

Brief

For those too busy:

The latest research, thinking
& news on growth pace and delivery
from around the world

Mindfulness – Why is it on the agenda for leaders at Unilever, Google and the House of Commons? And what is it?

Mindfulness is everywhere – what was once the habit of Buddhists in mountain retreats is now being practiced in well known companies like Google, by CEOs in over 40 breakouts at Davos, in the UK House of Parliament and on the trading floor in investment banks. But is this just the latest fad – or does mindfulness really bring something new to how we improve our working life and performance?

The concept of mindfulness, of being aware in the present moment, with a thoughtful and conscious acceptance of feelings and emotions, has been around for centuries. But the accelerating changes and complexities in the world have led to mainstream business interest. We now work under the pressure of hyper-connectivity, rising expectations of openness, increasing unpredictability - and declining levels of consumer, employee and investor trust. This has led some leaders to reassess how they can stop and reconnect with themselves and others in more authentic and richer ways.

Mindfulness has been explored as a way to do this, and academic research, neuroscience and case studies show potential benefits including stronger resilience, clarity of thought, better concentration and attention span, improved decision making, reduced stress and increased well being. Based on meditation techniques, mindfulness has seven key attributes, all which can be cultivated in, and have a direct impact on, day-to-day working life:

- 1) Fully sensing situations vs continual analysis:** balancing the brains capacity for analysis and planning with information we receive from our other senses such as intuition and body language
- 2) Making conscious choices vs operating on autopilot:** ensuring we really look at new information and the situation as it currently is, rather than responding unconsciously biased by previous experiences and knowledge
- 3) Accepting things as they are vs striving for preconceived ideas:** reducing the mental and emotional time wasted on thinking how things “should be” - acceptance allows for increased flexibility and creativity
- 4) Managing negative thoughts vs focusing on what is solid and real:** negative thoughts breed negative feelings which breed negative thoughts. Increasing psychological flexibility - the ability to recognise and stop ruminative patterns of thought and focus on the positives - helps leaders remain motivated and focused
- 5) Approaching vs avoiding uncomfortable things:** approaching challenging uncomfortable situations and personal thoughts and feelings straight up, rather than putting them off and letting them subconsciously influence the rest of your day
- 6) Remaining in the present moment vs reliving the past or worrying about the future:** reflective learning, and forward thinking are vital in business – but they are only useful when applied to the current reality – leaders can benefit from more focus on the “present moment”
- 7) Making time for nourishing activities vs depleting ones:** identifying the tasks and activities that give us and our colleagues energy, and making time for them to improve the quality of work, and life.

Research suggests that even 15 minutes a day building new ‘mindful’ habits in the office can make a difference – especially alongside a bit more exercise and a better diet. Measurable results include better decision-making, improved collaboration and simply enjoying work more.