
- Lack of understanding can also lead to misunderstandings or misuse of MBIs by reducing it to the level of 'a generic tool to fix things', rather than a complex and context-sensitive embodied practice. When used only as a tool mindfulness can fail to become something that I/we/everybody does. There are also many forms of MBI and no 'one size fits all' model is applicable to all organisational contexts.
- Resistance can exist within an organisation to what could be perceived as a 'fad of the day'. Scepticism about the need for change can come from traditional views of managing change; traditional approaches also include a top-down approach and instructive style, as well as a reluctance to adapt systems such as performance management and reward.

- Key managers who are uncomfortable in using or promoting mindfulness are a barrier. Mindfulness is promoted most effectively by those who endorse it personally and publicly. Managers are enablers as they have the power to implement systems and create spaces to enable those further down the hierarchy to 'taste' mindfulness and develop their own methods for practicing it.
- Workplace cultures can be a barrier if success is seen to be at an individual, as opposed to team or business unit, level. A lack of individual mindfulness can also lead to a lack of openness, interest or understanding of how mindfulness could support strategic change readiness. Achieving buy-in from staff across different levels of an organisation is also a practical issue.
- Generational issues identified included whether trainees have the maturity to take part in strategic change initiatives, though this could also be viewed as an enabler as younger individuals were often said to be more open to mindfulness practices within the organisation.
- A practical difficulty arises when incorporating mindfulness practices into workplace contexts that are already pressurised by a competitive business environment. Creating the space for new interventions in 'the day job' can be difficult with competing priorities, initiatives, and day-to-day delivery pressures. Practical difficulties can also lead to inconsistency of mindfulness as it rolls out across an organisation.
- The wider culture outside work was also identified as counter to the culture fostered by mindfulness. This wider culture was said to be characterised by fear, reactivity, overload, 'short-termism', and a so-called capitalist 'me' rather than 'we' society. Given that UK governments now have five year terms at most adds to the short-termism and a reluctance to invest in initiatives when results may not be evident before the government leaves office.

### **'Top tips' for applying mindfulness for strategic change**

- There is a need for evidence from credible sources as well as improved communication within each organisation about how mindfulness might help achieve the desired outcomes. Two-way communication helps deal with obstacles present when a mindfulness initiative stops and day-to-day operations continue.
- Consider how mindfulness is labelled and an adaption of this framing according to the organisational context. MBIs should be focused on benefits to the organisation (that often include wellbeing, stress and focus), but should also include food for thought on how they can be used on an organisational scale. MBIs should be understood on a behavioural level and be broken into processes, protocols, and norms that are meaningful to staff across an organisation. This may help foster a compassionate organisational focus and a culture of long-term goals.

- For MBIs to create value for organisational stakeholders, they need to be attached to meaningful frameworks within organisations, demonstrating a contribution to organisational goals 'with the end in mind'. In much the same way a big transformation is executed, articulating how an intervention could be applied at different levels helps break down the process of being mindful in a manageable way.
- Build momentum and sources of support through network connections; these facilitate learning from other contexts where MBIs have been applied.
- Course content needs to be carefully considered, adapted to the organisational context, and delivered authentically by trained individuals who truly 'embody' mindfulness and 'lead by example'.
- Strong leadership was also said to be critical. Role models are needed to lead change, and a senior individual within an organisation needs to champion the initiative, have a sense of purpose, and a clear view of the 'why'. This individual should inspire and enable at all levels, enable short 'taster' mindfulness introductions, generate support from key internal influencers, and signal the importance of the approach. They need to be aware of the best evidence for MBIs for strategic change as applies to their organisation.
- The concept of the 'post-heroic leader' may be applicable: one who is better able to engage on the business's strategic direction with individual employees, and can close any knowledge and understanding gaps at the team or individual level, addressing issues of the flow of accountability through the organisation.
- The devolution of power is as important as leadership in terms of bottom-up trust in the process. Champions could be identified throughout the organisation at whatever level, with the aim of building up momentum from people who 'get it'.

## Questions still to be answered

There is lots of interest in mindfulness in a workplace context but the evidence base is still emerging. Some early adopter organisations have dipped their toes into the mindfulness waters and been kind enough to share their experiences and learning from practice with their peers in other organisations via our case studies. They hope that the lessons they have learnt will help those following on. We suggest that some key questions remain to be answered before mindfulness interventions in workplaces become commonplace. These questions include:

- Is mindlessness the opposite of mindfulness? And is there a link between mindfulness and emotional intelligence?



- What exactly does a 'mindful' leader look like and how do their behaviours differ from 'engaging' or 'coaching' leaders?
- What message are organisations giving their staff through their corporate systems, processes and culture and how does a mindfulness based intervention fit (or conflict) with these? In particular are organisations tacitly rewarding line managers for having 'bulletproof' staff or 'needy' staff?
- How would we measure the impact and outcomes from mindfulness in a real world context?
- What problem(s) are organisations actually trying to solve with mindfulness interventions and might another less-popular intervention be more appropriate?

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## Appendix 1: Summary of case studies

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Organisation	Global Professional Services Firm	UK Government Department	US Military	Cross Government	BlueBay Asset Management	Transport for London	Google
Context	Firm's market positioning as a 'trusted advisor'.	Personal experience and championing by a Director.	New era of warfare requires improved adaptability and situational awareness.	Improve project leadership skills. Attract and retain specialist talent.	Young organisation needing to attract and retain specialist talent.	Stressful job roles. High absence rate.	Culture of innovation Pressured work environment
Purpose of mindfulness programme/ programme element	Enhancing organisational effectiveness through skills improvement.	Employee wellbeing. Developing a 'mindful' organisational culture.	Performance Improvement through mental agility. Personal Resilience.	More 'mindful' decision-making. Emotional intelligence and personal resilience.	Achieving peak performance through focus, calmness and concentration.	Stress reduction through improving individuals' ability to cope.	Emotional Intelligence Employee well-being
Programme design	5hrs over 4 weeks of group workshops and daily apps. Remote pilot. Drop-in practice sessions.	Introductory workshops. Piloted 16 hrs over 8 weeks and 12 hrs over 3 weeks and online. Drop-in practice sessions.	24 hrs over 8 weeks, silent workshop and practice. Short variant of 8hrs over 8 weeks.	Standalone e-earning module, half day workshop session and practice.	Introductory taster session 4hrs over 4 weeks, practice, and online tools. 15-min weekly guided group sessions.	24 hrs over 6 weeks of group workshops plus follow-up.	Variety of offers including 24 hrs over 8 weeks Online community and practice Reserved physical spaces
Target Audience	150 participants since May 2015. Open to all staff in UK and Australia. All sessions over-subscribed.	Around 1,300 staff since 2013. Workshops open to all staff. Pilots for leaders and fast streamers.	320 US Army and US Marine regulars and reservists. Mostly during pre-deployment training.	Plans for 1,500 staff during 2015-2020. Open to those responsible for large scale projects.	70 participants since May 2015.	600 participants since 2009. Open to all staff experiencing symptoms of stress.	Unknown. First programmes began in 2009

Organisation	Global Professional Services Firm	UK Government Department	US Military	Cross Government	BlueBay Asset Management	Transport for London	Google
Results	Provider surveys of participants indicate being more attentive in meetings (including client meetings) and increased ability to prioritise.	Evaluators say significant self-reports of higher wellbeing and lower perceived stress. Leader self-reports of a ripple effect leading to improved working environment, team performance and innovation.	Researchers say participants report improved team communications, unit cohesion, leader delegation, and more co-operative team behaviours during deployment. Self-reports of decrease in perceived stress and enhanced recovery from stress post-deployment.	Too early to identify. Provider surveys indicate feedback from participants on first two cohorts is positive.	Provider surveys of participants indicate increased feeling of being more effective and organised, less often operating on a short fuse and being more focused in meetings.	Company says 71% reduction in absence due to stress, anxiety and depression and 50% reduction for other reasons. Higher self-reported wellbeing continuing 2-3 years post-intervention.	No long term impact research available. Company reports participants have increased ability remain calm, connect with others and an increase in energy levels

Source: IES Interviews and desk research, 2015/6





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