

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE, CREATIVITY & INNOVATION

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2016

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INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive and increasingly fast-moving environments the ability to innovate is becoming a crucial requirement for organisational sustainability. This competence depends not only upon the flow of ideas (whether that be to do with product, service or process) coming from individuals, but also how the culture enhances or inhibits the way people collaborate to generate ideas and to bring them to market. In enterprising organisations, whatever sector they belong to, innovation and entre/intrapreneurship co-exist.

As Paulus and Dzindolet (2008) say, "it is true of course that no innovation can happen without the role of the individual" but to take ideas to market the process needs to be managed – consequently we need to explore both the factors that make it more likely that innovation will occur (the facilitators of innovation and creativity) and those that make it less likely that it will flourish (the inhibitors of creativity and innovation).

FACILITATORS AND INHIBITORS OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Amabile (1998) suggests that creativity relies on creative thinking skills, expertise, and *motivation*. For her, if you have someone who is competent in the field (i.e they have the necessary expertise) whilst investing in the development of creative thinking skills is useful but the time and knowledge needing to be invested in doing so is great. Her research indicates that intrinsic motivation can be increased significantly by subtle changes in the organisational environment.

Her research suggests that when people are extrinsically motivated they may become more creative in the short term but this is based upon the desire to get something desirable, or avoid something painful. And these sort of rewards still don't make the job itself any more interesting. In general terms, people are more creative when they are intrinsically motivated, when they find their passion, when they are engaged in the work because they feel motivated primarily by the satisfaction, interest and challenge of the job itself. She explains this using the metaphor of the creativity maze – one person will want to get through the maze as quickly as they can to get a particular reward e.g. money (much as a mouse would to find cheese). This might well solve a problem effectively but it is likely that this would have been done by treading tried and trusted paths without really generating any new insight. Taking a different approach, another person might find the process of wandering through the maze itself, exploring with curiosity, fun and intriguing. They might take longer to get through the maze, and make mistakes in doing so, because like any maze there are more dead ends than exits. However when the way out of the maze is finally found, this 'solution' is likely to be more imaginative and interesting. She cites Einstein as saying that what distinguishes creative scientists from those who are less creative is that they are impelled by curiosity. She suggests that managers

need to consciously build environments that support these characteristics instead of destroying them.

Challenge is important, but not to the point that people feel out of their depth or overly stretched. Autonomy also matters – to be creative people need to feel able to try new ways of doing things, to at least have some ownership of the means of doing something even if they cannot choose exactly what it is that they must do. Such empowerment might feel uncomfortable to the manager who needs to relinquish an element of control, and tolerate ambiguity. Diversity is important too (Amabile, 2008), and in creating teams the manager needs to be able to assess the attitudes that individuals have – whether they recognise the unique knowledge and skills that each individual brings to the team, and whether they are willing to support teammates through difficult periods. Finding the right balance in all of this requires managers to know their employees well, to know their strengths and weaknesses and understand what makes them tick. This requires considerable investment of time and energy, not to mention having the emotional intelligence needed to guide and support them as they work their way through the maze.

If individuals have/gain the courage to express creative ideas then these need to be nurtured – if they are met with scepticism, layers of evaluation, or a host of reasons why not to proceed then future ideas may not be voiced so readily – motivation can suffer. This can be especially crucial when ideas don't work out (Amabile 2008) and there is then a danger that individuals may become fearful of voicing ideas because they run the risk of attracting adverse reactions from their managers. Alencar (2011) suggests that intransigency and authoritarian attitudes stifle creativity and innovation, coupled with the predominance of an unaccepting climate towards opinions that differ from those that have been pre-established..

The value of learning in such circumstances must be embraced if experimentation is to be sustained. If managers are able to model attitudes such as perseverance in the face of adversity can go a long way to help in this respect – demonstrating personal resilience, and providing a safety net for those brave enough to risk failure, which in itself can be a stressful experience for all. Anxiety about how one's ideas will be received, the vulnerability in putting one's ideas up for scrutiny, the risk of failure, and the pressure to innovate to achieve organisational targets can take its toll on well-being. Ekvall (1997) sees worry, stress and anxiety as an inhibitor of creativity and innovation.

Table 1 provides a summary of some of the facilitators and inhibitors of creativity and innovation.

Table 1: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Creativity and Innovation

	Facilitator/Inhibitor of creativity and innovation	References
Facilitator	Manager's support – openness, respect for divergent opinions, encouragement of new ideas	Alencar (2011) Andriopoulus (2003)
	Freedom to decide how to perform tasks, with autonomy to take decisions when necessary	Alencar (2011) McFadzean (1999) Amabile (1998)
	Challenges - challenging tasks or missions that require creative ideas	Alencar (2011) Amabile (1998)
	Expertise, creative thinking and intrinsic motivation	Amabile (1998) McFadzean (1999) Eisenberger & Shanock (2003)
	Encouragement of personal initiative	Andriopoulus (2003)
Inhibitor	Intransigency, authoritarian attitudes, with the predominance of an unaccepting climate towards opinions different from those already established	Alencar (2011)
	A lack of concentration on the tasks being undertaken	Alencar (2011)
	In-group/out-group bias (and negativity bias)	Adarves-Yorno, Haslam & Postmes (2008)
	Creation of homogenous teams	Amabile (1998)
	An 'attention to detail' cognitive style	Miron-Spektor, Eriz and Naveh (2011)
	Fear of failure	Groth & Peters (1999)
	Worry, stress and anxiety	Ekvall (1997)

If we accept Amabile's views, then small changes that impact on the organisational environment have the potential to positively influence the climate for creativity and innovation. We propose that one way in which such a climate could be encouraged is through making mindfulness practice courses available as a routine part of management development programmes.

THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE IN THE FACILITATION OF CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

So what is mindfulness? Nairn (1999 p 27) describes mindfulness as the "systematic training in knowing what is happening, while it is happening." Kabat-Zinn (1999, p4) defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally". He suggests that there are 7 attitudes for mindfulness – patience, non-judging, beginners mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. In creating an appropriate climate for creativity and innovation all of these have relevance. Not every idea will be appropriate, and some may fail. We

have all heard stories of inventors that have persevered through many setbacks before becoming successful. Whilst recognising that not all ideas are good ones, and some need to be filtered out of the process, tolerance and patience are key in developing confidence. Bringing a beginner's mind to situations, being able to explore the possibilities with curiosity rather than forming premature judgements, even if they are grounded in past experience, is important in encouraging personal initiative, and avoiding closing down ideas before they have the chance to grow. Showing trust in the experience and expertise of the other and respecting their views even when they differ from your own or the ones 'normal' in the organisation will encourage individuals to take the risk of offering their ideas for scrutiny. Valuing diversity, not trying to pre-determine outcomes, accepting that change may be needed however painful that feels to you personally, and letting go of your own preferred way of doing things will help a manager 'walk-the-talk' and gain trust. Mindfulness practice supports the development of these skills through helping us to know ourselves better, to recognise how our thoughts and emotions influence our behaviour, and to see what is actually happening in the moment (rather than what we might think or feel is happening) by allowing a moments pause to respond rather than react.

Langer (1989, 2005) focuses mainly upon combating mindlessness, and her focus in mindful learning is based on switching modes of thinking rather than meditation. However (2005 p16) she speaks of seeing similarities in things thought different and seeing differences in things thought similar. This process serves to prompt the noticing of cues that disrupt the routine (mindless) patterns of thinking. This creates a void in which new insights may appear. Weick and Sutcliffe (2006 p 515) suggest that this void is similar to that induced by meditation. They also (2001 p42) refine Langer, defining mindfulness as " the combination of ongoing scrutiny of existing expectations, continuous refinement and differentiation of expectations based on newer experiences, willingness and capability to invent new expectations that make sense of unprecedented events, a more nuanced appreciation of context and the ways to deal with it, and identification of new dimensions of context that improve foresight and current functioning". The authors believe (2006 p 518) that "mindfulness is important because it weakens the tendency to simplify events into familiar events and strengthens the tendency to differentiate events into unfamiliar events" and would guard against the dangers inherent in associative thinking. This would suggest that mindfulness practice would facilitate creativity and innovation by helping managers to be more willing to accept ideas that differ from their own or those that predominate in the organisation, being willing to work with these new ideas and let go of their preconceptions. This would be consistent with developing the attitudes of non-judging, beginners mind, acceptance and letting go proposed by Kabat-Zinn (ibid).

Gartner (2013) in discussing the relationship between mindfulness and readiness for change suggests that mindful individuals are better prepared to cope with complex and conflicting issues and negative arousal (in a cognitive as well as an affective sense) and are better able to develop a detached view of their thoughts and emotions, learning what is reasonable and controllable and what is not. This leads to them being less likely to show resistance, defensive or aggressive behaviour or become trapped in spirals of negative thoughts and emotions, and reducing

perceptions of incapability. Instead of experiencing stress, mindful people are emotionally balanced and more effective and optimistic. Gartner also suggests (2013 p62) that “mindful organisations constantly learn because they are aware of failures and discuss the events that contributed to these deviations in order to more accurately understand the causes of failures and appropriate reaction”. This looks at systems and processes rather than simplifying interpretations, looking at collective rather than individual responsibility, recognising that organisations are complex systems where everything is inter-related. This requires active listening and mutual support. This would suggest that mindfulness might enhance the willingness to embrace creativity and innovation by reducing inhibitors of fear of failure, worry, stress and anxiety, and enhancing openness and initiative.

LINKS TO MINDFULNESS BASED LIFE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME.

The Centre for Mindful Life Enhancement has been offering an 8 week Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement Programme (MBLE) since 2011. The programme comprises both formal meditation and informal mindfulness practice. It also draws on the Four Immeasurables and positive psychology in the course design and associated activities. Table 2 summarises how some of the content of the course maps across to support the development of creativity and innovation; Table 3 repeats this for the alleviation of the inhibitors of creativity and innovation. Should organisations feel that mindfulness might be able to make a contribution in developing more innovative approaches, it might be useful as a starting point for their planning/thinking.

Table 2: MBLE and the development of Creativity and Innovation

Facilitator/Inhibitor of Creativity and Innovation	Links to Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement Programme (MBLE)
Facilitators (development of)	
Openness	Loving kindness, compassion and equanimity practices.
Respect for divergent opinions	Acceptance. Recognition and acknowledgement of thoughts and emotions and their lack of permanence. Mindful Listening. Changing Seats.
Encouragement of new ideas	Loving kindness, Compassion and empathetic joy practices. Beginner's mind/expert mind. Curiosity. Mindful Learning.
Allowing autonomy	Loving kindness and compassion practices. 'Just like me'.
Decision-making	REAL. STOP. Impulse Control. Reflective regulation of emotions. Reality testing. Research shows that mindfulness practice develops problem-solving skills. ABCDE. Increased working memory capacity. Dampening of distracting thoughts.
Recognising expertise	Empathetic Joy practices. Self-awareness. Mindful Competence: Beginner's Mind and Expert Mind
Using intrinsic motivators (e.g. showing gratitude, offering praise, providing challenging work)	Loving kindness and compassion practices. Positive Psychology – gratitude. Empathy and compassion. Mindful Learning.
Encouraging personal initiative	Beginners Mind. Courage. Self-reliance. Motivation and intention.

Table 3: MBLE and alleviation of the inhibitors of Creativity and Innovation

Facilitator/Inhibitor of Creativity and Innovation	Links to Mindfulness Based Life Enhancement Programme (MBLE)
Inhibitors (alleviation of)	
Intransigency and authoritarian attitudes	Self-awareness. Development of cognitive flexibility.
Lack of concentration on the tasks being undertaken	Mindfulness practice enhances ability to pay attention. Savouring. Dampening of distracting thoughts.
In-group/out-group and negativity bias	Positive psychology – gratitude and savouring. CEEN (connect, engage, expand, notice). Valuing diversity.
Creating homogenous teams	CEEN (connect, engage, expand, notice). Valuing diversity.
Attention to detail cognitive style	Cognitive flexibility. Acceptance. Letting go.
Fear of failure	Acceptance. Self-forgiveness. Equanimity practices. Optimism and Hope. Mindful Learning.
Worry, stress and anxiety	Mindfulness practice and its impact on the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system. Settling, grounding, breathing practices. Releasing the Tiger/Greeting the Lady. 3 minute breathing space. Second dart. Self-compassion. Daily Vacation/Savouring. Stress Tolerance

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Your comments on this discussion paper are welcome

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