Mindful leadership and reflective practice in higher education

A/Prof Marcus O’Donnell
Pro Vice-Chancellor Teaching & Learning
• What is mindfulness?
• Why is it relevant in Higher Education?
• What’s it got to do with leadership?
• What can I do?
• What is mindfulness?
The age of mindfulness

- One minute mindfulness
- Mindfulness: an eight week course for finding peace in a frantic world
- The mindful dog owner
- Mindful knitting
- Mindful horsemanship: daily inspirations for better communications with your horse
- Everyday blessings: the inner work of mindful parenting
- Eating the moment: 141 mindful practices to overcoming overeating one meal at a time
- The mindful couple: how acceptance and mindfulness can lead you to the love you want
- The mindful leader: awakening your natural management skills through mindfulness meditation
“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally. It’s about knowing what is on your mind.”

John Kabit-Zin
“Mindfulness helps us get better at seeing the difference between what’s happening and the stories we tell ourselves about what’s happening, stories that get in the way of direct experience. Often such stories treat a fleeting state of mind as if it were our entire and permanent self.”

Sharon Salzburg
Attention
• Focused concentration
• Open Awareness

Insight
• Exploration of awareness

Intention
• Heart and mind
• Breath meditation
• Walking meditation
• Body scan
• Compassion practices
• Body practices – yoga, tai chi
• Journaling
• Art practices
• Ritual
• Prayer
Mindfulness effects

• Health & medical: stress-reduction and pain tolerance programs (Kabat-Zinn 1982; Grant 2014)
• Psychological interventions and therapy (Grossman & Van Dam 2011)
• Business and leadership programs (Purser & Millio 2015)
• Big corporations such as Google, Facebook, Target and Ford (Wilson 2014).
• Schools & educational practices (Barbezat & Bush 2013)
Mindfulness effects

They point to four areas where they can now show convincing links between meditative practice and changes in brain systems or neural pathways:

- Reactions to stress, trauma and disturbing events
- Development of compassion and empathy
- Deepening of focus and attention
- Changes in our sense of self
What’s this got to do with higher education?
Disruption and change within the sector

• Australian Qualifications Framework Review
• National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy
• Performance-Based Funding for the Commonwealth Grant Scheme
• Review into University Freedom of Speech
• Review of the Higher Education Provider Category Standards
• Tackling contract cheating – Draft Legislation
Disruption and change within the sector
Disruption and change within academic workforce

- Casualisation
- Short-term contracts
- Divisional restructures
- Emergence of third space professionals
- Rebalancing academic and professional roles
- Audit culture
The age of supercomplexity

A complex world is one in which we are assailed by more facts, data, evidence, tasks and arguments than we can easily handle within the frameworks in which we have our being. By contrast, a supercomplex world is one in which the very frameworks by which we orient ourselves to the world are themselves contested. Supercomplexity denotes a fragile world but it is a fragility brought on not merely by social and technological change; it is a fragility in the way that we understand the world, in the way in which we understand ourselves and in the ways in which we feel secure about acting in the world. (Barnett 2000b: 257)
The idea of the university

- The adaptive university
- The borderless university
- The bureaucratic university
- The civic university
- The digital university
- The distributed university

- The global university
- The liquid university
- The managed university
- The performative university
- The schizophrenic university
- The therapeutic university
The triple challenge

This “constellation of fragility” is marked according to Barnett by

• uncertainty,
• unpredictability,
• challengeability and contestability

(Barnett 2000a: 63).

It presents a “triple set of challenges”

• challenges in the domain of understanding and knowledge,
• in the domain of action and professional work and
• challenges to self-identity and being-in-the-world.

(Barnett 2000b: 257)
• Mindful leadership for supercomplexity
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<th>Transformational Leadership</th>
<th>Authentic Leadership</th>
<th>Servant Leadership</th>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
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<td>idealized influence</td>
<td>internalised moral perspective</td>
<td>listening</td>
<td>self-awareness,</td>
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<td>inspirational motivation</td>
<td>self-awareness</td>
<td>awareness</td>
<td>self-management,</td>
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<td>intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>balanced processing</td>
<td>empathy</td>
<td>social awareness</td>
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<td>individualized consideration</td>
<td>relational transparency</td>
<td>commitment to the growth of others</td>
<td>social/relationship management</td>
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<td>positive psychological capital</td>
<td>persuasion</td>
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“These results indicate a strong connection between increased self-care practices during times of ambiguity and a sense of presence and self-awareness, advising leaders to select personal practices to develop mindfulness and to take care of their own well-being during change. Mindfulness helps change leaders embrace ambiguity, and therefore be more effective at leading transformational organizational change.”

Julie Chesley & Avonlie Wylson (2016) Ambiguity: the emerging impact of mindfulness for change leaders

Megan Reitz, Michael Chaskalson, Sharon Olivier and Lee Waller, The Mindful Leader
We identify a behavioral mechanism – **mindfulness in communication** – which explains the interpersonal effect of leaders’ mindfulness. The high agreement of multiple followers in their ratings of the leaders’ mindfulness in communication that we found in our data...suggests that mindfulness fosters a specific communication style, which is relatively stable across situations and followers.

Emerging connections: feedback

Paying attention (i.e. to fixed mindset triggers) and working to identify, then accept one’s thoughts and feelings are benefits of mindfulness practice that might enhance a growth mindset. Awareness of fixed mindset triggers can increase an individual’s ability to openly receive, accept and use critical feedback.

Danette V. Day, Jess L. Gregory, 2017, Mindfulness as a Prerequisite to Effective Leadership; Exploring the Constructs that Foster Productive Use of Feedback for Professional Learning
Mindful Practice

Self-care
- Meditation
- Pause Practices
- Gratitude
- Self-compassion

Curiosity
- Pause Practices
- Conscious reframing

Relational
- Deep Listening
- Pause Practices
- Compassion
Leading mindfully

Pause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You could meditate:</th>
<th>And you could be mindful:</th>
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<td>when waiting</td>
<td>whilst walking</td>
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<td>whilst commuting</td>
<td>whilst talking</td>
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<td>at your desk</td>
<td>when eating</td>
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<td>at the gym</td>
<td>when you’re irritated or upset</td>
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<td>when you’re put on hold</td>
<td>preparing a meal</td>
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<td>during ads on TV</td>
<td>listening to music</td>
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<tr>
<td>during meetings</td>
<td>playing sport</td>
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Melbourne Meditation Centre

Choose everyday triggers and use structured pauses to manage transitions
Let go of the need to add value. Many people, especially high achievers, have an overwhelming need to provide value to the people around them.

Let go of the need to win every argument. “Others don’t need to lose for me to win.” If you’re having a conversation and someone makes a statement that you disagree with, try releasing the urge to correct them.

Tell me more about that. Every now and then, I’ll challenge myself to stay quiet and pour all of my energy into listening to someone else. My favorite strategy is to ask someone to, “Tell me more about that.”

James Clear

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few.” - Shunryo Suzuki
The first step is to turn positive events into positive experiences. All kinds of good things happen in our daily life that we hardly notice at all, and if we do, we don’t feel it.

Second, really savor it. In other words, the way to remember something is to make it intense, felt in the body, and lasting. So rather than noticing it and feeling good for a couple of seconds, stay with it. Relish it, enjoy it, for 10, 20, or 30 seconds, so it really starts developing neural structure.

The third step is to sense and intend that this positive experience is sinking into you and becoming a part of you. In other words, it’s becoming woven into the fabric of your brain and yourself.

“The brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positives ones.” – Rick Hansen
“Mindfulness is not a ‘silver bullet’ solution as many books and courses would have one believe. Seen in context, as a gradual increase in awareness of these aspects in ones’ life, it is however essential and a great help in interacting with collaborators, managing a team, decision making and putting things in perspective.”

Megan Reitz, Michael Chaskalson, Sharon Olivier and Lee Waller, The Mindful Leader