



# MINDFULNESS STRENGTHENS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A customer reference of IKEA Switzerland

IKEA is the most famous furniture store in the world. We have a vision: "To create a better everyday life for the many people". To achieve this, we offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low, that as many people as possible will be able to afford them. We operate in 46 countries with around 328 furniture stores. We employ 160,000 people in a wide variety of areas. Our recipe for success: By optimizing the entire value chain, we work hard to offer the best quality at affordable prices. We invest a large part of our profits in existing and new IKEA furniture stores, in product development, in sustainable solutions and the constant reduction of prices for our customers.

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## IKEA as an employer

Our culture is based on community spirit, passion, and joy. Working at IKEA means being part of an inspiring, fun, unbureaucratic, and fast-paced work environment. At IKEA we respect each other and our different personalities and are open to everyone's input. We work with people from a wide variety of backgrounds, special skills, and a good sense of humor. Our values are based on a sense of community, simplicity, and openness. The latter applies to our dealings with each other every day as well as to new approaches and initiatives.

The idea of integrating the topic of mindfulness into IKEA Switzerland's corporate training program came up in autumn 2017. In 2018 the project was started with a pilot for the managers of the furniture store in Zurich. The project was so

successful that it was not only the starting signal for further initiatives but also received an award for innovative HR projects in Switzerland.

The next step was to develop and facilitate an open 1.5 day-program for the managers and executives of IKEA Switzerland. This was followed by an internal marketing campaign to promote the rollout of the program, the specially developed Mindfulness App, as well as the opportunity to participate in a live Mindfulness training to the entire workforce (3,200 employees). In an internal 2-day train-the-trainer program, 15 in-house trainers were trained to carry out the training. These initiatives continue to be implemented up to this day. Due to the Mindfulness training, self-organized meditation circles emerged among IKEA employees, and at the HQ Switzerland regular "Mindful lunches" are happening.

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## MRS. HOLE, WHY DID YOU CHOOSE AWARIS WHEN YOU CONSIDERED INTRODUCING MINDFULNESS INTO THE COMPANY?

"I had informed myself beforehand about various providers on the market. Awaris' performance seemed both professional and authentic to me. At the same time, I liked the fact that the offers are tailored to the needs of each customer."

**Mrs. Hole, Future of Work Project Leader at IKEA Switzerland**



## WHICH TASKS AND OBJECTIVES WERE INITIALLY CRUCIAL FOR YOU?

"The aim was to integrate the topic into our day-to-day business for a start as a pilot test. Internal surveys have also shown that the demands made on our employees have increased. I was particularly concerned about the question to what extent mindfulness could find a place in the hectic everyday life of a retail company like IKEA."

## THE FIRST PROGRAM FOR THE FURNITURE STORE IN ZURICH BECAME A NATIONWIDE ROLLOUT, HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

“The response from the pilot store was so positive that we then considered how we could disseminate it in the company. Since the national board also showed a great interest in the topic, the decision was ultimately made to expand the program to all managers and employees of IKEA Switzerland.”

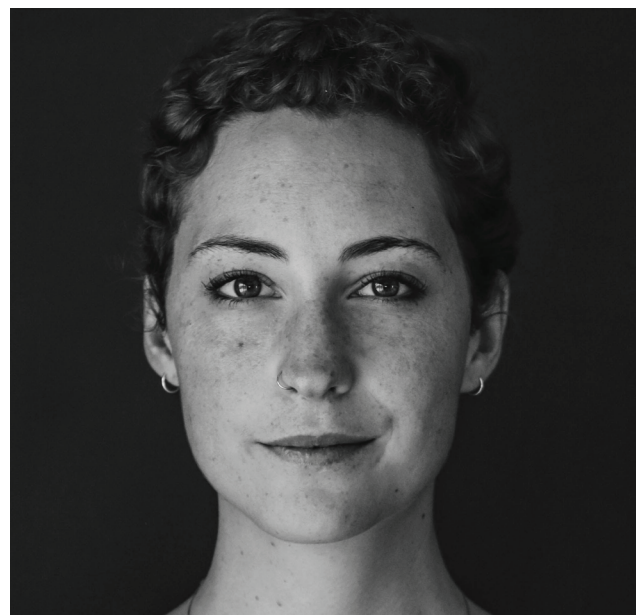
## THE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON AWARENESS TRAINING, WHY DID YOU PLACE THE EMPHASIS ON THAT?



“The topic of mindfulness helps a lot to raise awareness as a precondition for a change in behavior, both concerning one’s own behavior patterns (e.g. stressors) as well as concerning their handling of emotions. The topic of "Leading self" was, therefore, the main focus of the program - one of the most important requirements when it comes to leading others.”

## REGARDING YOUR COMPANY VALUES, WHICH VALUES DOES MINDFULNESS ADDRESS FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE?

„Our impression was that the topic strengthens togetherness, the feeling of being part of a community. The exchange among each other on the issues associated with mindfulness noticeably promoted the cooperation - and this across all departmental and hierarchical levels.“



## WHAT ADDED VALUE DOES MINDFULNESS OFFER YOU IN THE CONTEXT OF LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT, IS IT MORE THAN JUST MEDITATION?

"To be a good leader, I should be aware of my own behavioral patterns and emotions. Mindfulness strengthens emotional or social intelligence and at the same time the ability to work with others. It is much more than "just" meditation, rather a method or a way to continuously develop one's own personality."

## HOW DID THE PARTICIPANTS REACT TO THE TOPIC?

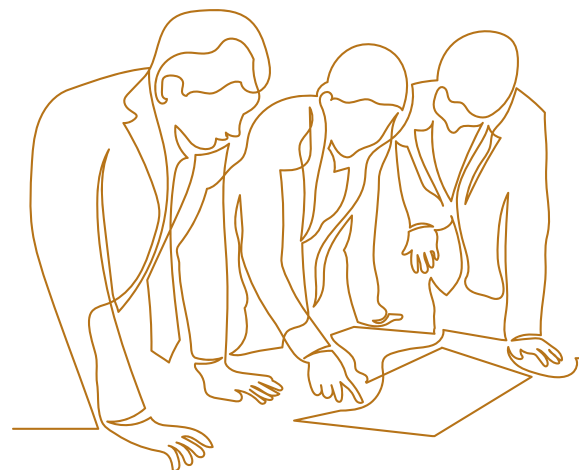
„Very positive – many of the former 'skeptics' were also pleasantly surprised. We ourselves would not have expected the program to be so well received – and we are always happy to hear that it still spreads and that many employees continue to practice mindfulness long after they have taken part in the workshops."

## WHAT DID YOU / THE PARTICIPANTS LIKE THE MOST AND WHAT IMPACTED THE GREATEST ADDED VALUE?

"The idea that you can – and should – 'cultivate joy' even in the everyday life of a large company. And the finding that mindfulness takes neither much time nor effort – and can easily be introduced as a ritual before a meeting. Furthermore, the sense of "multitasking" was strongly debated – many people agreed that mindfulness helps to use one's own resources more consciously in everyday work – and thus also more productively and efficiently."

## YOU CHOSE A TRAIN-THE-TRAINER APPROACH, WAS IT DIFFICULT TO FIND IN-HOUSE COACHES?

„No, in fact, we had too many applications. Overall, we were amazed at how many employees in our company already practice mindfulness or similar. They were often positively surprised by the fact that IKEA now introduces this topic into the professional context."



## WAS THERE ANYTHING SURPRISING?

„Yes, there is still meditation in our pilot store (IKEA Dietlikon), sometimes even before large meetings and even before internal audits. Actually we had expected much more resistance or skepticism – which did not arise.“

## WHAT WAS THE INTERNAL FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROGRAM? WHAT CONVINCED THE MANAGEMENT?

„The positive effect of the training on cooperation, atmosphere and also on individual behavior (self-reflection).“

## HAS THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM BEEN MEASURED?

„The outcome of the pilot program showed positive results in almost all subject areas, such as communication, individual perception of stress and cooperation. We do not yet have any data for the rollout at the national level, but the feedback we have received so far has also been very positive.“

## HOW DO YOU RATE THE COLLABORATION WITH AWARIS FROM PLANNING/BRIEFING TO IMPLEMENTATION AND INITIAL RESULTS?

„Super professional, innovative, open, unobtrusive, service-oriented and always with a positive mindset.“

## WHAT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND OTHER COMPANIES FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES?

„Just start. It is helpful to begin with finding allies who are already open to the topic. Start small. Be brave. Be patient and persistent at the same time. As soon as it runs, it runs by itself. Furthermore, it is very beneficial to have one or more internal ambassadors to represent the topic – and to continue to promote the initiative.“

## ARE FURTHER PROGRAMS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE?

“Yes, we are planning further executive Mindfulness training programs to enable new managers who have joined IKEA in the meantime to attend the training.“

## ABOUT AWARIS

Awaris is a leadership development company that combines scientifically proven mindfulness-based interventions with mindset and behavioral changes in the context of complex environments. A major focus of Awaris' work is the neurophysiological dimension of human behavior: Awaris seeks to deeply understand how humans function and what humans require to work well – individually and in groups. Awaris engages with clients in a variety of ways, including face-to-face training that applies blended learning formats, retreats, and train-the-trainer courses. The company also provides proprietary technology solutions to support leadership development, including self-developed mobile apps and a learning platform. Awaris is based in Germany and has a network of trainers in Europe, North America, South America and Asia. It has subsidiaries in the UK, France, Austria, the Benelux region and China.

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