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Chapter 24

Mindful leadership

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Abstract

This chapter outlines our three-day *Mindful Leadership* programme and provides both the theory and practice embedded in the course as well as example exercises. We also present empirical research based on 21 interviews with individuals who have participated in the programme. In this programme, individuals learn three levels of mindfulness: intra-, inter- and supra-individual. They start with learning mindfulness as an intra-individual practice, and practice mustering their attention to a single point and to become fully present in any moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). On Day Two, the programme considers mindfulness that is inter-individual: situated in the relationships between the leader and others. Throughout Day Three, the programme considers the third, supra-individual level of learning: mindfulness situated across the ongoing social practices of an organization (Crevani, Lindgren and Packendorff, 2010). Our empirical research suggests that mindful leadership can indeed emerge from this, and our data indicates an extension to Drath et al.'s (2008) Direction-Alignment-Commitment (DAC) *leadership as practice* model. Mindful leaders seem to invert the sequence of theorised leadership practices by first emphasising Commitment (to remaining present particularly), second Alignment and finally Direction. This suggests that DAC in mindful leadership may emerge as CAD: Commitment first, then generating Alignment, finally providing Direction.

Development and overview of the program

The Mindful Leadership programme was conceived as a key outcome of the “Mindfulness at Work” conference organised at Cranfield University in 2014. The topic of mindful leadership emerged as a topic of interest in numerous sessions, with individuals debating *what* exactly mindful leadership is and *how* it may benefit organisations.

Participants discussed how to bridge the gap between emerging theory on mindful leadership with ‘the practice’ of leading organisations mindfully. Cranfield University’s mission is to help organisations translate knowledge into action. Because of this strong focus and close ties to industry, as well as the enthusiasm for mindful leadership generated at the “Mindfulness at Work 2014” conference, it was felt that Cranfield was in a unique position to offer such a programme to its executive clients. Accordingly, the Mindful Leadership programme is structured to emphasise the translation of theory and practice of mindfulness to *in situ* work contexts.

Since then, Cranfield University has been running Executive Education Programmes on *Mindful Leadership*. Executives who choose Cranfield programmes are drawn from a wide range of industries and functional backgrounds. Those who participate may or may not

hold an official role as a leader, but may in future emerge as leaders (Hosking, 1988; Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2009).

Executives interested in Mindful Leadership self-select to attend the programme at Cranfield. Many who enrol are new to mindfulness. The span of positional power is as wide as CEO to supervisor, but all are considered leaders for the purpose of this programme and the introduction of mindfulness to them is assumed to change both the individual and their relationships as well as the system within which they operate.

Mindfulness can be defined as an “orthogonal rotation in consciousness” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 426) integrating a fuller understanding of the world derived from increased awareness of thoughts, emotions, sensations, and contextual flux (Fiol & O’Connor, 2003; O’Malley *et al.*, 2009; Brendel & Bennett, 2016). When defining mindfulness it is important to emphasise that this state-change moves beyond the cognitive to an embodied intelligence and as such it is not about “more” or “better” thinking, but a different and new way of knowing (Glomb *et al.*, 2011; Sinclair, 2016).

At Cranfield, through a careful study of the current scholarship in Mindful Leadership, we have come to understand that Leadership in the Mindfulness literature suffers from three conflation. The first is that leaders and leadership are used inter-changeably, yet they are not the same. Often individuals are connoted as leaders simply because they hold positional power, this may or may not make them leaders (Barker, 2001; Pye, 2005). Further, and this is the second conflation, those in positional power may or may not enact leadership practice (Raelin, 2016). The most confusing conflation in the literature is the use of imprecise terms e.g. leadership is used when what is meant is the leader as a single entity; alternatively, leadership is used when what is meant is the relating that happens between a leader and another. Gronn (2002) provides the key to untangle this muddle by suggesting a unit-of-analysis approach. In this analysis it is possible to parse the literature into three different units. Unit one is within an individual; unit two is between individuals; unit three is across whole systems. When this is applied to the Mindful Leadership literature, it is possible to dis-aggregate three different phenomena. The Cranfield programme is structured across three days to address all three phenomena.

On Day One, the programme considers phenomenon one: mindfulness that is situated within the leader. This draws on the mindful literature that considers the “intra” relational aspects of mindfulness (see for example: Fiol and O’Connor, 2003; Glomb *et al.*, 2011; Kearney, Kelsey and Herrington, 2013; Good *et al.*, 2016; Fraher, Branicki and Grint, 2017). As mindfulness is a self-induced state, much of the teaching on day one is through experiences such as eating or observing or moving. Individuals learn to muster their attention to a single point and to be fully present with whatever is happening in this moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Shapiro *et al.*, 2006). By the end of day one, the intention is to have offered enough variety in the training of mindfulness that individuals can choose their own practices that will activate mindfulness **within** (Sutcliffe, Vogus and Dane, 2016).

Following the different units of analysis described above, on Day Two, the programme considers phenomenon two: mindfulness that is situated in the relationships **between** the leader and others. The assumption is that the relationship is changed by the addition of mindfulness (for example, see: Fyke and Buzzanell 2013; Glomb *et al.* 2011; Good *et al.* 2016; Kawakami, White, and Langer 2000; Kearney, Kelsey, and Herrington 2013; Reb, Narayanan, and Chaturvedi 2014; Sauer and Kohls 2011; Yeo, Gold, and Marquardt 2015). Participants are encouraged to activate a mindful state and consider how this might impact their relationships at work, in meetings, during informal interactions and when dealing with difficult conversations.

Throughout Day Three, the programme considers phenomenon three: mindfulness that is situated in the ongoing social practices of an organization (Crevani, Lindgren and

Packendorff, 2010). The assumption is that the social system is changed, by the addition of mindfulness. This system-level of analysis is found in the mindfulness literature of Fiol and O'Connor (2003); Naot, Lipshitz and Popper (2004); Langer (2010); Dunoon and Langer (2011); Fyke and Buzzanell (2013); Yeo, Gold and Marquardt (2015); Fraher, Branicki and Grint (2017). Participants are invited to make sense of this theory **across** their own organization through a series of techniques including a dialogue approach (Ashford and DeRue, 2012; Bohm, 2013).

The programme allows time throughout for personal reflection and personal sense-making and concludes with a review of key points and outstanding issues raised by the participants. This pedagogic approach “place[s] learners directly in their practice worlds” (Raelin, 2007, p. 511) with an accent on action learning and experimentation in real-life enactments.

Through the three-day structure and by utilizing three units of analysis - *within*, *between*, and *across* – the Programme on Mindful Leadership avoids the three confluences discussed earlier.

Programme structure

The Mindful Leadership programme unfolds in four phases; (1) onboarding activities *before* arrival at Cranfield University, (2) a three-day residential workshop, and (3) a follow-up webinar approximately 4-6 weeks following the completion of the workshop; and (4) online support material available through a learning portal. In this way, the programme participants are guided *into* their personal exploration of what mindful leadership means to them, assisted *through* this experience at Cranfield University, and supported *afterwards*, in order to embed and sustain their learning.

1. Onboarding

Several weeks before the Mindful Leadership programme participants arrive at Cranfield University, they are invited to reflect on a particular leadership challenge they face, which they are prepared to discuss and work through during the programme. They are also invited to complete several self-report surveys including measures of resilience, emotional intelligence, and other surveys related to the practice of leadership.

2. Residential workshop structure

Having provided the theoretical underpinnings for the Cranfield programme in the foregoing section, in this section, we lay out the general syllabus that is provided each day. We describe this as a general syllabus, in acknowledgement that it would be mindless of us to expect it to be identical each time (Langer, 1997). To begin, therefore we provide a brief introduction on the intentions, attitudes and attentions (Shapiro *et al.*, 2006) we hold in guiding these three days.

Our intention is to hold the group in a safe space to allow for exploration and learning, in large part, experientially (McCowan, Reibel and Micozzi, 2011). In keeping with the precepts of mindfulness, as faculty, we consider ourselves to be Sherpas, simply walking alongside the track of learning; able to describe the journey but “allowing each participant to have their own experience” (McCowan, Reibel and Micozzi, 2011, p. 123). Further, we stand ready to acknowledge that our participants are adults, many of whom hold important roles in organizations, some with high status and power. Stepping into a learning experience with them is to approach the programme as peers and mutual learners. We therefore accompany

our participants with an attitude of service and equality, where it is more than possible for us to learn as much as they do.

Our attention is deliberately placed in two ways, both inward and outward. In the first instance to ourselves so that we do not lose connection (Schoeberlein and Sheth, 2009); but also to each other and the group, in the manner often described by Chris Cullen as a state of 50:50 (Williams, Penman and Cullen, 2015). This moving of attention between the intra and the inter mirrors also two of the phenomenon found in the literature.

Holding attention in this way, with intention, and a particular attitude, begins to mark out this syllabus from other Leadership development programmes, despite the common thread that is shared by all leadership development training: the course must meet the specific objectives of each participant and provide value for money. Many from the corporate world are curious about meditation, but also cautious. It does not always readily translate into a corporate environment. Hence, the Mindful Leadership programme at Cranfield does not overly rely on meditation as a method of teaching mindfulness. There is meditation, and help for participants to learn to focus, calm and stabilise their mind, but the emphasis in this programme has been moved to mindfulness *in situ*, with many practices that mimic everyday activities that lend themselves to increased attention and awareness. This approach is aligned to the part of the MBSR curriculum known as informal practice (Blacker *et al.*, 2009). Whereas in mindfulness training targeted as a health intervention, cleaning teeth might be an informal practice; we would offer instead other more office-relevant practices of mindfulness.

Here follows the syllabus in detail:

Day One

As previously set out, the focus of day one is on the individual participant and building their understanding and experience of a personal practice, in whatever way makes best sense to them. Table One below provides an example of the agenda for the day:

TABLE ONE: DAY ONE

<i>Learning Outcomes</i>	<i>Learning Process</i>	<i>Format</i>
Personal introductions and a mindful learning contract	Using visuals to elicit deeper reflection, get everyone's voice in the room, and encourage them to bring their real self. Understand the challenges they face and their desired learning. Agreeing a learning contract that is psychologically safe and productive for everyone.	Co-creation
Attention & awareness and how they are generated through mindfulness	Defining mindfulness and what it means for the participants. Discussing the business case for mindful leadership. Starting to practise mindfulness individually.	Short presentation Discussion Practice
The road to resilience: How to make personal performance sustainable	Explaining the link between mindfulness practice and neuroplasticity. Exploring ways to increase personal resilience during stress and challenge.	Short presentation Reflection Discussion
Your leadership journey and how mindfulness can increase clarity about it	Inviting participants to consider what leadership is inspirational to them, and where they are on their leadership journey. Practising mindful attention to the challenges they face as leaders.	Reflection Discussion Practice
Increasing choice concerning your own leadership style	Using an established model of leadership (e.g. Boyatzis et al. (2012) six leadership styles), eliciting new insight about their own leadership preference. Exploring how to extend their leadership behavioural repertoire.	Reflection Discussion
Values-based leadership	Using visuals to elicit insight about the difference between goals and the underlying values that drive them. Clarifying which personal values drive their leadership choices and behaviours.	Small group exercise Discussion
Mindful reflections	Reflecting on what was learned and what still needs to be discussed or explored more	Reflection Discussion

Day Two

TABLE TWO: DAY TWO

<i>Learning Outcomes</i>	<i>Learning Process</i>	<i>Format</i>
Returning fully to the workshop	Using mindfulness practice, bringing everyone's attention and voice back into the room, ready for the 2 nd day of learning.	Co-creation
Understanding decision-making at a deeper level: why it is so hard to make "the right" decision, and what to do about it	Demonstrating that feelings trump facts and that cognitive schemas are more firmly in place than we often assume. Practising possible ways to become aware of different factors impacting our decisions.	Demonstration Discussion Pair work Practice
Practicing making decisions mindfully	Using small group decision exercises (e.g. decision vignettes such as those outlined by Langer(2014)) exploring ways in which we can make decisions more mindfully than habitually.	Small group exercise Discussion Practice
Extending personal mindfulness practice	Reminder that a personal mindfulness practice is the basis for applying mindfulness to work situations. Exploring different ways in which to practise mindfulness at work.	Reflection Discussion Practice
Handling problems mindfully	Returning to the leadership challenges the participants face in their work, exploring all aspects of what such challenges can mean for different individuals, and what new insights can be learned here, individually and through mindful listening to others' perspectives. Using different perspectives and "not knowing" to consider difficult challenges.	Small group exercise Discussion Practice
Setting up a mindful decision making contract	Encouraging participants to continue co-coaching each other and to create an ongoing contract of caring and supporting each other mindfully.	Reflection Discussion
Mindful meetings	Explaining the research underpinning mindful meetings e.g. Pavlov (2010). Discussing mindful ways to apply this knowledge in the participants' workplaces. Reflecting and applying this learning.	Short presentation Discussion Reflection
Mindful reflections	Reflecting on what was learned and what still needs to be discussed or explored more	Reflection Discussion

Day Three

TABLE THREE: DAY THREE

<i>Learning Outcomes</i>	<i>Learning Process</i>	<i>Format</i>
Returning fully to the workshop	Using mindfulness practice, bringing everyone's attention and voice back into the room, ready for the 3 rd day of learning.	Co-creation
Personal mindfulness practice	Reminder that a personal mindfulness practice is the basis for applying mindfulness at work. Encouraging participants to practise mindfulness individually, without external support.	Reflection Practice
The meaning of "collective mindfulness" for your organisation	Explaining "collective mindfulness" (Weick and Roberts, 1993) for mindful leaders. Discussing how the elements of this framework apply to the participants' own work contexts.	Short presentation Discussion
Understanding why and how organisational culture matters for mindful leadership	Short presentation about the importance of understanding culture for leadership and strategy formulation. Applying these insights by creating a personal map of the organisation's culture, including where individuals and teams operate mindfully vs on autopilot. Reflection and discussion in plenary.	Short presentation Reflection Discussion
Impacting your own culture mindfully	Returning to the leadership challenges the participants face, or to a newly emerging challenge, exploring in groups what additional factors may be at stake/need to be considered to address the challenge. Co-creating new insight through mindful listening and feedback giving.	Small group exercise Reflection
Your mindful leadership takeaways	Co-creating meaningful takeaway messages, action points, and co-coaching commitments with the participants. Reflecting on what was learned and what remains as open questions. Celebrating the participants' achievements before closing.	Plenary work

Sample curriculum content

In the following section, we provide sample content drawn from the above described curriculum, so that readers can experiment with these ideas in their own relevant training programmes.

Exercise: Mindful Connections

Intention of the exercise: To allow participants to explore how mindfulness that is held within an individual (i.e. themselves) can effect mindfulness that is between individuals.

Person A speaks for five minutes. Person B listens.

Person B speaks for five minutes. Person A listens.

Dialogue mindfully together about what you learn.

Pause. Pause some more (!)

Reflect together on what you notice about this conversation

Your topics are:

Describe your perfect day.

What does leadership mean to you?

What about leadership challenges you?

Notes for the teacher who de-briefs this exercise:

During the de-brief of the exercise, we hold the following intention: help participants to stay with the experience and notice when they are moving to a judgement of the experience

What happened?

What did you notice, what did you discover?

What was unexpected about this conversation?

Exercise: Mindful Decision Making

Intention of the exercise: To allow participants to translate mindfulness to an everyday set of circumstances: decision making is a common executive function and one that can be automatic and mindless. This exercise helps to make manifest hidden ways of thinking and automatic ways of working. Participants are presented with the following vignette and suggestions for reflection:

You are the general manager of an oil refinery plant. You have budget and decision making responsibility. The plant employs around 300 people and they are rostered around the clock to run the plant 24/7, 365 days. As with any process manufacturing if the plant “stops” getting it back up to speed is time consuming. Each stoppage requires that the plant is stripped and “cleaned” and then re-commissioned in a specific sequence – each step of the sequence needs to be achieved precisely before the next step of the sequence can be initiated. The plant has a problem, it is not refining oil to the required quality which means that the heavy-oils i.e. a coke residue, remain even after a full cycle. The engineering team have spent months sourcing a cost-effective solution. It is a flexi-coker and it means that the system will be capable of refining a wider range of crude oil types and it will minimize the coke residue.

Installing the flexi-coker requires a shut down.

Shut down will cause a loss of revenue and comes with some risks associated with re-starting the plant. But for \$1bn of investment the ROI is expected to be 20%. You authorise a full project plan and final business case to be prepared. When these are presented to you, the costs have nearly doubled.

Read through the above case study. Initially reflect by yourself and consider these questions: What are your automatic reactions? When you sit in mindfulness, what now emerges? Outline a few mindful actions you might take. Notice how these might differ from your first automatic reactions?

Join others in your group to share themes. Think particularly about how this is relevant to your work situation? What sorts of situations do you regularly face?

Notes for the teacher who de-briefs this exercise:

During the de-brief of the exercise, we hold the following intention: generalise from the exercise to other contexts that they might encounter in the workplace. What did you notice about your conceptualisations of the decision?

What did you notice about the reality of the decision?

What do you discover when you make these distinctions?

What do you take away from this discussion?

Exercise: Activating Collective Mindfulness

Intention of the exercise: To allow participants to experience and experiment with mindfulness that is collective. This is a form of heedful inter-relating where each individual becomes aware of themselves in relation to others *and* to the system in which they are operating. They begin to understand interconnectivity and how their thoughts and actions interconnect with those of the group. Participants are presented with the following instructions.

Work as a group. Nominate one person to be the scribe: they observe and take notes of what happens, but do not take part in the discussion.

The group task is to make sense of an ambiguous picture, as displayed in Figure 1:



Notes for the teacher who de-briefs this exercise:

During the de-brief of the exercise, we hold the following intention: Help participants to see their interconnections and heedful inter-relating as well as notice when and where assumptions and conclusions are drawn.

Step one: hear feedback from recorders

Step two: ask others what happened for them

Step three: what aspects of mindfulness/mindlessness arose in the group? What was automatic?

Step four: meta-awareness: so, what's happening now, in this debrief?

Step five: If this is still relevant, explain that the object was designed as a Baby mop, available to buy on Amazon.

Exercise: Exploring the Unexplored

Intention of the exercise – being mindful in dialogue with ourselves is helpful but often we're in conversation with others and they've not been trained to be mindful! So, how do we use mindfulness in dialogue when others are hitting our hot buttons?

Participants are presented with the following instructions.

Consider the following: Whenever we're in conversation we have another conversation going simultaneously: a narration on whatever is actually happening. Mindfulness helps us make that visible to ourselves and [sometimes terrifyingly] to the other party. Only when we acknowledge it can we discern what's really happening and make different choices.

Work in pairs. Coach each other on a current work situation where you have difficulty with another person – explain the situation that you face and how you think and feel about it. Particularly make sure that you reveal your hidden thoughts about the situation; about the person. The person who is listening is invited to use open questions to explore the unexplored (a few examples are provided below, but please make up your own).

Questions you might like to ask each other:

- What would you think or feel if this was your [best friend / spouse / child?
- What might change for you about this situation, if you consider it from the very far future?
- If I wave a magic wand for you, what happens? What do you notice?
- If you assumed completely good intentions in the other person, what shifts inside you?

Notes for the teacher who de-briefs this exercise:

During the de-brief of the exercise, we hold the following intention: generalise more broadly
What difference did this make?

Where can you use this in your work life?

What prompts can you create to help yourself step out of automatic? What prompts can you ask others to provide?

3. Follow-up webinar

Approximately 4-6 weeks after the 3 day programme at Cranfield, there is a follow-up webinar for all participants. During this webinar, the participants are encouraged to share their experiences of returning to work as newly forged “mindful leaders” and their insights since the group spent time together at Cranfield. The webinar is designed to allow space for the emergence of new questions and time for them to be discussed. Typically, there is an exchange ideas of ideas about sustaining their personal mindfulness practice and how to overcome common challenges related to bringing mindfulness into their work and leadership. During the webinar, the facilitators explore where the participants' ongoing leadership are, and the group is encouraged to co-create new answers to the questions the leaders face at this time.

The webinar is also an opportunity for the group to embed important learning from the 3 day workshop, to discuss ongoing support, and agree ways to communicate with each other going forward. Some participants choose to establish semi-formal peer-pairs to continue their mindful mentoring of each other. Readers of this chapter might consider doing likewise. Below is an extract from the briefing we provide on how to work as peer coaches:

Peer-to-peer coaching is a way of embedding theoretical learning and a proven way to translate theory into daily practice.

In the past, pairs who have got the most from this sort of arrangement have told us that they do the following:

- Reviewed the guidelines below and talked them through to develop common understanding
- Continued to diary/journal about their mindfulness practice and reflections
- Set up pre-agreed dates for skype calls, approximately every three weeks according to workload and other factors
- Shared, appropriately, extracts from their journal
- Reviewed the slides from the programme, reviewed the learning summary and discovered each other's perspective on key points
- Chosen a behaviour or practice that they would like to embed and experimented over the three weeks with their chosen focus
- Reviewed at the skype call "what's happened" and either recommitted to continuing or trying something else
- Shared resources or helpful new understandings during the skype call
- One person might choose to lead a short/simple mindfulness practice to begin the call; and other to end the call (remember the five senses as a simple way to come into the moment)

Guidelines for peer-to-peer coaching

1. Hold a positive intention. If you can't think of a constructive for giving feedback, don't give any
2. Focus on being objective and encouraging rather than judgemental, and maintain dignity and respect in your comments
3. Be aware of feedback overload. Providing feedback can be counter-productive
4. Model an attitude of kindness
5. Share deeply, you don't need to tell the story, you can start with your inner sense of what is, e.g. I'm struggling with; or, I'm happy about
6. Practice open questions to each other so that this is a genuine exploration
7. Come with an open mind; accept the possibility that someone else can see things you can't

4. Online Support Material

Participants have access to an online learning portal so that they can continue to explore the theory and practice of mindful leadership. There are links to spoken word meditations and videos on the underpinning theory. Some of this material is also in the public domain and relevant links are provided at the end of this chapter.

Empirical research supporting the program

To date, no universally accepted definition of the meaning of “Mindful Leadership” exists; hence we conducted a qualitative research study on what it means to be a mindful leader in relation to the Cranfield programme. The two-fold goal of this longitudinal study was to further understand the experiences and perceptions of programme participants, and to contribute to theory-building on the concept of mindful leadership. The interview data gathered by the researchers provided fertile ground for generating new evidence-based insights on the link between mindfulness and leadership.

The research was exploratory in nature, examining themes related to a recent leadership theory whose tenets conceptually overlap with mindfulness: Drath et al's. (2008) *leadership as practice* model. In this model, leadership is conceptualised as a multi-level ontology of being, and it emerges predominately as a shared practice and shared perceptions of culture. This practice is centred around the three-pronged sequence of generating Direction – Alignment – Commitment (DAC). Mindfulness too is conceptualised as a multi-level construct (Sutcliffe, Vogus & Dane, 2016), and often referred to as a practice (e.g. Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003).

Sampling and procedure

The research drew on 21 in-depth interviews conducted over the course of 6 months with 8 individuals who had participated in the programme. Five female and three male participants constituted the sample of Mindful Leadership programme ‘alumni’. They were between 35-56 years old, leading teams of 3 to 1200 individuals from both private and public sector organisations across the UK, continental Europe, and the Middle East.

Approximately 25 hours of interview data was collected. Interviews were semi-structured, and template analysis (King, 2004) was used to evaluate the data captured.

Data Analysis

Building on the ontology proposed by Drath et al. (2008), the mindful leaders surveyed appeared to express their way of being as leaders and their commitment to mindfulness in at least five original, adaptive, and innovative ways.

The five themes that emerged from the data analysis are listed below and explained further in the section that follows:

1. Formal meditation vs. ‘in situ’ mindfulness
2. Mindfulness as a practice: Culture-changing
3. Alignment before Direction
4. Commitment before Alignment
5. Direction after Commitment

Discussion of emerging research themes

1. Formal meditation vs. ‘in situ’ mindfulness

First, the more mindful leaders embedded their personal mindfulness practice into their organisational context, the less formal their mindfulness practice became, and the more mindfulness permeated their way of leading at work.

Meditation, on the one hand, seemed to be considered a ‘holiday’ or ‘escape’:

“I just wanted to get back to sleep when I did that.”

There also seemed to be a certain reluctance to practise mindfulness meditation formally whilst back in their work setting.

“Don’t want someone walking into my office meditating”

However, practices discussed during the programme such as ‘holding the space’ were seen as very effective:

“Practising paying attention to others when they’re speaking made me more attentive – noticing works!”

2. Mindfulness as a practice: Culture-changing

Building on the first theme, several participants stressed that ‘*in situ*’ practice was highly beneficial to them in their work lives. Adopting a mindfulness-based approach to leading and engaging others seemed to impact the collective space and emotional climate of their workplaces.

“My questions are different and the way I listen to the answers has changed. I now really want to hear what people say.”

3. Alignment before Direction

Drath et al.’s (2008) Direction – Alignment – Commitment (DAC) model suggests that the practice of leadership starts with providing Direction. However, the evidence put forward by the sampled Mindful Leadership programme alumni indicates that seeking to build Alignment may represent a higher priority for mindful leaders than setting Direction. The focus among the sampled participants seemed to be on nurturing the relational space, especially in situations marked by challenge and conflict.

“A ‘no’ now means to me ‘let’s discuss this further’. In the past, I would have heard this as a ‘No’. Period.”

4. Commitment before Alignment

Drath et al.’s (2008) DAC model also proposes that generating Alignment amongst team members and followers is a higher priority action for leaders than building Commitment. In contrast to this, the Mindful Leadership alumni seemed to have inverted this sequence in that they emphasised demonstrating Commitment, by showing a willingness to accept the situation they have found themselves in and stayed put in the face of difficulty and disagreement.

“I breathe and think about how to move forward constructively rather than brooding on what I should have done.”

5. Direction after Commitment

Finally, over time the mindful leaders in the sample tended to use mindfulness techniques in order to change the context in which important decisions were to be shaped. In particular, mindful leaders seemed to proactively promote emergent, bottom-up decision making, in order to maximise the likelihood of a successful outcome:

“There’s more spaciousness in our conversations”

Direction seemed to arise in a less hierarchical, more democratic way. This is in line with one of the tenets of collective mindfulness coined by Weick and Putnam (2006): the idea that in mindful decision-making, the final say should always be deferred to “real-time” experts, in other words those members of the decision-making team who hold the highest degree of expertise in that particular situation and moment in time.

“Now I make sure the real experts have a voice on decisions.”

Conclusion

The evidence collected from the sample of Mindful Leadership programme participants suggests that a mindfulness-based leadership practice has the potential to generate a beneficial shift in the leadership context as well as in the relational space in which mindful leaders navigate. This leadership ontology shift may be predominately based on ‘in situ’ mindfulness practice, rather than formal mindfulness meditation.

In extension to Drath et al.’s (2008) *DAC leadership as practice* model, mindful leaders seem to demonstrate that the order in which the DAC model is constituted may be reversed in mindful leadership. In particular, a focus on Commitment seems to be top priority for mindful leaders, in the sense of remaining committed to making space for experiencing emotional and relational difficulty, rather than rushing to fix or attack it. Second, building Alignment appears to trump Direction giving as a priority of leadership, by remaining open to paying attention to the relational space between mindful leader and those they engage with. Finally, Direction giving may well be the last priority for mindful leaders as a sense of distributed leadership generated from the bottom up seems to be a hallmark of leading mindfully. This evidence suggests that DAC in mindful leadership emerges as CAD: Commitment first, then building Alignment, and finally providing Direction as an emergent quality.

More research is needed to expand this research base, however these early insights, provide fertile ground for more theory-building in mindful leadership.

Online materials and resources for further information on the programme

For more information about Cranfield University’s Mindful Leadership Open Programme and several tasters of the mindfulness-based practices taught in the programme, please go to the YouTube channel “Mindful Leadership – Introduction and Practice”, available here:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLs0OanxN4Ygg95RREoYtBw_FCM6WxOqWf

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