

## Why Mindfulness is the Key to Innovation

The world of work is becoming increasingly uncertain, and the lack of stability caused by factors like the economic downturn has seen many businesses struggling to survive. Today's workers face heavier workloads, pay cuts, and job insecurity, and this has inevitably impacted upon their physical and mental wellbeing.

### **What is the answer?**

Innovation is the key to helping businesses and workers become more resilient to future challenges and changes. The world of work is not the same anymore, so the way we work cannot remain the same. Innovation boosts productivity and performance, makes businesses more competitive, and boosts worker motivation and job satisfaction.

### **What is innovation?**

Innovation means adapting our ways of working so that we are more prepared in the face of uncertainty. Introducing innovation involves getting used to the idea of change, which is not always easy. A business or organisation might need to introduce additional training for employees or focus more on activities which help them to move forward. Mindfulness is one strategy that is being increasingly used in the business world to help encourage innovation and enhance people's wellbeing in one fell swoop.

### **What is mindfulness?**

Mindfulness is a mind/body practice that has its roots in ancient meditative teachings, but its effectiveness on wellbeing is backed up by over 40 years of research. The basis of the practice is bringing your attention to the present moment, and accepting it for what it is. It doesn't teach you to ignore thoughts and feelings, rather it allows you to recognise them, then let them go. It's easy to see how this could translate into a work environment; imagine how much better it would be if you could choose to react to a difficult work situation calmly and rationally, rather than allowing emotions to take over; well you can. It's the increased awareness of ourselves and what's around us that can help to encourage innovation in the workplace.

### **Mindfulness and innovation**

Most of our day to day actions are carried out when we are on autopilot. We are bombarded with distractions and information from the moment we open our eyes each day. This prevents us from being fully present in the moment, and fully aware of what is going on

around us. It also leads us to become quite rigid in our thinking and unaccepting of the opinions of others.

Mindfulness allows us to acknowledge where we are doing things or behaving in a certain way out of habit, and then clears the mind to allow in new ways of interpreting things. It removes the impulse to react emotionally, and so we automatically become more receptive to new ideas and we focus better.

### **How mindfulness boosts innovation**

Forward-thinking companies like Google and Apple have implemented mindfulness-based activities in their workplaces, and for employees, Tai Chi and meditation are part of a normal working day. The idea is that a calm, open, and aware mind is more open to new things, and more able to come up with new creative ways of working.

### **How distractions stifle innovation**

Think about a time in your life when you had a lot on your mind. How did you deal with it? Did you distract yourself by browsing social media, or by watching a film or TV? This does nothing to clear your mind, rather it fills it with even more distractions. There's no room for anything new.

When you learn to become mindful, it frees up space in your mind to be creative, to use different thought processes, and to embrace something new.

### **Clear your mind and innovation will follow**

Being mindful is not something that you can learn overnight, it takes sustained practice. It's not about suspending thoughts, it's about noticing them, but then letting them go.

By practising mindfulness, you can create space in your mind, and let creativity and clarity in. A clear mind is far more able to be creative, innovative, and calm, which is good news for the health of an organisation, and everyone who works within it.

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If you are interested in learning more about Maureen's research, looking at relationships between character strengths, mindfulness and prosocial values and behaviours in business entrepreneurs, email [mOCallaghan@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:mOCallaghan@lincoln.ac.uk)

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*Any questions, please contact [info@mindfulworkplace.community](mailto:info@mindfulworkplace.community).*