

A Mindful Post-COVID Future



Applying the New Science of Mindfulness, Empathy and Compassion



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Includes comments from the MFN Advisory Group.



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1. PROJECT SUMMARY

The Mindful Futures Network (MFN) was established on the basis that the skills and motivations of mindfulness, empathy and compassion at individual and societal levels can create new options for navigating complex and uncertain futures.

This MFN project was developed in response to the compounding social, economic, and health challenges the coronavirus is generating.

The project methodology comprised: developing and sending two questions to the MFN Network and from those responses two follow-up webinar discussions were arranged. In drawing on those responses, and other material from previous MFN forums and related research – this report provides tangible examples of the positive impacts of the applied science of mindfulness, empathy and compassion.

While sceptics may dismiss the evidence-base of compassion and empathy as sentimental or irrational, scientists are now studying the biological basis of compassion – and that research is uncovering its evolutionary purposes. These inquiries find that when we feel compassion and empathic concern for ourselves and others, our heart rate slows down, we release oxytocin, and the regions of the brain linked to caregiving and feelings of peacefulness, light up - which results in us wanting to approach and care for other people¹.

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http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_compassionate_instinct

The 60 ‘real world’ examples referenced in this report highlight that the transformations required to navigate a safer, and more mindful Post- COVID world will be enhanced if we consciously resource individuals and societal organisations to better:

- Learn and incorporate the skill of mindfulness in dealing with stress and cognitive bias;
- Practice the competence of empathy in more genuinely relating to the lived experience of others; and
- Use the motivation of compassion in ‘seeing’ and healing our common suffering.

2. PROJECT CONTEXT

The coronavirus is providing us with a unique set of circumstances within which to review the interplay between individuals, organisations, and governments in improving the local, national and global societies we all inhabit.

The World Economic Forum has recently launched ‘The Great Reset’ which emphasises the importance of ‘smart global cooperation’ in positioning us to address the challenges of the next 50 years. The WEF notes that, in part this will require ‘...a review of how traditional stakeholders in a global society can ensure that the struggles and challenges of the most vulnerable

groups are represented and supported'².

In addition, the Australian Reserve Bank Governor Philip Lowe has stated that the economic recovery '...is not going to be an immediate snap back to where we were pre-crisis. Instead, it's going to be a recovery that is going to stretch through this year, next year and beyond'.

Therefore what we are now witnessing across the world, will require more than incremental economic, social and strategic responses. In some areas it will require fundamental changes to our societal structures. Yet how prepared are we, to consciously make those changes?

Humankind is now better informed than ever about how the mind works; how our emotion regulation systems are impacted and impact us; how our cognitive biases interpret social and statistical information; why we prefer simple answers to complex questions; and why consistently we create 'in and out' groups.

Yet we continue to work within these evolutionary constraints at a time when we are dealing with problems that require multifaceted and insightful solutions. While Businesses and Government Reviews into these economic and health shocks will continue to be important policy responses – the work of the Mindful Futures Network demonstrates that we also need to recognise the limitations that our cognitive and emotional abilities place on us when

dealing with such complex and multifaceted issues.

Neuroscience tells us that changing our brain default responses will not happen automatically - and our default system is one of threat-based survival protection – and in that system we 'automatically react' and not 'consciously respond'.

In order to shift that default system, we need the resources and commitment to grow our emotional and social intelligence, in the same way we grow our intellectual and physical muscles i.e. through ongoing informed, resourced, and committed training.

Prof Richard Davidson, the Founder and Director of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison says 'I envision a day when mental exercise will be as much a part of our daily lives as physical exercise and personal hygiene.'



Studies in child development demonstrate that this shift will not be an easy task - babies at only three months old have been shown to favour the faces of their family's race and ethnicity. The difference now is that we have access to verified data about how we can change those inherent biases, in

² www.wef.org

ways that we haven't had access to, or been resourced to, in the past.

One of this project's assumptions is that a shift in our behavioural capacity will require significant cognitive change - the type that has been shown to bring about structural changes in the adult brain for improved social and emotional intelligence – changes that are supported by cognitive and emotion regulation training.

Prof Paul Gilbert, the originator of Compassion Focused Therapy, and a key inspiration for the work of the Mindful Futures Network, outlines that the research base of compassion and empathy is vital because, '...the motivation of compassion pushes us to understand how we have structured the world, and to ask how we can structure it better, not because we may suffer, but because others are suffering'.

When we can recognise this deep level of interdependence, it seems we are better placed to participate in our common humanity, whether that occurs within our local streets and suburbs, or across cities and regions, or across countries. Indeed in *Australia Reimagined: Towards a more compassionate less anxious society*, Hugh MacKay states that '...it's easy to be kind towards those we like, not so easy towards those we don't like - and yet how we respond to those we don't like is the ultimate test of our commitment

to the civilising discipline of compassion'.

As our political leaders have stated many times, 'we are all in this together', yet as more cases are reported and more borders are closed, it seems that we will be called on to develop the 'civilising discipline of compassion' in ways we haven't had to for many decades. If we are to take up the findings of this new knowledge then a better understanding of how we, as humans operate is needed. In a MFN webinar discussion Professor of Social Ecology, Stuart Hill outlined this challenge succinctly when he observed that 'We are all the primary source for meaningful change'.

3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This report draws on input from a number of sources to scope out the huge challenge in front us if we are to apply these skills and motivations, and those sources included:

- 1) Previous work of the MFN over four years, including examination of the literature, our links to global networks, research projects, presentations from MFN webinars, and our annual conferences;
- 2) Responses to the two project questions³ and;
- 3) Webinar dialog based upon the discussion points that were distributed prior to the webinar. (Appendix2)

³ How can the evidence base, and practice of mindfulness, empathy, and compassion personally support us through and beyond this

crisis?' How can we use the evidence base, and practice of mindfulness, empathy, & compassion to realise a more mindful post-covid world?'

As mentioned this MFN project was developed in response to the challenges of the coronavirus, and to date there have been no shortage of ideas for that better world – including calls for less inequality; improved public health initiatives; pollution reduction; for holding onto the new supportive communities being created; the short-term collaborative political processes we observed; and for keeping the homeless housed.

But at the same time we are witnessing increases in on-line bullying, cyber hacking, instability in geopolitics, the rise in suicide levels, high levels of spending on alcohol, and increases in the number of physical and verbal attacks within the family home, and in healthcare settings. By consciously resourcing people to learn the skill of mindfulness in managing their stress and cognitive biases; to practice the competence of empathy to better connect with others; and to understand the motivation of compassion in seeing and healing our common suffering, we will be better resourced to realise a more mindful Post-COVID world.

So what constitutes the evidence base of mindfulness, empathy and compassion?

4. THE EVIDENCE BASE OF MINDFULNESS, EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

Advances in the science of the brain, mind and consciousness are providing an improved understanding of the way in which our minds, thoughts, feelings,

emotions and behaviours all impact each other. Research shows that when applied, the motivation of compassion, the skill of mindfulness, and the competency of empathy can provide positive outcomes.

4.1 Mindfulness

In recent years there has been a huge increase in academic research on mindfulness with thousands of peer-reviewed scientific journal papers now being published every year. In addition developments in neuroscience and psychology are revealing the mechanisms of mindfulness. At its foundation mindfulness means paying attention to what's happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment as an observer. This innate human ability has been shown to be the principal of composure and the source of high performance and clarity of focus. Mindfulness has been identified as having a number of components including: awareness, presence, alignment and non-judgement.

One definition of mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally – Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn

4.2 Empathy

Empathy is an essential competency in social relations and in recent times there have been many studies on empathy within a range of disciplines including neuroscience, economics, neuropsychology, and community engagement. Cultural historian Dr

Roman Krznaric refers to empathy as an 'essential, transforming quality we must develop for the 21st century'⁴. He contends that we should move beyond empathy in individual exchanges towards a collective empathy and the role that plays in tackling the confronting problems of our age.

According to Krznaric, empathy has been viewed as having a number of components, including:

1. Emotional sharing – i.e. a capacity to share another's emotions, and is the simplest form of empathy;
2. Empathic concern – i.e. the motivation to care for another's welfare, including 'other-oriented' emotions and the inbuilt neural circuitry required to keep human offspring alive;
3. Perspective taking – i.e. the ability the consciously put oneself into the mind of another, and is linked to cognitive and social reasoning.

One definition of empathy is the art of stepping into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives and using that understanding to guide your actions — Dr Roman Krznaric

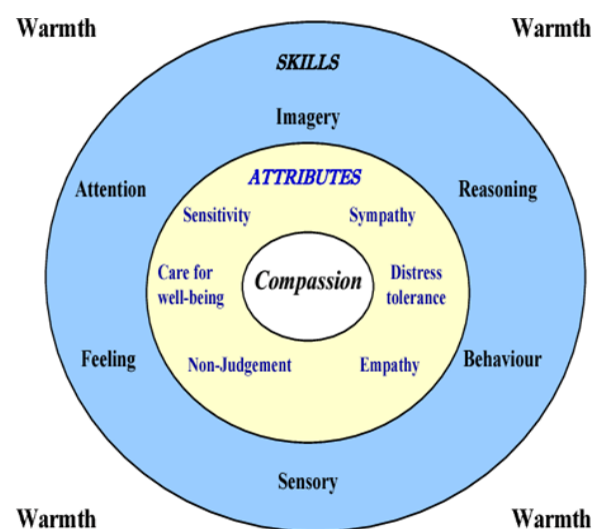
4.3 Compassion

In recent years there has been a global focus on compassion though the new understandings of 1) the neural pathways to compassion, 2) the effects of compassion on the brain and behaviour, 3) the development of

academically approved courses to cultivate compassion. These training courses include those designed at the Centre for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University, and at the University of Derby's Compassionate Mind Foundation.

Prof Paul Gilbert, Director of the Compassionate Mind Foundation has undertaken significant inquiry into compassion on the basis that it is strongly associated with well-being and improved psychological functioning. He considers that both the recognition of our interdependence and the increase in scientific data demonstrating the significant benefits of integrated behaviour are important components in progressing societal well-being.

Components of Compassion⁵



And in Australia, the Compassionate Mind Group at the University of Queensland is working on compassion research, including on a meta-analysis

⁴ Krznaric, R. (2015)

⁵ www.compassionatemind.co.uk

of the effectiveness of compassion intervention, developing a measure for assessing compassion motivation⁶.

One definition of compassion is being sensitive to the suffering of others with a deep commitment to try and prevent or relieve it — Professor Paul Gilbert

5. CAVEATS

While each of these has the potential to improve individual and societal well-being, we also know that mindfulness and empathy in particular, do not necessarily provide a direct path to moral choices.

In fact, mindful attentiveness can sometimes be a source of dishonest action by preferring self-interest. In addition, adopting the perspective of someone from another social group can be emotionally tiring.

Empathy can be used for both well-intentioned and unfit purposes. An undesirable example might be the decades that industries such as advertising have put into using the information they collect through focus groups to better understand and directly target human emotions in areas such as encouraging gambling, which negatively impact 'at risk' cohorts.

And mindfulness practices by themselves can simply result in better sports performances without any particular ethical component being incorporated.

Prof Tania Singer and her group at the Max Planke Institute have shown that empathy, mindfulness and compassion training are separate and all change different systems in the brain⁷. Indeed we know that we can have people who are very mindful but not particularly compassionate, and people who are compassionate but not necessarily that mindful. This is why Prof Paul Gilbert regards mindfulness, empathy and compassion as integrated interdependent competencies, and why he embedded empathy and mindfulness training with a compassion-focus, into his compassion focused therapy.

One of the MFN webinar presenters also spoke about the potential to reframe people's perceptions of what is "weak" or "powerful". Graham Doke, Co-founder and Director of Anamaya noted that strength and power are associated with aggression, while mindfulness and empathy can be seen as "weak" – which is why it's important to raise awareness of the resolve and courage that empathy and compassion require.

While there is rigorous research underway in educational and medical situations on these issues, more research is needed in other organisational settings, such as business and policy development. These points illustrate why the presence of mindfulness, the perspective taking of empathy, and the proactive nature of compassion are all important in overcoming the shortfalls

⁶ <https://psychology.uq.edu.au/research/labs-groups/compassionate-mind>

⁷ <https://www.mpg.de/12684119/soziale-neurowissenschaften>

that each on their own can deliver. If the integration between each can continue to be evidence based and underpinned by an ethical basis, then these skills and competencies all have a role to play in developing new and more ethical approaches to leadership and decision making in government, business, health, education and community sectors – and in creating a better-quality post pandemic world.

6. PROJECT OUTCOMES AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Individual wellbeing forms the basis of our ability to create wellness throughout our societies. This section of the report provides examples from individual, and social perspectives to answer the first question:

6.1 How can the evidence base, and practice of mindfulness, empathy, and compassion personally support us through and beyond this crisis?

Not surprisingly, this pandemic has exposed our lack of preparedness for the stress of community-wide job losses, physical distancing, economic uncertainty, and concern for adequate public health resources.

For most of us the coronavirus is producing high levels of financial and social distress. Over the next few months and years an increase in mental health cases is highly anticipated with alcohol sales rising dramatically.

A survey of 1000 young people (aged 13–17 years) conducted by UNICEF Australia found that almost half of respondents said COVID-19 had negatively affected their levels of stress and anxiety (47%), and almost one-quarter (24%) felt isolated and did not know where to turn for support.⁸

Humans have been wired to be social beings and physical separation is difficult. Managing our response to separation is important because high levels of stress show up in our bodies as: high blood pressure, tight muscles, increased levels of adrenaline, rapid heart rate, and suppressed immune system. Our mental states are intricately linked to our underlying biology as was noted in the MFN question responses ‘...we require soothing changes in the physiology of our body in order to allow for mindful, engaged and empathic states’.

In another reply to this question it was noted that ‘...developing a more non-judgemental attitude to thoughts and the mind allows us to put some of these stabilising techniques into everyday life rather than just regarding meditation as a calming or relaxing process’. And leading thinkers and researchers such as Dr Daniel Goleman and Prof Richie Davidson agree, finding that mindfulness practices support individuals, not only at the time they do them – but over time those individuals can actually develop traits such as equanimity, kindness and compassion. These traits endure beyond mindful practices, and most

⁸ <https://www.phrp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PHRP3022008.pdf>

compelling Goleman and Davidson conclude that ‘...those benefits are not just better health or sharper business performances, but rather a reach towards our better nature’.⁹

Research into mindfulness has grown over recent years. Prof Felicia Huppert who spoke at the 2019 Mindful Futures Network noted that ‘...there are now many studies that demonstrate benefits for those struggling with high levels of stress.’ In a recent paper she wrote with Nickolas Yu they referenced the Kuyken et al., study which was undertaken on patients with recurrent depression - following participation in an 8 week Mindful Based Cognitive Training program. The findings showed the participants were 31% less likely to have a relapse over a 60-week period.’¹⁰



And according to a study by Jha and colleagues in 2010, mindfulness meditation has also been empirically linked to enhanced working memory capacity. Comparing samples of military participants who practiced mindfulness meditation training for eight weeks with those who didn't, Jha et al, found evidence to suggest that mindfulness training helped 'buffer' against losses to working memory capacity¹¹.

In appreciating these benefits, we should not underestimate how difficult it is to manage our stress and anxiety. Dr Elizabeth Blackburn, Australia's first female Nobel Prize winner for Medicine reminds us that we have thousands of thoughts every day, and we need to ask ourselves: how many of those thoughts support us, and how many cause us distress?

The ability to consciously deal with, and manage the stream of thoughts the brain generates, and the associated emotions those thoughts create in the body every day is one of life's major challenges. Neuroscientist Prof Andrew Huberman describes this challenge as managing our 'state' – i.e. our state of being¹².

If we are better prepared as individuals to manage our 'state' then the studies show we will be better placed to connect with those around us.¹³ For example some compassion practices such a Metta meditation have also been shown to positively impact the human traits of empathic concern and identification with all humanity.

Dr Debbie Ling, a member of the MFN Advisory Group is currently investigating the impact of common humanity training on medical practitioners, their sense of connection to others, their own wellbeing, and levels of compassion. Dr Ling is currently developing a compassion strategy for one of Victoria's largest

⁹ Goleman & Davidson 2019

¹⁰ Kuyken, et al 2016 in Huppert & Yu

¹¹ <https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-mindfulness/>

¹² www.hubermanlab.com

¹³ Singer & Klimecki: 2014

health care providers, and has created a compassion and common humanity training course which has been delivered to hospitals across a number of Australian states. The research on common humanity is important at a time when the global world is showing signs of fracture.

Being able to sit with uncertainty is perhaps one of the most important capabilities needed during times of insecurity. In this context, one of the responses to the questions spoke to the importance of our stories in creating a sense of human belonging saying that 'stories are about helping people to grow and are often about compassion, certainly mindfulness - emotional awareness and personal insights often come through stories.'

Psychologists agree that storytelling helps us to make sense of our human experiences, connects us, and gives our human struggles deeper meaning. Indigenous Australians are experts in storytelling and have much to teach us in ways of thinking that support more creative and connected communities in times of fracture. During the initial preparations for the 2020 MFN conference, the Advisory group was planning to invite Tyson Yunkaporta author of *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Change the World* to give the keynote address. While this year's conference is not going ahead, Tyson has indicated he will consider speaking at future MFN conferences. Dr Yunkaporta notes that humans need to recover what he calls "...a wild ability to adapt and change in response to really hard circumstances".

He outlines five Indigenous ways of thinking that assist in growing that wild ability and these mindsets comprise: **Kinship-mind** – the knowledge that comes through relationships; **Story-mind** – reflections that come through narratives; **Dreaming-mind** - using metaphors for a deeper understanding; **Ancestor-mind** – connection to a timeless state of mind; and **Pattern-mind** - finding patterns and trends and using them to make big picture predictions and find solutions to complex problems; and these mind-sets join together to create a holistic system of thought.



In this context one of the MFN question responses recommended including Aboriginal Dadirri (indigenous deep listening) into mindfulness practices. Our emotional literacy skills support us in dealing with difference, and in different forms of understanding, and in particular, in honouring Indigenous knowledge.

NOTE: One of the most important points to make about the interplay between individuals and organisations is that mindfulness and emotional intelligence practices are not about teaching individuals to better handle

the dysfunction they may encounter within certain organisations and systems. Rather this is about giving individuals the tools and resources they need to create nurturing, not harmful institutions and societies.

7. PROJECT OUTCOMES AT A SOCIAL/ ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

Empathy, compassion and mindfulness are as critical to healthy workplaces and other societal organisations, as they are to individual, family and community wellbeing. This section of the report highlights examples from organisational and policy perspectives to the second question:

7.1 How can we use the evidence base, and practice of mindfulness, empathy, and compassion to realise the Post-COVID world we are now imagining?

7.1.1 BUSINESS

Dealing with the sometimes perplexing tasks of modern business requires a clear understanding that emotional maturity is not an 'add-on' to effective business, but a core skill for any team of people. There are now a growing number of examples of companies that are becoming aware of the importance of including

emotional intelligence training in their HR offer.

The issue of psychology safety was highlighted in one of the responses to this question, noting that '...the legal responsibility for workplace health and safety includes psycho-social safety, yet this is often ignored. Many employers are often not aware that they're legally responsible for their employees' mental health and safety at work. Bullying is one of the biggest risks to this, yet persists as a significant challenge in Australian workplaces'.

To support and grow the development of psychological safety within organisations, consultants such as Murray Paterson, Director, Potential Project¹⁴, who spoke at the 2019 MFN conference, and Libba Granger, Director for Organisations at Openground,¹⁵ and a member of the MFN Advisory Group are taking mindfulness and empathy training into Australian companies.

A specific example of applying the evidence base of mindfulness into business comes from a WorkSmart Australia project who have tested a 'Mindful Leadership 360 Assessment' to measure the links between leadership, mindfulness, engagement and mental health outcomes¹⁶. Almost 450 leaders from some of the biggest corporations in the world were assessed, with about 4000 observers. The study participants were provided intensive training in both mindfulness

¹⁴ www.potentialproject.com

¹⁵ <https://www.openground.com.au/>

¹⁶ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/developing-mindful-leadership-360-assessment-michael-bunting/>

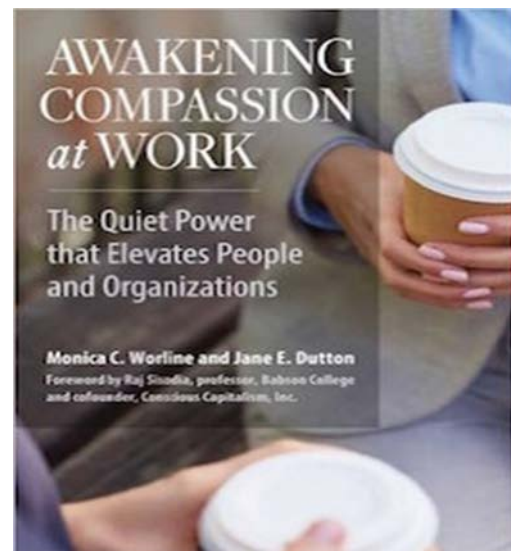
and mindful leadership based on engagement scores from the global, 'Great Place to Work' benchmarks. Michael Bunting spoke at the 2018 MFN conference about this study, reporting that '...it had found the mental health scores of both leaders and their direct reports showed significant improvements following the training'.

During the recent MFN project webinar, the lead author of a research project at Swinburne University, Dr Asanka Gunasekara mentioned her study that is examining the mediating effect of psychological flourishing on the relationship between mindfulness and work engagement. With a sample of 229 employees, a path analysis with structural equation modelling (SEM) was conducted to test the direct and indirect factors influencing both psychological flourishing and work engagement. In particular, this study found that individual exercises of being mindful and organisational mindfulness programs not only had direct positive effects on the level of employee mindfulness, but indirectly also influenced psychological flourishing.¹⁷

And a response to this second MFN project question also pointed out that while many company director courses cover most corporate aspects of what is required in being a Board director: finance, marketing, risk and governance, environment etc, very few if any, include a module on empathy,

mindfulness and compassion to equip potential directors, at the very least, with an understanding of how those considerations could be of benefit to them as leaders'.

International associates of the MFN include Prof Jane Dutton, Director at the Centre for Positive Organisations at the University of Michigan. In 'Awakening Compassion at Work' Jane and co-author Monica Worline note: 'that we need to develop compassion competence – so that we are capable of noticing, interpreting, feeling and acting in effective ways when alleviating suffering in the workplace'.



Notably their research indicates that compassion in organisations bolsters human creativity and the capacity for innovation in two ways: 1) By supporting an employee's need for meaning, these organisations foster creativity and the generation of new ideas; and 2) by creating the psychology safety that enhances learning. Their research confirms that

¹⁷https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326276836_Mindfulness_and_Work_Engagement_The_Mediating_Effect_of_Psychological_Flourishing

managing with compassion can be learned and developed through practice¹⁸.

Already many are on the journey to create those meaningful and nurturing organisations, including the global CEO of Accenture who says that 'today's workforce is looking for meaning and human connectedness, which many existing performance management systems simply cannot provide'.

And here in Australia, Deloitte Access Economics have released a new report entitled 'Why the Future of Work is Human'. The report notes that jobs are now increasingly likely to need the skills of the heart, i.e. interpersonal and creative skills. The report author, David Rumbens noted in presentation at the 2019 MFN conference that jobs increasingly need us to use our hearts with uniquely human skills, such as creativity, service design, care for others, and collaboration.

7.1.2 GOVERNMENT

Many studies have clearly shown that the competences of mindfulness and empathy, and the motivation of compassion all support improved decision making. Yet you may well be called naïve for suggesting that these competencies and motivations be incorporated into government administration and policy formation.

One of the responses to the questions noted that '...the coronavirus pandemic offers us a great opportunity for change - but this will only happen if values and attitudes alter'. While compassion has been with us as a value for centuries, it is only in recent times that the science is now able to understand compassion as a motivation, one that requires the courage to 'see' into the often stark reality of the human experience.

It's an important point to make that our values are essential, but if we are not resourced to implement them - then often they can be overridden by our default-survival mechanisms.

Economic editor, Ross Gittens reminds us that economies where everyone sticks out for Number One, don't work very well - noting that what the conventional economic model misses with its emphasis on individuals, competition and self-interest is that much of the success of the human animal – including its success economically and politically is owed to people co-operating to achieve changes of benefit to the whole community.¹⁹

Therefore it is may be timely to question the underlying and confrontational basis of how governments operate. The coronavirus and associated social and economic fallout has put parliamentarians around the world under significant stress, and reminded us all of the uniquely important role governments play in maintaining social and

¹⁸ <https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/>

¹⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/business/the-economy/we-won-t-achieve-economic-reform-until-we-go-back-to-co-operating-20200717-p55czq.html>

economic cohesion. Across the world, governments have been handed the weighty responsibility of managing the profound disruption this pandemic is imposing on all aspects of society. Some countries are clearly responding better than others to the entirety of the economic, health and social aspects of this global virus.

Rather than accepting that hostile language and intimidation tactics are just part of the political process – it might be better to ask what political attributes are needed in order to better:

- Manage the on-going pressure that comes with multifaceted policy challenges;
- Communicate clearly in a crisis context to translate strategic vision and to mobilise responses;
- Respond more consciously and carefully to in rapidly changing situations with no clear end date or single-known deliverables; and
- Deal better with the inherent cognitive biases that can impair decision making when working with ambiguity.

It's of interest therefore that the European Commission, the New Zealand and ACT governments are all examples of governments that are currently introducing new measures of well-being into their budgets.

NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern developed a wellness budget to reflect a growing trend for government's wanting to go further than using GDP as measures of societal growth, noting that 'economic growth is pointless if people aren't thriving'.

And following the approval of the European Commission, incoming

President Ursula von der Leyen has recently outlined a new approach to running the EU's finances, noting that both the societal and economic wellbeing of the European Union need to be addressed. The EU Budget will now use a Living Standards Framework to inform its investment priorities and funding decisions. In particular, the EC President, Ursula von der Leyen is calling for a shift beyond short-term cycles and for seeing politics through a lens of '... empathy and wellbeing'.

In Australia, the ACT Government is also developing a well-being budget noting that *...having a set of wellbeing indicators will help 'zero in' on where we need to invest more of our time, energy and creativity to make a real difference for those in Canberra who currently aren't sharing in the benefits of our prosperity in the way they should.*



And in local government, the Ballarat City Council in Victoria released its 2020-21 Prosperity Strategy which outlined its intention for Ballarat to be a '*...compassionate city powered by a community with a high level of emotional intelligence. Where community connection, health and wellbeing is one of the highest priorities, and this in turn enables strong civic participation, open-mindedness, and*

self-perpetuating success. A welcoming, inclusive and active city – demonstrating our shared values’.

7.1.3 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Another assumption underpinning this MFN project is that government and industry policy makers as strategic leaders, are pivotal in achieving social changes - sitting as they do between government ministers and the broader community. How do they benefit from this new science?

A growing body of neuropsychology research suggests that we can differentiate at least two major aspects of interpersonal understanding and decision-making. These encompass the social awareness of empathy, and the motivations of compassion.

Reviewing these recent outcomes allows for a better understanding of how empathy can result in improved decision making. For example an empathy research study on the creation of more liveable cities, developed an empathy conversation and training process to study those living in high rise apartments who were strongly ‘for and against’ apartments being let out for Airbnb purposes within their apartment block.²⁰

This study found that by taking part in the empathy conversation and training processes, the participants were able to:

Suspend the default mode of participants thinking –i.e. it challenged their ‘fixed notions’ of the other;

Acknowledge the other’s emotions – i.e. the empathy and mindfulness training supported trust and wider perspective taking;

Gain a more nuanced look at the human experience – i.e. the empathy conversation provided direct access to another’s lived experience;

Grant to the other’s emotions a presumption of credibility – i.e. the training & conversation processes provided a pathway to each other’s humanity²¹.

This study confirmed that empathy training can bring people together in areas where they hold strong and opposing opinions, to enable them to find common ground and a new starting point for their negotiations. In a similar vein, one of the MFN responses noted that ‘empathy and self-compassion are skills that can be learnt and developed – e.g. *Thrive* is an evidence based workplace wellbeing program developed by the Centre for Transformative Work Design at Curtin University in collaboration with the WA Mental Health Commission’.

Verified cognitive training processes now demonstrate an increased human capacity to advance our social and emotional intelligence. This type of training is being shown to bring about structural changes in the adult brain for improved social and emotional

²⁰ ‘Empathy Conversations for Vibrant Vertical Villages’ presentation at Liveable Cities conference 2017 Dr Lynne Reeder and Dr Janette Corcoran

²¹ Corso, 2014

intelligence. In particular, compassion motivation and mindfulness training creates inner patterns or relating elements within our brains and bodies, and between us, that are quite different to say competitiveness²².

The Table below outlines how our human motivations engender different cognitive and emotional responses – and provides an insight into the types of decisions we make in each of these three motivational systems.

THREE MOTIVATIONAL SYSTEMS²³

Motivation System	Cognitive and Emotional responses
Defensive	Punitive/Protective/Survival Safety-seeking REACTIVE
Activating	Goal orientated/ Competitive/Pursuing Achieving REASONING
Calming	Compassionate Connected/Contented Peaceful REFLECTIVE

Each of these systems are useful to us in specific settings – but the key point Prof Gilbert makes is that our defensive and activating motivations are inbuilt – we don't intentionally create the adrenaline to run quickly from a

dangerous situation – the body does that for us.

We can however, consciously train our calming system to better regulate our emotions, moderate our responses, empathically investigate complex information, in order to more deeply connect to each other.

Dr Nichols Gruen from the Centre for Social Innovation in his presentation at the first MFN conference in 2016 described this aspect of empathic design as '...a deep understanding of the needs of people for whom the solution is being designed'. So in these difficult times, thinking about how often that depth of understanding is achieved in public policy design will remain essential.

In reflecting on how empathy and compassion needs to infuse our policy thinking - former National Director, Emergency Management Australia, Mark Crosweller, a speaker at the 2019 MFN conference notes that his philosophy to policy development has been shaped by understanding the nature of suffering and what can be done.

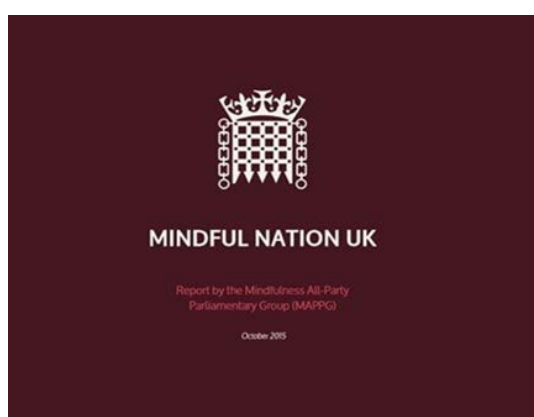
He says that when mindful leaders emotionally connect with constituents directly and symbolically, things got better - '...it is that personal experience of sitting in the space of the suffering of another human being, and the symbolism of that suffering that seems to motivate policy makers to change and make a difference'.²⁴

²² Gilbert, 2017:492

²³ Adapted from Prof Paul Gilbert's 3 Circle Model

²⁴ [linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6689692674506801152/](https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6689692674506801152/)

In global terms, two of the other MFN's international associates are Chris Ruane and Jamie Bristow of the Global Mindfulness Initiative. They were pivotal in the development of the 2015 Mindful Nation UK report – which was the first policy document of its kind, seeking to address mental and physical health concerns in the areas of education, health, the workplace and criminal justice system through the application of mindfulness-based interventions in those Departments.



Chris Ruane himself, a former MP in the House of Commons presented at the first MFN forum and subsequently at a one of the Network's webinars. The Mindfulness Initiative continues through a policy institute that grew out of a program of mindfulness teaching in the UK Parliament. Chris and Jamie now work with politicians around the world who practice mindfulness and help them to make capacities of the heart and mind serious considerations of public policy. As of 2017, 145 British MPs and peers, and 250 staff, have completed an adapted 8-week Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy course in Westminster.

²⁵ Seppälä E., Simon-Thomas, E., Brown, Worline, M. Cameron, D, Doty, D (eds) (2017) *Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, Oxford, UK

7.1.4 ARTS AND CREATIVITY

Creativity has been shown to be an important component of empathy and compassion. One of the MFN responses noted that the '...creative potentials inherent in mindfulness have never been more important; and igniting these potentials, starts with the skills to notice how our reactions are often shaped by profound discomfort with uncertainty, and the methods to help us embrace our vulnerabilities and cultivate the forms of hope that lie in our interdependence and our social natures'.

One of the essays in the 2019 Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science²⁵ in commenting on the link between compassion and creativity notes that, 'compassion is not only an act of imagination, but also another kind of imagination: an imagination that is not only part of the way we think, but also part of the way we sense, the way we experience the other. The connection between compassion and imagination is also a connection between imagination and the human being²⁶'.

Our creative selves open us up to the wonder and awe that surround us, and studies of awe have revealed that the experience of wonderment can make us feel part of something larger than ourselves and thereby focus more on our others than on ourselves²⁷. Art helps to foster empathy, the ability to understand or feel the experience of others, and we also know that no single

²⁶ Koopmann-Holm & Tsai 2018

²⁷ greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/awe_boosts_health

human culture on earth has ever lived without music.

In recognising this, art galleries across Australia are now incorporating empathy and mindfulness in their art programs. The NSW Gallery and the Australian National Gallery are offering mindfulness in art programs which are showing positive mental health outcomes for those who participate in them. And the Ballarat Art Gallery has developed 'Art and Empathy Tours' for participants to view its art works in a guided process that provides a deep appreciation of another's perspective.

One of the responses to the MFN questions also noted that 'we will need the Arts even more Post-COVID to cultivate and make sense of the experiences we are all now going through'.

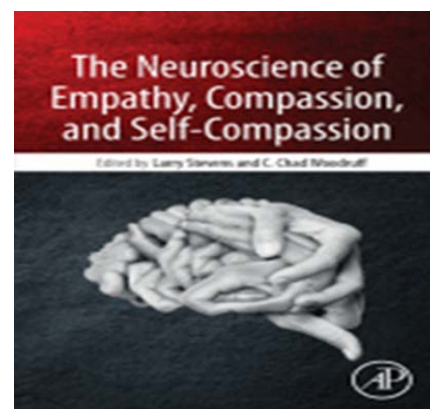
In order to make what Krznaric calls the 'imaginative leap of empathy' we need to 'humanise' the other', to discover what we share and what we don't with others. Embedded in the restorative processes of many art practices are the creative tools and resources we need to 'humanise' the other – and this is why our creativity is a vital emotional literacy resource.²⁸

7.1.5 HEALTHCARE

While many hospitals and health care institutions have compassion listed as one of their core values – many still

struggle with what compassionate responses look like 'on the ground'. Embedding compassion into healthcare systems is important because evidence shows that when empathetic communication and compassion are prevalent, clinical teams are more effective, staff morale is higher and patient complaints are fewer. Moreover, the work of Trevor Danos, Chairman, Northern Sydney Local Health District and Dr Frank Daly, the Oceania Medical Director, Ernst & Young has found that these more supportive corporate cultures also result in improved financial outcomes.²⁹

Becoming more aware of the research into compassion as a motivation is important for hospital managers, because as Paul Gilbert notes, 'our human motivations create 'certain patterns in our brains that organizes our motives, emotions and thoughts'.



And we know ourselves that positive motivations such as compassion organise our thoughts, feelings and actions in very different ways, to that of negative motivations, such as revenge.

²⁸ Krznaric, R (2014) *Empathy*

²⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/more-compassion-and-empathy-will-improve-our-health-system-20180606-p4zjty.html>

We will feel, think and act very differently when we want to be compassionate to someone – than when we want to exact revenge on them.

Formal mindfulness courses are already underway in Australian hospitals. Dr Tony Dunin, an orthopaedic surgeon and Jo Dunin from the Melbourne Centre for Mindfulness run an eight week 'Mindfulness in Medicine' course for doctors and surgeons.

Last year, in a MFN webinar Tony and Jo referenced these positive benefits – and they were also echoed by Dr Maura Kenny in her MFN webinar where she outlined the mindfulness training that SA Health offer. The feedback both courses have received have been very positive, with one comment from a senior surgeon stating that '...at tricky moments during operations, my mindfulness practice has helped me stay calm and clear so I am better able to respond precisely to the problem at hand.'

One of the myths about compassion in healthcare settings is that it can cause burnout. But that misunderstanding occurs when we conflate empathic distress with compassion. Compassion is feeling *for* not feeling *with* the other. Empathic concern on the other hand is focused on another's suffering, where you do not need to 'feel' the same suffering as the other, more to have a genuine concern. In empathic distress you over-identify with another's suffering, resulting in a self-focused and overwhelmed reactions.

And it must be remembered that the high value now placed on good

empathic communication in medicine, is relatively new. Until the 1970s and even beyond, the doctor-patient relationship was mostly paternalistic. Perhaps not surprisingly then there is growing interest in related medical research, clearly evidenced by the recent \$100 million philanthropic donation to the University of California to fund neuroscience research into the biology of empathy and compassion to improve medical training for new physicians.

7.1.6 EDUCATION

As you might expect of the education sector - there is already considerable work happening in the introduction of mindfulness courses for school children; and in emotional and social learning (SEL) frameworks for those in early childhood settings.



Courses developed using SEL frameworks specifically focus on the skills necessary for children to identify and manage their emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively.

These integrated pedagogies accentuate the process by which children thrive, rather than the accumulation of knowledge per se, making these learning approaches particularly relevant for today's world.

And the need for these interpersonal skills is becoming more evident - a recent Productivity Commission report into mental health noted that one in 10 pre-school aged children in Australia are exposed to multiple factors that put them at increased risk of mental illness in adulthood.

The CEO of not-for-profit Smiling Mind, Addie Wootten who spoke at the 2019 MFN conference, notes that the current remote learning and changes in routine that COVID is imposing can be particularly harmful for children. She adds '...that we shouldn't underestimate the impact these big events can have on young children - as those changes can throw them out of kilter in terms of their mental health'³⁰.



It's important therefore that social and emotional learning frameworks such as Think Equal are now being accurately evaluated³¹. The Think Equal framework as developed by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence is undergoing a global evaluation, and Australia is taking part in that research assessment.

In conjunction with Think Equal Australia, Dr Lynne Reeder and Dr

Sue Emmett are currently undertaking a randomised control trial of over 400 children in Melbourne and Brisbane. The early findings are very positive with children who have completed the 30 weeks of the program better able to name, and manage their emotions. Beyond growing these higher levels of self-awareness and self-regulation, the children in the treatment group could also better recognise empathy and acts of kindness in themselves and others. And when they noticed and experienced that kinder more compassionate behaviour, teachers reported that had a reinforcing and calming effect on them, and on the other children they were engaging with.

In the higher education sector, one of the MFN responses notes that '...like the rest of society, universities will soon be moving to "the other side" of the COVID pandemic - a time opportune to reform'. While universities are being significantly challenged financially, and their research and teaching structures are presently under review, these tertiary institutions are significant contributors to the global stock of knowledge in both basic and applied research via study centres such as the 'Compassionate Mind Research Group' at University of Queensland; the 'Body, Heart, and Mind in Research' group at the University of Sydney Business School; and the Centre for Positive Psychology at the University of Melbourne. Dr Stan Steindl has also been running a UQ Compassion

³⁰ <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>

³¹ <https://www.thinkequal.com.au>

Symposium for over five years now – which brings together the latest research in the psychology of compassion, and compassion focused therapy.



There are also some noteworthy examples of long-standing practice such as those Prof Craig Hassed has introduced at Monash University. For over 20 years any student doing a health or medical course at Monash is required to do an eight week mindfulness course; and in conjunction with FutureLearn, Dr Craig Hassed and Dr Richard Chambers at Monash have also created one of the most globally successful Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) programs - 'Mindfulness for Wellbeing and Peak Performance'.³²

In 2019 the ACC Scholars Network was established to support compassion research in Australia. In conjunction with the University of Sydney's Body, Heart and Mind in Business Research group, the ACC Scholars Network of over 30 leading compassion scholars is mapping and distributing information on the compassion research underway in Australia, and is sharing information on how this research is/can be deployed

and applied more effectively in business, health, education and other policy settings³³. Research questions are outlined in Appendix 2.

In addition to conducting academic research, members of this ACC Scholars group, such as Dr Paul Atkins are also involved in knowledge transfer, and in writing cutting-edge books such as *Prosocial: Using Evolutionary Science to Build Productive, Equitable and Collaborative Groups*.³⁴

7.1.7 ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND CITY DESIGN

If we are to better engage with long-term environmental issues such as climate change, then it seems learning more about how the brain evolved is crucial – because neuroscience has found that the human brain did not evolve to deal with long-term dangers, and when faced with these types of hazards, the brain actually produces indifferent or aversion responses. Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert argues that humans are exquisitely adapted to respond to immediate problems, such as terrorism or pandemics, but not so good at more probable, but distant dangers, like global warming³⁵.

If we accept that governments have a duty to protect future citizens, not just present ones, then on issues such as climate change, they have a responsibility to contribute to global

³² <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/mindfulness-wellbeing-performance>

³³ www.charterforcompassion.com.au/accscholars

³⁴ Atkins, P. Sloan Wilson, D. Hayes, S. (2019)

³⁵ www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5530483

mitigation, not just local adaptation. In this context Roman Krznaric considers the most important question of our time to be 'How can we be good ancestors'? He argues that asking this question will require our generation to imagine its future with deep-time humility – something indigenous groups have been doing for tens of thousands of years. And Krznaric is not the first person to ask this question. In his just released book 'The Good Ancestor' Krznaric reminds us that Jonas Salk who cured polio in 1955 and saved millions of lives, but refused to patent his discovery or make any money out of it, also asked 'Are we being good ancestors?'

The Co-Director of Compassion in Politics UK, Jennifer Nadel has now established a cross-party group to put compassion into the heart of UK policy making, with a focus on protecting future generations.



This All Party Group for Compassionate Politics was launched in March 2020 and Jennifer gave the Keynote lecture at the 2019 MFN Conference - explaining that the cross-party group of MPs and Lords are working together to reform parliamentary systems so they are more cooperative and inclusive and to promote laws that are built on the value of compassion. This Cross-Party's Group

focus in 2020-21 will be on changing the political culture to one that is respectful, compassionate, and cooperative. They are doing this by developing a new code of conduct – one that includes a focus on future generations.³⁶

Incorporating policy approaches that focus on future generations, may just assist in moving away from a scenario where one of the only lessons learned in climate change policy, is that evolution has led our behaviour and societal institutions in directions that are unsustainable. In his most recent book It was reaffirming therefore to get feedback in the MFN webinar from the group 'Psychology for a Safe Climate' who already offer workshops that involve mindfulness, creative methods, and self-compassion teaching³⁷.

Australia is one of the most urbanized countries in the world, and the evidence base of empathy has a role to play when dealing with issues such as public housing and food security as these become ever more significant issues for local government.

Whilst in the past local governments may have been restricted to rates, roads and rubbish, a recent Municipal Association Victoria (MAV) report concludes that local governments '...now have a unique mandate to support, represent and give voice to communities of place. It is this level of government that can provide an ideal platform for governments at all levels to strengthen their engagement with communities'³⁸.

³⁶ <https://www.compassioninpolitics.com/>

³⁷ www.psychologyforasafeclimate.org

³⁸ mav.asn.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/21958/2017-18-MAV-Annual-Report-Section-1-Key-Messages.pdf

At State and Territory levels, it was noted in one of the MFN responses to the questions that ‘...the ACT Government’s Living Infrastructure Initiative, which forms part of its climate change policy, might be seen through a compassionate design lens’.



These approaches are significant because studies are finding that our external environments affect our physical and emotional wellbeing, and that if our environments are degraded then we are more likely to be negatively impacted. Social infrastructure is important because when our libraries, play grounds, and other public meeting spaces are degraded people reduce the time they spend in public settings and hunker down in their own houses, their social networks weaken and distrust rises³⁹.

In reflecting on the ways in which our external environment impacts on our internal mindset, the town planner Jenny Donovan in her book ‘Designing the Compassionate City’ states:

‘..the ways our cities are designed, managed and are occupied, embed messages in them that influence what we do and what we

want to do. This matters. It impacts the trajectory of people’s lives.’

Jenny spoke at the 2018 MFN conference commenting on the importance of developing spaces that invite children to play, invite adults to stay long enough to bump into each other; that are enlivened by smiles, laughs, and artworks; and just by the presence of others. There are also wonderful international models of designs that bring people together and support community connections - a team of Montreal designers placed an interactive installation of musical swings alongside a city bus stop. The swings play a tune when pedestrians move in unison rather than independently. The result is a giant instrument made up of 21 musical swings; each swing in motion triggers different notes, all the swings together compose a piece, the sounds of which emerge only from cooperation.



7.1.8 URBAN DWELLERS IN URBAN DISASTERS

The recent devastating fires in Australia have exposed the changing nature of urban disasters. Events are increasing in intensity and frequency

³⁹ Klinenberg, E.(2018) *Palaces for the People*

and their after effects are more complex. The unpredictable nature of natural hazards have a significant impact on the fear and stress levels of those who experience them, and on those involved in disaster responses.

Policy development in disaster management has mostly focused on building and sustaining physical and community infrastructure. Although urban resilience policy covers a range of socio-economic, environmental and physical aspects, there are a very few examples that focus on the emotional wellbeing as crucial aspects of responding to urban disasters. Prof Christine Wamsler, Dr Lynne Reeder, and Mark Croswell recently noted in a chapter in the Routledge Handbook of Urban Disasters, that we need to build personal and societal resilience to prevent individual and social harm and to increase personal and collective wellbeing. They recommend that if decision makers are to produce more evidence-based disaster response policies, then they, and first responders should be trained in socio-cognitive and socio-affective mindfulness modules - to assist in putting the experiences, capacities and emotions of urban dwellers at the centre of social resilience planning⁴⁰.

One of the MFN responses reflected that 'experientially I also witness that through mindfulness practice we can decolonise our minds and hopefully then the systems we've been shaped by, that for centuries have contributed to

the decimation of nature and marginalised peoples'.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We should not underestimate the significant challenges a post pandemic era will bring. Many countries will be subject to prolonged struggles across communities, sectors and regions.

A recent McKinsey Global Institute report estimates that in the next three years, the disparity in lost global GDP between economies with partial virus-spread control and those with 'near-zero virus' situations may reach \$15 trillion; and the World Bank has warned that the virus could push between 40 and 60 million people into extreme poverty just this year, with sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia expected to be the hardest hit⁴¹.

The nearly sixty 'real world' examples outlined in this report have made it clear that resourcing and training our cognitive and emotional abilities to better deal with the health, social and economic threats that are forecast to surround us for years to come, should be a high priority.

This new science is important because it is finding that cultivating compassion and prosocial motivations are associated with improved well-being, physical health, stress management and the development of more ethical, social environments.

Certainly, there is now considerable evidence that when people are caring towards others and feel cared for by others, their physical and mental health improves. So the challenge is not to simply

⁴⁰ Wamsler, Reeder, Crosweller (2020) Routledge

⁴¹www.wef.org

support the welfare and NGO sector in providing housing, food, and mental health services for the few, but to resource every institution within society to create nurturing and safe spaces so that all of us can have the opportunity to live meaningful and creative lives.

This is an important aspiration when many mental health services are concerned at the high number of people who are reporting a lack of purpose in their lives. One of the MFN responses stressed that 'our capacity for holding uncertainty in ways that dissolve habitual and imprisoning mental categories are vital to envisioning alternative futures'. While we still have so much to learn about how the human mind works, even now, neuroscientists such as Antonio Damasio are calling on policy-makers to inform themselves of the latest learning from neurobiology stating that:

...the time will come when the issue of human responsibility, in general moral terms as well as on matters of justice and its application, will take into account the evolving science of consciousness. Perhaps that time is now.

This report's examples provide an excellent starting point for how we can apply the evidence base of mindfulness, empathy and compassion, but if we want to extend that impact then other possibilities include:

- ✚ **Applying compassionate design, and empathic communication into all healthcare systems;**
- ✚ **Developing verified mindfulness and compassion resources for the medical, legal, and other professions;**
- ✚ **Continuing to evaluate the impact of social and emotional learning programs**

have on the capacities of young children to demonstrate empathic concern;

- ✚ **Introducing mindfulness and compassion training into leadership and Company Director courses;**
- ✚ **Testing the viability for empathy training and empathy-based processes for policy makers, and information and artificial technology designers;**
- ✚ **Assessing the benefits and impacts of government well-being budgets – and the robustness of correlated methods and measures;**
- ✚ **Improving the psychological safety within workplaces, and other social institutions within which we spend significant time;**
- ✚ **Deeply developing our creativity and sense of wonder for the world we inhabit;**
- ✚ **Fashioning specific mindfulness, and creative mind programs into art galleries, museums and other exhibition spaces;**
- ✚ **Taking into account how our inherent inability to deal with long-term threats, impacts future-based policy issues such as climate change;**
- ✚ **Improving societal wellbeing in times of cumulative urban disasters by including mindfulness training into urban disaster preparation;**
- ✚ **Using stories, indigenous mind-sets, and deep listening practices such as Dadirri to give our human struggles deeper meaning;**
- ✚ **Incorporating compassionate design into city landscapes for improved social infrastructure;**
- ✚ **Viewing complex and deeply-embedded problems, such as family violence through a compassionate and empathetic lens, to more effectively address the underlying multi-factor issues.**

Consciously choosing to create mindful organisations and societies will require us all to more deeply engage in the cognitive and emotion regulation work needed to develop, embed, and evaluate these new approaches. As Prof Paul Gilbert concludes in his thought provoking book, *Living Like Crazy*: compassion in particular 'is one of the most healing motivations that nature ever came up with'. Not to draw on these research and policy evaluation outcomes to cultivate and use these skills and motivations 'for the benefit of us all would be to live like crazy'.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to this project – this report will be distributed to governments, NGOs, professional associations, policy makers and influencers across Australia.

We look forward to expanding the work of the Mindful Futures Network - to continue to map and gather these examples - to in turn inspire others to apply verified models of mindfulness, empathy and compassion into all societal organisations and structures that impact our human experience.



www.australia21.org.au

9. APPENDIX 1

9.1 MFN ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

- Dr Lynne Reeder - Founder, Mindful Futures Network, Adjunct Research Fellow, Federation University Australia;
- Lyn Stephens - Organisational Development consultant and Board Director at Australia21;
- Libba Granger – Director of Organisations at Openground;
- Dr Nicky Grigg - Senior research scientist at CSIRO;
- Peter Yuile - a former senior public servant and Board Director, Australia21;
- Dr Debbie Ling - Lecturer and Senior Clinician Social Worker at Monash University;
- Nicholas Sing, PhD student and Youth advisor.

9.2 ABOUT THE MINDFUL FUTURES NETWORK

The Mindful Futures Network is a group of around 700 people across Australia who recognise that advances in the science of the mind have implications for the skills and motivations required to improve decision-making, perspective-taking, deep-thinking, and higher levels of engagement. This new science of mind awareness builds on studies underpinning emotional intelligence, and on the growing body of knowledge about mind and emotions and how they guide our motivations and actions, to in turn progress personal and social awareness and the application of mindful cultures into business, government, wider organisations and society. The aims of the Mindful Futures

Network reflect these applications by creating a national space to collect and distribute case studies and to link together those interested in these skills, competencies, and motivations.

9.3 ABOUT AUSTRALIA21

- Australia21 is an Australian registered charity based in Canberra, which was established in 2001 to undertake research with a view to ensuring an informed national debate that leads to evidence-based policy that benefits all Australians. We make the results of our investigations and research widely available, across multiple platforms so that policy developers, industry, media and the public can benefit from our work and the insights we have. We are funded by donations from the public, philanthropic grants, government grants, academic and industry partnerships.

10. APPENDIX 2

Below are the responses received to the two questions from the Australia21 and MFN databases.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

Question 1

How can the evidence base, and practice of mindfulness, empathy, and compassion personally support us through and beyond this crisis?

Mindfulness

- I am very hopeful that COVID has given us time to pause and yes, reflect, on our lives and why we do what we do, in the way we do it – to realise that reflective practice is essential for growth; that time just listening, and checking in with our bodies is actually energising and genuinely empowering;
- First help people be mindful - and through that to develop compassion, and the bigger vision required to inspire people to change and act. Stories are about helping people to grow and are often about compassion, certainly mindfulness, emotional awareness and personal insights often come through stories;
- Include a focus on the changes we require in the physiology of our body in order to allow mindful, engaged and empathic states - as our mental states are so intricately linked to our underlying biology;
- Develop a more non-judgemental attitude to thoughts and the mind in general, to be better able to put some of these stabilising techniques into everyday life rather than just regarding meditation as a calming or relaxing process.
- Each time I lead a practice, I notice that the experience of frustration disappears as I deal with people – even in a virtual world – which is teaching me the deep importance of connecting with others. Not surprising to discover this, though surprising in the degree of impatience and frustration which I don't normally feel. I have also noticed that friends and acquaintances are now more personally curious about practicing mindfulness as an antidote to their own experience of stress caused by the pandemic. Many seek advice on how to practise, and are experimenting which may well lead to an increase in both general awareness and actual experience of practice.
- Research shows that uncertainty can be a source of stress and a risk factor for psychological distress, and that mindfulness has potential to allow individuals to tolerate certainty even to the point of finding beneficial aspects of the experience of doubt. We can practice intentionally being

present to uncertainty and its affects, in the moment, with curiosity. Mindfulness is associated with less automatic behaviours and has been shown to significantly increase distress-affective tolerance and improve emotion regulation. So, practicing mindfulness, in ways small and large we can strengthen our ability to disentangle from distress. Less pushed and pulled around by reactions, our capacity to be in the moment with what matters most increases, and with it our ability to make intentional choices.

Empathy

- We can learn that the most important growth is that of our awareness. Growth itself has to be redefined less in physical terms, and more in relation to our role as actors sharing a very finite planet. Then perhaps we can all breathe together;
- Empathy is always going to lead to compassionate leadership. I'd love to do some more thinking about this, of course Jacinda Ardern has nailed it over and over.
- Empathy and self-compassion are skills that can be learnt and developed - *Thrive* is an evidence based workplace wellbeing program developed by the Centre for Transformative Work Design at Curtin University in collaboration with the WA Mental Health Commission.

Compassion

- For children to develop their own metacognitive self-regulation and a sense of purpose and meaning, schools need to teach the relevant skills from early years until pupils finish education. Brief programmes in which children learn a few strategies are unlikely to have longer-term impact.
- In addition to basic cognitive-behavioural therapy strategies and relaxation techniques, there should be development of healthy qualities of mind such as compassion and gratitude, and reflective exploration of purpose and meaning of life;
- The House Within approach, developed in Melbourne, focusses on helping people to understand their emotional states of mind, and it emphasizes how having a purpose that is good for them individually, and good for the world, in equal measure, can help them to manage their emotions in a whole new way.
- Buddhism as a valuable philosophy teaches us to look after others, as well as ourselves. To be critical yet compassionate and tactful. To never live in the extremes and to not belittle others. To live responsibly, ethically and compassionately.

QUESTION 2

HOW CAN WE USE THE EVIDENCE BASE, AND PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS, EMPATHY, AND COMPASSION TO REALISE A MORE MINDFUL POST-COVID WORLD?'

Mindfulness

- We are a social species, so we must consider how our focus on individualism stops us from collaborating with others;
- Introduce mindfulness practices and Dadirri (indigenous deep listening) as part of our key leadership skills...as ways to connect to our first people, our land and to feel strong and connected. These along with Youth Mental Health First Aid training forms the basis for building resilience in our emerging leaders
- Advocate for the nation/government to join the (presently few) nations that use a measure of wellbeing/quality of living as the prime determinant of national success rather than economic measures such as GDP and wages growth;
- Like the rest of society universities will soon be moving to "the other side" of the COVID pandemic, a time opportune to reform, thinking and expression of truth, a time for the Real University to be considered.

Empathy

- We need a different kind of social structure - one in which people can hear all sides before making up their minds;
- Research on urban disasters have found they cannot be solved by 'business-as-usual' approaches - rather they require new social practices and a broader cultural shift to build the individual and community resilience needed to mitigate disaster impacts, and to improve societal wellbeing in times of cumulative urban disasters and climate change.
- The legal responsibility for workplace health and safety includes psycho-social safety, yet this is often ignored. Many employers would not be aware that they're legally responsible for employee's mental health and safety at work. Bullying is one of the biggest risks to this, yet persists as a significant challenge in Australia's workplaces. Empathy, compassion and mindfulness are critical to mentally healthy workplaces, as they are to individual, family and community wellbeing;
- For a better post-pandemic Australia we need to look after the arts.
- We know that hard-edged business people will always have the economic lens firmly fixed, but my ideal post-COVID world is going to have empathy and compassion as core values and mindfulness as a central practice;

- When policies are being made, talked about and then implemented; they are often done by people that have no real world experience in those issues. There are people who have a disability and yet often none of those policy makers have a disability. There are people who are unemployed and again often none of those policy makers have experienced unemployment;
- Resourced and verified empathy conversations as a policy resource need to be developed – as research pilots have shown these direct links can improve the understating of the lived experience of those on whose behalf they are making policy.

Compassion

- The ACT Government's Living Infrastructure Initiative, which forms part of its climate change policy, might be seen through a compassionate design lens, and we should also consider a wider definition of production which is more inclusive of the creation of public value and takes a more positive view of the role of the public sector in innovation, inclusion and sustainability;
- Many company director's courses cover most aspects of what to expect in being a board director: finance, marketing, risk and governance, environment etc. I could see how a module on empathy, mindfulness and compassion might fit in and equip potential directors, at the

very least, with an understanding of how those considerations could be of benefit to them as leaders;

- Complex and deeply-embedded problems like family violence need to be seen through a compassionate and empathetic lens, in order to be effectively addressed.
- Research shows that practicing meditation and particularly practices that focus our attention to think about others in different ways, practices cultivating warm heartedness and connection can help with the fear challenges of our biological heritage. Experientially I also witness that through mindfulness practice we can decolonise our minds and hopefully then the systems we've been shaped within for centuries that are contributing to the decimation of nature and marginalised peoples.

Webinar questions

1. What assumptions underpin the evidence base of mindfulness, empathy, and compassion?
2. How does the evidence base of mindfulness, empathy and compassion support people in creating the social structures and institutions necessary to nurture not injure people?
3. Thank you for the application examples you have provided in your responses (as below*);

What other examples do you have? What sectors haven't we covered?

4. How do we embed the good ideas you have generated e.g: Wellbeing measures in government budgets? Empathy into policy making? Compassionate design into city planning? Psychological safety into work-places? etc. Any other comments on barriers and enablers?
5. What is already underway? Why is that working? What are the results? – e.g. Mindfulness into schools.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESEARCH/ POLICY QUESTIONS

MINDFULNESS

- Can a more structured conceptual and methodological approach to defining specific features of mindfulness support higher levels of its research efficacy?
- Is there evidence that mindfulness training supports improved leadership engagement with staff?
- What teaching models of leadership built in mindfulness, self-awareness, resilience, and compassion exist, and how do they impact the business students' capacity for leadership?

EMPATHY

- What are the new developments in applying the science of empathy to the development of ethical technologies?
- How does a distinction between empathic concern and personal distress affect empathic burnout?
- What influence does cognitive bias have on a lack of empathy in social welfare policy?

COMPASSION

- How does viewing material on common humanity impact on healthcare workers' level of compassion?
- What behavioural changes are present in four year olds following participation in an applied compassion curriculum within early childhood settings?
- What are the barriers and enablers to nursing staff's well-being and compassion, and how are these barriers and enablers affected by an intervention?

11. FURTHER READING AND REFERENCES

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