

How mindful are you?

If you are not at all familiar with the term "mindful", please read through the page "[Managing the Unexpected](#)" first.

Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliffe define **mindfulness** as follows: "a combination of ongoing scrutiny of existing expectations, continuous refinement and differentiation of expectations based on newer experiences, willingness and capability to invent new expectations that make sense of unprecedented events, a more nuanced appreciation of context and ways to deal with it, and identification of new dimensions of context that improve foresight and current functioning."

Of course, this definition is hard to digest (it only figures on page 42 in their book, so they introduce it gently). Look at the following list to get an initial understanding of how mindful you are (some of the bullet points have pages with more detailed questions on their own):

- **Assumptions:** Are you aware that implicit assumptions guide your behavior? <=> Do you typically not question your assumptions?
- **Blaming:** Do you blame yourself first when something unexpected happens? <=> Do you blame someone else if something unexpected happens?
- **Bolt from the blue:** Are you rarely hit by a bolt from the blue <=> Have you already been hit several times?
- **Boundary spanners:** Do you encourage boundary spanners who have diverse experience, skepticism toward received wisdom, and negotiating tactics that reconcile differences of opinion without destroying nuances that diverse people detect? <=> Do you strive for a homogeneous group of people with equal rights and knowledge?
- **Context:** Do you develop a nuanced understanding of the context? <=> Do you have more important business to do?
- **Consensus with qualification:** Do you come to decisions by consensus first (decentralized step involving everyone who will be affected by the decision) and qualification (centralized decision making if decentralized consensus couldn't be reached)? <=> Do you make lonesome decisions or consensus decisions only?
- **Continuous updating:** Do you continuously update and deepen the increasingly plausible interpretations of what the context is, what problems define the context, and what remedies it contains?
- **Evidence:** Do you typically look for evidence that disconfirms your expectations? <=> Do you typically look for evidence that confirms your expectations? Do you try to explain away the disconfirmation?
- **Expectations:** Do you know that expectations direct your attention to certain features of events? <=> Do you not really ponder about your expectations?
- **False positives:** Do you accept a larger number of possible alarms (even if a lot of them are false positives) so that you don't miss any possible alarm? <=> Do you rather classify an alarm as a false positive (because you don't want to waste efforts)?
- **Front line:** Are decisions made at the front line? <=> Are decisions made in the corporate offices?
- **High-tempo times:** Do you distinguish between normal times, high-tempo times and emergencies? <=> Do you react when the problem occurs?
- **Lapse:** Do you treat any lapse as a symptom that something is wrong with the system

(something that could have severe consequences)? <=> Do you focus on the big problems?

- **Latent failures:** Do you consider latent failures as loopholes in the system's defenses? <=> Do you rely on sound operation procedures to cope with failures?
- **Longer:** If something takes just a little longer, do you take the time to investigate the causes? <=> Do you continue with business as usual?
- **Loop of conversation and verification:** Does a constant loop of conversation and verification take place (monitoring for deviations, reacting almost instantaneously to anything that doesn't fit the expectations)? <=> Do you just try to listen closely?
- **Near miss:** Do you debrief near misses as soon as possible? <=> Do you celebrate near misses as close victories?
- **Normalize:** Do you try to seek disconfirmation? <=> Do you try to normalize by seeking confirmation?
- **Plans:** Do you understand that plans act the same way as expectations (so that people might search narrowly for confirmation that the plan is correct, avoiding disconfirming evidence, overlooking the buildup of the unexpected)? <=> Do you put together detailed plans and rely on their execution?
- **Reluctance to simplify:** Do you take deliberate steps to create more complete and nuanced pictures? <=> Do you have simple pictures and metaphors?
- **Reporting of errors:** Do you encourage reporting of errors, elaborating experiences of near misses for what can be learned? <=> Do you punish people for making errors?
- **Resilience:** Do you develop capabilities to detect, contain, and bounce back from inevitable errors? <=> Are you occupied with daily business already so you can't withstand a big-hitting error?
- **Routines:** Do you resist to define routines for typical errors (because people might become mindless)? <=> Do you define routines for handling typical errors (to limit the variation in handling the errors)?
- **Slack:** Do you accept and build in slack into your system? <=> Do you cut away all the slack (thereby losing some resilience)?
- **Surprise:** Do you take brief moments of surprises seriously and learn from the situation? <=> Do you typically just gloss over what has happened and treat it as normal?
- **Unexpected:** What do you do if something unexpected happens? Do you stop and investigate the reasons? <=> Do you wait until the problem develops to its full strength?
- **Updating:** Are you preoccupied with updating (your expectations, your plans,...)? <=> Do you prefer to stick to your plans?
- **Weak signals:** Do you recognize weak signals? Do you give a strong response (because you see the possible significance of the event)? <=> Do you give a weak response (because you don't feel the signal is worth more attention)?
- **Wrong:** Do you think that you'd rather not be wrong? <=> Do you think that just people in high-reliability organizations (like aircraft carriers) can't afford to be wrong?