



This guide is to help develop the business case for mindfulness at work. Focusing on the economic case, the broader process that includes locating funding sources, senior sponsorship and stakeholder management are outside the scope. The business context and needs are outlined and the most recent research evidence of benefits are highlighted. An approach and key metrics used for calculating the business case are included. Based on this approach, the business case for mindfulness at work is very compelling.

1. Business context

In today's economic climate, both private or public sector organisations are challenged to do more with fewer resources; meeting increasing demands from customers and end users; all while operating within a complex, dynamic and uncertain external environment. The typical workplace of today is often busy, fast moving and subject to change. People do their best, but can easily become distracted, exhausted and stressed. Developing mindfulness skills and attitudes improves an individual's ability to: focus and think clearly; make better decisions; manage emotions; be more skillful in relationships and cope better with workplace demands. In other words, practising mindfulness improves well-being as well as performance.

Within large organisations, mindfulness development is logically anchored in the Health and Well-being, Employee Assistance, or Occupational Health approach of an organisation, specifically around employee mental health. In medium and smaller organisations mindfulness may sit within Human Resources, Learning and Development, or could be sponsored by a passionate and supportive senior leader from anywhere in the organisation.

1.1 Mindfulness within the broader health and well-being context

Although Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) can be used to improve well-being, resilience and performance, they have no direct impact on some of the main causes of workplace stress, anxiety and depression. Typically these include overwork, lack of management support, job insecurity and too much responsibility. MBIs need to be positioned as interventions within a portfolio of services in a Health and Well-being strategy or programme, which both addresses these root causes and also provides solutions to reduce their impact.

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1.2 Aligning with business needs and priorities

An organisation's approach to mental health and well-being will be aligned with the overall strategy of the organisation. Relevant MBIs are positioned within a portfolio of services or interventions within the broader, managed approach. In all cases, the particular outcomes and benefits of using mindfulness development need to be aligned with the business needs and priorities. These could include, for instance, a project to improve leadership focus and emotional awareness, or more long standing needs like reducing the rates of mental health-related sickness absence.

For reasons explored in more detail below, the generic business needs used in the guide, that are impacted by offering mindfulness in the workplace are:

- Reducing the cost of lost productivity through mental health-related sickness absence and presenteeism
- Improving employee well-being, performance, commitment and engagement

1.3 Mental health-related sickness absence and presenteeism

Mental health-related sickness absence tends to be around the stress, anxiety or depression that people may experience at work and in their personal lives. A survey of NHS employees with depression found that the average absence was eight weeks, with 30% off for three months and 5% for over six months¹. According to a recent Institution of Occupational Safety and Health paper², "At any one time, nearly one in six people in the UK workforce is affected by a mental health condition such as stress, depression or anxiety. Mental health problems account for around 40 per cent of sickness absence, which equates to around 2.8 days per person per year, while stress and mental health may account for up to 5 per cent of total staff turnover."

Presenteeism is defined as working while unwell. Mental health-related presenteeism is strongly related to sickness absence, but possibly about an earlier stage in the process. This impacts productivity - as people are unlikely to deliver their best work when they are suffering from stress or anxiety, or are not feeling good about themselves. In fact researchers estimate that productivity drops by around 20% when people work when unwell³. According to the Sainsbury Centre, the costs of presenteeism are likely to be, "1.8 times as important as absenteeism."⁴

Absence and presenteeism challenges

- When people are absent, or their productivity is reduced, work colleagues often have to absorb additional activities and demands, which can raise their levels of anxiety and stress.
- The longer people are off work the more difficult it is to manage a smooth and sustainable return to work.

¹ [Managing mental health related sickness absence](#)

² [Working well: Guidance on promoting health and wellbeing at work IOSH](#)

³ [Stress and presenteeism "sapping UK productivity", says research](#)

⁴ Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health. Mental Health at Work: Developing the Business Case. Policy Paper 8 London. Sainsbury Institute for Mental Health

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- Unlike sickness absence, presenteeism can be hard to identify as in times of economic uncertainty, employees may be unwilling to admit that they are unwell
- Up until recently, levels of presenteeism has been difficult to measure, as they tend to be based on subjective report
- Issues with mental health increase the health and safety risk at work, as people may be less aware and careful in their surroundings, which has a significant impact in some roles

1.4 Well-being and performance

People who experience a sustainably healthy level of well-being will always perform better, have greater emotional intelligence, more skilful in managing relationships and generally more successful. There is a wide body of research that supports the link between employee well-being and performance⁵. Mindfulness development in the workplace targets improved well-being, for instance, through improving emotional awareness, resilience and relationships skills and attitudes. MBIs also impact performance by, for example, improving cognitive clarity and attentional focus.

Although these benefits are apparent, they are difficult to make tangible enough in a formal investment case for mindfulness development within an organisation. Instead, the business case will be more successful if the focus is on the tangible improvement of productivity by reducing absence and presenteeism. The main reason is that business cases are generally approved by accountants; a profession that is comfortable with tangible certainties that demonstrate a linear cause and effect, but has yet to generally embrace the causal complexities of nonlinear dynamics⁶, like the relationship between improved well-being and performance.

However, approvers of the business case may well accept productivity and performance improvements as additional opportunities and benefits, as long as the case is based on more tangible outcomes.

2 Evidence of benefits

As well as being used in the workplace, mindfulness is making a difference within health, education, sports, prisons and the military. Studies show that practicing mindfulness delivers individual physical, psychological, social outcomes that translate into business benefits like improved performance, productivity and decision-making.

Although gathering the research evidence for mindfulness at work is still in progress, a recent Journal of Management article⁷ reviewed over 4,000 research papers on mindfulness and found evidence of the following benefits:

- Mindfulness appears to positively impact human functioning overall. Research in such disciplines as psychology, neuroscience and medicine provide a wealth of

⁵ [Tightening the link between employee wellbeing at work and performance: A new dimension for HRM](#)

⁶ [Nonlinear Dynamics in Economics, Finance and the Social Sciences](#)

⁷ [Contemplating Mindfulness at Work: An Integrative Review](#)

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evidence that mindfulness improves attention, cognition, emotions, behaviour and physiology.

- Specifically, mindfulness has been shown to improve three qualities of attention— stability, control and efficiency. The human mind is estimated to wander roughly half of our waking hours, but mindfulness can stabilise attention in the present. Individuals who completed mindfulness training were shown to remain vigilant longer on both visual and listening tasks.
- Although mindfulness is an individual quality, initial evidence suggests that it affects interpersonal behavior and work-group relationships.
- Mindfulness may improve relationships through greater empathy and compassion— suggesting mindfulness training could enhance workplace processes that rely on effective leadership and teamwork.
- Mindfulness beneficially impacts the full spectrum of human workplace functioning, from how we think, feel, and act, to the quality of our performance, relationships, and well-being.

3 Calculating the business case

Although MBIs can deliver many positive performance and productivity-related benefits, the target outcomes need to focus on reducing mental health related sickness absence and presenteeism. Very few organisations systematically measure levels of presenteeism. Although most organisations track rates of sickness absence, fewer than 40% monitor the costs. The actual costs of mental-health-related sickness absence and presenteeism tend to be hidden and absorbed within teams and business units of an organisation.

When people are off sick, or their productivity is affected through mental health issues, the workload and stress levels can increase for other work colleagues within the same team or unit. In cases of absence in a critical role, the role may have to be back-filled in order to mitigate business risks and deliver operational commitments.

3.1 Total labour cost as a proxy for lost productivity

There is still an open debate about how to measure lost productivity as part of ongoing and systematic measurement to support Health and Well-being management. For the purpose of developing a business case, and in the absence of actual measures in an organisation, a useful and practical alternative is to use total labour cost as a proxy for lost productivity.

The total labour cost is the total expenditure borne by employers for employing staff. This includes salary, tax, insurance and employee benefits. Either an average can be used, or different averages across roles and levels. For instance this may include people in operational, customer-facing, functional and management roles and levels.

3.2 Business case worked examples

The following worked example for sickness absence assumes that 10% of MBI service users would otherwise be absent for a typical period of 8 weeks. This example is simplified to illustrate the approach. A more realistic method can segment service users by grade and total labour cost, in order to determine different costs of lost productivity. If available, actual measures from your organisation will make the business case more robust. From these

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examples, it's useful to see the high order of magnitude that lost productivity from mental health-related sickness absence and presenteeism can reach. The cost of MBI interventions tends to be incredibly modest when compared against the potential productivity gains. Depending on the delivery mode, a return on investment ratios of 6:1 to 8:1 are achievable - so every pound, dollar or euro spent on targeted MBI development will return up to eight times that amount.

Mental health-related sickness absence	
Assumptions	
Number of MBI service users	500
Service users prone to sickness absence	10%
Typical sickness absence period (weeks)	8
Working weeks per year	48
Worked example	
Service users with mental-health-related sickness absence	50
Typical Total Labour Cost of service user	£50,000
Proxy cost of lost productivity per service user	£8,333
Total proxy cost of lost productivity due to sickness absence	£291,667

Presenteeism	
Assumptions	
Number of MBI service users	500
Service users prone to mental-health-related presenteeism	10%
Productivity loss due to mental-health-related presenteeism	18%
Worked example	
Service users with mental-health-related presenteeism	50
Typical Total Labour Cost of service user	£50,000
Proxy cost of lost productivity per service user	£9,000
Total proxy cost of lost productivity due to sickness absence	£450,000

4 Learning options and effectiveness

Although the business case outlined above is very compelling, the realisation of these outcomes is dependent on the “what” and “how” of the particular mindfulness service used. See the appendix for detail on modes of delivery, example suppliers and comparison of benefits and limitations.

One important consideration is the recent research on knowledge decay⁸ after learning. Although learning and memory may be active during a training course, knowledge decay begins almost immediately after and can lead to more than 90 percent being forgotten within a month.

⁸ [Combat Knowledge Decay in the Workplace](#)

5 About Mindful Call

Mindful Call provides flexible mindfulness development for organisations as well as individuals, with regular weekly audio sessions supported by digital on-demand content.

These short-duration, live sessions are able to reach, engage and support a diverse and geographically distributed workforce who work from anywhere.

This agile solution fits within busy work schedules and reinforces sustainable learning and development over time.

Visit www.mindfulcall.co.uk to find out more and explore the approach, including arranging a taster session for people in your organisation.

Thank you for downloading this paper and hope you find it useful.

Paul Riches

Email: paul.riches@mindfulcall.co.uk

Tel: +44 (0) 208 441 4151

Mobile: 07532 112 400

6 Appendix - delivery options

The following table lists the major modes of delivery, example suppliers and comparison of benefits and limitations.

Delivery mode	Description	Example providers	Pros	Cons
Face-to-face courses	Often based around the 8-week MBSR/MBCT course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are face-to-face MBSR and MBCT courses available in many locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rich communication Group sharing and learning Very structured Clinical evidence base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited to small numbers of attendees If during the work-day, then there is a productivity loss What next after the course? Learning decays over time
On-line course	Tend to be video-based and take users through a structured course.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BeMindful (UK) eMindful (US) Palouse Mindfulness (US) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best are video-based Lower cost than face-to-face Extended reach and scale Palouse is a curated free set of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning decays over time What next after the course?
Smartphone apps	There are a variety of different smartphone apps on the market including	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headspace Buddhify Calm Sattva Insight Timer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Useful for beginners and embedding daily meditation habits Extended reach and scale Range of assets Some include social networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use may drop-off after initial period Same issue with learning decay for course-based content
Regular online or audio event backed up with digital content	Flexible mindfulness development services like Mindful Call eMindful offer webinar-based Live sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mindful Call (UK) eMindful (US) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly live events encourage sustained engagement, learning and development Fits within busy work schedules Extended reach and scale Live interaction and mutual support within session community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service users need to commit to a regular time slot each week Service users need access to somewhere they will not be disturbed for 30 minutes