



## MEDITATION – A ROUTE TO BUILDING A STRONGER, HEALTHIER AND MORE CREATIVE ORGANISATION

*A white paper from azzur*

## INTRODUCTION

Once the province of Eastern cultures, gurus, mystics, and self-improvement classes, meditation is an increasingly mainstream business tool, integrated into the working day by some of the biggest names in the corporate world for its clear benefits in:

- Enhancing health and well-being
- Boosting cognitive capability, memory and concentration
- Improving creativity

In this paper we look at the value it could add to your organisation.

Research by Harvard Business School and INSEAD cites meditation and intuition as the two most effective business tools for today's leaders – interdependent capabilities with the power of the latter significantly boosted by the practice of the former.

In the world of work we face increasingly complex and uncertain times. Organisations and their leaders are tasked with holding a steady course in a business climate that is increasingly volatile and uncertain. The pace of, and demand for, change is relentless.

Consequently, the system is under stress, as are the people within it, impacting health, wellbeing, productivity, problem-solving ability, creativity and overall performance and prosperity. Stress is 'the health epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' according to WHO. The annual cost of mental ill health is estimated at £26bn for UK business<sup>1</sup>, and \$300bn for the US.<sup>2</sup>

Technology may have made us more connected, yet the window it provides on global issues has also disconnected us individually and collectively from some of the stability that gives peace of mind. And this erosion is gathering pace as more and more conventional work is replaced by machines – increasing uncertainty and, likely, anxiety.

Meanwhile the need to achieve more with scarcer resources in organisations isn't going away. Nor is the need to reinvent work and people's capability to meet new and very different challenges. So, a strong and sustainable antidote is needed.

The case for meditation is compelling on many fronts and everything points to the need for leaders of whatever hue and level to tap into this resource to assure our future.

## WHAT IS MEDITATION?

**Meditation** is a spiritual practise that provides greater connection between our higher self or intuition and our everyday persona. Within this connection we typically find a sense of active peace that guides our choices and ways of being.

**Intuition** is described as knowing something without thinking beforehand, a guiding "inner voice" or wisdom. Intuition sees us tapping into the quantum field science has proved is present in all humans and is achieved by accessing the higher mind. Meditation, with its ability to still the noise and chatter and cut through physical, mental and emotional distraction is a key route to improving our intuition.

More recently meditation, and more particularly **mindfulness**, has become far more attractive to business and organisations generally – including the health service and colleges and schools - as a form of stress reduction and for the development of mental agility and creativity. Mental health

charity MIND is particularly promoting the value of mindfulness and working with schools and colleges in this area. NICE (the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) is also recommending mindfulness-based therapies for the treatment of depression, stress and anxiety. In the world of work the subject of well-being and particularly mental health is high on the corporate agenda, giving rise to ever greater interest in the practices of mindfulness and meditation. Both practices involve the stilling of the mind to enable a conscious connection to a deeper reflective, and ultimately more creative space.

The difference is that meditation tends to be underpinned by a set of values or philosophy centred around a spiritual perspective – a sense of something bigger and more overarching, gluing all life together and the sense that we can, and indeed must, cooperate with that creative energy (often called the quantum field) for a greater good.

Focused on attention and awareness, both practices bring a greater degree of control over consciousness or mental processes. This supports the development of our capacity to calm the mind, achieve clarity, sharpen concentration, and promotes both a more relaxed state, and higher levels of energy, effectiveness and performance. Each of these provides access to a deeper sense of self and contributes to greater effectiveness, personally and professionally. In short, meditative and mindfulness practices afford us greater access to our full human potential.

### **ORGANISATIONAL VALUE – PURPOSE AND PEOPLE**

The world of work is transforming with greater emphasis placed on the importance of purpose at the heart of organisations to shape strategy and goals, orient decisions and actions and create the meaning behind people's effort. Meditation can enable greater connection and alignment with purpose.

Organisational transformation is also heightening the value placed upon people. We are steadily migrating from saying people are our finest asset to behaving that way. The transition from hierarchy to team-based structures and co-operation rather than competition continues apace. These shifts towards more 'systems-based' working, demand greater focus on the development of people's mental, emotional and spiritual or consciousness capability – aspects on which meditation has been shown to impact positively.

This cumulative gain is leading to increasing numbers of organisations introducing meditation-based activity, anything from periods of quiet reflection, through mindfulness to training in, and deployment of, meditation practice within the working day. In some organisations the move to this more consciousness-raising practice is self-organised with teams and small groups taking the initiative for themselves.

### **SPECIFIC BENEFITS**

The evidence from scientific research, social studies and anecdotal and experiential accounts makes clear the significant benefits that can be derived from meditation practice at a number of different and interconnected or interdependent levels

- **Improvement in mental, physical and emotional health** - a 2017 PwC study concluded that 1 in 3 British workers are dealing with anxiety, stress or depression all of which inhibit performance.<sup>3</sup> Investors In People had similar findings in 2014. Workers themselves note stress impacts as: reducing concentration, increasing mistakes, missing more deadlines, relationship issues with co-workers and managers, lateness and absence.

Meditation has been shown to help: reduce stress, improve cardiovascular function, alleviate chronic pain, reduce insomnia and strengthen the immune system. For example, the benefits from the practice of rhythmic breathing meditation (Sudarshan Kriya) identified in more than 65 independent studies<sup>4</sup> include: a 57% drop in the stress hormone cortisol; a 50% increase in well-being hormone Prolactin; higher levels of three key anti-oxidants; better sleep patterns; a 13% drop in cholesterol after 6 weeks' with no diet changes; a 4-5% reduction in blood pressure.

- **Emotional intelligence** - emotionally intelligent people are highly effective in building and sustaining high quality relationships as well as building engagement and motivating others. Daniel Goleman's seminal research in this area highlights emotional intelligence (EQ) as 85% of what differentiates star performers in leadership from the average.

Brain imaging research has shown that meditation strengthens the ability to regulate emotions while Stanford University Medical School neurosurgeon Dr James Doty believes it cultivates EQ based on very personal experience, crediting his mindfulness practice with supporting an emotionally intelligent response to the angriest investor in a business he led. The investor became an ally in making the company a success. (It ultimately went public with a \$1.3bn valuation).<sup>5</sup>

Jonathan Tang, founder and CEO of premium clothing manufacturer VASTRM Fashion, introduced workplace meditation post 9/11 and found it strengthened his people's emotional resilience and ability to focus despite their traumatic experiences.<sup>5</sup>

- **Brain Power** – meditation improves memory according to research by Harvard's Dr Sarah Lazar and others, whilst studies from UC Davis and Rutgers University have shown meditation can reduce cortisol levels by more than half which helps increase memory power.

Harvard research also notes meditation promoting increased neural mass (grey matter) associated with long and short-term memory and stimulating greater cognitive flexibility and ability, resilience, 'age-proofing', focused attention, deep thought and overall brain power.<sup>6</sup>

- **Creativity** – Steve Jobs is one of a number of business leaders citing the positive impact of meditation on creativity. Former Procter & Gamble CEO Alan Lafley says 'you cannot out-work a problem, you have to out meditate it'.<sup>7</sup> Research suggests meditation's 'in the moment' focus increases concentration, heightens sensory receptiveness and stimulates divergent thinking. In experiments at Rotterdam's Erasmus University "the meditators generated a 22% wider range of ideas than the two non-meditating groups."<sup>8</sup>
- **Productivity and performance** – in drawing each of these benefits together it is appropriate to conclude that healthier, happier employees with greater focus and creativity will be more productive and perform at a higher level.

## WORKPLACE IMPACT

Many businesses have incorporated meditation into their working day as the benefits more than justify the time investment. As a tool for transforming organisational culture, increasing engagement, relatively easy application (it can be practised by anyone irrespective of religion or intellect) and delivering a solid, and, at times, spectacular, return on investment, meditation ranks pretty highly:

- Healthcare insurer Aetna’s implementation of meditation (among a range of well-being practices) helped save \$9 million as a result of a reduction in employee sickness. Their employees reported a 28% drop in stress levels, a 20% improvement in sleep quality and 19% reduction in pain. The business gained 62 minutes per week of productivity equivalent to \$3,000 per employee a year.<sup>9</sup>
- Three years after Detroit-based chemical plant, H.A. Montgomery, implemented meditation: absenteeism fell by 85%, productivity rose by 120%, injuries dropped by 70% and profits increased by 520%.<sup>10</sup>
- A meditation programme developed by McKinsey for an Australian client saved the business more than A\$20million.<sup>11</sup>
- At BlackRock, one of the world’s largest asset management firms, global program manager Golbie Kamarei founded the BlackRock Meditation Programme. Her measurement of the results found: 91% of participants reported that meditation positively impacted the culture; 66 % felt they could better cope with stress; 63% felt more confident; and 60% reported improved decision-making skills. Almost half the participants felt better able to manage work relationships and 46% also felt meditation boosted their creativity and ability to innovate.<sup>12</sup>
- Transport for London (TfL) introduced meditation and mindfulness into its Occupational Health mix in its Ride the Wave programme - a suite of measures also including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to improve employee mental health and well-being. Around 600 employees have completed the programme since 2009 with the number of days off for stress, anxiety and depression falling by 71% over the following three years. Absences for all conditions dropped by 50%.

Qualitative improvements have included: experiencing improved relationships (80% of participants); improved ability to relax (79%); improved sleep patterns (64%); greater happiness at work (53%).<sup>13</sup>

Meditation is also front and centre with some of the biggest global corporate names and employers. Those on this more conscious journey include:

BP	Google	Apple	Sony
Unilever	Department of Health	Ford	Prentice Hall (Pearson)
Transport for London	General Mills	Procter & Gamble	Heinz
Reebok	McKinsey	Toyota	Ikea
Deutsche Bank	American Express	Barclays	JP Morgan

Unsurprisingly, Silicon Valley was an early adopter of the power of meditation to unlock creativity and productivity.

At Apple, founder Steve Jobs’ introduction of Zen mindfulness meditation to Apple’s corporate culture led to him being considered a pioneer of ‘mind technology’. The approach he introduced continues to this day. Workers have access to a meditation room, 30-minute daily meditation breaks, and on-site meditation and yoga classes. Jobs himself was a long time meditator. A famously irascible boss, he credited the practice specifically with helping him to innovate rather than in his leadership of people.

Google's head of personal growth – Chade-Meng Tan - has led a programme called 'Search Inside Yourself' covering mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence. More than 1,000 have attended and a further 400 are awaiting a place. The business holds bi-monthly mindful lunches, conducted in complete silence apart from the ringing of prayer bells. Google has also built a labyrinth for walking meditations.<sup>14</sup>

More seemingly conventional businesses are also committed to the practice. Meditation is part of McKinsey HR strategy to support the health and happiness of its employees, as well as being a people development approach with clients. Deutsche Bank has been providing meditation classes and quiet spaces on site for several years with the aim of reducing stress and prompting more level-headed thinking. BP has meditation rooms and Goldman Sachs uses meditation pods.

Many examples are based on leadership getting behind the idea of meditation as a key business tool and bringing it into the business. However, there are other, equally powerful examples where individuals and groups of employees lower down the organisation have taken the initiative to develop their own group practice informally. Awake@Intel is one example of a corporate mindfulness programme that grew from an operations manager in Intel's Business Client Platform division setting up an informal Tuesday lunchtime group.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile the growth of businesses supporting meditation highlights its growing popularity in both personal and professional contexts. The online environment is both a case in point and reflective of our increasingly virtual lives. Buddhify, an app designed by Glasgow-based Rohan Gunatillake, became a worldwide success with Buddhify2 clocking as high as six million minutes of use in less than a year. The Headspace app, meanwhile, which has been downloaded in 150 countries, was designed by former Buddhist monk Andy Puddicombe and is now a business worth £25 million.<sup>16</sup> Puddicombe's business is working with more than 100 major firms including Credit Suisse, KPMG and Deloitte.

### **MEDITATION AS A SERVICE**

Alongside the individual and organisational benefits of meditative practice we can also consider the service it brings to the greater good. Meditation raises levels of consciousness individually and collectively – this impacts not only those within the organisation but also the wider community it serves and beyond, creating a more harmonised environment. The greater the numbers engaged in meditation the wider the harmonising effect.

More than 50 scientific studies have identified 'the Maharishi effect' - the result of large groups of people meditating together and in which there is a coherence of their brainwaves which harmonises the environment across a wide area and has a marked impact in the reduction of anti-social and negative incidents – crime, acts of violence, accidents, etc.

For example The Washington DC meditation project (TM crime prevention project) in 1993 was overseen by a distinguished review board and saw up to 4,000 transcendental meditators (TM) meditating together over a 3 week period in July. Crime rates reduced by 23.3% (researchers had publicly predicted a 20% fall).<sup>17</sup>

### **IN CONCLUSION**

Meditation (or mindfulness) is growing in its appeal and application in the workplace and though adoption may have been relatively slow and focused around the more obvious early adopters in tech (though not exclusively) momentum is gathering.

There is plenty of evidence supporting the value meditative practices add. And it is growing all the time. Strategically and tactically for organisations meditation makes good business sense. Creating a healthier, happier and more engaged workforce reduces:

- The cost of health-related impacts on the business – days lost to sickness absence
- The ‘cost’ of lower levels of concentration, attention and focus that leads to more mistakes and deadline drift
- The ‘cost’ of conflict – interpersonal, intra and inter-team. Poor quality relationships undermine trust and collaboration

Meanwhile meditative practice provides a number of ‘dividends’:

- Access to more ‘resources’ which raise awareness, concentration, and cognitive capability in individuals which in turn helps greater effectiveness.
- An uplift in creativity which supports both a more vibrant and progressive culture as well as the possibility of generating innovative and important ideas.
- Stronger colleague relationships based on greater emotional intelligence, deeper levels of caring and a desire to see and help others flourish.
- A more conscious workforce in which the more conscious workers can better attune to the organisation’s purpose and its consistent delivery, especially where that purpose is in service of a greater good.

Leaders are making more conscious choices about the role of their organisation in wider society and the positive legacy being created for future generations, for humanity and the planet. Meditative practice can play an important part in that legacy creation, contributing to our collective ‘well-being’ and unlocking our inherent creativity and collaboration to improve the future of humanity and our relationship with each other and the planet.

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