

This book does a great job of bringing together the important ideas of mindfulness and Otto Scharmer's powerful Theory U as an aid to leaders and managers in coping with the increasing stresses of organizational life.

Edgar H. Schein, Professor Emeritus, MIT Sloan School of Management. Author of "Organizational Culture and Leadership" and of "Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking instead of Telling."

Just imagine if a good proportion of leaders in all sectors really were mindful – self-aware, resilient, open and less imprisoned either by habits or hang-ups? How different would the world be? Wibo Koole's book rightly asks us to see this as an achievable goal, and provides pointers as to how it could be achieved.

Geoff Mulgan, Chief Executive of Nesta, and author of "The Locust and the Bee."

Filled with practical insights and a wealth of practical tools based on his experiences as a company director and mindfulness teacher, Wibo Koole shows us how mindfulness enables leaders and their organizations to tackle and become freed from deep-rooted, limiting patterns of behavior. A compelling and inspirational read for leaders of all kinds.

Lisa Lahey is a faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, co-founder of MINDS AT WORK®, and author (with Robert Kegan) of "Immunity to Change," and other books that help people to close the gap between their good intentions and behavior.

"Mindful Leadership" points at the biggest leverage point we have for initiating and sustaining positive change: our awareness. This much-needed book provides insights, tools and practices for how to create awareness as leaders and teams in organizations, and shows how mindful leaders can foster a culture of awareness-based strategy development in organizations.

Otto Scharmer, senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and author of "Theory U, Learning from the Future as It Emerges," of "Leading from the Emerging Future. From ego-system to eco-system economy" (with Katrin Kaufer), and of "Presence" (with Peter Senge, Betty Sue Flowers, and Joseph Jaworski).

In our rapidly changing world, leadership requires that our minds be flexible and open like never before. But how? Mindfulness training helps us meet the inevitable challenges of our lives with curiosity, ease, courage, and warmth. Wibo Koole expertly guides the reader into core concepts and practices that have the power to transform individuals and their teams, both inside and out.

Christopher Germer, PhD, clinical instructor, Harvard Medical School, author of "The Mindful Path to Self-Compassion," and co-editor of "Mindfulness and Psychotherapy."

In an age where we are constantly confronted with even bigger and more complex interconnected challenges, true leadership makes the difference. Leadership that is on a constant mindful journey to see the whole and the parts, to explore and know yourself while recognizing and connecting with others. Wibo gives in his book a very compelling and practical description of how leaders can shift their mindset and become more resilient, have unconditional responsibility, and become more innovative and connecting. It starts with yourself, and it is the most rewarding journey of all.

Lucas Simons, founder and CEO of NewForesight and SCOPEinsight, Young Global Leader – World Economic Forum (2011), Ashoka Fellow, and former director UTZ Certified.

Bringing the wisdom of mindfulness meditation to the challenges of leading organizations has finally found traction in business schools, law firms, hospitals, board rooms, and more and Wibo's contribution to this trend is central. I highly recommend exploring the topic of mindful leadership and this book is an excellent guide.

Michael Carroll, author of "The Mindful Leader."

What were once esoteric teachings of Buddhism are now commonplace in school, hospitals, and boardrooms. In a clear and concise way, Wibo Koole demystifies mindfulness and explains how it can make a measurable difference in organizational leadership.

Jay Michaelson, author of "Evolving Dharma: Meditation, Buddhism and the Next Generation of Enlightenment."

While many managers have intelligence, experience, and interpersonal skills, truly outstanding leaders possess something rarer and more important: deep wisdom. In this clear, practical, step-by-step guide, Wibo Koole shows us how to use the power of mindfulness to develop managerial wisdom – the ability to see the big picture and respond skillfully to challenges rather than react out of our fear or egoistic concerns. It's a must-read for anyone who wants to be a wiser, happier, and more effective leader.

Ronald D. Siegel, Psy. D. assistant clinical professor of psychology, Harvard Medical School, and author of "The Mindfulness Solution: Everyday Practices for Everyday Problems."

Wibo has written a book that is practical, grounded and urgently needed. In mindful leadership lies the answer to many of humanity's challenges, making this a much-needed book.

Zaid Hassan, co-founder and partner of Reos consultants, and author of "The Social Labs Revolution."

Mindful Leadership

Effective tools to help you focus and succeed

Wibo Koole

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Table of Contents

Introduction

- Permanently subject to change 4
- Leadership: beyond the autopilot 6
- What you train when you train mindfulness 7
- This book 10

Chapter 1. The Autopilot

- Organizations: high reliability, innovation, and an open corporate culture 14
- Teams: smarter collaboration through emotional intelligence 16
- Leaders: wrestling with change 17
- The autopilot keeps taking over 22
- Leadership in unknown territory 25

Chapter 2. Mindfulness: Doing and Being

- Mindfulness: what it is 35
- Mentally switching attention 40
- Attentiveness: recognize every experience 49
- Getting to it mindfully: insight and connection 55

Chapter 3. Building Your Core: Resilience and an Open Mind

- Resilience: learning the game of switching 60
- The richness of seven senses 63
- Insight into the autopilot 66
- Signals from the body 68
- Handling stress: stretching without striving 73
- The art of pausing 79
- The limits of your availability 81
- Sensing well instead of feeling good 82

The difference between your thoughts and yourself:
 accepting and staying present 83
The mindful manager: resilience and an open mind 91
Appendix: the learning process of mindfulness 95

Chapter 4. Mindfully Managing Teams

Successful teams and the green zone of mindfulness 101
Resilience in your team 105
Using emotional intelligence 110
A culture of dialogue 119
Compassionate performance 133
Responsibility and stewardship 142

Chapter 5. Charting a Course with Full Attention

Mindfulness in the organization 148
Focusing the attention of organizations 152
The first field: eye for routine-breaking moments 156
The second field: using differences 159
The third field: recognizing patterns in a broader whole 167
The fourth field: innovation 174
Embedding mindfulness in the organization 183

Epilogue: Mastering Mindful Leadership

Mastery of the conscious response 189
Mindful leadership: character and connectedness 191

Acknowledgements 194

About the Author 197

List of exercises 199

Index 201

Introduction

“It’s just paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.”¹

Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of mindfulness training.

My body felt heavy and incapable of much action. And that at the very moment, in the summer of 2005, when I was about to embark on a new, exciting adventure: setting up my own company, Createzconnect. I had spent the past ten years working day and night as campaign and strategy manager for the Dutch Consumers’ Association; but instead of feeling a rush of fresh, new energy, I just lay there on the sofa, debilitated, hardly able to pick up the books I had so looked forward to reading.

Apparently I was completely exhausted – both physically and mentally. And that rather surprised me: I’m a regular jogger and I’m in fairly good condition. What’s more, I had participated in a number of management development programs and built up a fairly good insight into myself. But without seeing it coming, I had fallen into one of the most pervasive traps of leadership: sacrificing yourself out of a feeling of responsibility and accepting all the exhaustion that came with it.

I put it down to the constant changes in the organization. To new demands for information from our clients. The emergence

1 Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2003): 145.

of new technology, having to work faster and more flexibly. They were challenging and exciting times, and I wanted to take full responsibility for things together with my team.

Fortunately, I quickly recuperated and got back into the swing of things. The question of how to prevent this surfaced again just over a year later when I began mindfulness training. I experienced how attention exercises were an important means of making timely adjustments to your stress housekeeping. But more than that, they sharpened my awareness of everything that was happening around me and therefore inside me.

I had the feeling that I had come across something that, despite all the leadership training programs I had followed, I had missed in my management role: a sensitive antenna for everything happening around me and how I was coping with it myself. I regularly reacted from what I thought something should be rather than from a clear experience of what was actually happening. And that meant that as a manager I had been functioning less effectively than I could have.

At the end of the training, I asked myself whether I could employ mindfulness in my work as interim manager and management consultant. And I found that I could. It allows you to lead intensive change processes with much more attention to what is really happening with people in the organization and to be more open to the demands made by your surroundings. With greater awareness and resilience. It is also something I recognize in people I have assisted as a consultant and who have followed a mindfulness training program.

Permanently subject to change

The constant change in the organization that I experienced as a manager at the Dutch Consumers' Association, is now found in all organizations. Change has become the status quo. It seems as if, in the day-to-day work of many organizations, not a single process can be carried out any longer according to strict rules; and policy changes are the order of the day. Innovation has become a must – whether to address the competitive struggle in the market or to adapt to new technologies. The result is that organi-

zational structures are constantly changing. One month a team can be part of department X and the next it reports to department Y or has been integrated into a completely different structure. Making labor more flexible, supported by the possibilities of web-based work in the cloud, is the new way of organizing work, independent of time and place.

As all these changes take place, managers and teams are expected to deliver excellent operational performances with a high level of reliability. Technology and people must work perfectly together and failure is not tolerated, for it has enormous consequences. Just think of a disruption on the railroads or at a cell phone provider. Or even worse, in a surgical team at a hospital.

Teams must work more intensively and more intelligently together on their performance. Working on your own, individually at your own desk, is something that happens much less frequently; you are part of a team in a larger chain. Mutual relationships shift from hierarchical to horizontal and that means that, as manager, you share the managing and monitoring tasks with your team members. Collaborating and managing make a much greater demand on everybody's emotional intelligence to get things done.

Creativity and the ability to innovate must increase in response to rapid economic and social change. This is dictated by competition, by changes in policy instigated by political decisions or the media. An increasing number of products and services demand a smarter, more attractive and qualitatively better design if they are to satisfy the needs of the customer. In addition, organizations are expected to be fully aware of their relationship with the environment, to take into account issues regarding climate, water, biodiversity, raw materials and social diversity and equality in everything you do. Leadership must be constantly aware of what the organization is doing and which direction should be taken, ultimately under penalty of losing the *license to operate*.

In light of this need for permanent change, it is hardly surprising that pressure of work and stress remain high. 40% of Dutch em-

employees and companies see work pressure as a major risk. Emotional strain, particularly in care and social services, is an additional factor. It leads to serious problems with health: in 2010, 43% of sickness absence days in the Netherlands were related to workload, work stress and physically demanding work.² Mental overload is also increasing. Although people generally feel healthy, they also admit that mentally their work is frequently extremely demanding. At the end of the day, they are worn out. Or, when they think of work, they simply can't face the start of a new day. The costs of absenteeism are high: employers could save up to one billion Euros a year.³

That organizations are permanently subject to change means that people in organizations must change with them. But that change process is not all that easy and that is the major challenge for leadership. To keep an eye on the surroundings and at the same time change.

Leadership: beyond the autopilot

Agreeable work with less stress, achieving higher reliability of operational processes, much more intensive teamwork with horizontal responsibilities, and a greater call for creativity and innovation. We also have high expectations of managers, for they can guide their teams and organizations in the proper direction, or they can slow them down in the delivery of performances and setting out innovative courses. Many actions are, therefore, undertaken to boost team performances, managers work on their competencies or change programs are implemented.

And yet, in our daily work, we see that it is far from easy to provide leadership for those changes. Again and again we see organizations and their leaders fall into the same old traps. Apparently, as manager, you are not sufficiently aware of the emotional reality of your team, and the result is a spate of trouble and inadequate performances. Or the top management of an organization does not succeed in keeping an open mind as it tries to focus on customers

2 TNO, *Arbobalans 2011* (2012), 19.

3 *Ibid.* 51-52.

and the social environment, resulting in the competition grabbing the lion's share of the market or government policy proving completely redundant.

At the heart of this is what I call the autopilot of routine, which encourages you to trust in what you already know rather than seeing the signals of the change that are on the horizon. Managers are so busy being busy that they forget to take time out for reflection. And often forget that when change happens they, as manager or leader, have to change along with everybody else.

Now, managers and leaders of organizations can handle a lot; they are very good at persevering. That's why they were chosen. But enduring stress and persevering under pressure is something other than coping with it smartly and effectively. And you need to free yourself more from your autopilot. You must be able to deal consciously and attentively with your role, know what you're doing, strengthen your physical and mental resilience, and be able to concentrate not only your attention but also the attention of your team or organization on the right things. And for that you need mindfulness. Mindfulness as the basis for leadership that shifts the attention towards unknown territory, without losing sight of the here and now. For in that unknown territory lie the solutions with which organizations can create value for their customers and their social environment.

Mindful leadership ensures that teams and organizations have a broad awareness of what they are doing. And for that they must learn to switch between action and reflection. Mindfulness enables that by strengthening physical and mental resilience, increasing the presence of mind to see what is really happening and taking responsibility for it. And this makes it possible for them to investigate what is necessary with an open mind and discover while innovating what works best.

What you train when you train mindfulness

Mindfulness enables you to escape your autopilot and consciously switch between action and reflection. In essence, mindfulness helps you learn how you can mentally switch your focus. You develop a greater awareness of your mind and, as a manager

you can use this to direct your team or organization in a far better way.

In 2010, the British Mental Health Foundation published a review of scientific research into the effects of exercising mindfulness. Participants in such training at work reported 31% fewer medical symptoms, 17% reduction in “daily problems” and 31% fewer cases of a psychological nature. Three months later, the improvements were even more pronounced. Compared to the control group, participants in mindfulness training saw an increase in their ability to concentrate and had greater effectiveness of the immune system, for example against flu.⁴ And so there is every reason to give mindfulness a place in the development of a culture in which work pressure, stress, and mental strain can be coped with more effectively.

Other research shows that exercising mindfulness leads to a greater processing capacity in the brain and therefore to higher quality decision-making. It sharpens your perception of matters that deviate from what you expect and helps you see that something must be done; not put things off, but signal and intervene. That is true in hospitals and on the deck of an aircraft carrier or for a large banking system, but equally for customer services at an internet provider, where you must be highly skilled in the interaction between technology and people in order to perform excellently.

Mindfulness also offers teams and their leaders the chance to deal more intelligently with each other, because it increases their emotional intelligence and their ability to work together in a smart and relaxed way. It is with good reason that Google has developed a program for emotional intelligence for its employees based on mindfulness, *Search Inside Yourself*. An extensive program of meditation and yoga offers Google employees the room to excel not only in software technology but also in social skills. With enormous success!⁵

Mindfulness offers employees and leaders in organizations great-

4 Mental Health Foundation, *Be Mindful Report 2010* (2010). 30.

5 Chade-Meng Tan, *Search inside Yourself* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

er possibilities for breaking free of a rigid and closed mindset and creating an open, innovative mindset. Mindfulness breaks through existing patterns and gives people and organizations the possibility of responding consciously to the challenges from the environment. It creates an “open mind” for the future.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of mindfulness training in its current form, describes mindfulness as “*paying attention in a special way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.*”⁶ What is most striking in this description is its simplicity and directness. It is about an action done on purpose. Paying attention and observing what is happening to you, nothing more.

Being mindful actually means that you *don't* do certain things: you don't allow yourself to be swept along in mental diversions and express no judgment about what happens to you. Each thought, sensation, or each feeling that arises in your field of attention is recognized and accepted as it is.

This being observant, the state of mindfulness, also allows you to observe your feelings or thoughts as events in the mind, without strongly associating yourself with them and without reacting in a familiar automatic pattern. This calm way of reacting gives rise to a moment of pause between observation and response. And so mindfulness makes it possible for you to provide a more thoughtful answer to a situation instead of a reflex.⁷ In short, you learn to concentrate on switching between action and reflection, between doing and being.

The advantages of this can be felt both on a personal level and on the level of team and organization. As examples, I'd like to give a number of reactions from people who attended our mindfulness training for managers:

“I notice that I am developing a different energy management system. Less stressed.”

“I see that I react more consciously.”

6 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Waar je ook gaat, daar ben je* (Utrecht: Servire, 2006). 24.

7 S. Bishop et al., “Mindfulness: a proposed operational definition,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 11, no. 3 (2004): 232.

- “I make use of my emotions rather than be controlled by them.”*
- “Now that I react more calmly, the people in my team do the same.”*
- “We observe much quicker what is taking place emotionally in our team and do something with it.”*
- “We are better able to distinguish between primary and secondary issues and concentrate better on them.”*
- “We simply take the time and our creativity increases.”*

Many of the exercises in this book are meditation or yoga exercises and originally come from the East. That immediately raises the question of whether you have to be a Buddhist. The answer is simple: no! Mindfulness makes you clearer and opener in your mind, but rest assured:

- It doesn't empty your mind
- It doesn't make you emotionless
- It doesn't make you withdraw from life
- You won't be striving for enlightenment
- You will still feel pain and discomfort
- You won't be converted to a (new) religion.

This book

The book is about mindful leadership. How you can develop it and how you can use it: for yourself, in teams and in organizations.

In chapter *one* I shall describe the autopilot of leadership, teams and organizations. This is a major pitfall that confronts leaders and it can be difficult to escape from it because we make ourselves immune to change. I will show how, using mindful leadership, which I shall describe in more detail, you really can escape from that autopilot.

Chapter *two* shows in detail what our ability for mindfulness actually is. What it means to regulate your attention and what makes it so interesting to train it and use it. What is the difference between the doing mode and the being mode, and what do rigid and open mindsets look like?

Chapter *three* teaches you the basic skills of mindfulness. There is a description of the basic exercises and you will see how a mindful learning process takes place. On a personal level, it means that you, as manager, learn how to master the game of switching between doing and being. Developing mindfulness makes it possible to adjust how you proportion your attention to what the situation demands: focused in the doing mode and relaxed in the being mode.

In a team on autopilot, attention is quickly narrowed and that leads to a restrictive rather than an open reaction. Objectives become hard targets in a scoring culture; the emotional reality is repressed and not used. Mindful managing of teams is done by creating in your team what I call a *green zone of mindfulness*, which leads to a more harmonious collaboration and better performance. In chapter *four*, I will show you how to organize such a green zone and thus perform with compassion. You shouldn't think that mindfulness is soft or that it doesn't lead to better performance. Quite the opposite: mindful teamwork has a high aspiration level.

With the green zone, you also lay the foundation for directing the organization's attention. I deal with that in chapter *five*. Our focus will not only be on operational excellence but also on issues that demand innovation. How do you deal with developments among your customers and in the social environment which force your organization to change course? Which instruments can you use for this?

In the *closing chapter*, I look at the significance of mastership in mindful leadership.

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1

The autopilot

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”¹

John Lennon – Beautiful Boy

A lot of managers and leaders are so tied up in enhancing their own performance and that of their teams and organizations that they completely overlook how things are getting out of hand. Suddenly a competitor seizes a large share of the market. Or a business or government body is, much to its surprise, confronted with considerable criticism about its production methods, business ethics or the way it implements policy. Stress and workload in your team remain high and targets are not met – yet again. And, on top of it all, you feel that you are perilously close to a burn-out.

The disappointment is often tangible, for so much has already been invested in improvement processes, culture change, and innovation. And that wasn’t a bad idea, for generally managers have a good picture of the challenges facing the organization: performing more effectively and with greater reliability, more intensive teamwork, and adapting to new customer demands and policy needs through innovation.

Despite all good intentions, many organizations apparently have considerable difficulty keeping operational processes in order and

1 Taken from the song Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy) from *Double Fantasy* (1980), the last album John Lennon released before his death.

deploying and maintaining change processes. Again and again, the autopilot of routine takes over and new blind spots arise. Leaders seem unable to focus their own attention and that of their teams and organizations, to see what is really the matter and act accordingly.

In this chapter, I shall sketch – on three levels: organizations, teams, and leaders – how the autopilot works and why it is so persistent. I will show that the core of this mechanism is nothing other than the result of the very human characteristic of trusting in routine. This also occurs, logically enough, when people work together within an organization. And the reason we keep the autopilot alive, even if we see it occasionally, is because we make ourselves immune to change, have a deep internal fear of it. Yet that does not mean you can't change anything – quite the contrary. Mindful leadership, founded on a strong basis of resilience, strengthens our ability to face up to things, including our fear of change, to take responsibility for it, to investigate it and, while innovating, find new ways from a shared perspective. In this way, you can manage both yourself and your teams and organization more effectively.

Organizations: high reliability, innovation, and an open corporate culture

A high level of reliability in processes is expected of many organizations. The examples of this demand for operational excellence are very diverse. They can be surgical teams at hospitals, fire-fighting teams and ambulances, refineries, the back-office of a major bank, or the network of a telecom provider; but they can also be the customer relations department of an insurance company, or city council, or the administrator of the railroad infrastructure. There are two aspects to this high reliability. First, that it is almost always on the cusp of technology and human actions that have to be accurately attuned to each other. Second, and that makes it even more compelling, is that in a number of cases, total reliability is essential. If that is absent, the results can easily be disastrous.²

2 Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe, *Managing the Unexpected* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2010). ix.

The railroads can no longer transport thousands of passengers, surgery at a hospital goes wrong with serious consequences for the patient, payment transactions seize up with damaging results for the economy.

There are companies and organizations that realize that reliability is their *core business* and know how to act accordingly. What is striking is that they think and act differently, a different culture prevails. One that is characterized by a far greater attentiveness. A sharp perception of matters that deviate from what you expect and the courage to recognize that something must be done. See clearly and not put things off, but signal and intervene. That applies in hospitals and on the deck of an aircraft carrier or for a large banking system, but equally for the customer services department at an internet service provider. You must be highly skilled in the interaction between technology and people to be a modern highly productive organization.

Today, enormous demands are made on our creativity and on the ability of organizations to innovate. Virtually every organization feels the pressure of competition in the market or from policy changes by public authorities. Hospitals face the need to change, as costs rise and patients demand better care. In our societies, innovation is high on the list of priorities because countries must respond to the international call for sustainable renewal. Anybody who looks around will see that many innovation challenges are not restricted to the private sector but affect the public sector as well: climate, water, biodiversity, social inequality, and diversity. And then not only on a national or European level, but on a global level.

Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO – one of the largest design companies in the world – suggests that creativity and innovation require a corporate culture where experimenting, taking risks, and making use of all your creative and human abilities is encouraged. An organizational culture where asking forgiveness in retrospect is valued more than requesting permission in advance. But equally vital is that those cultures are reflective and cooperative. With highly diverse, interdisciplinary teams. Their members must have professional depth and the ability to cooperate across the bounda-

ries of disciplines. Every team member must be able to work from a joint ownership of the ideas and take responsibility for that attitude.³

Teams: smarter collaboration through emotional intelligence

Teamwork too is subject to increasingly higher demands. Organizations are restructuring to be better able to create value for customers and stakeholders, to gain or retain market positions, to enter into alliances, or to deal with diversity in society. It means that collaboration increasingly takes place across borders, across teams and departments, but also across companies, public authorities, and other organizations in all sorts of hybrid forms such as alliances or temporary projects. The latest form of this is cloud-based working, in which technological possibilities are combined with the emergence of collaborating in networks.

In addition to expanding across borders, a change in the character of the responsibility for results is visible. It is no longer about individual responsibility for just a part of the activities, a section of the work, but rather about mutual support and shared responsibility for the performance as a whole.

The classic role of the leader as the one who sets the norms, gives direction, and offers security is changing. People in teams play more roles than the official job description would suggest: tasks and roles are increasingly interchangeable. It is no longer the managers who monitor and supervise, but the whole group or team that directs the work and monitors progress.⁴

Both the expansion of collaboration and the shift towards shared responsibility for the results demand smarter forms of collaboration and the use of each other's strengths and competencies. To achieve this, a far stronger appeal is made on the use of emotional intelligence: understanding the emotions of others and being able to deal with them accordingly. Managers must be aware of

3 Tim Brown, *Change by Design* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009). 27-28.

4 Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, *Het geheim van teams. Een organisatie van wereldklasse creëren* (Schiedam: Scriptum, 1997). 206.

emotions and build a culture of dialogue and effective collaboration.

Leaders: wrestling with change

Organizations invest heavily in performance enhancing programs, culture change, and innovation in order to respond or adjust to the challenges I mentioned earlier. That does not make the manager's task any easier. What problems loom ahead? I will describe them below and also show how exercising mindfulness can help avoid them.

Pitfall 1: Constantly sacrificing yourself

Persistence and perseverance are criteria in the selection of managers, but the pressure of the organization and the willpower and perseverance of the manager himself can be so great that he easily finds himself in a negative spiral of working too much and too hard and taking too little rest. You accept the pain and the inconvenience of the effort required to lead and go on and on.⁵ You suppress warning signals: "They simply can't do without me." Or: "If I don't do it, who will?" You keep on sacrificing yourself and this is ultimately at the expense of your own health or the personal relationships with your partner and friends.

If you could detect the danger of stress earlier, you would do yourself a big service. I have noticed that regularly exercising mindfulness sharpens my perception and enables me to react to stress signals sooner and to take appropriate action. Mindfulness also had a much wider effect on my attitude to work: I could pay attention and focus better in my conversations with other people, both at the office and at home. Since then, I have noticed that the quality of my work and the pleasure I have in it has increased and that my attention, when put under pressure, can be more easily redirected. It thus proved possible to escape from the cage of stress and sacrifice, but to do that I had to give up my conviction that I

5 Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Resonant Leadership* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Press, 2005). 6.

was indispensable. I also had to curb my excessive self-confidence that I could handle anything. Surprisingly enough, when I did this, my resilience turned out to be greater than I had imagined.

Pitfall 2: Focused only on substance

As manager, it's not enough to keep up your resilience. As a matter of fact, that's actually a basic condition, albeit a very important one. Management is, first and foremost, giving day-to-day leadership to teams and developing an effective and productive culture of working in the organization. The challenges are countless. How do you ensure that a team with a wide diversity of characters continues to function well? How do you deal with the many daily decisions and delegating responsibilities? How do you create a culture in which people are players and not victims and in which they can get the best out of themselves?⁶ As leader, you are like the spider in the web, keeping all the threads of human relationships in harmony.

Take the example of Karel, a young, successful policy officer at an international development NGO. He was smart and pro-active. His contacts with partners in Latin America went well, because he gave well-founded substantive advice on requests and evaluations of projects, and he didn't mind at all reworking parts of the texts himself at night. When the position of team manager for Latin America became vacant, it was logical that Karel was given the job.

The things Karel did well in the past were repeated here: quick contact with his employees and an emphasis on substance. There was a lot to do, because the position had been vacant for some time. A backlog in project assessments and evaluations had to be cleared away. And at the same time, a change in direction at the ministry of development aid meant that a policy change had to be implemented. The number of partners in Latin America had to be considerably reduced, even cut back to zero in three countries. Colleagues who tried to share their stories and emotions about the consequences of these changes with Karel found his door closed to

6 Fred Kofman, *Bewust in zaken* (Haarlem: Altamira-Becht, 2008). From 50.

them. The content of the case was completely in order and that was all that mattered to him.

Until a very dissatisfied and shocked letter from the Latin American partners landed on the director's desk *and*—almost at the same time—the team lodged a complaint with the head of HR about Karel's leadership because he showed not the least bit of interest in his people.

When both matters were discussed in a meeting between Karel and the director, something snapped: "This can't be true! I've put all my energy into it." Apparently the need to get content and practical issues right had been Karel's priority over giving any attention to emotional reality. His team felt completely left out in the cold, and so did the partners with whom they worked.

Fortunately, Karel proved very resilient. He realized that he had continued working as team manager in the same way he had done previously as policy officer. Together with his director, he visited the Latin American partners to discuss the new policy with them and the changes this would entail. In his team, he had personal meetings with his employees, and these cleared the air.

But he also realized he would have to keep on training himself in being attentive to the emotional reality and the nature of the culture in his team. And he did just that. He nurtured an attitude of attention and thus learned how to pick up on signals much earlier. He learned to recognize emotions and give them space, although he had to let go of his idea that emotions were, above all, obstructive. And he took time for much more personal contact with his team. It prevented problems from escalating. He discovered to his amazement that by paying friendly attention, there was a much better balance and greater energy in his team.

What Karel experienced with his team also works in maintaining the relationships that an organization has with the outside world. Depending on the sort of organization, this can involve a wide variety of people, groups, and stakeholders. We can even extend it from emotions to being attentive to physical and mental signals in general. I have already written about the challenge that certain teams face, such as surgical or fire-fighting teams, which must operate faultlessly and reliably under high pressure. It is then crucial

to use all your senses to observe every possible signal. A light physical sensation in a leg or arm, a strange feeling or an intuition can set you on the track towards something that could prove dangerous or which must be corrected. In other words, in every case it is essential not only to watch substance, but also to remain connected with the emotional reality.

For that you must have the courage to acknowledge things and name them. And to take steps to do things differently. Mindfulness also trains that courage and enables teams and their leaders to deal more intelligently with each other, because it increases their emotional intelligence and their ability to work together in a smart and relaxed way.

Pitfall 3: Sticking to certainties

Good leadership in a situation of intentional change demands that leaders be capable of looking outside and inside with an open mind, that they dare to ask questions beyond the boundaries of their own limitations. And they must be capable of articulating new values and concepts and of involving their team or company in solving its dilemmas of strategy and organizational culture.

Edgar Schein provides a detailed description of a change project at Ciba-Geigy in the 1980s (the company has since merged with Sandoz to form Novartis) in which these roles were carried out with drive and rewarded with success.⁷ Ciba-Geigy had a strong science-gearred culture with a clear hierarchy. A number of divisions were under-performing but that problem was casually brushed aside because the company as a whole was in the black. The problem, however, emerged at a large leadership conference during a comparison of the figures by division. Considerable concern and uncertainty were the result.

The leadership team (around fifty people) at Ciba-Geigy succeeded in implementing a renewal of the organization. The disquiet that arose when it emerged that the company wasn't doing as well as was thought, was addressed through a renewal program

7 Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2010). 339-62.

that included horizontal communications and clearly managed task groups. Restrictive hierarchy and rigid thought structures were abandoned. That the CEO of the company, Sam Koechlin, was the first to be able to make the switch proved the crux of the change process. He could apply the attention and the perception to see what was happening and was able to accept that his image of reality was inaccurate. At the same time, the strength of the program was that a number of cultural certainties the organization had, such as well-founded knowledge and clear collaboration, were carried over to the new way of working. In this way, the good was retained and the impediments of the old working method were removed.

Another example. For a drinks manufacturer such as Coca-Cola, use of water is essential and for years they have concentrated on using water as efficiently as possible at each bottling plant. But gradually, they became aware that there was a broader responsibility. Coca-Cola would, whether they liked it or not, be held responsible for the sustainable development of the water systems. Coca-Cola chose to enter into an alliance with the World Wildlife Fund. WWF helped Coca-Cola to ascertain where the water used in the company actually originated, far beyond the local authority. And gradually the focus switched from concentrating on water efficiency to concentrating on the “water footprint” of the company, in which water used for other ingredients, such as the cultivation of cane sugar, was included.⁸ Both Coca-Cola and WWF had to discard old prejudices and step over their boundaries. That was something in the mindset of the employees of both companies, and what helped was that they discovered that behind an old opponent, there was often an interesting human being. But it also emerged that the definition of each organization’s own business – “efficiently producing soft drinks” or “saving nature” – proved a lot broader than it was initially thought.

8 Peter Senge et al., *The Necessary Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 2008). 77-95.