

# Mindfulness, the art of being present

Training to cultivate a resilient, creative and effective mind

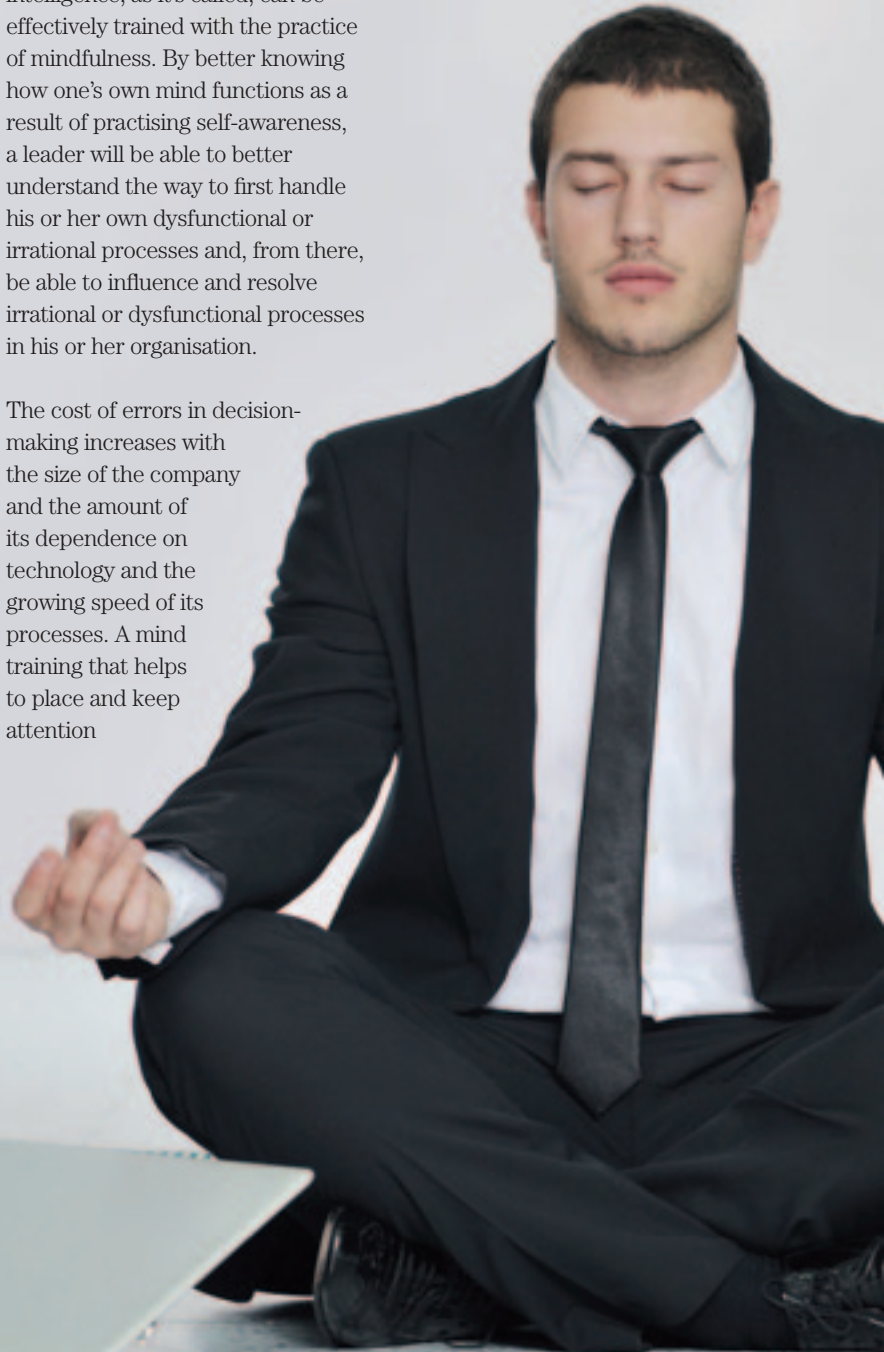
When I interned at the University of Massachusetts Mindfulness Center in 2003, they were very proud of the 50 studies published in 20 years; now there are over 600 studies published each year. In 2004, when I began to teach MBSR, Mindfulness and Stress Reduction programmes in Spain, this term only interested Buddhist meditation practitioners. Now our institute receives requests from hospitals, universities, professional colleges, companies and public agencies, and totals over 2500 attendees at the different courses we offer each year. But that's not all. The United Kingdom is exploring the possibility of placing Mindfulness on the political agenda<sup>1</sup> and has begun through education.

It is a bit early to guarantee the most effective way to apply this training in attention for all professional groups and, as with all fads, there are many trainers who enter the market with mindfulness programmes without any scientific basis or evidence. But it is clear that this is an important innovation in the strengthening of the processes of attention and self-awareness that deserves to be taken seriously by some company directors, not only in Human Resources, for the following reasons:

- 1) Executives often focus on rational analysis models, giving way too little attention to the emotional impact and all its derivatives

that comprise human behaviour. However, the success of any group initiative needs true understanding of the emotional side when making decisions, and this emotional intelligence, as it's called, can be effectively trained with the practice of mindfulness. By better knowing how one's own mind functions as a result of practising self-awareness, a leader will be able to better understand the way to first handle his or her own dysfunctional or irrational processes and, from there, be able to influence and resolve irrational or dysfunctional processes in his or her organisation.

- 2) The cost of errors in decision-making increases with the size of the company and the amount of its dependence on technology and the growing speed of its processes. A mind training that helps to place and keep attention



<sup>1</sup> [http://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/images/reports/Mindfulness-APPG-Report-Mindful-Nation-UK\\_Oct2015.pdf](http://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/images/reports/Mindfulness-APPG-Report-Mindful-Nation-UK_Oct2015.pdf)

*In recent years, we have witnessed an explosion of interest in the practice of mindfulness, a mental training originating from Asian contemplative traditions. Mindfulness means paying attention to what is happening in the present, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness. For a manager, its practice has special value, since it promotes greater resilience, a more creative mind and better decision-making.*



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and avoid cognitive biases, as some studies on mindfulness are proving, is very useful. There is also evidence that mindfulness encourages greater ethics when deciding under pressure.

**3)** All the research consistently shows the enormous impact of stress and, in general, of psychophysical well-being on productivity and the bottom line. However, according to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), around half of European workers consider stress to be a common element in their work, and it contributes to about half of all work days lost. As with many other issues related to mental diseases, stress is often misinterpreted or stigmatised. However, the use of sleeping pills and anxiolytics has increased in Spain by 57% in 12 years, meaning

a level 4 times higher than in Germany,<sup>2</sup> whilst anti-depressants have increased by 200%<sup>3</sup>. The importance of caring for mental health is increasing.

**4)** The concept of mental capital, meaning the cognitive and emotional resources that ensure resilience when faced with stress, provide flexibility for the mind and the ability to learn in order to adapt to a job that quickly changes, whilst the employment lifetime grows longer. It's easy to see how the development of people's mental capital will be crucial for their future prosperity and well-being. Qualitative research shows that mindfulness develops exactly these aspects of mental capital, and the experience encourages an attitude of curiosity, openness, receptivity and creativity.

I'd like to end with a thought. In the 50's, jogging was considered an unusual form of exercise, practiced by few people. Now it is recognised and encouraged as an easy and effective exercise tool, used by millions of people, with great benefits for health. There is currently a broad consensus regarding the benefits of active physical exercise, but we still don't have the same level of understanding regarding how to care for mental health. Mindfulness could well fulfil this role as a popular and effective way for people to maintain a healthy and effective mind, cultivating impact and creativity in a lifetime that is getting longer and longer. **E**

## Mindfulness in 3 rituals and 1 exercise

- 1** When you have a shower or a wash in the morning, make it a time for pampering and paying attention to your body. Avoid being on autopilot and rushing your mind into the daily tasks ahead.
- 2** When starting a task or a meeting, take in the fact that you are there, remember what your intention is and stay fully present.
- 3** During trips from work to home, practise disconnecting by paying attention to

what you are experiencing one moment at a time (this is known as informal mindfulness).

- Practise placing attention on your breathing: At a quiet moment and whilst sitting, let your breathing flow freely and place all your attention on the process for about 5 to 10 minutes, as a way of looking after your body and nurturing yourself (this is known as formal mindfulness).

<sup>2</sup> Source <http://www.elmundo.es/salud/2016/02/10/56bb63cde2704e9f4d8b45e2.html>

<sup>3</sup> INFORME DE UTILIZACIÓN DE MEDICAMENTOS U/AD/V1/14012015. Utilización de medicamentos antidepresivos en España durante el periodo 2000-2013. Publication date: 14/01/2015