

# INCUBATIO

## INCUBATIO THEORY AND METHOD

### **Underlying theory: mindfulness**

The method is based upon a basic Buddhist practice called ‘mindfulness’. At its heart, this is a simple and natural way of bringing attention to the multi-layered facets of our experience, and thus increasing awareness of our inner world and outer world, and the relationship between the two. This can take place at all levels: individual, group, community, society. By increasing awareness of these conditions, then we are able to bring greater conscious choice into our actions, and thus widen the impact we have within our situation. For example, if we learn that our habitual way of thinking is naturally and habitually risk averse, but we have examined the conditions in our organisation that suggest greater investment is required, we may be able to overcome this habitual response, and open up to the possibility of taking different action. We can create some space in our thinking that gives us the ‘bigger picture’. It is this awareness of the interaction of our personalities, with the environment that can move us to greater clarity and sense of purpose. Such a practice enhances our sense of interconnectedness with our world and one another, and means that our communication and actions can become creative rather than habitual. We learn to be more present to those around us. We gain confidence in the wider perspective and depth that we can bring to our decisions and actions. Furthermore, mindfulness is a practice that can be learned and cultivated – it is open to all of us.

Our understanding of personality is drawn from Buddhist psychology which suggests that the creative core of our being is hidden by many layers of habitual patterns, which create a fixed sense of the self. These patterns are formed by our family and cultural conditioning. If we can slow down our thoughts and actions sufficiently, then we can notice these patterns, and open up a space in which we have a wider choice and can consciously change what is blocking our thoughts and hence our communication. However, these patterns are very deeply embedded, and usually formed by the roles we played in our families in order to survive. There is a body, emotional and cognitive aspect to these patterns. To notice them, and even transform them requires some sustained attention in a non-judgemental setting. Usually, our habits are formed by ‘views’ that we have built up over time through acting out these patterns. For example, some people believe that ‘anger’ is bad. They will probably avoid conflict. Others may think that being aggressive is a good way of getting things done.

They may perceive slower, or 'passive' people as incompetent. Our early experiences shape the way we both perceive and respond to the world. Not only do we act differently in the world, we also perceive it differently. In these times of greater and greater speed, however, there is little time to notice these differences and arrive at consensual practices that help us to work together in harmony.

Ironically, whilst the pace of life increases, we are also embracing increasing diversity. So the potential for greater conflict and stress also increases. However, networking and communication across organisational and national cultures is what is 'added value' in today's organisation. Never has there been a more important time for learning how to communicate from our deeper selves. By bringing greater awareness to our thought, speech and action we bring ourselves into better relationship with the world, and learn to become 'embodied' in a meaningful way. Such an awareness leads to greater individual effectiveness, and transformation, and hence to the organisation.

### **Embodying emotion**

There has been an increasing commitment to the importance of emotions in organisational life. However, the study of emotions in the West is characterised by a polarisation between reason and emotion. Our understanding suggests that awareness of ourselves and our environment show a constant iteration between reason and emotion. Being embodied means learning how to feel and understand our emotions so that we gain intellectual clarity. If an emotion is unexpressed, or unfelt then it clouds our rational mind. So embodiment means listening to the whole range of our experience, and thus bringing ourselves more fully into contact into any situation we meet. If for example we experience a felt sense of anger, we can acknowledge this, either to ourselves or the people we are with, but we do not 'act it out' by blaming other people, neither do we attempt to repress it through withdrawal from the situation. This we, we learn to hold an awareness of the many different conditions that are present, without harming or judging others.

Being embodied is a breaking down of the dualism between mind and body that has taken place in our modern society. Becoming embodied suggests that we can only really make sense of our experience when that experience has been reflected upon, and 'embodied' in both body and mind – expressed both emotionally and intellectually, and expressed in relationship to others and to the broader community.

Thus, the term 'embodiment' can be used to express the essential inter-penetration of mind and body and world. It refers to 'felt sense' or an emotion, a bodily sensation that has been reflected upon. If we have brought a degree of awareness to our emotion and body through mindfulness, then we have embodied the experience, and broken the habitual pattern of relating. However, if we are stuck in habitual ways of thinking and being, then our

experience is not reflected upon, and is not embodied. Thus, for example, if I habitually respond to my subordinate with impatience, without slowing down enough to listen to him or her, or my felt response, then we will repeat a cycle of behaviour. If however, I am aware of my emotional response, and can communicate through this awareness, then a shift in our dynamic takes place. Group dynamics are created and re-created in this way. If we can slow down the pace of the discourse sufficiently, then we open up a space for self- and group reflection that is not merely abstract or technological, but which becomes embodied which means that the group gains clarity and a sense of shared purpose.

Because that experience has been reflected upon in relationship, then we feel more interconnected, a meeting has taken place at all levels of body, mind and action. And that experience almost always takes place within the context of relationship. – relationship to other people, and to the universe in which we live. What is it to be human? What does it mean to be part of an organisational community? How can we create a sense of community that moves us forward, and which also attempts to benefit those in contact with that community?

Thus, one of the major characteristics of embodiment is to be ‘embedded’ in different sets of communities. Embeddedness is the characteristic expression of embodiment. When we feel truly part of our social and organisational communities, then we feel interconnected, and we begin to share the meaning we make of our world. Put simply, we learn to become happy rather than fearful. The conditions of our modern workplaces are such that our ‘meaning’ has become fragmented by the technological nature of our work. So much is mediated through the e-mail, through the computer, that our ‘being’ is more often than not reflected back through the glare of the screen, rather than the animation of another human face. Traditionally, this ‘embeddedness’ would have arisen through rites and rituals, through our connections with our home communities, through the various roles that we would play in the various stages of our lives – and even at work, people would move through various different stages of life, youth ( and the positive young hero) middle age ( and the respect given to length of time or status in an organisation) and old age (reflected in the leaving party, the moving on into holding a respected position as an ‘elder’. All these stages are encapsulated in the various archetypes as described by the psychologist Jung, but these have been eroded in our workplaces and society.

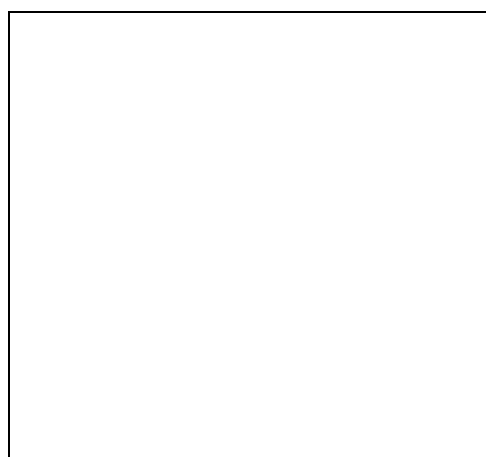
### **Expressing embodiment**

One of the most important ways of bringing awareness to experience in the organisation is to learn to dialogue in relationship, or create a ritual space where we can tell our stories and our experience. This does not sound revolutionary, or different, but how can learn to engage not in an intellectual exchange of theoretical ideas, but in the exchange of ideas and feelings? If we think of its meaning as ‘to converse’ it has the sense of a mutual exchange

where listening is as important as speaking. In order for 'embodied' dialogue to take place, we need to take into account not only the so-called 'facts' of the situation, but also questions of meaning of the dialogue for participants. It is precisely through expressing our thoughts, which might well be unknown to us, that our thoughts themselves become embodied as physical activity, moving from the internal mental world of our inner mind into the outside world. Speech is one of the principal ways we have of showing ourselves to the world as well as creating ourselves within the world.

The challenge for us is to engender a dialogue situation where those involved feel able and willing to speak with honesty, and a concern for the effects that their speech has on the situation that they are in. The dynamics of a particular group are largely, not exclusively, revealed in the way that they are able to discourse. One of the major factors influencing organisational effectiveness is their ability or inability to communicate in an effective and open manner. We could learn to become more 'embodied' as organisational members through learning how to bring awareness to dialogue, and dialogue that is set up on the grounds of feeling able to know and express our emotions.

Thus, our challenge is not to talk about 'emotional intelligence', but to embody our emotions in relationships. Whilst the conditions of our workplaces generally render the experience of 'embodiment' difficult, we can address these on a fairly simple way – and this way is through the practice of mindfulness which cultivates greater awareness. This means awareness of ourselves in relationship to ourselves, our bodies and with others, and through creating the conditions where can express our emotions, and thus truly 'embody' our experience and live authentically in organisations.



## INCUBATIO METHOD: ETHICAL INQUIRY

The method is developed from the shared experience of highly experienced meditation, therapeutic and organisational practitioners, who together bring insights from both the East and the West. The work is underpinned by action research methodology. Action research itself shares a commitment to the importance of reflexive processes, and builds in a collective, collaborative and self-sustaining element to the work. What Incubatio brings to this in addition are Buddhist insights into the nature of that reflexivity, and deepening this process to 'embody' both emotional and intellectual processes. The ethos of Action Research is combined with reflexive techniques to produce a more creative, reflective space that helps the generation of new possibilities and solutions. Put simply, the work is one of slowing down our habitual responses to the world, and attempting to engage with one another at levels which are usually covered over by the speed at which our society functions. In times of escalating misunderstanding, we believe this holds a possibility for recovering means of dialogue that transcend organisational and national cultures.

The practitioners have spent many years developing ways of teaching mindfulness, visualisation, and the art of slowing down. This is combined with insights into Jungian psychology and the latest in modern therapeutic techniques. Participants will learn the principles of mindfulness, and be able to practise this in their own lives, and in their workplaces, thus bringing greater emotional and intellectual clarity.

Fundamental to the method is the preservation of a reflexive cycle, and with this is an acknowledgement that no sustainable change is possible without a crucial first stage of 'remembering' or 'recovery'. This means that mindfulness is used to create the space and conditions for this process to take place.



## A SAMPLE PROGRAMME

### 8 steps to collective embodiment

These steps could form a day, or a set of days over a period of weeks in order that these practices become part of the manager's everyday tools. In each of the steps, basic mindfulness is used to create space for something new, and more sustainable to emerge.

Step 1: Slowing down

Step 2: Finding ground

Step 3: Walking into community

Step 4: Examining conditions

Step 5: Shadow practice

Step 6: The Crucible: voicing the shadow

Step 7: Finding collective ground

Step 8: Sustaining vision and ground

#### *Slowing down*

The first principle of the work is to slow down habitual ways of thinking and acting. This can be done through a series of short body awareness meditations and/ or communication exercises.

#### *Finding ground*

In slowing down, participants may well notice their own resistances and fears. These are examples of the defensive and habitual patterns. In this session, participants would be encouraged, in different ways, through speech, or writing, to explore their own relationship to the group and the world. This may be extended to examining the relationship between intellect and emotion, and the way they influence one another. Participants are invited to come 'home' to themselves.

#### *Walking into community*

Walking meditation, reveal how the body stores up habitual patterns. This exercise reveals where participants habitually feel they are in community - at the centre, or at the outside.

#### *Examining conditions*

Having examined their internal world, participants now look at the conditions in which they work. What are the blocks to reflection? Are these within the organisation or outside it?

What is the nature of the relationships in the organisation? This could take place over a whole day, or in one session, depending on what is required.

### *Shadow practice*

Through group work, participants are encouraged to voice their own truth. In so doing, they may well encounter deeper resistances. This in Jungian terms is typically known as the shadow. In the shadow lies all the emotional and psychological material that we may have repressed over the years. If unspoken, this shadow material emerges in conflictual and unexpected ways, such as backbiting, gossip, views and judgements of others' differences. This part would help participants find the 'gold' in the shadow, and also unveil the shadows that prevent its emergence

### *The Crucible: voicing the shadow*

Deepening into group work, participants are invited to enter the crucible, which is traditionally the vessel in which transformation can take place. We use this metaphor to reflect the 'holding' given by facilitators. In the crucible, heat was applied and turned up to encourage the shadow to emerge and dissolve. This shadow can manifest in terms of operational procedures, outside constraints, organisational structures, or in terms of individual relationships. Power may well arise as an issue here.

### *Finding collective ground*

After exploring blocks and constraints, participants are encouraged to try and find mutual ground for going forward. This may be in the form of action plans, reflective practices, or whatever is needed in the particular group, or for individuals in their workplaces.

### *Sustaining vision and ground*

Whilst participants may have experienced shifts, unknown truths, how can this be sustained? For community to be sustainable, it is important that this is not a one-off event. Participants will be given practices and exercises, or encouraged to develop them for themselves in the particular conditions in which they work.

