

Research to support the benefits of creating a mindful workplace culture is growing. At [MindfulnessUK At Work](#), we want more people to understand and learn the power of mindfulness and how to consider creating a thriving mindful workplace.

In our previous blogs '[Mindfulness and how it can support today's leadership challenges](#)' and [Team mindfulness and the importance of taking it seriously](#)', we highlighted more about the effectiveness and impact on the workplace that comes from the implementation of mindful leadership and team mindfulness.

In this blog, we explore ways of creating a mindful workplace culture and how, if this is developed, an organisation could look and feel positively different, reaping the benefits in the longer term.

## How the Approach to Wellbeing in the Workplace is Changing.

The approach to workplace wellbeing has shifted significantly, particularly since the start of the pandemic. Organisations are beginning to think more broadly about employee wellbeing, moving away from the traditional approach of one-off sessions that focus on specific wellbeing-based themes like nutrition, exercise, or mental health to a more holistic approach. This latter approach starts to touch on changes in organisational culture to accommodate changing employees' expectations of the workplace.

Of course, organisational culture is a very broad term. Edgar Schein's<sup>[1]</sup> classic definition talks about a shared pattern of assumptions that guide organisationally accepted behaviour in the face of internal and external organisationally relevant problems. We know that organisational culture is acquired over time and is often based on a set of principles (written and assumed) that is present at the businesses' foundations. ***However, if the culture and behaviours within the organisation are no longer fit for purpose, can mindfulness practice help to shift it to a place where the culture helps organisation and employees to thrive?***

## **The Benefit of Mindfulness in an Organisation.**

Use of mindfulness in organisational context has been extensively researched for the past two decades. Having already explored the effectiveness of team mindfulness over individual practice, we can safely infer that making mindfulness part of the culture and strategic focus of the organisation is likely to reap benefits in the future. It will allow the organisation to stay dynamic, fluid, constantly evolving and enabling organic alignment with the changing times, where employees' needs are recognised and met.

Essentially mindfulness can become the key ingredient in the “secret sauce” of culture that keeps employees motivated and engaged. How as Peter Drucker allegedly once said “culture eats strategy for breakfast” so how can we implement mindful organisational culture with real changes without it becoming a token gesture towards a popular trend?

## **The importance of informal mindfulness practices.**

Mindfulness at organisational level is not about availability of training courses and meditation rooms, if the workload and stress remain the same. It is often about what we call ‘informal mindfulness practices’ where we practice on the job, moulding the principles and practices into an organisation’s culture.

Sometimes it is easier said than done and as [Dr Jutta Tobias](#) noted in her research on organisational mindfulness, a systematic formula for ‘making an organisation mindful’ does not and cannot exist<sup>[1]</sup> because each organisational culture is unique and first we need to develop a better understanding of it before bringing the changes. However, we can talk about a few elements that we believe can play an important role in creating a mindful workplace culture such as communication, trust, and empathy. Let’s look at each one in detail.

## Key Ingredients for Creation of Mindful Organisation.

### ***Communication:***

How we communicate, both in and out of work influences our lives, relationships, happiness and even our levels of success. At an organisational level, mindful communication must be honest, open and transparent. It is key to consider the reader and how they will be affected in receiving the content.

The pandemic has meant that many employees have been living in a world of uncertainty for long periods of time. Communication with employees from a place of mindfulness should aim to reassure, be consistent in message and tone and would do well to reflect the thoughts and experiences of employees across the matrix.

[Achievers.com](https://www.achievers.com) talks about the four elements of mindful communication that can support and develop a mindful culture in the workplace:

- Is the message truthful?
- Will the message be beneficial for the person or the situation? If not, how can you effectively communicate to ensure a positive outcome?
- Can your message be organised to not disturb the mind and emotions of the recipient?
- Can your messaging be structured so that it is pleasing to the recipient?

Communication in the context of mindfulness is of course wider than that as it brings everybody onboard, raises awareness of mindful approach. We communicate our aligned values and vision and constantly bring attention back to ensure that short term objectives are in line with that vision and there is a clear feedback mechanism between organisational structures and individual employees. ***Mindful and compassionate interaction that stays attentive in the present moment without judgement will ensure that conflicts either do***

***not arise or are swiftly resolved, leaving more time for productive and creative work.***

### ***Cultivating trust among employees:***

In communicating well, trust can be cultivated. Strong storytelling, which is underpinned by supporting mechanisms and developing capability of employees, can help to shape the picture of a changing culture and in turn build trust among the employees.

It is described that trust can sometimes be seen as the bridge between “the known” and “the unknown” (Boser 2018). Trust is to believe despite uncertainty (Misztal, 1998) and given the amount of uncertainty we have had to cope with since early 2020, we cannot underestimate how important building trust is for employees in terms of achieving organisational effectiveness.

One of the biggest challenges during the pandemic is the fact that a lack of face to face interaction in a live physical environment can diminish trust as we lose the connectivity at a human level beyond the working context (remember those famous conversations at the coffee machine). Now, we need to work harder at our social interactions so that trust is re-gained, particularly in the context of leadership

Ultimately, individuals follow good leaders when they can be supported to feel safe (Sinek, 2009). Trust in a leader is a follower’s belief that a leader can and will act on the basis of the leader’s words, actions, and decisions (McAllister, 2005). In mindful organisations it becomes collective leadership where people share collective responsibility because they trust each other knowing that their backs are covered.

Ability, integrity, and benevolence are all important factors of building trust with employees and can contribute to creating a mindful workplace culture. ***Trust is all about interconnection, working within individual teams and across an organisation without boundaries, creating an environment where people experience appreciative joy at work.***

## ***Empathy***

One way we can create a mindful workplace culture is to practice empathy. What is empathy? In simple terms it's about walking a mile in someone else's shoes, but this isn't easy. How can we begin to even comprehend what someone else is going through?

We have a strong belief that our experience is our experience, and no one will ever know what it's like to experience "inner me". Let's face it, there are thousands of reasons why we all behave the way we do, from past experiences, childhood upbringing, engrained values, and behaviours so it can seem like an impossible task. To this end, is empathy for others really achievable?

Even though building empathy for others might feel difficult, we have to try and find ways to build relationships in order to build trust and to empathise with colleagues to the best of our human ability. If we take a moment to listen well, learn to understand, build compassion and empathy we will in turn build trust and create a more mindful culture at work.

Empathy is important to those leaders working to cultivate mindful skills in their approach to leading and managing others. A simple moment of carving time out of your day as a leader to intentionally get to know a member of your team on a personal level without agenda or work-related discussion sneaking in, can be a good place to start. Letting an employee know that you are as interested in their wellbeing (genuinely) as much as their ability to meet objectives is vital during this covid-19 period and for that matter, in the long term.

But ultimately building empathy will help to cultivate cultural [diversity](#) which is a paramount ingredient in building a mindful culture. It will help to diminish the cultural and [cognitive biases](#) and avoid misunderstanding and miscommunication because you show up at each interaction being in the present moment with beginner's mind (both are key tenets of mindfulness practice)

### **Mindfulness in the Workplace is More than a Nice to Have.**

To finish the series of our blogs we would like to stress that mindfulness practices in workplace cannot be just a nice to have. We have shown the benefits of mindfulness to individuals that extends into team mindfulness, but ultimately, we would like to see the change in culture. This progression will lead to more organisations that are open, honest, authentic, and true to their vision and values. Those that are able to learn and grow stronger when faced with challenges, which of course will lead to employee satisfaction and a positive effect on the bottom line.

If you are interested in working with us, please reach out to Steph and Vera ([vera.dubrovina@mindfulnessuk.com](mailto:vera.dubrovina@mindfulnessuk.com) and [stephanie@mindfulnessuk.com](mailto:stephanie@mindfulnessuk.com).) to work with you on your journey.

**[www.mindfulnessuk.com](http://www.mindfulnessuk.com)**

[1] a former [professor](#) at the [MIT Sloan School of Management](#), has made a notable mark on the field of [organizational development](#) in many areas, including [career development](#), group process consultation, and [organizational culture](#)