



mindfulnessfirst™
a sense of calm for communities and classrooms

Mindfulness First

An Organization Transitioning to Sociocracy

About the Organization

Mindfulness First is a 501c3 nonprofit located in Scottsdale, Arizona, USA. Founded in 2014, Mindfulness First's mission is "to offer scientifically-informed programs based in Mindful Awareness and Social-Emotional Learning which provide children and adults with tools to manage stress and navigate life's challenges. It is comprised of 17 people including staff and board members"¹

Why Sociocracy?

Mindfulness First aims to have an organizational culture that reflects the fundamental principles of mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness is about paying attention to this present moment by noticing thoughts, emotions, physical sensations and feelings. Through this attention to our physical and mental impulses, we can learn to regulate them to respond rather than react in any given situation. This means that Mindfulness First aims to prevent the all too common burnout related to workplace stress. Focusing on collaborative approaches to decision-making and creating healthy boundaries and support for each team member can do this. Sociocracy provides the framework and methods for supporting this type of environment to ensure each person's voice is valued equally.



Transition So Far

Prior to learning about Sociocracy, Mindfulness First leadership promoted a culture of inclusion and respect for all members and did not develop a strong hierarchical structure. The Founder and Executive Director, Sunny Wight, insisted that all opinions mattered and adopted a supportive leadership style that allowed for self-agency and freedom within roles. This foundation provided a fertile environment for the adoption of Sociocracy.

Mindfulness First began the formal transition to Sociocracy when the board voted in favor of adopting the governance approach in December 2016. Serendipitously in January 2017, three of the team members were able to join the 2nd cohort of Sociocracy Leadership Training (SOLT) through Sociocracy for All to enhance their understanding and share it with the organization through the transition.

The first phase of the transition began in January and continued through February 2017. It focused on educating the team members about what Sociocracy is and how it can be implemented at Mindfulness First. This involved individual study for some of the leadership of Mindfulness First to understand the fundamental principles and the process. The leadership team then drafted a version of the organizational circles to propose to the rest of the team.

The next step involved conducting an introductory presentation facilitated in the sociocratic way to the rest of the Mindfulness First team in order to demonstrate Sociocracy and ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of understanding. This also served as an opportunity to consent on the organizational circles proposal drafted by the leadership. Following this meeting, the team members were then asked to sign up for which circles they wanted to participate in. Given the existing culture provided by Mindfulness First leadership, all

¹ More information about Mindfulness First can be found at <http://mindfulnessfirst.org/>

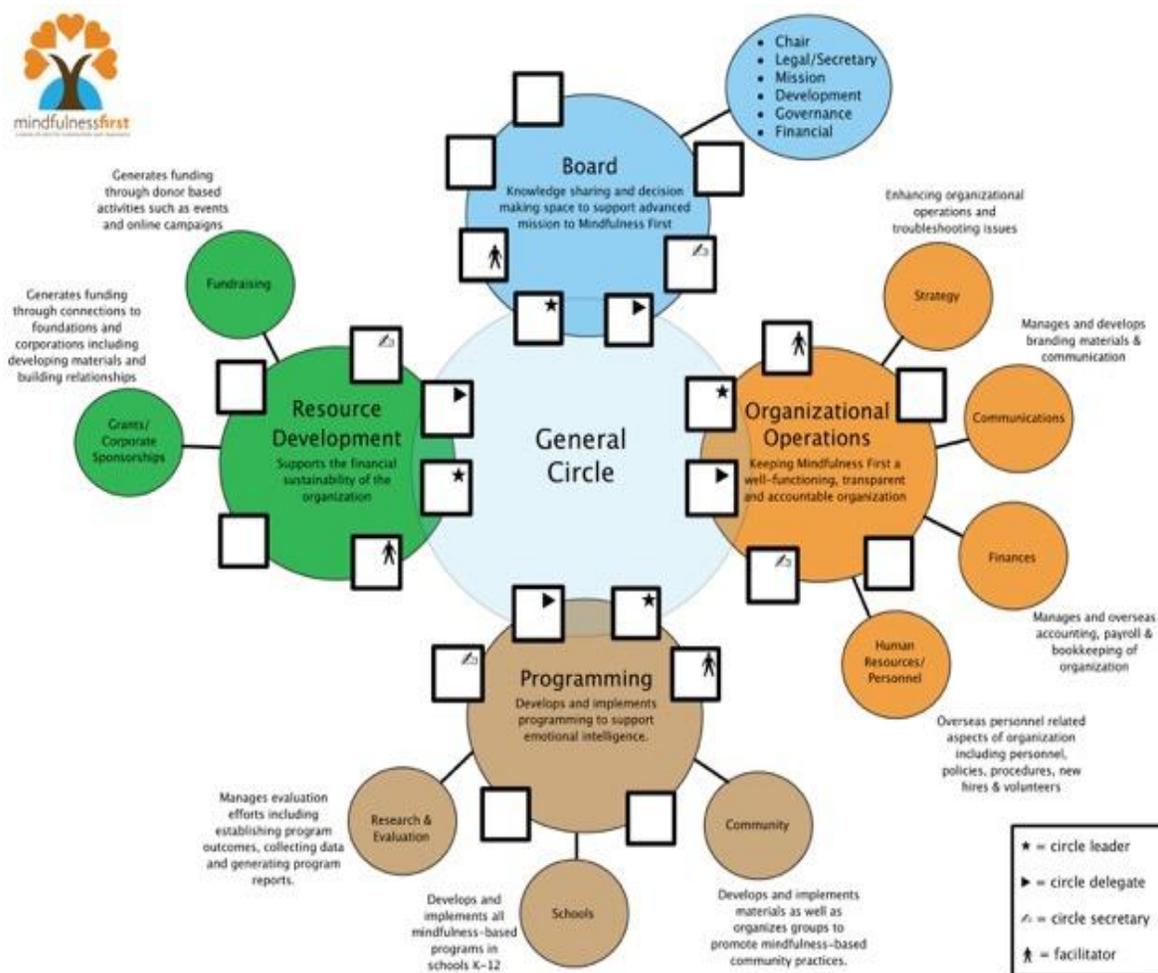
team members felt it was a natural fit and in fact one shared “it’s like we have been doing this all along in a less structured way.”

Moving Forward

Moving forward, Mindfulness First has several steps to complete the full transition to sociocratic governance. The next phase involves setting up the circle infrastructure. This includes consenting on the proposed aim and then consenting to a leader, delegate, secretary and facilitator. Once each of these roles has been elected, the circle members can move forward with the work. The three Mindfulness First members involved with SOLT will serve as guides for the other members to support meeting functioning until more clarity is established. They will also develop a guide and materials for new staff member orientation.

Organizational Infrastructure: Circles

Five circles have been established thus far at Mindfulness First. One circle is the Top Circle, which includes the board along with core leadership aimed at providing strategic oversight. Another circle is the General Circle where organizational policies are developed collaboratively. Finally, there are three functional circles: Operations, Programming and Resource Development. The Operations Circle is focused on managing infrastructure and communications, the Programming Circle focuses on services provided by MF, and Resource Development aims to support the generation of funding.



This case study was written by Stephanie Cordel as part of her contribution to the [Sociocracy Leadership Training](#)