

# COMPASSION AT WORK Toolkit



National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The concept for this Compassion Toolkit was developed following a number of meetings of the Compassion at Work Sub-Group of the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work. The document was authored by Fiona Meechan on behalf of the sub-group and members provided input and feedback throughout, and it builds on the great work already started by the team at Roffey Park, and the work of the Compassionate Management Social Movement, led by Tony Vickers-Byrne. Special thanks go to Alison Hoare of Roffey Park who provided the graphics.

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## FOREWARD

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When the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work was considering the key issues in creating healthier workplaces, the issue of compassion and empathy at work, and in leadership more specifically, came up as a significant challenge. We have had numerous headlines on lack of compassion in healthcare, in social care and in the wider public services as well. We have heard also about toxic leaders in the private sector; psychopathic managers, the bullying bosses and colleagues who have had a 'social skills bypass'. On the other hand, most of us have experienced empathic and compassionate leaders and colleagues, who have engaged us as valued colleagues in achieving our personal and organisational goals in a way that has enhanced our wellbeing, and ultimately our productivity. As the great Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu once wrote of effective leaders: "a leader is best when people barely know she or he exists. When the work is done, her or his aim fulfilled, people will say 'we did it ourselves'".

I would very much like to thank Fiona Meechan and the National Forum Sub-Group who have developed this Compassion and Empathy Toolkit, which will help us all understand these concepts, and be able to ensure that our managers, leaders, and staff more generally develop their social and interpersonal skills of empathy and compassion to enhance their own and others' wellbeing, for the good of the enterprise whether a hospital or multinational or SME. This is a major challenge in an era of great change, and an overly robust global leadership style. As Henry David Thoreau wrote in 1853: "How prompt we are to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our bodies; how slow to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls".



**Professor Sir Cary Cooper, CBE**  
50th Anniversary Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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In July 2017, the National Forum on Health and Wellbeing at Work met to focus on the role and impact of empathy and compassion in the workplace. Following that meeting and discussion they decided to work across organisations to develop a guide and toolkit which would set out the business case for compassion at work and provide examples of how this could be implemented in practice.

This document sets out what can happen in organisations when empathy and compassion are missing, and goes on to set out some of the evidence which demonstrates that adopting a compassionate approach in organisations improves not only staff wellbeing, but also productivity.



Productivity starts with people... We need a shift in focus towards increasing the value generated by the workforce and how work is organised. This will require a renewed focus on the way people are managed and developed to deliver 'smarter', more productive working.

Peter Cheese, CIPD chief executive



This toolkit then goes on to highlight some practical actions that can be taken in organisations in order to embed a compassionate approach with a view to improving wellbeing and productivity.

A focus on the need for cultivating compassion is growing on a global level. This document looks at what we can do to assist with this in the workplace. For a wider range of information and resources, please explore the following:

<https://charterforcompassion.org/>

<http://ccare.stanford.edu/>

<http://compassiongames.org/>

## 2. EMPATHY AND COMPASSION AT WORK – WHAT DO WE MEAN?

When we talk about empathy and compassion, we also use a number of other words which mean very similar things, but they're not quite all the same. Words like sympathy, altruism, kindness, benevolence and care are all linked to empathy and compassion and help to give a sense of what they mean. They do all have slightly different meanings; however, arguably the most important part of a concept is the outcome.

Empathy is widely understood as being able to resonate with someone else's feelings, effectively being able to

metaphorically put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel with someone in their given circumstances. This can lead to people feeling recognised and valued (Sinclair et al, 2016).

Compassion takes this a step further. It is about recognising the circumstances of another person or group of people and, critically, feeling compelled to take action to improve those circumstances.

Compassion is not religious business, it is human business, it is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability, it is essential for human survival.

Dalai Lama XIV



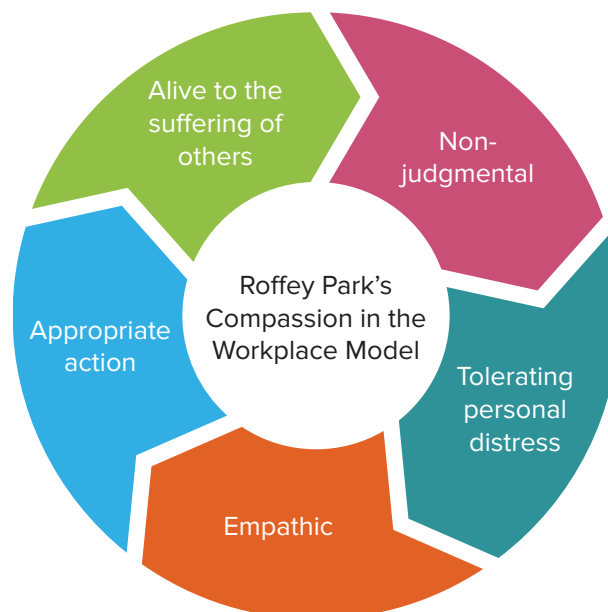
Our task must be to free ourselves... by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty.

Albert Einstein



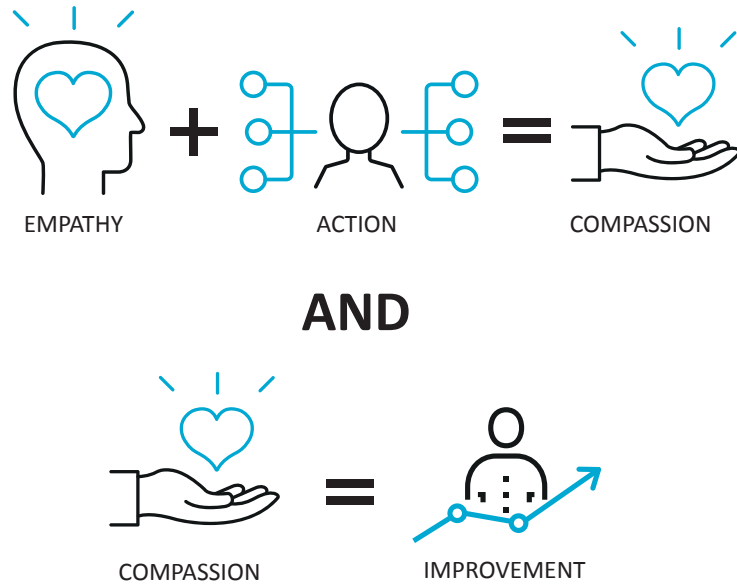
There is an argument that compassion is a fundamental human condition, and it has been found to be the one concept which underpins all of the world's major ethical, spiritual and religious traditions (Armstrong, 2012; Worline and Dutton, 2017) and so it makes sense to focus on compassion in particular, as something which most people naturally have. In addition, the outcome of compassion is improvement, which is why it is particularly important in a work context.

Some talk about a compassion process, which involves, for example, noticing the discomfort of another person, being able to resonate with that discomfort and taking action to improve the circumstances of the other person (Kanov et al, 2004). Research from Roffey Park (Poorkavoos, 2016) has identified a helpful 'Compassion in the Workplace Model' which highlights 5 key attributes of a compassionate individual at work, as highlighted in the model below:



To take this concept a little further, some writers have highlighted that compassion doesn't have to be in response to suffering, but can simply be about understanding others and taking action to improve their circumstances, for example in the workplace this might be through development and coaching (Boyatzis et al, 2013), and so in this way compassion can be seen to be a basis for continuous improvement.

So in its simplest form, we might conceptualise this as:



There are a number of ways to deliver this kind of improvement in the workplace, and we'll go on to consider those once we've looked at the business case for empathy and compassion. But first let's look at what can happen when we do not have empathy and compassion at work.

### 3. WHAT HAPPENS WITHOUT EMPATHY AND COMPASSION?

Businesses may be inclined to ask what the business case is for demonstrating empathy and compassion in the workplace, and we'll come to that later.

Firstly, let's consider what happens when empathy and compassion are NOT demonstrated in the workplace.

Research has found that a lack of empathy in organisations is associated with unethical practice (Dietz and Kleinlogel, 2014), and leadership practices which lead to reduced staff wellbeing and reduced performance (Mathieu et al, 2014; Schyns and Shilling, 2013).

At the most extreme end, this results in highly public examples of poor practice which become recognised and remembered as scandals in a range of organisations.

Examples from healthcare include the Mid-Staffordshire Hospital, where a lack of compassion led to people experiencing serious failings in basic standards of care which led to suffering and avoidable deaths; and the Winterbourne View Care Home, where people who should have been cared for were abused. In policing, we have seen evidence of poor practice and covering up in relation to the handling of the Hillsborough disaster and reports of child sexual exploitation.

In some of these public scandals it has been found that there was more care for organisational reputation than there was for the people affected, but of course the irony is that ultimately organisational reputations were highly damaged when these practices were finally exposed.

And of course such unethical practice, leading to damaging publicity, public backlash and sometimes huge fines, can also be found in the private sector. For example, there have been:

- The pharmaceutical companies who have vastly increased the price of life enhancing and life-saving drugs, putting profit over people and demonstrating a lack of compassion for vulnerable and sick individuals and their families.
- A number of car manufacturers who have been found to be cheating on their emissions tests, demonstrating unethical behaviour and a lack of compassion for our environment<sup>1</sup>; and

- The airline company who have cancelled around 715,000 bookings so they can improve their 'punctuality targets', showing no compassion for their customers who needed reliable travel. And the one which overbooked its flights and physically removed a doctor from an aircraft who had paid for his seat, overlooking the fact he had patients to see.

These are extreme examples, with very negative public and reputational outcomes, but practices in workplaces which are lacking in empathy and compassion occur on a daily basis.

You might recognise practice where, for example:

- Managers are only interested in targets being delivered, with no interest in how that happens or in the people who deliver them;
- Organisational change is implemented with no meaningful consultation with staff;
- People are dealing with wider life issues such as bereavement and illness and managers are insisting that those things should be kept separate from work; and
- People are expected to deliver more work with fewer resources due to budget cuts and pressure to increase profits.

Such practices can lead to staff feeling undervalued, unappreciated, de-humanised and pressurised, which generates suffering.

”

**“Suffering at work is a hidden cost to human capability.”**

(Worline and Dutton, 2017)

**“...employee suffering within an organization incurs considerable financial, psychological, and social costs.”**

(Moon et al, 2016)

“

<sup>1</sup> Further examples can be found at <http://fortune.com/2016/12/28/biggest-corporate-scandals-2016/>



So we can see that empathy and compassion are ethical issues, because when they're not demonstrated, unethical practices can thrive and go unchallenged (Holt and Marquess, 2012) and people, both within and out-with the organisation, can suffer.

And empathy and compassion are also about productivity. Where people experience suffering, stress and strain in the workplace and beyond, often they are absent from work, and if they are in work, they are not motivated or indeed able to give their best effort.

In February 2017, a survey of a range of companies by Legal and General reported that, despite nearly 80% of employers thinking that staff would be comfortable discussing their mental health problems with their manager at work, in fact less than 10% of staff would be, and 25% of staff felt that the level of pressure they were put under at work was 'unacceptably high' (Calnan, 2017).

Interviews with more than 15,000 staff in a range of large private sector organisations showed that over a quarter of employees who said they had poor mental health said that work is the main cause (Calnan, 2017).

Around 40% of employees reported experiencing 'excessive pressure' at least once a week in the latest CIPD and Halogen survey (2017).

RECENT  
RESEARCH  
SHOWS...

Figures for the period December 2014 to March 2017 reveal that nearly one third of all 'fit notes' issued by GPs during that period, which had a diagnosis, were related to mental or behavioural disorders (NHS Digital, 2017).

The latest Labour Force Survey results from 2015/16 show that 11.7million working days were lost to work-related stress, anxiety and depression that year in the UK, with the main factors being "workload pressures, including tight deadlines and too much responsibility and a lack of managerial support" (HSE, 2016).

Loneliness is also costly for business, with a recent report commissioned by the Co-op finding that people who are lonely are more likely to leave a job within one year at a cost of £2.5bn per annum to businesses (Gyton, 2017).

In summary then, where organisations and leaders do not demonstrate empathy and compassion, employees can suffer and become less productive, generating cost for the individuals and for organisations, and in the worst case scenarios organisations can behave unethically on a scale leading to widespread public condemnation and potentially large financial penalties.

“

“...empathy is an essential aspect of 21st century leadership and can no longer be ignored if we want to prevent continuation of ethical disasters in the business world.”

Holt and Marquess (2012:104)

”

Happily, there are many instances where organisations and leaders do demonstrate empathy and compassion and we can learn from these.


## 4. THE BUSINESS CASE FOR EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

It might be said that avoiding unethical practice and poor productivity are strong enough arguments for ensuring empathy and compassion in our workplaces. Thankfully, there is also plenty of evidence emerging to show the positive benefits of empathy and compassion in practice.

In relation to research which focuses on empathy in particular, the following evidence has been produced:

- Empathy is associated with transformational leadership (TL), which has been found to be more ethical and more effective than other forms of leadership.
- Transformational leadership is related to a number of positive work outcomes including improved relationships, motivation, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, creativity, safety, performance and wellbeing, and reduced turnover (Rahman and Castelli, 2013; KelleTT et al, 2002; Inzunza, 2015; Gunther et al, 2007)
- In addition, Wong et al (2013) found that TL leads to improved communication and reduced absenteeism and turnover. In a healthcare setting, this was found to lead increases in patient satisfaction and reductions in serious incidents, and even reductions in patient mortality.
- Empathy is linked to ethical decision making and ethical leadership (Dietz and Kleinlogel, 2014) and it has been found that ethical leadership is linked to improved employee performance (Walumbwa et al (2011).
- In healthcare, empathy demonstrated towards patients leads to a range of positive health outcomes and improved patient and staff satisfaction (Wiseman et al, 2007; Gunther et al, 2007; Ward et al, 2012; Quince et al, 2016).
- Empathy has been found to be a key skill for leaders in relation to globalisation; this is because when you can put yourself in the shoes of others, you can relate to people from different cultures, with different backgrounds – and can therefore deliver more appropriate services.

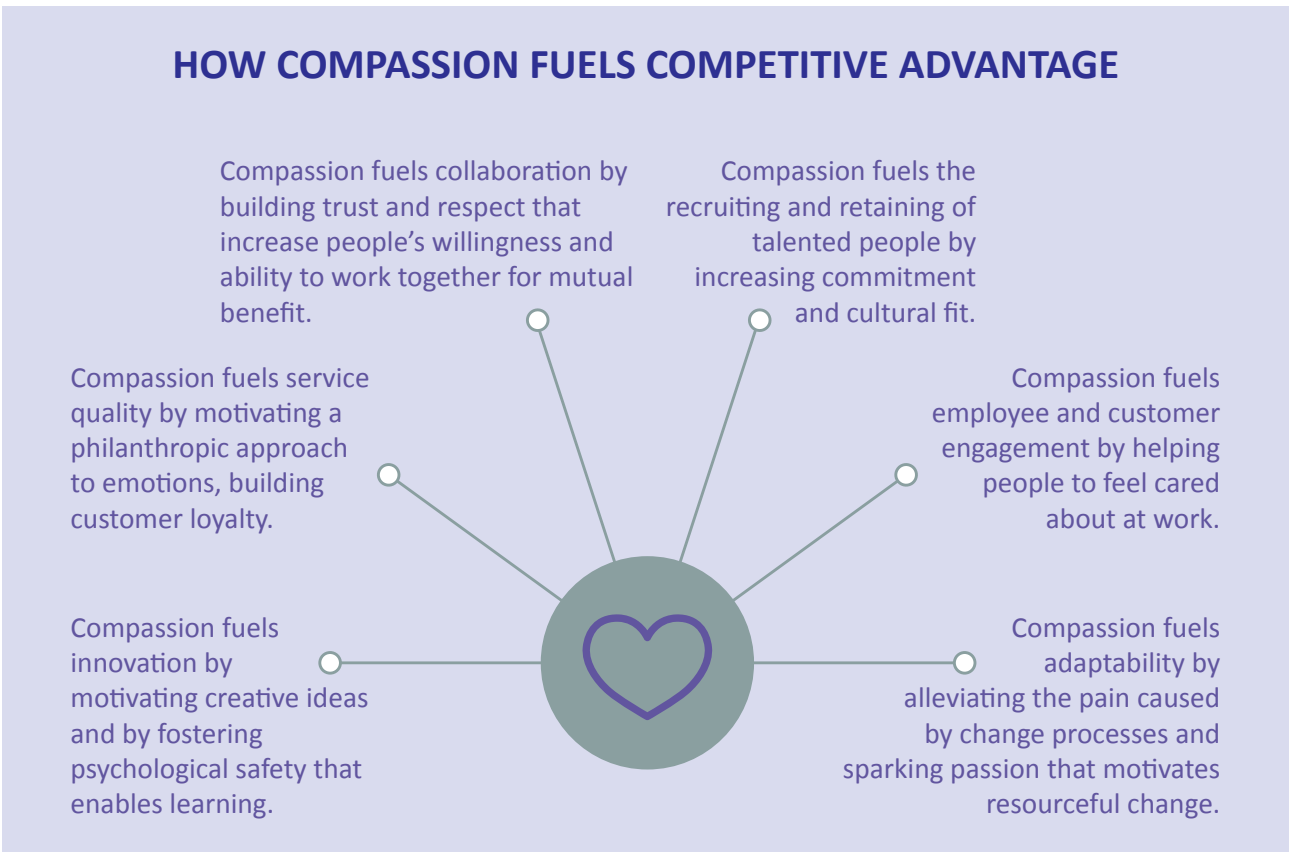
Research at Roffey Park (Poorkavoos, 2016) identified a number of studies which demonstrate the positive benefits of compassion in the workplace. The following summary of evidence is adapted from their report, and further evidence has been added:



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those who experience compassionate leadership at work are more likely to report affective commitment to their organisation and to talk about it in positive terms (Lilius et al, 2008).</li> </ul>	<p>therefore more collaboration in the workplace. (Dunn et al, 2008; Dutton et al, 2014). It also reduces employee turnover and increases organisational citizenship (Lilius et al, 2011; Fryer, 2013).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion breeds compassion – those who experience it are then more likely to demonstrate it towards others (Goetz et al, 2010), and supervisors who perceive that their organisation values their well-being are more likely to show supportive behaviour towards the people they manage (Eisenberger, 2006).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiencing compassion at work connects co-workers psychologically and results in a stronger bond between them (Frost et al, 2000).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not only do people who receive compassion benefit from it, but the person demonstrating compassion also benefits, as do colleagues who witness compassionate acts. This has a ripple effect whereby a whole organisation can benefit (Boyatzis et al, 2012; Moon et al, 2016). This leads to relationships which are stronger and more positive and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those working in care-giving organisations which are compassionate are more likely to have the emotional resource needed for caring and are less likely to experience burnout (Figley, 1995; Lilius et al, 2011).</li> <li>• Compassionate healthcare organisations generate improvements in the health outcomes of their patients (Kanov et al, 2004; Fotaki, 2015), and compassionate leadership in these organisations has been linked to improved innovation (West et al, 2017).</li> </ul>

- Employees who believe that their leaders care about their well-being are more satisfied with their jobs and show higher organisational commitment (Lilius et al, 2011; Moon et al, 2016).
- Compassionate leadership improves employee engagement and retention (Fryer, 2013; Lilius et al, 2011; Moon et al, 2016).
- Compassion enables people to experience positive emotions, which lower heart rate and blood pressure, strengthen the immune system, and decrease employees' psychological distress, contributing to lower absenteeism (Fredrickson et al, 2000; Gross, 1994; Boyatzis et al 2006).
- Experiencing positive emotions also boosts productivity (Lilius et al, 2011) and results in positive customer service (Figley, 1995; Goetz et al, 2010).
- Where someone has experienced loss or trauma, compassionate leadership sustains the sufferer through the grieving process and facilitates faster recovery (Lilius et al, 2011; Moon et al, 2016).
- Compassionate leadership is more likely to generate resilience in stressful times amongst staff (Melwani et al, 2012) and leaders who develop others experience lower stress and greater resilience (Boyatzis et al (2006, 2013).
- When compassion is core to organisational values, there is a measurable increase in productivity and financial performance (Kim et al, 2004, 2011)
- Compassion can be demonstrated through relatively small acts of altruism, kindness and care (Sinclair, 2016).

In summary then, there is increasing research evidence to show that empathy and compassion in the workplace are related to a number of positive outcomes related to improved employee wellbeing, increased productivity and reduced cost to the business. Worline and Dutton (2017) summarise this well, as follows:



## Simple, right?

Well, it's mostly simple, but we do have to recognise that there can be some complexities. Some recent research has highlighted that there can be some problems in relation to empathy, and we need to be aware of those in order to tackle them.

We are seeing in neuroscience (Singer and Klimecki, 2014) that there appear to be different responses to empathy, one of which is *Empathic Distress*, which can occur to such an extent that if a person sees another in pain they can actually physically experience discomfort or even pain. Especially in customer facing and 'helping' jobs, a person can feel with the other person, and absorb negative emotions to the point where they experience negative emotions, distress and potentially emotional burnout.

There is also some critical literature emerging in relation to *Empathy Bias*, where people like people like themselves (Bloom, 2016), and so only feel empathy for people like themselves. It's also been found in studies that nurses find it easier to be empathic with people who have well-developed communication skills, and are outgoing and friendly (Wiseman, 2007) – arguably conditions which are much more difficult for those who might be unwell.

And it has been found that it can be more difficult to show empathy when there is role overload (Dutton et al, 2014) and when under stress, and key studies have shown *Empathy Decline* for example, as medics go through training.

So arguably what we want to aim for is unconditional compassion, where the response is positive emotion, caring, warmth and a motivation to act to relieve the other person's discomfort and improve their situation. We do need empathy, but we also need to respond to it in a positive way to generate compassionate action.

As Worline and Dutton (2017:224) clearly conclude:



... the challenge is no longer to find a good reason that compassion matters for business. The challenge now is to heed the call to design work and workplaces that awaken compassion.



## 5. WHY DO WE LACK EMPATHY AND COMPASSION AT WORK?

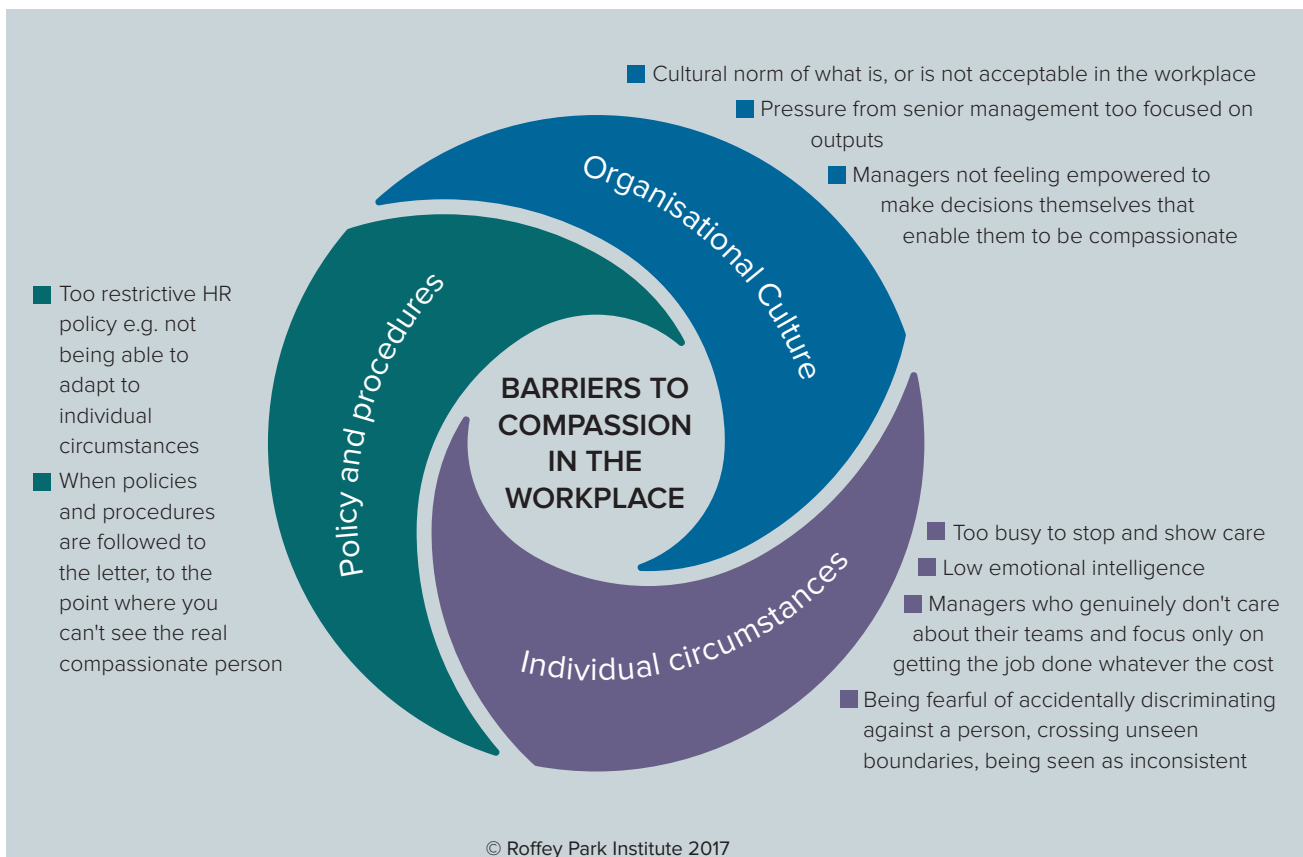
Before we can identify how we can embed compassion in organisations, it is important to understand why we don't already do this, especially if this is such a fundamentally human trait and there is so much evidence to demonstrate that it improves wellbeing and productivity.

Some research has found that some people have a fear of demonstrating compassion towards themselves and others and a fear of receiving compassion, and this can have a negative impact on leadership skills, and particularly interpersonal skills. Given that leaders lead by example and model expected behaviours (consciously or not), this can have a serious negative impact on behaviour throughout an organisation, and is also linked to stress, anxiety and depression in the individual (Martin and Heineberg, 2017).

Others have found that demands on staff to improve performance lead to over work and time pressures and subsequently missed deadlines and mistakes which can distract us from noticing when people are suffering and lead to a blame culture rather than a culture of compassion.

In addition some of the structures that we set up in organisations which become behavioural norms, supported by policies and rules, can lead us to focus on punishment when things go wrong, rather than encouraging us to consider what might be happening with the individual. (Worline and Dutton, 2017).

A recent study<sup>2</sup>, conducted by Roffey Park, identified three main barriers to compassion in the workplace as shown below:



<sup>2</sup> Based on a survey conducted by Roffey Park in July 2017 which received more than 400 responses from people across different sectors.

## 6. HOW WE CAN FOSTER COMPASSION

Compassion is something that can happen at many levels in the workplace, at individual, team and organisational level. A good place to start is with ourselves.

### Start with Self-Compassion



*“...self-compassion involves being open to and moved by one’s own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness toward oneself, taking an understanding, non-judgmental attitude toward one’s inadequacies and failures, and recognizing that one’s own experience is part of the common human experience.” (Neff, 2003a:224)*

Self-compassion is a necessary first step in embedding compassion in the workplace, regardless of which position you might have in the organisation. However, arguably it’s even more important for those who are the most senior in the organisation, because leaders set the tone and lead by example.

The analogy of the aircraft safety briefing is a good one here, i.e. if it drops down, fit your own oxygen mask before helping others. And of course that’s because if you can’t breathe, you’re not going to be much use to anyone else!

And it’s the same with compassion – if you’re not demonstrating compassion towards yourself, you’re less able to demonstrate it towards others.

Self-compassion starts from the premise that all life is of value, inadequacies and failure are part of being human, and everyone is worthy of compassion; (Neff, 2003b), defines 3 main components of self-compassion, namely:

- Understanding that your experiences are a normal part of being human;
- Being aware of your thoughts and feelings, which might be painful, and taking a balanced approach to them (not being absorbed by them); and
- Demonstrating non-judgemental understanding towards yourself, and ultimately being kind to yourself.

Overall, self-compassion has been found to increase satisfaction with life and decrease anxiety and depression, and therefore is likely to also increase psychological resilience and wellbeing (Neff, 2003a).

Research is emerging to demonstrate some key techniques which might help us to demonstrate compassion towards ourselves:

### Mindful Self-Compassion

The technique of Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) has been found to increase compassion for self and others, and satisfaction with life, as well as decreasing stress, anxiety and depression (Jazaieri et al, 2013:24)

### Relaxation

Training in relaxation techniques has been found to reduce heart rate and blood pressure and even reduce angry thoughts in people suffering from the effects of stress, and the training appears to be most successful when there is a focus on external surroundings, rather than on oneself (Boyatzis et al, 2006)

### Meditation

There is also increasing evidence to show the benefits of meditation both generally and in particular for those experiencing stress (Boyatzis et al, 2006) and meditation has also been used as a fundamental part of compassion

training, which has generated positive outcomes both for the person demonstrating the compassion and others who receive the compassion (see below).

In relation to both relaxation and meditation, Boyatzis et al, (2006;18) find that:

*“Engaging in these activities may...facilitate a leader’s efforts to show compassion for others within the organization while operating in a stressful role.”*

So demonstrating compassion towards yourself leads to improvements in your own moods, feelings and resilience, and in addition makes you more able to demonstrate compassion towards others.

If we accept that a core part of compassion is taking action to improve circumstances, then compassion in the workplace can be seen to be linked to improvements in our organisations and it is therefore also important to understand how we can develop compassion in others.

## Reflection

Structured reflection on our actions and behaviour can help us to make sense of the circumstances around us, learn from experiences and understand ourselves better, and improve our responses and actions going forward and so regular reflective practice can arguably also improve our capacity for compassion and improvement.

There are many models for structured reflection and they are mostly based around describing the circumstances you are reflecting on, considering your thoughts and feelings about those circumstances, interpreting and pulling out the learning from the events, and clarifying what you will do differently in the future as a result of your learning. A commonly used and useful framework was devised by Gibbs (1988). A useful resource to support daily structured reflection to create compassion can be found here: [www.creatingcompassion.com/book](http://www.creatingcompassion.com/book).

## Developing Compassion in Individuals - Empathy and Compassion Training



People often wonder if you can develop empathy and compassion through training, and the answer appears to be yes.

Interesting results from neuroscience research show that training which has a focus on identifying with the suffering of other people can lead to increased empathy, but as a result can also increase distress and negative feelings (empathic distress).

However, where there is a focus on empathic concern and the positive emotions associated with compassion, these are also associated with strengthening resilience and the ability to cope in the face of stress (Fredrickson et al, 2003, 2008), so compassion training can also help people to build personal resilience. Roffey Park has developed a psychometric instrument called the Compassion at Work Index (CWI) which you can use to measure your level of compassion at work. After completing the CWI you can compare your result with a norm group of 500 managers in the UK and download your individual report which includes practical tips on how to be a more compassionate colleague. The CWI is available at [www.roffeypark.com/CWI](http://www.roffeypark.com/CWI). Within organisations, compassion training could be embedded into learning and development strategies and delivery plans.

## Extending Feelings of Care to Others

Training which is focused on extending positive feelings and feelings of care (which we naturally have for those we love) to other people, appears lead to positive emotion (towards oneself as well as towards others) and an improved likelihood of taking action to help others (Klimecki et al, 2012). These are the key features of empathic concern and compassion and it appears that there would be value in focusing on this type of training in particular.

*“...the deliberate cultivation of compassion offers a new coping strategy that fosters positive affect even when confronted with the distress of others.” (Klimecki et al, 2012(abstract))*

In the Klimecki et al (2012) study, participants were given a one day training course in 'loving kindness meditation' which consisted of input on theory, and practice sessions, and was delivered by an experienced teacher. This was followed by an additional 2 hours (min) training under supervision and participants were encouraged to practice in their daily lives. In another study (Weng et al, 2013) participants adopted a similar approach but were guided by audio instructions for 30 mins a day for 2 weeks, and similar results were found using brain scanning and other data.

A similar process for cultivating compassion is also described by Armstrong (2011) in her book, which is a method that anyone can follow at any time, without formal training.

### Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)

CCT is a structured training course devised at Stanford University, which is also largely based around meditation practice. It consists of one, 2-hour session, once per week plus daily meditation at home. It is based on a mix of Buddhist and Western psychological practices and is taught as a secular course.

Findings from reviews of CCT show that this training enhances both self-compassion and compassion for others. In addition it has been found to reduce worry and suppression of emotions, and improve both happiness and mindfulness (Jazaieri et al, 2014). Importantly, CCT has also been found to reduce fear of compassion for self and others, and particularly the negative organisational impact of fear of compassion amongst leaders.

### Compassion Skills Training for Leaders and Managers

This training draws on elements of Compassionate Mind Training (above) and Compassion Focused Therapy (below). The training input covers theory around emotions and how the mind works, as well as evidence of the benefits of wellbeing and compassion, coupled with participants reflecting and taking part in experiential learning in pairs (Martin and Heineberg, 2017).

This training is relatively new but is showing promising signs in relation to reducing fears of compassion for self, others and from others and increasing levels of compassion for others; again, important results in the context of the research showing the negative impact of fear of compassion amongst leaders.

### Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)

CFT also utilises traditionally Buddhist approaches as well as evidence from neuroscience, such as some of the training above, however CFT takes compassion training further and is mainly developed for use with people who have more serious and complex mental-health problems which are often linked to difficult backgrounds and manifest in self-criticism and shame (Gilbert, 2010). This is perhaps a more advanced approach than could appropriately be applied in the workplace, but is worth knowing about in case a referral might be appropriate.

### Coaching with Compassion

Traditionally coaching is considered in relation to its beneficial effect on the person being coached, however benefits have also been found for coaches themselves, particularly when they are in leadership positions.

Boyatzis et al (2006, 2013) have found that people in leadership positions who coach others, benefit because taking time to understand the other person and demonstrating benevolence and care towards them – essentially demonstrating compassion – neurologically mitigates the negative effects of the stress which comes with leadership, both physiologically and psychologically, so the resilience of the leader/coach is improved.

It is important however, to ensure that the focus of the coaching is not explicitly on organisational benefit, but on the development of the coachee as an individual. As Boyatzis et al (2006;12) clarify, the focus for the coach should be on: "helping others in their intentional change process (i.e., achieving their dreams or aspirations or changing the way they think, feel, and act)".

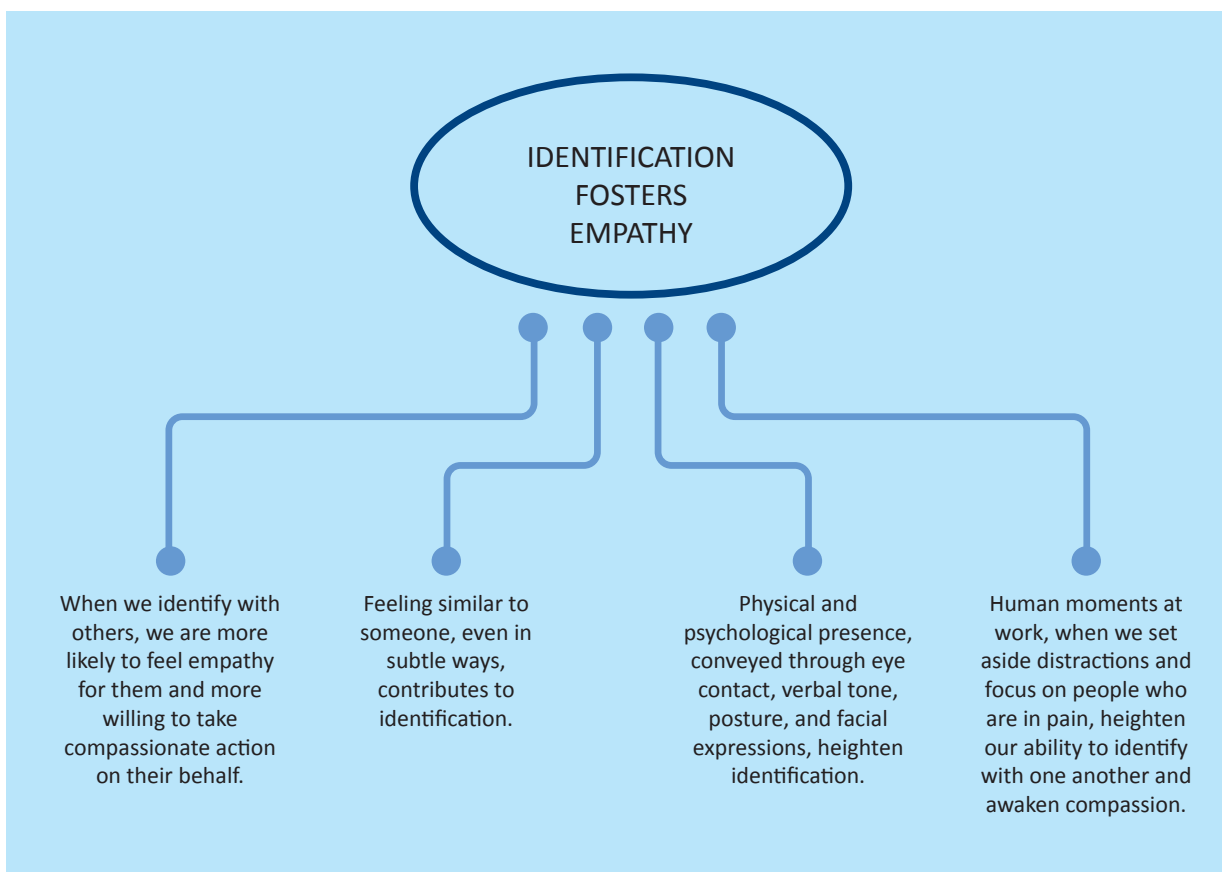
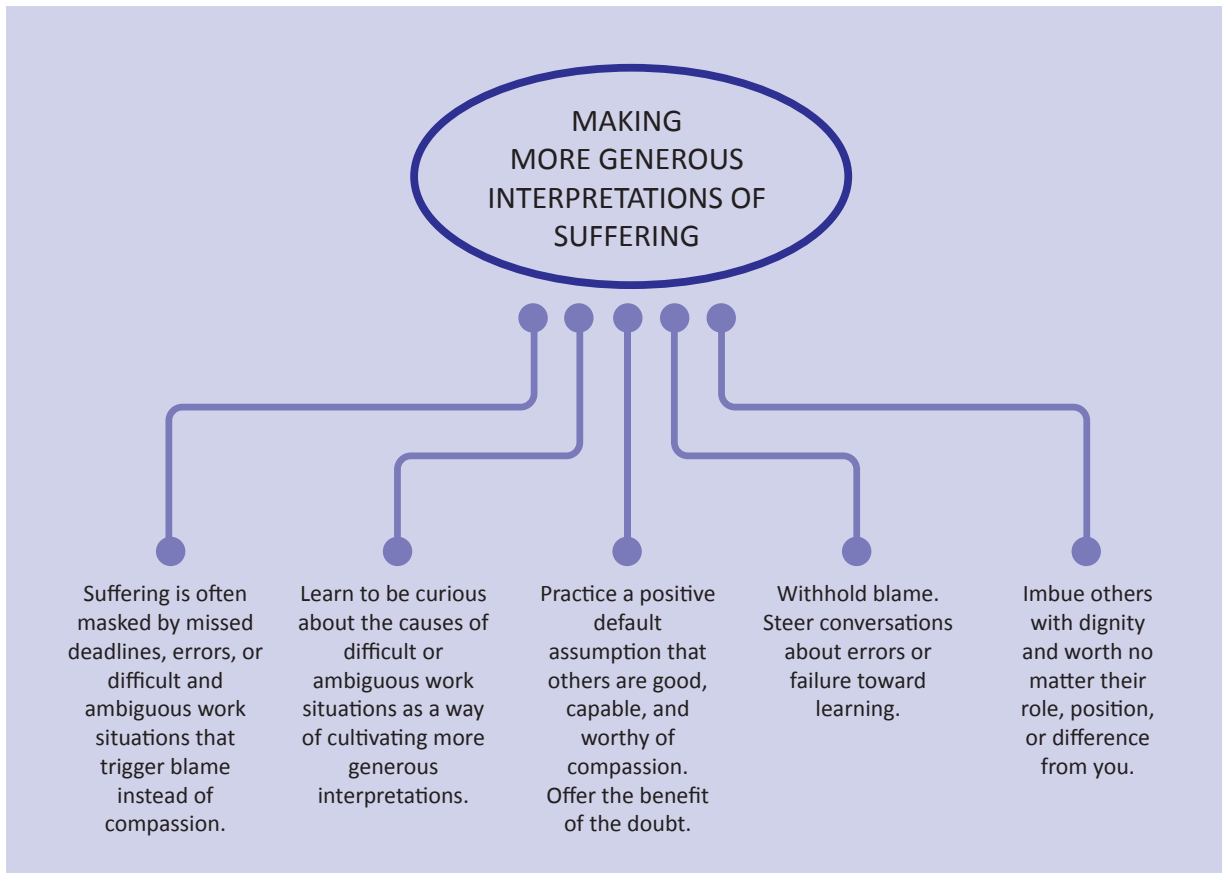
In addition to the physical benefits of the neurological response to being compassionate, the authors also contend that the act of coaching another is likely to reduce the potential for narcissism in the leader due to the need to focus on the needs of the coachee during the process. In addition, they argue that the leader is also then more likely to be open to feedback and new ideas from others, so coaching with compassion can be seen to have a number of benefits for the individuals in the coaching relationship and wider organisation.

Watch this short video with Professor Boyatzis, to see how coaching with compassion triggers areas of the brain which are responsible for opening up positive emotions and creating new ideas: <http://goo.gl/jRcVqe>

An example of a Compassionate Coaching Programme can be found here: [www.creatingcompassion.com](http://www.creatingcompassion.com)



Again, Worline and Dutton (2017) offer a sound summary of advice for individuals in the workplace:



## Compassionate Leadership



There are a great number of Leadership concepts, and empathy and compassion are linked to Transformational and Positive Leadership practices in particular (Martin and Heineberg, 2017)

*“Compassionate leaders take pleasure in being able to foster the development and learning of those around them; they use their own knowledge to support and help others...” (Martin and Heineberg, 2017;228)*

These are some of the practical steps that leaders can take to foster compassion in the workplace:

### Modelling

Leaders set the tone in organisations and lead by example; whether consciously or not, everything that leaders say and do is communicating to staff. Leaders have a role in demonstrating care and concern for others, and showing that expressing emotion, respect and affection are all leadership behaviours. By acting in this way, leaders can normalise this behaviour for others.

The importance of leadership behaviours can be captured practically in organisational leadership behaviour frameworks and embedded into recruitment, induction, appraisal and promotions processes. The following behavioural framework from Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust provides a clear example of how this might look in practice: <https://www.cmft.nhs.uk/media/1520137/behavioural%20framework%202015.pdf>

### Staff Engagement

Engaging staff is about truly listening to them, valuing their wants, needs and contributions, and responding to these in the spirit of improvement, and in this way staff engagement is a compassionate act. Engagement should exist throughout an organisation and leaders can create the environment for this through modelling active listening and compassionate response.

Linked to overall staff engagement, it is important for leaders to get to know their staff as individuals and understand their needs, skills and strengths, as well as some of the difficulties and development needs that they might have. In this way leaders recognise the shared humanity of individuals and are better able to notice and respond if support and development is needed.

Much research has found that staff engagement leads to improved staff wellbeing, and organisational productivity and performance (Rayton et al, 2012).

Engage for Success is a voluntary movement who promote and provide practical guidance on staff engagement across a wide range of employment sectors, with a view to improving performance and productivity. Many examples of good practice for leaders and more generally can be found at their website: <http://engageforsuccess.org/>

### Vision and Values

Leaders are responsible for setting the vision and values for an organisation and we know from research that where there is clarity around these and ownership for them throughout the organisation, then organisations are more successful. Leaders firstly need to engage staff in the development of the vision and values, so they can feel part of them, and need to ensure that empathy and compassion are core to these.

Consider this example from IMS Facility Maintenance Services who have built Compassion into their organisational values: <http://www.ims.gs/core-values-compassion-generosity-righteousness-faith/>

Critically, leaders need to live the values; if leadership behaviour is not aligned to organisational values then values are worth little, but where there is congruence with the values and leaders are authentic, this builds consistency and trust, which generates similar positive outcomes to empathy and compassion (CIPD, 2012), arguably magnifying the benefits of compassion.

Manley Hopkinson sets out 5 key values of compassionate leaders, being awareness, courage, confidence, joy and compassion: <http://goo.gl/nzfLQ3>

### Workload to Resource Alignment

We saw earlier that workplace pressures and work intensification can generate suffering in organisations. If we are to take a compassionate approach than this needs to be recognised and acknowledged and leaders need to pay attention when matching capacity to demand. In this respect a compassionate approach might involve taking some tough decisions about what work can and cannot be delivered so, as with challenging behaviour which undermines compassion (p21), compassionate leaders also need to demonstrate courage – one of Hopkinson’s key values set out above.

Martin and Heineberg (2017;229) provide further practical advice for leaders and managers in relation to implementing compassion in the workplace:

- Express awareness of challenges as well as confidence in employees’ capabilities;
- Set high performance expectations while providing resources to accomplish them;
- Offer opportunities for employees to participate in decision making;
- Remove constraints that stifle autonomy, compassion and awareness of linkages between jobs and positions;
- Set inspirational goals.

## Compassion in Organisations and Teams



### Culture

The culture of an organisation is formed from shared values, assumptions, beliefs and practices which shape the behaviour of an organisation (Schein, 1985). In order for the culture of the organisation to be a compassionate one then, it is clear that compassionate approaches need to be embedded, through the demonstration of caring actions.

In the same way that having a wellbeing strategy will be useless if there is a bullying and blame culture, because we know that bullying and blame have a negative impact on wellbeing, having a compassion strategy will also be meaningless in such circumstances. Compassion, like wellbeing, needs to be weaved into the fabric of the organisation, and this can be achieved in a number of ways.

### The Compassion Games

A fun and fast way to introduce compassion into a culture is to get involved in an initiative such as The Compassion Games, which is a worldwide movement, that can be implemented at an organisational or team level. Individuals and teams can get involved in a wide range of activities to generate kindness and care through ‘co-opetition’. They are encouraged to reflect and report on the impact this has had, and there does seem to be a fast and strong impact from engagement in these Games, which happen 4 times a year (although the principles could be adopted throughout the year of course).

A short video showing an example of how this reduced violence and improved the culture in a prison after the warden approved an 11 day trial of The Games, can be seen here: <http://goo.gl/6e7UDD> in a post on 18 September 2017

The concept of The Compassion Games is explained here: <http://goo.gl/4wsJsP>

And more information can be found on the dedicated website: <http://compassiongames.org/>

### Coaching Culture

The importance of coaching with compassion was highlighted above and leaders have a role in modelling this approach and embedding it throughout the organisation. In this way it can become part of the organisational culture.

In addition, coaching is an approach which can be built into the learning and development strategy of an organisation so that staff can be enabled and empowered to adopt a coaching approach in their day to day interactions.

### Vision and Values

As we set out above, leaders have a clear role in ensuring that organisational vision and values are developed with staff to create buy-in, and in ensuring that empathy and compassion are reflected in the vision and values. Embedding empathy and compassion in values will begin to build them into the culture.

### Values Based Recruitment (VBR)

VBR is an approach to ensuring that the personal values of people applying for jobs within an organisation, at any level, are aligned to the values of the organisation. As set out above, it is especially important for leaders to 'live the values' in order to lead by example, and it is critical for members of staff at all levels to deliver services in accordance with those values too. This is an approach which is used particularly in healthcare settings, with a view to ensuring that staff have a focus on delivering safe and compassionate care; and it is an approach which could easily be adopted by other types of organisations and businesses.

Some examples can be found here: <http://goo.gl/jJpZjj>

### Induction

Following on from recruitment, the induction process is a key time for helping new employees to acclimatise into their new organisation and for clarifying vision, values and expectations. This is a good opportunity for reinforcing the importance of empathy and compassion in the organisation.

### Organisational Objectives

The vision and values should then inform the organisational objectives and targets, so there is clarity about how the vision will be achieved through day to day delivery. Much of the work that is delivered in organisations is delivered through teams.

### Effective Teams

We know from extensive research that there are three core features which enable teams to be effective, being clear objectives, interdependencies and regular review.

The first of those core features is having clear objectives. In order to ensure that the performance of teams will contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives, team objectives should clearly align to the organisational objectives and be delivered in accordance with the organisational values, to ensure consistency and focus, and so these should reflect the compassionate intentions of the wider organisation.

Another critical feature of effective teams is clear interdependency. This means having clarity over who has which roles and how everyone works together in order to achieve the objectives. In order to be effective, such interdependency is enhanced when team members know each other well, including knowing strengths, weaknesses, needs and skills, and take action to actively support each other in the achievement of their objectives, i.e. working compassionately.

A third critical feature of effective teams is regular review and reflection on progress against objectives. Review of progress relies on an environment in which it is safe to be honest about what is going well and not so well, so that teams can learn and adjust their behaviour in order to improve performance. This means that team members need to actively listen to and understand the position of one another, and work together to improve the position of the whole team.

In these ways, compassionate team working can lead to improved effectiveness.

## Schwartz Rounds

The concept of Schwartz Rounds started in the US in the 1990s and was brought to the UK in 2009. It is an approach which originated in healthcare and is widely used in that setting, however it is an approach which can be used in many different work settings in a range of organisations and sectors.

Schwartz Rounds work by bringing together a number of members of staff to reflect on issues they have been experiencing. There is usually a panel of 3 or 4 staff who will tell the stories of their experiences, and this is followed by a facilitated session of reflective discussion, focusing on emotional impact, with a view to supporting staff in order to improve compassion.

*“The underlying premise for Rounds is that the compassion shown by staff can make all the difference to a patient’s experience of care, but that in order to provide compassionate care staff must in turn feel supported in their work.”*

For more information about what Schwartz Rounds are and to see an example of how they work in practice, have a look here: <http://goo.gl/RsRerp>

## Individual Goal Setting

Again we know from wide ranging research, tested over many years, that working with individuals in order to set stretching performance goals leads to better motivation and performance (Locke and Latham, 2016). Critically important to success is timely constructive feedback on progress; when done in a compassionate way, this involves managers taking time to understand where the individual is up to, what challenges they might be facing, what development they might need and the skills and strengths that they bring, and supporting them to continue to improve. This is a really practical way of using a compassionate approach to improve performance .

It does have to be recognised of course that, alongside supporting improvements in behaviour and performance, poor behaviour – that which is lacking in compassion – also has to be addressed. Behaviours which directly contradict a compassionate approach, and which need to be challenged, include:



Often these kinds of behaviours can lead to suffering and so challenging these behaviours is a compassionate approach to tackling that suffering. Challenging conversations can be difficult however, and managers would benefit from support and development in relation to holding important conversations. As Worline and Dutton (2017:47) point out:

*...withholding blame and engaging in compassionate conversations that allow generous interpretations about what's happening, while still setting high standards and holding people accountable for consequences, is one of the most skilled forms of workplace interaction we must all learn."*

### Reward and Recognition

In addition to being enshrined in the vision, values, objectives and targets of an organisation, it is important to recognise and share stories of great compassionate behaviours in order to bring them to life. Compassionate behaviours can be the smallest kind gestures and these should be celebrated, along with larger compassionate acts, to reinforce the value of these gestures and behaviours.

In addition, decisions around promotions should be linked to organisational compassionate values and behaviours, again to ensure that these are perpetuated within the organisation.

Derby Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have compassion as one of their core values and their staff recognition award scheme is focused on recognising staff who deliver against these values: <http://superhospital.co.uk/why-work-for-us/rewards-and-recognition/>

### Social Networks

Creating space for people to get to know each other in the workplace and facilitating networks of people with common interests creates social support. When people get to know each other better, they can begin to understand and appreciate the challenges that people face and the support that they need in order to give their best, and also the skills and strengths that they can bring and share with others, and in this way people can support each other in a compassionate way. Social support in the workplace has also been seen to be key to building individual and organisational resilience at work which helps people to give their best.

Somerset CCG have introduced a series of actions in order to improve levels of compassion in their organisation, with a view to generating a number of measurable performance improvements. Actions include building compassionate policies into existing HR policies, asking staff to volunteer to be 'Compassionate Friends' to provide emotional support to others, and setting up a bank of volunteers who are willing to help each other out with practical support. For more information, have a look at the following presentation: <http://goo.gl/owfw6S>

### Responding to Suffering

Whilst we have said that compassion is about improvement and does not need to be based on a response to suffering, it can also be about that, and organisations need to be clear about how they will respond when people do experience suffering, whether this is generated in the workplace or beyond it.

Policies and procedures can help when people aren't clear about how to respond, but we also need flexibility to understand and respond appropriately to the wide range of individual circumstances that we all experience.

Jeff Greenberg who was the CEO of one of the companies based in the World Trade Centre in New York on Sept 11 2001 said clearly that in amongst all of the technical business continuity processes which became operational during that time, "People's wellbeing comes first" he said "...our immediate and longer term assistance gave meaning to our commitment to people" (Harvard Business Review, 2003). That assistance included things like family liaison, counselling, financial assistance and remembrance.

And of course organisational responses to suffering don't have to be in relation to disasters on the scale of 9/11, but we can learn from those to inform our response on a more daily basis.

## 7. SOME EXAMPLES

“Jerry was a very bright academic who had a history of emotional pain that included a very unhappy and unloving childhood. He was in a faculty where he felt underappreciated and he was regarded by most of his colleagues as a jerk. He was also a poor teacher. He would act up with the dean of the department. If the dean wanted him to write a paper or do something he was often so angry that he would put the request in his drawer and refuse to do it. One day this dean came over to him and said, ‘Let’s go for lunch. I want to take you out.’ And he took him for lunch and he said: ‘What’s going on, tell me about this, what’s happening?’ And Jerry told him he was having all these problems, and he was just starting to work [them] out. And the dean said, ‘Oh I see. Why don’t you come to my place every Tuesday and Thursday evening and we will work together.’ And they worked on his papers and the dean was an incredible mentor to him.” (Fineman, S. (Ed.). (2000). *Emotion in organizations*. Sage.).

“When Alan was breaking up with Mary he was late to work, he was making mistakes, and the boss was understanding about it. He allowed him to make more mistakes than he usually would have. He sort of let the rest of us know that we needed to keep an eye out to help him or whatever. He talked to everybody about it.” (Fineman, S. (Ed.). (2000). *Emotion in organizations*. Sage.)

“A co-worker was diagnosed with breast cancer. Our entire department knew about this with our co-worker’s permission through the Director. We all decided how to best handle the absences of the co-worker. She happened to be a single mother so it was important to help her at home during her chemo. Our department set up a rotating schedule to bring the family dinner each night for a 6-week period, and her work activities were covered” (Lilius, Kanov et al. 2011).

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## 8. CONCLUSION

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We are living through difficult and trying times. Many of the old approaches to workplace wellbeing, attempts to foster effectiveness in organisations and the pursuit of productivity gains have either failed or have been found wanting.

This toolkit is one modest step in a direction which we feel has the potential to shift dysfunctional ways of working and create a better environment within which UK workers can thrive. We see a clear convergence between compassion and wellbeing – especially mental wellbeing. No one can have failed to notice the burgeoning issue of mental illness across all sectors of British government, commerce, industry and care. Stress levels are acute and action is needed, right now. More compassionate workplaces have got to be one of the key goals for anyone who is concerned with mitigating the damaging effects of a lack of mental wellbeing on the people of our country. More compassionate leaders, managers and workplaces will- without doubt- help assuage the worst effects of mental illness.

There is still a mountain of indifference or scepticism about the positive effects of compassion at work that together, we need to tackle. For too long we have ignored the toxic effects of poor or aggressive management in the UK: for many organisations, so-called high performers have been allowed to continue with their bullying ways, immune to action by managers fearful that they will be unable to reach the stretch goals, KPIs or levels of profit demanded by stakeholders without such individuals. This needs to change. We need to challenge the status quo and make it clear that enough is enough and that a radically new way of looking at things, indeed a radical new way of being, is what is required.

With each passing month we see a growing body of evidence which underscores the multiple benefits of introducing a culture of compassion into organisations. Where once we had only US examples we are now starting to see evidence from UK organisations that creating and promoting compassionate ways of working does make a difference. We are building a body of data and strengthening what we feel is already a compelling argument for change.

At various points in this toolkit, Fiona has shown how compassion is all about improvement. It brings multiple benefits. It generates a culture of wellbeing. It facilitates productivity and performance. With this in mind, we hope that this excellent piece of work will help you to make the case for compassion in your organisation, signposting you to resources and support that can help you make the compassionate workplace a reality.



**Michael Jenkins**  
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Roffey Park Institute



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The Compassion Toolkit has been developed in draft format initially in December 2017, with the intention of developing this into an online resource over the coming months, which businesses will be able to access for free. The Toolkit will be updated as this area of work develops.

We'd be very grateful if you would let us know what you think about the Toolkit and how it can be improved. Please send your comments to [fiona.meechan@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:fiona.meechan@manchester.ac.uk)

The National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work was established in November 2016 by Professor Sir Cary Cooper, 50th Anniversary Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Alliance Manchester Business School and Dr Paul Litchfield, Chief Medical Officer at BT. The National Forum is attended by HR Directors and Chief Medical Officers from over 30 leading global companies and major public sector institutions and is dedicated to improving workplace wellbeing in the UK and globally, working on the premise that “Good health is good for business, and good business is good for health”.