



RESEARCH PAPER

TOWARDS A MORE COMPASSIONATE
WORKPLACE IN THE EVENTS AND
HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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#MeetingMindsMatter

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The Meetings Industry Association (Mia) launched a campaign in August 2017 to raise awareness of compassion, mental health and resilience in the events and hospitality sector. As part of the campaign, Roffey Park, an internationally-renowned leadership and organisational development institute, has conducted a comprehensive study with mia members using a survey and a series of focus groups to examine the following questions:

- How do we create a compassionate work environment in the event and hospitality sector?
- How does this impact on recruitment, staff retention, engagement and the bottom line?

Findings from this study show that compassion in the work environment improves staff well-being, staff retention rate and positively impacts on organisation bottom line.

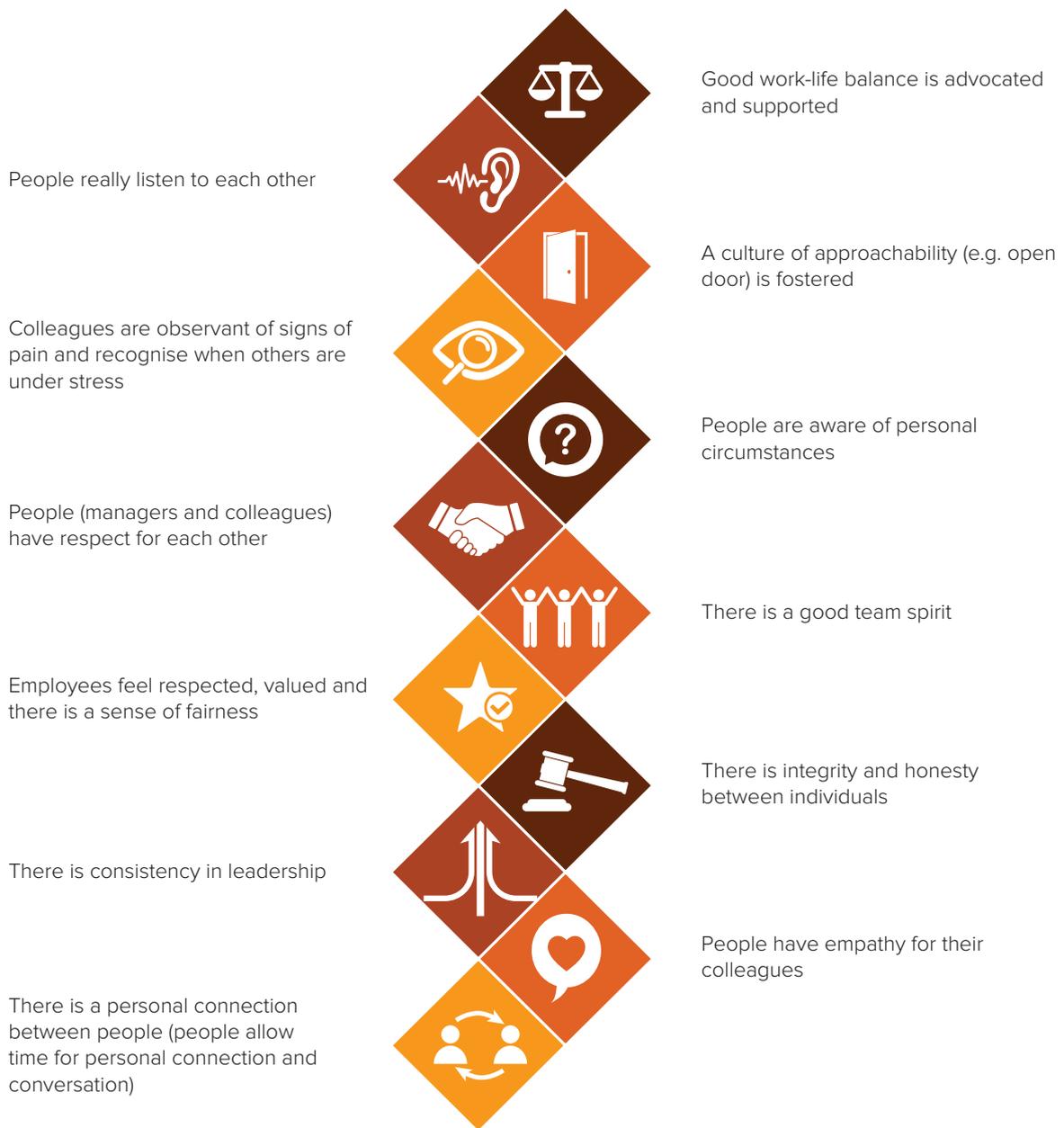
In this paper we'll share findings from the study and cover the following:

- Characteristics of a compassionate workplace in the event and hospitality sector
- The business case for compassion in the workplace
- The challenges of being compassionate in the sector
- Recommendations and guidelines on how to build a compassionate organisation



Characteristics of a compassionate workplace

We asked study participants to identify the attributes of a compassionate organisation/workplace in their sector. They identified a compassionate organisation/workplace as a place where:



We define a compassionate organisation as a place where people trust each other and feel it is acceptable to talk about their problems and seek help and support from their colleagues or the organisation. In such an organisation people know that if they talk about their problems, other colleagues will not judge them and will listen and try to help.

Business case for compassion in the event and hospitality sector

We asked survey participants what the impact of a compassionate culture would be on their organisations' bottom line. More than four-fifths of the respondents reported that a compassionate culture will have a positive or very positive impact on their organisations' bottom line. (Interestingly only less than 1% said that it will have a negative impact).¹

We asked participants why they think compassion will have a positive impact on their organisation's bottom line. The general theme that came out of their responses was that people who feel cared about will work better and feel happier about coming to work. This also encourages them to provide a better service to their clients. Here is what some of the respondents said:

"A healthy close team emits a vibe that the clients feel and see, we have very low staff turnover and we are all very close, we are very familiar with each other and have all shared and helped each other through tough times" (conference centre, senior manager)

"If an employee feels that their issues will be dealt with in a compassionate manner, they will in turn feel very loyal to an organisation. There are enough horror stories out there about business not being compassionate that when you do find one, you hold onto them!" (agency, non-managerial staff)

"Having this culture means people will be happy, supported and as a result perform the best they possibly can. It also reduces the chance of people leaving which can result in extra recruitment costs, cost of sales etc." (hotel, senior manager)

"We are an organisation that is people driven. People buy from people, so if the team are feeling positive and supported they can project that more naturally at their work. If people are happy it comes across and they are more confident to do their job well and that success breeds more success in the 'bottom line'! It also means if someone needs time out, personal time or similar they appreciate it and work harder when they are back. It builds loyalty." (convention bureau, senior manager)

In the survey, three quarters of the respondents said that they have been managed by someone who in their view lacked compassion. We asked these people how manager's lack of compassion impacted on them and their colleagues. They said it

- increased their stress and anxiety
- made them feel demotivated and disengaged
- reduced productivity and commitment to the job
- resulted in high turnover of staff

Here are some of the quotes from the respondents:

"Office environment was like walking on egg shells, everyone was scared to talk/have 5 minutes of general chat or to leave work on time, we always stayed late. Created a negative office environment, low team morale, fear of not hitting deadlines & targets." (junior manager)

"The result is a reluctance to do more than the minimum; why should we care if our manager doesn't? Ultimately it is the business that suffers. The staff turnover has risen and the lack of interest in the business stultifies innovation and any willingness to go the extra mile. People don't feel appreciated or supported." (middle manager, conference centre)

"This manager was in a previous company and made all our lives quite a misery.....no compassion, caring or empathy for either personal or work issues. She made me feel insecure, constantly at risk within my role and every time she walked into the office the feeling of dread was overwhelming to the point I took time off work as I didn't want to be there. I did actually leave eventually as did several other colleagues as the feeling of constant dread of being at work was too much." (academic venue, senior manager)

"By being arrogant, believing mental health is a made up concept and anything someone says, he has always done it or had it bigger, better or much worse than anyone else." (conference centre, senior manager)

¹ 8% said it has no impact and 10% said they don't know.

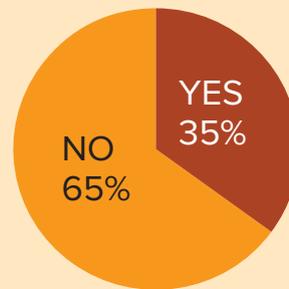
Barriers to a more compassionate events and hospitality sector

These findings build a strong case for compassion in the workplace in the sector. The question raised by these finding is 'what are the barriers and challenges to being compassionate in the workplace?'

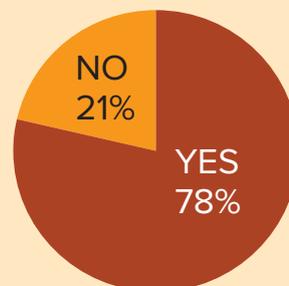
Over one third of the survey respondents felt that they have missed an opportunity to show compassion because they felt that it wasn't professional to express emotion or care for someone in the workplace. Similarly, nearly 80% have seen others miss opportunities for compassion because compassion wasn't seen as part of the job. Over two-thirds have witnessed missed opportunities for compassion in their workplaces because people were too burdened or burned out to feel empathy and act with compassion.



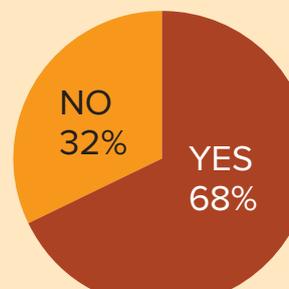
Have you ever missed an opportunity for compassion at work because you felt that it wasn't professional to express emotion or care for someone?



Have you seen others miss opportunities for compassion because compassion wasn't seen as part of the job?



Have you witnessed missed opportunities for compassion in your workplace because people were too burdened or burned out to feel empathy and act with compassion?



The barriers to being more compassionate reported by many participants seem to fall into one of the following categories:

- Organisational culture related barriers
- Individual circumstances related barriers
- Policy and procedural related barriers

Here are some of the quotes for each of the categories:

Organisational culture related barriers

"Cultural norm of what is, or is not acceptable in the workplace"

"Being worried about being perceived as too soft - widely held view that being compassionate, kind and caring is inherently 'pink and fluffy'"

"Technology - i.e. sending emails as opposed to face to face or phone contact does not help"

"Managers not feeling empowered to make decisions themselves that enable them to be compassionate"

Individual circumstances related barriers

"Too busy to stop and show care - so busy that one is not able to lead or manage at basic level let alone when people need additional support"

"Low emotional intelligence"

"Managers who genuinely don't care about their teams and focus only on getting the job done whatever the cost"

"Pressure from senior management too focused on outputs"

"A lack of understanding or role modelling of what compassion in the workplace looks like and how it can help create and sustain a positive culture"

"Getting the right balance between achieving goals and being compassionate"

"Lack of experience in how to show compassion in a professional way"

"Concern about how a show of compassion will be received by the other person"

Policy and procedural related barriers

"Too restrictive HR policy e.g. not being able to adapt to individual circumstances in the case of bereavement"

"Being fearful of accidentally discriminating against a person, crossing unseen boundaries, being seen as inconsistent"

"When policies and procedures are followed to the letter, to the point where you can't see the real compassionate person"

Building a compassionate organisation

In a compassionate organisation people trust each other and feel it is acceptable to talk about their problems and seek help and support from their colleagues or the organisation. Leaders play a key role in creating such an environment in their organisation. We asked focus group participants how they would encourage compassion in their workplaces and build a culture of compassion. Key activities that were suggested by most of the participants include:

- Leaders and managers need to be and feel equipped to role model compassion in their workplaces. For example this could be done by showing compassion towards other colleagues and encouraging other people in the team to act compassionately towards a colleague who needs help
- Leaders need to promote healthy practices at work. For example make time for individuals – one to ones, break down the long hours culture
- Improving their emotional intelligence skills to understand others' motivations and tipping points. This could be done by
 - acknowledging your own feelings and expressing them appropriately
 - finding ways to help you become more aware of, and process, your own emotions
- Leaders need to be highly skilled in communicating openly and honestly
- Support from senior management is very important. Role modelling begins at the top.
- Embed compassion into company values. It needs to be part of organisational strategy that can be delivered overall. Also pay attention to how this is embedded at all levels, not just “top-down”
- Reward compassionate acts (recognising and appreciating compassion)
- Training on compassion
- Raising awareness about compassion
- Include compassion as part of recruitment process (e.g. apparent lack of compassion)
- Someone to confide in, or seek advice (may be an external source)
- HR policy would be helpful to give people some guidelines on what supports are available from the organisation. But they must be flexible and have an entrepreneurial approach so they can be adapted depending on people’s personal circumstances

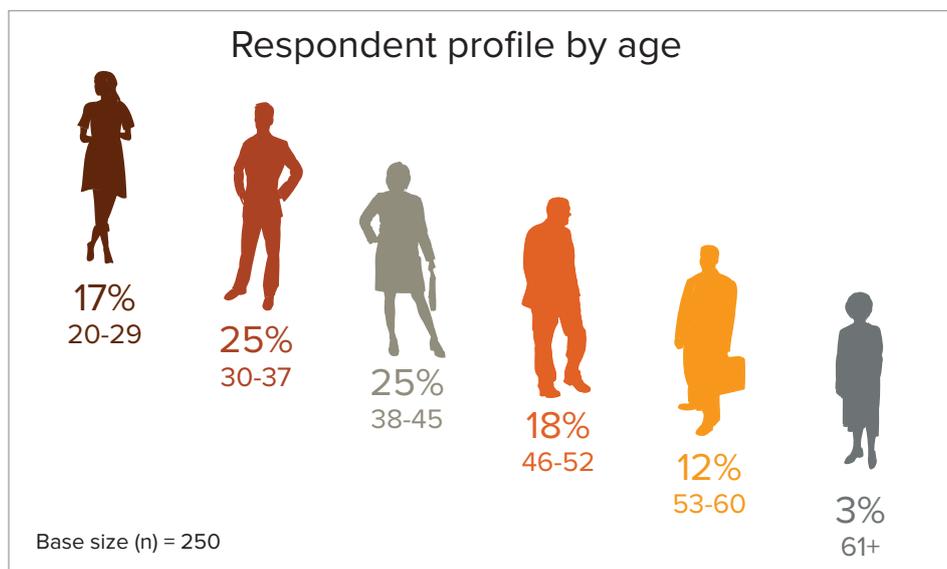
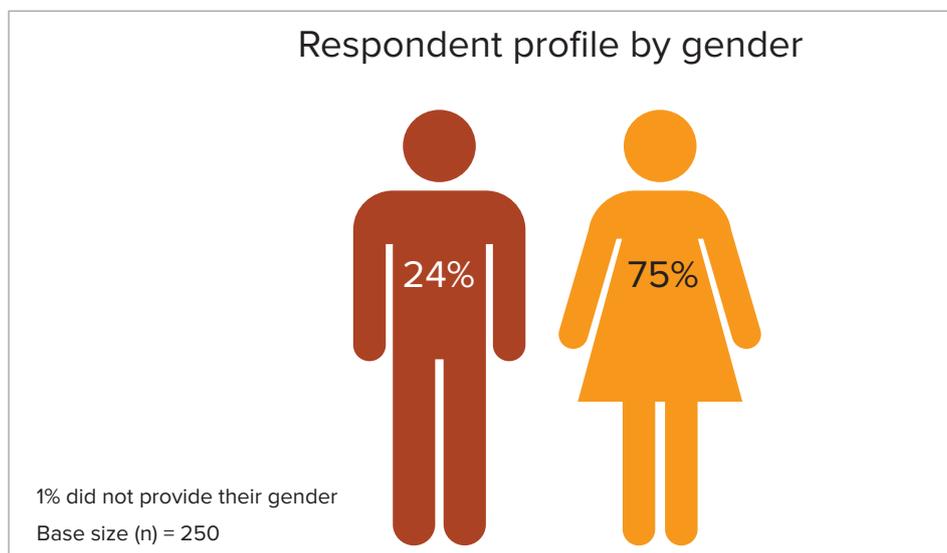


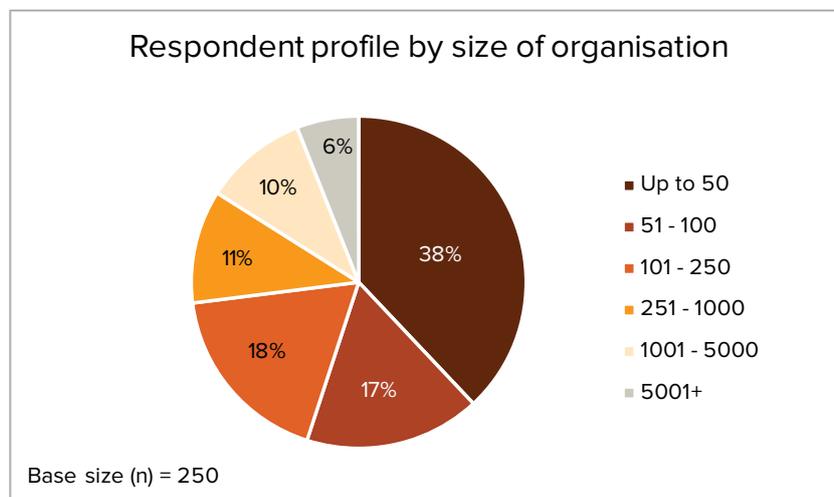
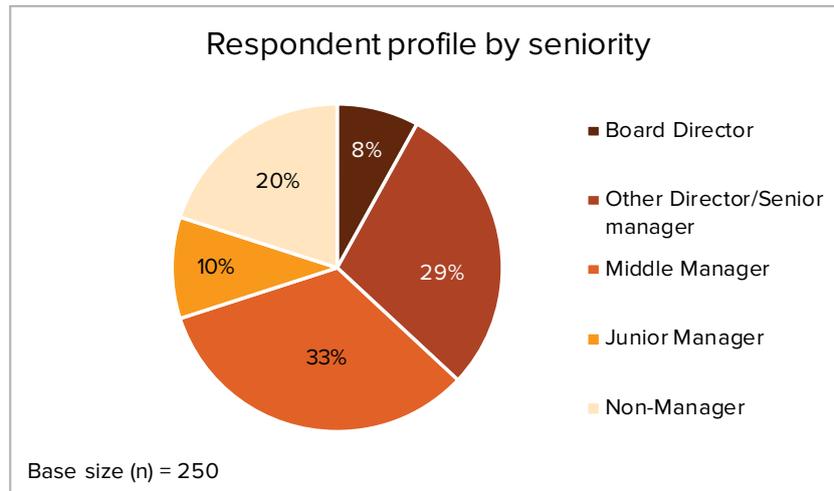
Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology of the study

Roffey Park designed and conducted a survey about compassion in the workplace. More than 250 members of the mia completed the survey during August and September 2017. In addition to the survey we invited business leaders within the sector to take part in a series of focus groups. 20 people took part in three focus groups, held in London and Birmingham, and shared their opinions on what the sector currently does well to create compassionate workplaces, and what could be done to improve resilience and mental well-being in the work environment.

Appendix 2: Events and hospitality survey of compassion in the workplace – Respondent profile





Respondent profile by type of organisation

Conference Centre	29%
Hotel	19%
Academic Venue	16%
Agency	8%
Sporting Venue	3%
Supplier	3%
Exhibition Centre	2%
Museum	1%
Stately Home	1%
Racecourse	1%
Other (please specify)	17%

Base size = 250

About Roffey Park

Roffey Park is an internationally renowned leadership institute based in the UK and Singapore. We develop people who develop organisations. With over 70 years' experience of leadership and management development, organisational development, human resources and personal effectiveness, we provide executive education and research to many of the world's leading companies and organisations.

Roffey Park Employee Research Consultancy

Many organisations commission us to conduct research to gain a better understanding of employee views and perspectives on everything from engagement, how change efforts are being perceived and the value of different HR policies and programmes. We offer a unique combination of expertise in employee research and organisational development. Our expertise includes both quantitative analytics and in-depth qualitative enquiry.

We aim to:

- Tailor our approach to meet your needs and organisational context
- Share our expertise and in-depth research with other organisations from a variety of sectors to provide you with new ideas and different perspectives
- Use the research process as a way for you to reflect on how your overall approach to people issues affects the execution of strategic aims
- Work with you in partnership, working as an extension of your team
- Go beyond the data, generating insights and facilitating change
- Help you demonstrate the impact of what you do

Some things we do:

- Design and develop leadership competency frameworks and 360 assessment tools
- Bespoke research and consultancy on diversity and inclusion
- Demonstrate ROI of leadership development and organisational change programmes
- Action research into leadership and organisational performance
- Design and deliver customised workshops on compassion, trust, resilience and other topics
- Assess and improve organisational performance using diagnostic frameworks such as Burke-Litwin
- Inquire into and develop organisational values

Author's biography



Dr Meysam Poorkavoos, Researcher
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Meysam is an experienced researcher with a strong knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods. His main areas of interest are around compassion in the workplace, resilience, interpersonal trust and innovation. He has authored and co-authored a number of published reports for Roffey Park including The Lived Experience of Trust, Compassionate leadership: what is it and why do organisations need more of it, and an in-depth study of Building Personal Resilience. He has also developed two self-assessment psychometric instruments to measure personal resilience (Resilience Capability Index) and compassion at the workplace (Compassion at Work Index). Before joining the research team at Roffey Park, Meysam worked as a university lecturer delivering a variety of management courses.

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