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Mindfulness at work and in coaching:

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Introduction

Mindfulness promotes health and well-being. Its applications and benefits have been the subject of research for thirty years and there is growing evidence of the positive effects across a multiplicity of domains.

Organisations today are confronted by challenges brought by continuous change, globalisation, growing cultural differences and a constant need for efficacy and efficiency. These and other factors contribute to the ever increasing pace at which organisations operate to remain competitive in a difficult market place. This trend is challenging the well-being and health of the working population and indirectly of the economy itself. The costs of ill-health as a result of stress and other work related disorders is a significant drain on resources. It is estimated that in the UK in 2006/07, some 30 million days were lost due to work-related ill-health; around three quarters of the cases were musculoskeletal disorders, stress, depression or anxiety. In people terms, some 2.2 million people were reported to be suffering from an illness they believed was caused or made worse by their current or past work. When looked at in terms of the working population, around 14% of all working individuals believed their work to be very or extremely stressful (HSE, 2007).

The above figures are sign of a nation that is under extreme pressure to perform. The UK Government is attempting to respond to these challenges through a joint venture between the Health and Safety Executive, the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions; the “Health, Work and Well-Being” strategy (Government, 2005). This strategy aims to improve general health of the working population and to use the workplace as a catalyst for general health improvement. Such actions at national policy level provide an opportunity for positive psychology

and its practitioners to contribute to its success. It is within this context that mindfulness can positively contribute to individuals, organisations and the economy.

In this paper we aim to show how the constructs at the heart of mindfulness are central to positive psychology when applied to the workplace. In the first part we aim to introduce mindfulness as a tool for the workplace, highlight the human and business case in its favour and clarify what is intended by mindfulness. In the second part we focus on a range of areas of applied positive psychology where mindfulness is or could be of positive impact, while also providing suggestions on how to begin developing mindfulness through a series of simple and quick exercises.

Mindfulness in the workplace

Mindfulness promotes an approach to the present that is more inclusive and authentic, and provides the opportunity to 'slow down' and observe the full range of our experiences as they truly are. When most organisations today operate in a fast-paced environment and reacting to constant change seems to be necessary norm, one has to wonder whether organisations and their CEOs could possibly be convinced that 'slowing down' is the answer to their challenges. Slowing down in a world which is constantly aiming to go quicker may seem counter intuitive, however, we would argue that only by slowing down, can one be at once more effective and more satisfied. In fact, it is the engaging in moments of inner stillness that creates opportunities to step out of this overwhelming flow, regain composure, strength and clarity of thought, to rejoin the flow and follow it harmoniously. Visualise the following example.

A cabinet-maker is intent on putting the finishing touches on a commissioned piece of furniture. They are feeling under great strain and pressure; the deadline is looming

and they are late. The eight hours work remaining must be completed in the four hours available. They are so overwhelmed and so hurried that they fail to realise their chisel has become blunt. What would you do if you were the cabinet-maker? Some would continue working, pressed for time and unaware of the energy they are expending pressing against the wood that will not cut; as a result obtaining rough, grainy cuts. Others would stop; gather their energy and thoughts, sharpen the chisel and return to work; as a result producing faster, cleaner and smoother cuts. What do most managers do when faced with pressing deadlines?

While this example may seem obvious, not many among us, including the authors, succeed in recognising when the chisel needs sharpening, or at least, not always. It is possible that this failure may be fed by the need to constantly focus on outcomes and the future. Mindfulness aims to refine the ability to focus our attention to the present moment, and to promote a more authentic and inclusive experience of it. Research shows that when practiced regularly, mindfulness can improve memory, motivation, creativity (Langer, 1997) and job satisfaction among other psychological and physiological factors. Mindfulness can be introduced at an organisational as well as an individual level, and has, so far, been studied in the occupational, medical and clinical contexts and has been shown to positively impact individuals and their performance, at least in some areas.

The Benefits of Mindfulness

Over the past three decades research has begun to reveal the benefits of applying mindfulness and other meditative practices to a wide range of interventions. The findings suggest that meditation, including mindfulness, can contribute to physiological, psychological and transpersonal well-being and it may help identify and actualise human strengths (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Santerre, 2005).

While it is not our purpose to provide a detailed critique of the research, it may be helpful to illustrate some of the evidence of mindfulness contributions to practice. The majority of the research has so far focused on medical and clinical settings; however there is a growing wealth of data being collected within other domains, such as the occupational and recreational.

The Human Case

As mentioned, mindfulness benefits both the physiology and the psychology of individuals. Physiologically it has been shown to positively impact a large variety of factors like blood pressure (McCraty, 2003) and the immune system (Rein & McCraty, 1995); there are however many more studies that show its wider impact; e.g. in a study with patients suffering psoriasis (a skin disorder) the experimental group showed significantly faster recovery rates than control, after practicing mindfulness meditation (Kabat-Zinn, J., Wheeler, E., Light, T., Skillings, A., Scharf, M. J., Cropley, T. G., et al., 1998); in another study, survival rates among the residents of a care home for elderly where higher for those who attended mindfulness practice compared to those who attended relaxation training or no-treatment groups (Alexander, Langer, Newman, Chandler & Davies, 1989); and finally, in a study with 48 healthy employees from a biotechnology corporation, the meditators group reported significant increases in left-sided anterior brain activation, a pattern usually associated with positive affect, when compared to the non-meditators in the control group. Furthermore, the left-sided activation predicted the rise in antibody to the influenza vaccine (Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz, Muller, Santorelli, et al., 2003).

Perhaps more relevant to the workplace are the numerous aspects of one's psychology that can also be improved through mindfulness, including: job strain

(Cropley & Purvis, 2003), job satisfaction and vision (Kriger & Hanson, 1999), self-compassion (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005; Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005), emotional awareness and interpersonal sensitivity (Shefy & Sadler-Smith, 2006) and learning (Yeganeh, 2006) among others. These factors can in turn contribute to improving health and well-being in the workplace and foster more effective skills in managing conflict, stress, personnel, communication and leadership.

These findings are promising. However, caution should be noted in that many of the studies are not randomized or controlled, and sample sizes have in some cases been small or are based in specific populations. Mindfulness interventions are relatively new to scientific scrutiny and although evidence is growing in quality and quantity, one has to remain cautious in making conclusive statements. The evidence so far strongly suggests that mindfulness is a positive intervention and it can contribute towards improved outcomes in stress management, general well-being and performance.

The Business Case

Mindfulness has been shown to positively impact several areas that are directly responsible for business performance; among them: safety culture (Hopkins, 2002), conflict resolution (Riskin, 2004), creativity (Langer & Piper, 1987) and decision-making (Fiol & O'Connor, 2003). Such benefits have been studied, amongst others, in the context of high reliability organisations (HRO) (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001; Fiol & O'Connor, 2003) and the findings show how mindfulness can be applied collectively at an organisational level, internally and externally. Following this research a 5-step mindfulness management model was develop to describe mindful organisations. The five steps are: being preoccupied with failure rather than success; reluctance to simplify interpretations; sensitivity to operations; commitment to resilience; and deference to expertise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

The effectiveness of organisational mindfulness in internal interactions was shown in a study that aimed to improve rates of infant death and pre-term birth in a health initiative in the USA. Through the application of the 5-step mindfulness model, over a period of five years, mindlessness was shown to occur across the system and to be in part responsible for the disastrous outcomes (Issel & Narasimha, 2007), which in turn provided direction towards improved performance. The effectiveness of organisational mindfulness in external interactions (public outreach) was instead shown in a study of prescribed forestry burn. In this study the organisation used the 5-step mindfulness model to manage public outreach and analyse the interaction with the public; as a consequence the efforts of the organisation were recognised to have followed the mindfulness model and to have been in large part effective (Knotek & Watson, 2006). Further evidence suggests that an organisation that operates mindfully fosters a learning culture of understanding and action, rather than one of training that focuses on planning, control, processes and procedures (Browning & Boudès, 2005) and that the former is conducive to creating "truly healthy organisations" (Kriger & Hanson, 1999). Yet again, some organisations that have introduced contemplative interventions not only as measures for stress reduction, but as an intrinsic part of the organisational structure, have improved communication and increased a sense of team and community (Duerr, 2004).

The practical implications for mindfulness in the workplace are far reaching and have the potential to improve general well-being, create a healthy and safe environment and foster an organisational culture that is open to change, learning and growth. It is by clarifying the concept of mindfulness that this will become clearer.

What is mindfulness?

In this chapter we define mindfulness as “a state of mind that cultivated regularly promotes an inclusive and authentic experience of the present moment”. This can be achieved by purposely focusing our attention onto the present moment in a non-judgemental way.

This description captures the essence of mindfulness, however for those new to the concept it both may seem obvious and distant; obvious in the sense that we understand the meaning of these words, distant in terms of our experience of what this may feel like.

Most of us have experienced being so deeply engaged in an activity enough to lose the perception of time. The loss of time perception is just one example of the experience of mindfulness. Other times we might be so deeply engaged in an activity that we lose awareness of our environment or of ourselves. In these moments of ‘detached’ experience we become absorbed and fully focused. However, a mindful experience is anything but detached; that hovering feeling of existence sensitises our minds and enhances the quality of our experiences; awareness is sharpened, but with no sense of pressure or urgency. Nevertheless the more natural state we find ourselves in, however, is that of ‘mindlessness’.

We all recall a time when we forgot the name of someone who had just been introduced to us. Or perhaps once, when on our way home from work, we needed to buy milk, but found ourselves at home, having forgotten to detour to the shop. Or at work, when talking to a colleague and realising we had not heard anything of what was said. All those events, during which we do not attend to the present, are examples of ‘mindlessness’. In this state we become absent, the mind wanders, it is

worried about the past or the future, and it is clouded by thoughts or overwhelmed by emotions.

Mindfulness provides a new frame of reference, one to open our eyes to reality in a more objective way; one where we purposely step back from imposing our rules and routines on reality and observe in a more inclusive and authentic way; one where we relinquish control. It is in fact through our mental models that we control what we believe to be reality. Our environment is extremely rich in detail, as a result our minds are unable to attend and process all that we experience. To manage this overload of sensory information we apply filters to create a reality we understand, feel comfortable with and that we can manage and make sense of. This frame of reference we create is unique to each individual and mediates our interactions with the environment. Being mindless means being governed by these rules and routines; being mindful, however means being guided by them (Langer, 2002).

Mindfulness as applied positive psychology

Mindfulness as an attribute of consciousness can be part of every aspect of life and can enhance our experience of it. A more inclusive and authentic experience of the present moment, achieved through a renewed awareness and a stance of non-judgemental acceptance, can enhance the regular experience of pleasantness (the Pleasant Life), of the sense of engagement we derive from our primary activities (the Good Life) or the sense of fulfilment derived from contributing to the well-being of something beyond ourselves (the Meaningful Life) (Seligman, 2002). Many parallels can be drawn between mindfulness and positive psychology, in particular for some research areas that have been applied to and studied in the workplace, including: flow, learned optimisms, strengths, time perspective, stress management and coaching.

(i) Flow

Many people are at their happiest when in flow (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989; Delle Fave & Massimini, 2003; 2004) and experience it within their working activities, yet without knowing how to label such an experience. Flow occurs when a combination of specific features is present and has been extensively studied among individuals engaged in various activities. These features are: clear goals; concentration on a specific, limited field; direct feedback; loss of conscious awareness of the self and of time; a balance between the level of ability and the challenge; a sense of control and a sense of absorption with the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 72). Most of these factors can be recreated through the management of the environment, ourselves or the interaction between the two. Mindfulness can actively contribute to the experience of flow by influencing to some degree: feedback, loss of self-consciousness and absorption with the activity.

When engaged in any activity the response to our performance is the product of outcome progress and the awareness we possess of that transition. When in a mindful state the mind extends its capability to capture the surrounding stimuli and process them at a conscious level. It follows that a mindful state should promote the recognition of immediate, direct feedback.

Loss of self-consciousness and absorption with the activity are intrinsic to the nature of mindfulness and were illustrated earlier

(ii) Learned Optimism

Learned optimism is a second area of positive psychology which can be heavily influenced by mindfulness and be applied to the workplace.

A study conducted with a large insurance company showed that the worst performing sales agents were the pessimists. Even among those who were academically excellent, those who reacted negatively to the numerous refusals of prospective clients, the pessimists, were still outsold by the optimists (Seligman, 2006).

It is suggested that our natural tendency to be pessimists can be altered through the practice of activities designed to help us identify the negative, ruminative type of thinking that is typically associated to a self-defeating approach to adversities. The ABC (Activating event, Belief, Consequence) model, initially developed by psychologist Albert Ellis (1994), describes the process we engage in when facing adversity; adversity stimulates thoughts that we adopt as beliefs upon which we act. The ability to recognise these processes is critical to modifying the negative, self-defeating thinking that usually precedes helplessness. Mindfulness, with its focus on the present moment "as is", authentic and inclusive, can help identify this faulty links and facilitate the process to break the self-defeating patterns; it can help individuals "tune in on the perpetual dialogue that takes place" (Seligman, 2006, p. 213) in their minds. This has been shown to be so among samples of depressive patients, for whom mindfulness proved an effective therapeutic tool (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002; Brown & Ryan, 2004).

(iii) Strengths

Character strengths have been the focus of extensive research by several of the most respected representatives of the positive psychology field. At the centre of this research there is the core belief that when developing their potential, one should focus on enhancing their existing worth and strengths, rather than focusing on weaknesses. This approach is particularly relevant to today's workplace, where more and more organisations aim to develop the existing potential of their human capacity. Two strong models of strengths: the Values in Action (VIA) classification, (Peterson &

Seligman, 2004) and the Strengths-Finder (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) have been developed to identify and classify human strengths and are being used by employers to select, recruit and develop their workforce. Both models propose to identify the core strengths within an individual and to equip them with the awareness to develop their potential.

In one study (Silberman, 2007) conducted with undergraduate students, students completed the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the VIA Institute Signature Strengths Questionnaire. The results showed that mindfulness was positively and significantly correlated with several strengths with coefficients of r = .3 or higher, including: self-control and self-regulation, integrity, bravery (valour), perspective (wisdom), citizenship, and social intelligence. Although causation cannot be established from the study, it appears that evidence suggests that mindfulness contributes to these strengths. Research on the relationship between mindfulness and self-regulation (Brown & Ryan, 2003; 2004) suggests that mindfulness predicts self-regulation. Further evidence also supports the links between mindfulness and character strengths (Epstein, 1999; Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Brown & Kasser, 2005). However, more research is needed to identify the links between these two constructs.

(iv) Time Perspective

Mindfulness is deeply focused on the present moment, however most people would naturally have a preference to focus either on the past, the present or the future, with a specific attitude, positive or negative. This is called time perspective. Organisations generally need a workforce that is representative of all of them in a balanced way. There is a need for visionaries who are able to see things that don't yet exist, realists who recognise the present and exercise caution when necessary, and employees who use the past to inform the present. Within individuals a balance is also needed to

promote a more satisfactory life and avoid dysfunction (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999; Boniwell & Zimbardo, 2003).

Mindfulness promotes an experience of a fuller present; however the discipline recognises the value of a balance between all time perspectives. Despite the strong focus on the present moment, a mindful approach to life does not dismiss the importance of the future and the past. The future provides us with the vision towards which to channel our energy; the past and its memory teaches us of opportunities. Vision and lessons from the past can be brought to the present to inform our actions and allow us to behave in an authentic way.

Time perspective has been extensively researched and its findings applied to several aspects of time managements in organisations. Together with flow, learned-optimisms and strengths it contributes to creating a healthier workplace. Such a contribution is also being brought about by stress reduction programmes such as the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

(v) Stress Reduction

CASE STUDY

The plant manager of a large manufacturing organisation was referred by his doctor to the stress clinic after complaints of dizzy spells and a general feeling of losing control of his life.

His sleep patterns were heavily affected, he would feel faint during the day, he would be constantly worrying about work and he did not believe that stress could be responsible for such severe symptoms. He was sure he had to have “something wrong with me internally”, maybe a brain tumour.

The eight-week MBSR programme was life changing, especially sharing other people’s experiences, which made him believe that he too could begin to regain control of his life. His

raised awareness made him realise how strongly linked his symptoms were to work pressures and as a consequence was able to change his attitude towards his work. He is now able to catch himself from passing the point of no return and gently guide himself to a more relaxed state; "I can back right off it now. I don't even have to go sit down. I can just do it." More importantly, the MBSR programme and his renewed awareness contributed to him improving on his communication skills and gave him a clearer picture on implementing changes within the organisation, including improved employee engagement. He perceives himself as more productive by delegating more and spending time being strategic instead of constantly operating in 'fire fighting mode'.

Table 1 - MBSR Case Study (adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1990)

The MBSR is an eight-week programme designed to empower the participants in self-regulating their health through mindfulness. Its benefits are reported as life-changing by many of its students who take part in it for various reasons, including chronic pain, coronary heart disease, cancer and stress at work, and its effects have been scientifically tested by many researchers (Langer & Piper, 1987; Kabat-Zinn, Massion, Kristeller, Peterson, Fletcher, Pbert, et al., 1992;Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995; Rein & McCraty, 1995; Langer, 1997; Barrios-Choplin, McCarty, & Cryer, 1997; Speca, Carlson, Goodey, & Angen, 2000; Tacon, Caldera, & Ronaghan, 2004). Attempts have been made to bring the MBSR within occupational settings, but its eight-week nature does not lend itself to the reality of today's organisational life. One and two days training workshops have been developed, however their effects have so far not been tested. Another field that marries mindfulness with applied positive psychology and is in need of further empirical data is coaching.

(vi) Coaching

Mindfulness, coaching and positive psychology aim to improve well-being and as such it takes a small step to see coaching within the realms of applied positive

psychology and to see mindfulness within them. Strong links have already been emphasised between the two disciplines (Kauffman & Scoular, 2004; Linley & Harrington, 2005). The role of mindfulness can be beneficial to the coach, the client and their relationship, and can contribute to establishing a more fertile ground for the client's potential to flourish (Passmore & Marianetti, Dec. 2007). In coaching, mindfulness skills can also be taught as a strategy to enhance relaxation. Both the coach and the client can benefit from regularly practicing mindfulness meditation to promote a fuller experience of life; however mindfulness can be weaved in the coaching practice at diverse levels.

Rogers (1961) argued that individuals are naturally good natured and that by working on that potential during the counselling the client can promote their self-actualisation. This process is only possible if the relationship between counsellor and client is based on a series of necessary and sufficient conditions, central to developing the coaching partnership (Passmore, 2007). Mindfulness can be seen as an invaluable tool in guaranteeing that Rogers' conditions are met and maintained. Congruence, the ability to be true to oneself, for example, requires that the coach is in touch with their current experience of the present to behave and communicate in a way that is consistent with it. Mindfulness' inclusive and authentic approach to the present provides the right tools for the coach to experience reality and remain non-judgemental, while at the same time maintaining genuineness and authenticity. Empathic understanding, another construct central to Rogers' model, requires for the coach to experience reality through the client's mental models. While mindfulness does not necessarily provide a vision of reality from others' point of view, it provides an inclusive picture. The picture that the coach and the client are constantly painting together belongs at once to the coach, the client and their union; as such the coach, by being mindful, is able to experience their contribution and that of the client as if it were their own. Furthermore, it has been shown that mindfulness promotes creativity

(Langer & Piper, 1987; Langer, 1997) and it is accepted that part of the coaching process is creative, in particular for the client who may need to mould potential outcomes out of their current understanding of reality and their vision of the future. The individuals and their relationship can further benefit when the coach adopts mindfulness techniques to ground themselves to the present to leave behind the pressures and the burden of commitments prior to the meeting, such as, for example, a previous coaching session.

All these areas of positive psychology aim to improve well-being and have, to a degree, been applied to the workplace. A common thread linking them to each other is mindfulness and its ability to contribute and positively influence each of them.

Developing mindfulness

Mindfulness can be developed by anyone through training and practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), determination, patience and, almost paradoxically, a mindful approach. How can something be developed when that same something is needed to develop it? This paradox is an indication of the difficulty in explaining mindfulness through words alone. However, this does not signify that its process cannot be broken down to identify areas that can be described, and taught.

Several different ways of developing mindfulness have been described according to its applications; we propose a four-step model, similar in content to others, but grouped under different categories: Knowledge; Purposeful Awareness; Inclusive & Authentic Attention; and Non-Judgemental Acceptance. Although we recognise that the very attempt of providing structure is in itself limitative to mindfulness and its nature, learning requires a strong cognitive input and we felt that providing some structure may prove conducive to learning and adopting these skills.

Prior to describing some exercises to develop mindfulness, we feel compelled to clarify the meaning of our proposed model. The first important step is *Knowledge*. This may appear an obvious choice; however we have yet to find in the literature an explicit attempt to include learning mindfulness knowledge as a central step into the journey to becoming more mindful. We feel it is crucial to developing this state of mind that one understands its concepts, its benefits and the rationale behind its adoption.

The second step is *Purposeful Awareness*. This is the part of the process that is most difficult to commit to a description, as it is pre-verbal. Awareness is at times confused with attention. The two terms are not synonyms, however they are closely linked. Awareness is the collection of all present sensory inputs; imagine it to be a radar that constantly scans the environment, internally and externally to you, consciously and sub-consciously. Attention is focusing the cognitive efforts on one specific target that the radar presents on screen. Purposeful Awareness is the appreciation for the complexity of reality and the vast range of stimuli it provides. It is at this stage that one learns to be mindful about being mindful and expands their perception of "what is" to the present moment. It is at this stage that one remembers to remember.

The third step, *Inclusive & Authentic Attention*, aims to develop the ability to observe and focus attention on the: who, what, when and where; the why is excluded to emphasise the non-judgemental nature of this process. This skill should be approached with a sense of deep curiosity, as if we were engaging in that observation for the very first time. An example may help. While reading these words you are probably standing or sitting. If you are standing take a few seconds to notice your feet pressing on the ground; if you are sitting notice your bottom pressing on the chair. Inclusive & Authentic Attention is what allows discerning between the

knowledge that gravity is having an effect on our body and the actual experience of that effect, which we only notice when focusing attention on it. There is no goal in the process of awareness and attention; one should immerse themselves in the present moment “as is”, without a desire to experience more. Our brain is not designed to process all that reality presents, one should trust the process and realise that what is important and relevant will emerge from the background.

The fourth and final step is *Non-judgemental Acceptance*. The aim is to observe the stimuli, internal and external, for what they are: thoughts, emotions or physical sensation; at this stage there is no intention to seek meaning. The only interest is in experiencing the events as they unfold. Thoughts, emotions and physical sensations are not necessarily facts and can be experienced without an intention to change them, approve or disapprove of them, like or dislike them.

We feel that this approach to developing mindfulness skills is not complete as each individual lives the dimensions of this experience in a completely personal way. It is however a starting point, which provides a certain frame of reference to begin this journey. This framework provides a guide to initiate altering habitual states of consciousness that trap us into automatic actions. Mindfulness is a journey, a gradual process, and this is why it is most effective when awareness is brought on this path regularly and on a daily basis. The table below summarises our four-step model.

Knowledge	To understand mindfulness’ concepts and benefits
Purposeful Awareness (remembering to remember)	To appreciate the complexity of reality “as is”
Inclusive & Authentic Attention (focusing attention)	To bring attention to the present moment

Non-Judgemental Acceptance (letting go)	To recognise events without making assumptions

Table 2 - Four-step approach to mindful awareness

Mindfulness in the workplace

The following activities are not sufficient to absorb and savour the full extent of mindfulness practice; however, they provide a first step into the process. They are designed to be easily included in the workplace and they are not substitutes for formal mindfulness training, which can be undertaken in the organisation with a trained instructor through coaching or training.

Developing Purposeful Awareness (remembering to remember) can be helped by triggers and is easily implemented at work. The more triggers people are sensitive to, the higher the chances to live mindfully. Everyone can develop their own set of triggers through practice; however there are some simple ones that are easy to implement: the telephone ring, logging into the workstation first thing in the morning, placing visual reminders (such as colourful post-it notes) in visible areas (i.e. monitor, keyboard or handset), looking at the watch and more. Virtually any cue can become a mindfulness trigger, what is needed is the mental association between the trigger and awareness: “every time I see/do/experience X, I will remind myself to open my mind to the complexities of the present”. No trigger can retain its strength forever, eventually desensitisation will take place, this can however be recognised as a trigger and an opportunity for change.

Developing Inclusive & Authentic Attention (focusing attention) can be achieved through various exercises that purposely focus attention on a particular aspect of the present. The following three exercises are very brief and can easily be integrated in

our work lives. The aim is the same for all three, to sensitise our attention to the events of the present moment.

5 MINUTES A DAY

This exercise can be conducted wherever and whenever it is possible to pause for 5 minutes; at the desk, waiting for a meeting to start, on the way to work …

- Begin by becoming silent and centring on yourself
- Ask yourself direct questions about your thoughts, emotions or physical sensations (i.e.):
    - What thoughts are currently running through my mind?
    - How are they affecting me?
    - What emotions can I feel right now?
    - Where am I experiencing them in my body?
    - What physical sensations can I detect in my body right now?
    - How is my body reacting to them?
- Watch the answers to these questions
- Let them flow
- Experience the outcomes

NOTE
This short exercise may bring to attention some negative stimuli that may prove uncomfortable. If this is the case you may choose to carry it out in a more private area, in any case allow the sensations to surface. The purpose is to experience your real self in the moment in an inclusive and authentic way, accept reality with equanimity.

Table 3 -5 Minutes a Day

BREATHING SPACE

This exercise could be conducted as a complement to '5 Minutes A Day' or as a standalone; it should not take more than 3 minutes.

- Begin by becoming silent and centring on yourself (skip this step if you are conducting this after the previous exercise)
- Redirect full attention to the breathing, noticing in particular the end point of each in-breath and the end point of each out-breath
- Continue for around 20 breaths
- Expand your present awareness to include your whole body and your feelings
- Experience the feeling of reality and the renewed sense of calm that usually follows

NOTE
This exercise should provide an opportunity to step out of a repeating pattern or a difficult moment, such as before a meeting, a presentation or after a heated exchange with someone.
Breathing is a function we always carry with us, as such it can be the easiest and most accessible tool we can use to focus attention to the present moment.

Table 4 – Adapted from 'The 3-minute Breathing Space (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002)

BUON APPETITO!

This exercise should be conducted at least once at week during breakfast, or lunch. The purpose is to consume your meal paying full attention to the food you are eating.

- Choose a quiet, relaxed area where to consume your meal alone
- Remove all distractions (TV, books, newspaper, meeting notes, music, etc)
- Prior to beginning eating, observe, smell and (if possible) touch your food. Be curious about it, experience it as you have never done before, as if it is the first time you see it
- Begin eating slowly. Take a bite and experience the flavours on all areas of your mouth (each area of the tongue is sensitive to different flavours). Chew it noticing its texture and consistency
- Swallow the food and follow its path to the stomach and notice being fuller by one bite

- Every other bite will be somewhat different, experience these differences and fully enjoy your meal
NOTE While conducting the exercise, as it is normal, you will experience many different thoughts, some that are related to the food you are eating, some that are not, some positive, some not. Whatever the thoughts, just observe them, welcome them and go back to eating mindfully. We realise many of you probably do not take a lunch break, however this could be a weekly appointment which provides the right excuse to take it.

Table 5 - Buon Appetito!

Developing Non-judgemental Acceptance (letting go) is an intrinsic part of the above exercises and mindfulness meditation. Trying to quiet the mind is extremely difficult, even for experienced meditation practitioners; this however, should not be seen as a problem. Mindfulness does not have a goal, there is no control over the experience we guide ourselves through; the purpose is the experience itself. This means that when practicing, the mind is left free to wander and is gently guided back to the practice when this happens. At the beginning of their practice one of us (Oberdan) used to negatively engage with events and get frustrated for his inability to stay focused; he would engage in inner-dialogue such as: “Come on, this is pathetic, you ought to do better than that. Come on, leave that thought and come back to the breath, it’s not that difficult after all!” This is counterproductive; there is an attempt to control the process and one soon realises that fighting it only makes it more difficult. Non-judgemental Acceptance is the ability to accept the events that surface, allow them their space and letting them go. The inner dialogue may, in this case, change to something like this: “Ok, I notice you have surfaced and I realise you may need your own space. We can engage later; now I will guide my attention back to the breath”.

Other exercises that can be integrated in everyday informal practice can include the Three Pleasant Things (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005); the Body Scan and the Walking Meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1990); for a list of activities that can be

implemented in our working routine see *Mindfulness and Mastery: 21 Ways to Reduce Stress During the Workday* (Santorelli, 1996). With time the practice will become easier and more habitual, its healing effects will modify the outlook on life and operate at a conscious and subconscious level to enrich our experience of the present.

Conclusion

Mindfulness is a state of mind that cultivated regularly promotes the experience of the present moment in an inclusive and authentic way. Research appears to suggest that this process has a positive influence on well-being and throughout this chapter we have described ways in which this process can promote health, contribute to self-actualisation and better performance. We have discovered that as a state of consciousness it is difficult to describe and can only be fully understood through practice. Its practice has, for the last few thousand years, entertained and benefited many people and in the last three decades its presence has pervaded the popular and academic press following its integration as a complement to traditional Western medical and clinical practices. The number of mindfulness-based interventions continue to grow and now include some that adopt a pure positive psychology perspective, that of building on the existing potential of “healthy” individuals.

The application of mindfulness to the workplace has enormous potential, there are however important obstacles to overcome. First among all of them is convincing CEOs, decision and policy makers that slowing down in a business environment that is under constant pressure to accelerate its pace is the answer to many of today’s great business challenges.

The evidence is mounting strongly, and mindfulness continues to prove beneficial across many domains, but more research is needed to measure the impact that mindfulness has on the health and well-being in the workplace, and also on the bottom line. There is a need to translate our psychological language into a business language that captures attention and invites businesses to embrace the practice of mindfulness in an attempt to create healthy work environments that foster learning and development, and perhaps there is space for new products that mix the all important positive psychology and business knowledge, languages and practices.

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