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# The Mindful Organization

Myth or Living Reality?

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Mindful Business International Series

Based on experiences from  
the Network for Mindful Business



# May all beings be happy and free.

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# Introduction

For over 2500 years the training of mindfulness has been regarded as the essential prerequisite for cultivating compassion, inner freedom, ethical interactions and deeper insights in Buddhism . Mindfulness is seen as the royal state of mind. During the last several years mindfulness training has been discovered by ever-widening circles in the West. More and more companies and organizations use mindfulness to combat stress, as a means for self-management, improved communication or as a management tool. The question has been heard, how we can create “mindful organizations”. This article will show developments in the subject area, define central concepts and insights by the expert group “Mindful Organization” which is part of the Network for Mindful Business, as well as multiple impressions collected by the authors (Romhardt – dharma teacher; Plischke, Romhardt – organization consultants). This is an invitation to dedicate some time to practice mindfulness and start an individual as well as a collective journey of discovery towards a new understanding of organizational actions.



## Mindfulness – the Royal State of Mind

*Mindfulness* means to be present and to be able to offer enough inner space to take in everything that is happening in the present moment. This is hardly an easy task. Beginners in the practice of mindfulness are often shocked how intensely their mind becomes engaged in future scenarios, plans and projects – or they get stuck in the past and regret missed opportunities. Mindfulness is fascinating, because it gifts us with something that we have lost in our busy, over-scheduled and media-saturated lives: *Life only happens in the present*. It is only in the present that we think, feel, perceive, speak and act. Only in the present do we manage, work or plan. As our mindfulness increases, we regain control over essential parts of our life. Whoever takes good care of the present is also taking care of the future. The strengthening of mindfulness is part of a much deeper process, which can affect all parts of our lives.

Here are some *attributes of mindfulness* from a Buddhist perspective:

- Mindfulness is a state of mind we can train like a muscle. Mindfulness enjoys the highest esteem in Buddhism and is referred to as the royal state of mind.
- Mindfulness allows us to see reality without distortions and beyond the framework of concepts and judgements. This immediate perception of the present allows us to deeply experience reality.
- Mindfulness forms the basis for a deeper reaching training of the mind and insight meditation by helping us understand the interactions between physical processes, mental processes, emotions, perceptions, feelings and one's awareness.
- Mindfulness combined with concentration leads to insight. We recognize what we project into the world daily in the form of thoughts, words and deeds. We also see how these actions affect ourselves and others.
- Mindfulness connects us with our personal reality and helps us experience our environment more vividly. Mindfulness leads to compassion, understanding and love.
- Mindfulness gives us a clear, honest mirror. We recognize that we harm ourselves, when we harm others. We work with an ethical compass. Ethical, non-harmful action increasingly accompanies those who practice mindfulness.
- We develop mindfulness during a life-long process of practice. It needs to be maintained and deepened, it cannot simply be 'achieved' on a permanent basis. Mindfulness needs to be cultivated and kept alive.

In *Buddhism* mindfulness is also one of the eight practices of the *Eightfold Noble Path*, one of the key teachings of Buddhism. This path of practice includes 'right thinking', 'right speech', 'right resolve', 'right conduct', 'right livelihood', 'right effort' and 'right view'. Mindfulness assists us when we engage in either of these practices and interacts differently with each of them. In the long term mindfulness cannot be realized separately, but it will permeate different actions and areas of life. This notion is important as it clarifies that living mindfully will always go hand in hand with living ethically. On a deeper level mindfulness concerns ethics and therefore it can change the core beliefs and values of organizations.



# Mindfulness: A Wave Arises

In 2004, Members of the Network for Mindful Business (registered association)<sup>1</sup> started to examine the effects of mindfulness relating to economic processes like work, consumption, dealing with money and the operation of organizations. During the first few years hardly anyone wanted to hear what we had to say, but in the meantime the theme of mindfulness has started to receive a tremendous increase of interest. TIME magazine called out the “Mindful Revolution” (Pickert 2014). The Washington Post, the Harvard Business Review, the Guardian and many German publications like Der Spiegel, Focus or DIE ZEIT, and also Handelsblatt have run extensive articles on mindfulness. Here are a few more examples:

- The futurologist Matthias Horx sees mindfulness as the new mega trend (Horx et al. 2015)
- At the World Economic Forum in Davos workshops on the topic of mindfulness need to move to bigger rooms each year due to popularity ...
- In Great Britain a mindfulness initiative<sup>2</sup> was formed in cooperation between the House of the Lords and the House of Commons. The group recently issued a report titled *The Mindful Nation*. This group led by Chris Ruane (Member of Parliament) meets for meditation on a regular basis, acts across party lines and between the chambers to examine the potentials of mindfulness in all areas of society.
- At Harvard Medical School’s cafeteria certain tables are reserved for those who want to eat quietly and mindfully. Harvard Medical School also publishes books about the interactions between mindfulness and health (Thich Nhat Hanh/ Cheung, 2012)

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1 The Network for Mindful Business is a registered nonprofit association. It examines the potential of Buddhist teachings and practice for our work, economy and business. (see [www.network-mindful-business.org](http://www.network-mindful-business.org)).

2 For more information see: <http://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org>

## A Flood of Publications on the Topic of Mindfulness

In addition to an ever increasing number of workbooks on mindfulness practice,<sup>3</sup> research on the subject of mindfulness is also increasing dramatically. There are medical studies on the effects of stress, but there is also brain research examining mindfulness (Singer/Ricard 2015). Additionally, mindfulness is studied in the context of management (Weick/Putnam 2006).

More and more managers and business leaders step up and publicly share how much *meditation* helps them to remain clear headed and relaxed despite a life full of challenges (Kohtes/Rosmann 2014). It almost felt like a revolution when Norbert Reithofer, former Chairman of the Board of Management of BMW, had his picture taken with his eyes closed for Manager Magazin 6/2014 and admitted that he meditated on a regular basis.

There is a growing number of meditators who meet in Buddhist sanghas, Christian contemplation circles and other spiritual groups and there is the *MBSR movement*, which can be seen as the leader in secular meditation. Secular simply means: meditation- and mindfulness practice without integrating aspects of Buddhist religion. MBSR stands for *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction* and is a meditation-based eight-week course, which has been developed over the course of 30 years by the cardiologist and molecular biologist Jon Kabat-Zinn. Hundreds of clinical studies have confirmed the effectiveness of this method.

By now there are more than 400 teachers in German speaking countries alone certified to teach MBSR. Many of them have expanded their areas of expertise and teach in the classic fields of human resources like leadership, communication and working methods. Additionally, there are many mindfulness-based coaching companies and training providers competing within the mindfulness market, some of which work on a global scale like Google, "Search Inside Yourself" or Kalapa-Akademie in German-speaking countries. Working as a trainer, advisor and keynote speaker I have helped more than a hundred organizations in the last ten years to create special impulses regarding mindfulness. I notice an increasing openness and deepening of interest in corporations, mid-sized companies, but also among freelance professionals and in NGOs. Meditation Apps like *7Mind*, *Achtsamkeit App* or *Headspace* can be found on millions of smartphones.

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3 Example (Buddhist): THich Nhat Hanh (2007); example (secular) Kabat-Zinn (2013)

## Buddhist Interjection: Is This Still Considered Mindfulness?

For experienced meditators the rising popularity of mindfulness is both a joy and a curse at the same time. A manager who up until yesterday praised competitive thinking and aggressive marketing for dubious products is transformed overnight and now presents himself as a self proclaimed mindfulness expert after attending one seminar. A producer of alcoholic beverages who sent some of his leading managers to a mindfulness training, renames his company a 'mindful organization'. In economic contexts the promise that mindfulness leads to higher productivity, effectiveness, resilience and stress resistance dominates the classical motivation of mindfulness training, which is the cultivation of concentration, insight, wisdom and compassion. Ron Purser, professor for management at San Francisco State University and David Loy, Zen-teacher warn in their article *McMindfulness* about the dangers of instrumentalizing methods which are thousands of years old and taking them out of their ethical and religious contexts (Purses/Loy 2013). The danger of abusing mindfulness as a 'tool' for stress reduction and performance increase no longer seems unrealistic, when we know that the American private military company Blackwater included mindfulness-based methods in its training for snipers.

# Mindfulness in Organizations: A Few Definitions

There are apparently very different ideas floating around about how mindfulness might change an organization for the better. We see the subject of Mindfulness in the Organization as a quite young field of research, experience and practice, which examines the effects of growing mindfulness in all areas of an organization. In the following text we would like to introduce a few key terms that help us structure our work in the expert group Mindfulness in the Organization:

*Mindfulness Methods* are exercise practices we use to train mindfulness. The goal is to strengthen the state of mind of mindfulness and to be able cultivate within oneself this state for longer periods of time. There is a wide range of methods for mindfulness training, which can be practiced individually or together with others. They all can be used to establish and maintain mindfulness on an individual and collective level.

Proven methods in the Network for Mindful Business are:

- Sitting meditation
- Walking meditation
- Mindful Breathing
- Deep Listening
- Mindfulness Bells
- Work Meditation
- Leisure
- Eating Meditation/Mindful Eating
- Noble Silence
- Metta Meditation
- Deep Relaxation
- Deep Exchange
- Smiling

*Organizational Mindfulness* refers to the level of collective mindfulness within a group or within an organization. The term can refer to a level of mindfulness existing at a distinct point in time or over a certain period of time (Mindfulness as a formative power in organizational culture).

*The Mindful Organization.* This term refers to an ideal – an ideal-typical organization – where organizational mindfulness is present and consistent at high levels at all times and in all processes. Organizations can only come so close to the ideal and use it like their North Star. They can refer to it for guidance and use it as a mirror. To do this, they must consistently use individual and collective mindfulness methods in order to strengthen organizational mindfulness.

Most of the companies whose employees practice mindfulness do not strive for this ideal. They want to use instruments of mindfulness like mindful breathing, pausing or forms of walking – and sitting meditation selectively. Oftentimes they don't see the connection between ethics and mindfulness. Their foremost goal is to help their individual employees to become more efficient, more effective, faster, more concentrated, healthier, more successful or more relaxed. This is legitimate and most of the time a wonderful development. A mindfulness-based economic ethics won't be integrated in this approach even if it is experienced as meaningful or providing orientation. Organizations that rely on this understanding of mindfulness use it in a broader sense, for them it is a new tool for reaching old goals (speed, efficiency, gains ...). We speak of *Mindfulness within the organization in a broader sense*.

If mindfulness functions as the basis and foundation of organizational reality, however, new and very different forms of organization might arise. Here we refer to *Mindfulness in the organization in a narrow sense*. Organizations that accept this type of process or even embed it in their founding principles wish primarily that their members will act more compassionately, wisely, with more understanding, more joyfully, more concentrated, freer and in more meaningful ways within and for the organization: all members should develop their true potential. The organization is a means to an end of higher goals promoting the common good. The fact that its members will act more effectively, be more relaxed and move forward in healthier ways on this path is simply a beautiful and logical side effect. *A mindfulness based economic ethics approach* which creates meaning and provides orientation is integral in this process.

In order to understand the remarkable potential of mindfulness for organizations we can take a closer look at the Buddhist monastery *Plum Village* from the perspective of a management consultant. Plum Village is an organization which has mindfulness imprinted in its DNA. It was founded by the famous Buddhist mindfulness teacher, the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. Here are a few facts to provide historical background. Plum Village was founded in 1982 in the Dordogne, approx. 80 km from Bordeaux. Today it consists of four monasteries, which are connected with each other. It is the home of more than 150 nuns and monks which makes it the largest Buddhist monastery in Europe. Visitors are welcome most days of the year to participate in the intense mindfulness training of the community.

### **A Management Consultant in Plum Village: An Encounter of a Special Kind**

Ever since I first participated in a class with Thich Nhat Hanh on a farm in Northern Germany I wanted to visit Plum Village. Now it is finally happening. I will participate in the summer retreat in Southern France. The journey to Plum Village from Vienna immediately tests my patience. I decide to travel via Paris. When I arrive at the monastery after a day and a half of travel, I marvel at the calm and serenity which hang above the whole place like a cloud and envelop me right away. The sign at the entrance expresses exactly how I feel when I check in: "I have arrived, I am home."

It is not just the practice of mindfulness, which made me go on this long journey, that keeps me occupied during these days. I am also impressed by the manner in which this retreat is held. There are more than 800 participants who are staying in the four monasteries. For Thich Nhat Hanh's daily talks they come all together. After the talk we practice walking meditation in the forest and through the plum garden to enjoy the here and now. Everything happens incredibly peacefully. After we finish with a cup of tea there is no trash whatsoever to be found despite hundreds of visitors. My experience during our daily work meditation is similar. My group has been assigned to clean toilets for a week. It doesn't sound like one of the lucky tickets at first. Yet every day we are in for the same surprise: not a single one of the toilets is dirty. A coincidence? One thing seems certain to me however. The people who came here follow a common goal and share a similar attitude. The guests' individual motivation agrees with the general mission and purpose of Plum Village and therefore makes living together amazingly easy and free of tension. Very few principles are needed to guarantee the organization and the schedule of the retreat. There is a bulletin board with the important information at the entry of the monastery. It is not used often. Additionally every participant is part of a 'family' of approx. 15 to 20 people. In this group we answer the few questions regarding organization, eat together in silence and talk about our experiences during the day. Everything is supported by the regular practice of mindfulness. In the beginning I am a bit disappointed that the classic sitting meditation is only scheduled once a day in the morning, yet I soon realize that the practice of mindfulness during everyday activities and thoughts is the intended goal. The nuns and monks support us in these efforts whenever possible.

Our Dharma Sharing, the mindful sharing of impressions on Thich Nhat Hanh's daily talk and our experiences throughout the day is guided by a young Vietnamese monk. Despite his youth I am impressed by his aura and impact on the group. His simple act of being present and giving a few instructions create an open setting where sharing can take place with great mindfulness. Everyone in the group gets a chance to speak. All participants are deeply motivated and share poignant experiences and insights. I notice the quality of our daily exchanges, when our group has to manage without Brother Phap Hui on the penultimate day. Soon we find ourselves in a discussion, there is no mindful exchange on that day.

All over Plum Village we are provided with opportunities which allow us to return to mindfulness. The sound of mindfulness bells alerts the community in intervals throughout the day to pause, take a deep breath and refocus on

breathing. During deep relaxation in the great meditation hall after lunch more than 200 men, women and children lie on their back and practice the art of letting go guided by reflections and songs of an experienced nun. This is a practice that the nuns and monks seem to like a lot. I keep on noticing brothers and sisters lying on the ground balancing body and mind throughout the course of the day.

A last highlight of my stay is the ceremony of accepting the Five Mindfulness Trainings, a contemporary version of the classic Buddhist ethical precepts. Whoever chooses can commit to one or all of these trainings. The idea is to anchor, practice and implement the principle of mindfulness in our everyday life. Each one of the trainings has an individual and a societal dimension: When I commit to practice mindfulness in certain areas of my everyday life, it will have a corresponding positive effect in my environment. I decide to make a commitment to training #4: "Kind speech and deep listening." Before I do so, in a personal conversation with one of the monks, I make sure that this training actually means to speak precisely and get to the heart of those things that are important to me, something I experience as a true challenge.

After I get back to Vienna I share my experiences with friends and colleagues. In my role as a management consultant I need to answer the question of what I have learned from the 'event'. To me as a participant the way in which the retreat in Plum Village was 'managed' seemed effortless and made it into an unforgettable experience for all. This makes me think of discussions in manager circles about collective forms of value creation. We have talked about 'agile organizational structures' and 'purpose-driven organizations'. For me Plum Village is a living example for these.

### **How mindful can it be? And how Buddhist?**

Hardly any organization exists worldwide which, like Plum Village, focuses on the cultivation of mindfulness in all fields of organizational activity and in all work areas. In these dimensions Plum Village is truly different from other organizations. We have tried to systematize and illustrate our personal experiences,<sup>4</sup> the experiences of the Network for Mindful Business (especially in reference to the ideal of a mindful organization) and the reports of many visitors, monks and nuns, who experienced Plum Village in the following table, (compare Laloux 2014).

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4 Kai Romhardt lived and practiced for two years in Plum Village.

## Experiences with Mindfulness

Dimensions	Ideal of a Mindful Organization (Vision)	Plum Village
<b>Purpose</b>	Organization has meaningful goals and performs useful activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overarching goal: spiritual growth of individual members – pursues causes that serve the common good.</li> <li>• Measure of success: Increase of the Gross Happiness Product, Reduction and understanding of suffering and problems.</li> <li>• Happiness perspective: individual and collective happiness are inseparably connected – “Inter-Being”.</li> <li>• Relationship to environment: inclusivity.</li> <li>• Organization is a place for healing.</li> </ul>
<b>Values</b>	Clear values and norms derived from the universal experiences of mindfulness- and meditation practice, values that are expressed in practice ethics with specific fields of practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five Mindfulness Trainings of a Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethics. Foremost priority is the practice itself, i.e. of loving speech and deep listening knowing that no one is perfect.</li> <li>• Brotherly and sisterly interaction.</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational development</b>	Intuitively as a result of the system, determined by the sense and purpose of the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trigger of activities: real needs; potential to promote happiness, reduce suffering.</li> <li>• Growth path: organic, on its own, self-funded, dana (donations).</li> </ul>

Dimensions	Ideal of a Mindful Organization (Vision)	Plum Village
<b>Organizational structure</b>	Self-organized teams and decentralised decision-making processes (fundamental human ideal: compassionate, wise human who will develop his/her potential in the organization).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dharma-Teacher Council (watches over quality of meditation practice), Care-Taking Council (watches over quality of processes).</li> <li>• “Families” during summer retreats, guided by monks and nuns, clear organizational questions, eat together in silence and discuss experiences of the day.</li> <li>• Self-organization within the framework of work meditation (i.e. cooking for the community, cleaning of bathrooms and showers).</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	Leadership by example and as a contribution to the common good, inner freedom from titles and power.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance through inspiration, teachings, embodiment of wisdom, shared insight and practice ethics.</li> <li>• Seniority principle (depth of experience, elder brother/sister in the practice).</li> </ul>
<b>Meetings and Coordination</b>	Meetings are held when necessary, special practices for maintaining mindfulness and taming of the ego.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• i.e. Clarification of organizational issues during the summer retreat in families as needed.</li> <li>• Exchange about talks and personal experiences in mindful speech and deep listening within the family.</li> </ul>
<b>Conflicts</b>	Time and space to acknowledge and address conflicts; multi-level process for solving conflicts.	Process of ‘Beginning Anew’, meditative process providing space for appreciation (watering flowers), personal feelings, expression of regret and hurts.

Dimensions	Ideal of a Mindful Organization (Vision)	Plum Village
<b>Reflection and Contemplation</b>	Spaces for silence and meditation, mindfulness in all actions as a goal, rituals of a collective pause.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided and silent sitting meditation.</li> <li>• Physical exercises.</li> <li>• Walking meditation (in the community).</li> <li>• Eating Meditation.</li> <li>• Deep Relaxation.</li> <li>• Mindful speech and deep listening (i.e. when drinking tea).</li> <li>• Mindfulness Bells.</li> </ul>
<b>Training of the Mind and Self-Leadership</b>	Strengthening of wholesome individual and collective states of mind, like compassion, concentration, contentment. Taming of unwholesome states of mind like anger, envy and greed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused mental training: protecting the mind and developing it beneficially.</li> <li>• Spiritual ideal: wisdom and mindfulness.</li> <li>• Formative states of mind: happiness, composure, non-violence, generosity, shared joy.</li> <li>• Mental qualities: compassionate, understanding, non-discriminatory, non-dual, we-oriented.</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship to Time</b>	Present, Here and Now, "The best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise naturally: a certain time is available during work meditation, the work is done when the time is up.</li> <li>• Keep returning to the present by individually and collectively assigned pauses</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship to Silence</b>	Silence acts as the opposite pole to the dominance of the word.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness Bell i.e. used during an exchange in order to relax and to become conscious of the breath.</li> <li>• The practice of Noble Silence i.e. before bedtime until after breakfast, during meals.</li> </ul>

Dimensions	Ideal of a Mindful Organization (Vision)	Plum Village
<b>Individual purpose of existence (raison d'être)</b>	Purpose of existence for individual and organization fit well together; interest in making money to work on meaningful projects and to contribute to the greater good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work as a process of getting to know oneself better and to develop true Buddha nature.</li> <li>• Ideal: simple life.</li> <li>• Measures/limits.</li> </ul>

Table: Personal experiences, experiences within the Network for Mindful Business (especially relating to the ideal of the mindful organization) and the insights of many visitors, monks and nuns who experienced Plum Village (see Laloux 2014)

We realize, after reading this table, that a deep practice of mindfulness can have far-reaching side-effects. To put it clearly: many organizations would be shaken down to their foundations if they had the courage to examine their own practices mindfully. They would be able to see how and where their actions cause harm in the world. When we come to realize that we harm ourselves as we harm others, a lot will change. It is only then that the door for change opens up. This forceful process of insight and transformation can start very quickly and directly, when we start with mindfulness practice. We awake to our own actions and to the spirit that governs the organizations, in which we invest our life force and energy. Many practitioners decide after a while to look for a new employer or even start their own business. Others try to change their organizations from within.

It is not my intention to idealize Plum Village in this article. Plum Village is no stranger to mistakes. People deviate from their values and get entangled in conflicts there as well. Practicing mindfulness doesn't mean that one is perfect, yet, one has the willingness to understand one's own self and collective processes more deeply.



# Mindfulness in Organizations: Experiences from the Network of Mindful Business

In the last years the authors had the opportunity to meet many individuals and organizations who manifested a great longing for mindfulness in every sense of the word. Many executives and entrepreneurs are looking for new types of companies and organizations. They are seeking places where they can work together mindfully and where wholesome business transactions are possible. Currently many journalists, scientists, consultants and authors search for such 'mindful organizations' and their success stories.

How can the spark of mindfulness jump from the individual to groups, organizations or even the whole economy? How can the treasure of mindfulness practice be brought into organizations?

In the last chapter we would like to introduce a few access points which help to approach the topics of mindfulness and mindfulness in organizations. We will start with the individual preparation, highlight voices of practitioners who talk about the potential of successful mindfulness practice, show a few examples from organizations and finally present several theses on the subject.

## **Individual Preparation and Cultivation of a Mindful Work Style**

The foundation of any collective mindfulness is always individual mindfulness, which needs to be practiced with great patience.

The practice process ideally follows this pattern:

- We become familiar with a method of mindfulness (i.e. walking meditation)
- We practice this method on a regular basis (on our own individually or in a group setting)
- We witness the positive effects of this method, experience successes, transformations and begin to trust the practice.
- We begin to integrate the practice into our work and into other areas of our lives (practice off the cushion)
- We begin to share the practice with others based on our own experience.

In the Network for Mindful Business we chose a number of methods one can practice outside of a Buddhist framework or context. Regular, quiet *Sitting Meditation* strengthens the ability to focus and concentrate, and calms a restless mind. *Walking Meditation* turns one's attention right on to the next step instead of focusing on the distant future and helps us realize which states of mind we currently inhabit. *Systematic Pausing* or *Breathe, Smile, Pause* allows us to take breaks in the midst of a busy day, presents us with small insights and reunites body and mind over and over again. *Mindful Eating* and *Fasting* encourages us to look carefully at what kind of input we rely on and whether or not we keep the right balance in both our body and mind. We ask ourselves whether we appreciate what we encounter in life and how we digest these stimuli.

Experience has shown that daily work on the computer, on the phone, in meetings or also daily mental work can completely change through mindfulness. Next, we will introduce two mindful work principles: impulse distance and 'being without extras' (see Romhardt 2013, p.56f.):

*Impulse distance* is the ability to understand a physical or mental impulse clearly, to be able to watch its rise and fall without giving in to it. Impulse distance is the basis for human freedom; it gives us permission to understand the consequences of an action and to make a clear-minded decision regarding this action. We will not be pulled under. We must not react simply because our coworker used a certain word that pushes our buttons. One to three conscious breaths suffice to build distance. And five minutes later we are most likely glad that we did not react.

*"Being without extras"* means that we focus solely on the core of one activity. When we moderate a work meeting, we stop asking ourselves what could possibly go wrong during this task and what kind of consequences the 'going wrong' could have for ourselves. Mark Twain once said appropriately: "The worst things in my life never happened." Buddhist psychology puts it this way: The greatest part of our problems is created by the untrained mind. When we are "without extras" we won't enter negative emotions, thoughts and scenarios. Without extras many activities will be done much more simply. We work in the relaxed way of single-tasking. Conflicts need a foundation, and they lose any foundation when we stop assuming incorrectly, stop hoping and expecting or simply stop working without giving our full attention. 'Being without extras' and single tasking can change our performance in organizations extensively.

There are many more mindful work principles and dozens of methods to practice mindfulness.<sup>5</sup> It is important to find one's own path and to commit to it. Experienced mindfulness – and meditation teachers as well as a practice community provide valuable assistance when choosing one's practice method and deciding how to integrate it into one's life.

Voices from Active Members and Practitioners in the Network Mindful Business:

"I realized that I have more than enough conditions in my life for happiness."

"I encourage my co-workers in our company to train their mind. I know that this will benefit all of us."

"I began to understand how strongly fear and anger dominate the culture at my place of employment. Something needs to change."

"I was always thinking, always judging, always comparing myself to others. I had no idea how much stress I caused for myself and for my environment."

"My colleagues say that I am more patient now and that I listen more effectively. This brings a lot of relief and clarity into our daily work."

"It is wonderful for me to realize that economics and ethics are compatible. This is a practice which begins in my everyday life."

"Transition, impulse distance, leisure, single tasking and 'being without extras': these work principles changed my daily actions fundamentally."

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5 In the Network for Mindful Business we practice among other things metta-meditation, mindful breathing, deep relaxation, work meditation, laziness, Noble Silence. Read more <http://www.achtsame-wirtschaft.de/uebungen-einfuehrung.html>



# Final Theses to Further Develop the Subject

The desire for mindful work and mindful organizations will continue to grow.

Meditation and mindfulness training will become more acceptable in the everyday life of organizations. Labels like 'esoteric' will no longer play a role.

Secular meditation techniques (with no religious affiliation or framework) will spread widely.

Mindfulness can bring surprising new perspectives to classic organization processes like work, production, sales or finance and classic operations in organizations like meetings, strategies, projects or plans.

Universities will open up more and more to the idea of mindfulness on different levels (mindfulness as a field of research, brain research, pedagogical consequences).

The use of mindfulness as a management tool is limited as the desired results of ease, concentration and effectiveness can only be realized by compassion, understanding, wisdom and ethical action over the long term.

Transformation on a deeper level will hardly be possible without the integration of ethical practice.

The effectiveness of mindfulness will be questioned after a first wave of disappointment. Exaggerated promises, unrealistic expectations and the erroneous belief that we can have the light of mindfulness on a selective level might be some of the causes for disappointment. Then there is also the hope that unpleasant truths can be avoided.

Employers who will introduce mindfulness into their companies and pioneers who build mindful organizations in the narrow sense will be able to demonstrate the potentials that mindful economic actions hold. These beacons of light will need time to come into their own, yet they can develop a great light of radiance.

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## Network for Mindful Business

The Network for Mindful Business (Netzwerk Achtsame Wirtschaft) is a buddhist-inspired community connecting German-speaking dharma practitioners since 2004.

The German word "Wirtschaft" is broader than "business". We are interested in exchanging ideas about how to engage more mindfully in our daily economic activities. We're not just managers. We are employees, entrepreneurs, free-lancers and the unemployed. We work in business consulting, teaching, tech, social work, healthcare and a wide variety of other sectors. We all create our economy together.

We were founded by friends in the Plum Village Dhyana Zen tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh and cherish these roots, but we see ourselves as broadly Buddhist and we are open to the insights of other contemplative traditions.

In 2014 we established ourselves as a non-profit charity under German law. Our goal is to promote mindfulness, compassion, understanding and wisdom. In 2020 we published our first English-language materials and started opening our circle beyond the borders of Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

We organize regional groups, opportunities for contemplation and exchange, co-working days, lectures, retreats, working groups and seminars. We connect and inspire people who wish to put buddhist-inspired practices We see our activities as seeds of awakening in the vast field of business and in the economy.

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