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Mindfulness: from Mania to Meaning

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List of Abbreviations

MBSR – mindfulness based stress reduction
MBCT – mindfulness based cognitive therapy
ACT – acceptance and commitment therapy
CBT – cognitive behaviour therapy
CSR – corporate social responsibility
HRM – human resource management
CBE – community-based enterprise

Abstract

Recently meditative and stress reduction practices under the umbrella of ‘mindfulness’ have become a buzzword, hawked as a panacea for the mounting chronic problems in western mental-wellbeing. This thesis critically investigates how mindfulness practices are evolving in the context of western capitalistic culture, critically assessing the commodification of eastern meditative traditions into the current ‘mindfulness mania’ (Thompson, 2020). The ways to transition mindfulness practices from the current commodified version to the more meaningful and socially beneficial are investigated by analyzing phenomenological and cognitive psychology perspectives around consciousness and embodiment. Specifically, I examine 5EA and 7E cognitive frameworks and the phenomenology of Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (2013). The commodification of mindfulness finds its support in the insights from neuroscience that propels uncritical reductionist views around neuroplasticity, which in turn entices people to perceive themselves as brains that need to be re-wired to better fit in society (Malabou, 2008). The current neuroscientific approach adopts a dualistic stance on body and mind, emotions and rationality. This dualism is shown to be the major limitation that has landed us with individualistic, personalized perspectives to fixing problems and leaves out a broader idea of cognitive ecology (Thompson, 2020; Varela, 1998). Therefore novel, interdisciplinary approaches such as neurophenomenology (Varela, 1998; Thompson, 2020; Singh Sikh, & Spence, 2016) and somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2008) describe ways to more deeply understand cognitive processes embedded in social and cultural environments (Thompson, 2020), embedding meditation and mindfulness practices in a wider societally meaningful context supportive of mindfulness and wellbeing (Thompson, 2020; Shusterman, 2008; Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Purser & Milillo, 2015).

“Courage to change the world is essential to sustainable business and social innovations. Hence, those who have reached self-transcendence and have re-engaged with their organizations and the wider community with an enlightened mind may demonstrate a higher level of creativity, initiative, and leadership. Some may reorient their life priorities [...] to maximize their contribution to society.”

(Qiu & Rooney, 2019, p. 725)

Chapter I – Introduction

I-1. Presenting a real-life context behind ‘mindfulness mania’

Silicon Valley, the year 2010, big tech corporations organized a new conference called Wisdom 2.0, which from then on would become a yearly event attracting attention to the mental well-being of workers. So far, the conference has been creating the buzz around the implementation of innovative solutions for stress reduction, avoidance of burnouts and enhancement of creativity, productivity and work efficiency (Healey, 2015; Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Corporate leaders of tech giants have been making an emphasis on ‘soft’ solutions to a tough issue - that is using meditation practices to aid employees with their mental health. At first, the Wisdom 2.0 conference was aimed at spreading the word about the set of meditative training within psychological therapy, which has successfully implemented old Buddhist wisdom and showed better results compared to the traditional cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) were at the beginning of their rise at that time. These two inspired corporate management, to relay the methods from the new stream of clinical psychology and therapy in the corporate context, making courses and programmes specifically targeted at office workers (Allen, et al. 2015; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017), for instance mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003).

The practitioners and researchers were invited to Wisdom 2.0 to share the success stories and provide the inspiration for the workplace implementation (Healey, 2015). Leaders of the companies were sharing their own experiences of implementing eastern meditative practices in their daily life and subsequent surges of productivity (Nelson, 2017; Lau, 2020). A few years after the first conference, it became an official Wisdom 2.0 Mindfulness Summit, and the success of implementing the ‘workplace mindfulness’ was spreading like wildfire (Healey, 2015). Soon most big corporations in the US have implemented some version of training to support their employees (Levin, 2017).

Google, for instance, started with ‘Search Inside Yourself’ mindfulness programme to raise awareness towards meditation as a tool for mental growth and stability leading to a successful and satisfying working life (Kelly, 2012; Stulberg & Magness, 2017). Later, the company built a leadership crash course with the same name (‘Search Inside Yourself Google Leadership Institute’). The big corporations like Apple and Facebook soon had training programmes of their own, and non-tech firms followed the suit such as Nike, General Mills, and Target (Schaufenbuel, 2015).

However, the implementation of workplace mindfulness did not really address the core of the problem, and perhaps even made it worse. The unhealthy corporate climate still remained, which is characterised by a ‘work-till-you-drop’ working ethic, heavy workload and constant deadlines, high amount of internal teams/employees competitiveness, and demanding hierarchal structures (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). The ‘soft’ meditation solutions, could not stand a chance to be an effective countermeasure in such circumstances (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). All those pieces of training did were to focus on individual employees without considering the workplace environment overall. Hence, making the meditation and mindfulness not into a soft solution but a soft work intensification pill (Qiu & Rooney, 2019) as leadership believed that employees are going to be more productive and efficient and hence could handle a greater workload.

That has especially become more clear with the waves of recent lockdowns brought by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hartmans, 2020). The big issue occurred whence employees struggled to regain the work-life balance as expectations from the managerial side have increased leading to work-from-home exhaustion (Hartmans, 2020; Liu, 2021). The new hazard was named to be “burnout and stress”, which called for different enhanced measures (Vishwanatham, 2020; Liu, 2021, Hartmans, 2020; Glassdoor, 2021). Google and Facebook reacted to the problem by introducing the “no meeting weeks” and TEA check-ins, which is a stress resilience training programme called “Thoughts, Energy and Attention” (Elias, 2020; Kolakowski, 2020). However, the measures were not as helpful as management believed them to be (Hartmans, 2020). That is because “no meeting weeks” were mostly organised around the time employees had a vacation period or holidays when by default no one would expect to be actively engaged in meetings (around Christmas and Easter for example (Kolakowski, 2020)). Meanwhile, though, many people in high managerial positions and strategic teams were required to continue working during that time (Kolakowski, 2020). Current employee reviews on Glassdoor (2021) express the same issue regarding a work ethic in Apple, which received the label “innovation-by-burnout” even years before the pandemic (Osborne, 2013).

Important to understand, that what really presents the hazard is not burnout or stress, the actual hazard is the competitive environment and lack of moral compass in the sphere of workforce management. As Purser and Milillo (2015, p. 18) write the following regarding Google for instance:

An ethically informed practice of mindfulness would enable employees and managers to discern that much of their personal stress stems from Google’s workaholic corporate culture that demands 80-hour workweeks. By cultivating wisely direction attention, an expanded view of mindfulness would empower Google employees to question whether the deliberate thwarting of iPhone and user privacy settings, obstructing Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) investigation of street

view, and its corporate policies of tax avoidance are congruent with the ethos of right mindfulness, right effort, right view, and right livelihood. (p. 18)

Looking at the current examples and implementation of mindfulness by corporations, we see that in an organizational context “Buddhist-inspired” courses, training and interventions run the risk of being “co-opted and exploited for maintaining the status quo rather than effecting transformative change” (Qiu & Rooney, 2019, p. 716). As such, corporatization of mindfulness, has been met with a number of protests during the Wisdom 2.0 conferences throughout the years in order to try to redirect the attention of corporate leaders to what actually matters (Healey, 2015). During the fifth annual conference, for instance, protesters included working-class residents of San Francisco, who had their neighborhoods gentrified as Silicon Valley technological giants continued to grow (Healey, 2015). Members of the East Bay Meditation Center in Oakland, gained support from other ‘socially engaged’ Buddhists who together with “[s]ecular critics have questioned the appropriation of Buddhist practices by corporations whose business practices and products arguably undermine the cultivation of mindfulness” (Healey, 2015).

Big issue that led to such a situation is that western mindfulness implementation almost fully disregards the Buddhist original values and ethical background behind spiritual development and mindfulness practices (Purser & Milillo, 2015). As the result leading to a mindfulness phenomenon - as Bodhi (2011, p. 22) names it - “so vague and elastic that it serves almost as a cipher into which one can read virtually anything we want”. Sadly, the drastic example of this is not even corporations, which try to get the most out of their human resources and powerless stakeholders. It is the example of implementation of mindfulness-based training among US marine officers who are being sent to Afghanistan and Iran called “Marines Mindfulness-Based Fitness Training (MMFT)”, “MMFT for Warriors,” or “M-fit” (Nauert in Purser & Milillo, 2015). This presents a pretty extreme example of “the denaturing and misappropriation of Buddhist mindfulness [...] with this pre-deployment mindfulness training program tailored for developing stress response regulation skills that are relevant to the contemporary battlespace, including the counterinsurgency environment” (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p. 17). This completely reverses the Buddhist ideals of practice to achieve the reduction of suffering, instead it was turned into a tool - “boot-camp to inflict more harm and pain on the enemy” (Purser & Milillo, 2015). And while there are protests to bring attention to corporations and make the corporate side consider more ethical implementations and change practices from within, it is very likely that mindfulness-army implementations remain pretty unknown and unaddressed.

The contemporary problem of mindfulness lies in the fact that “market imperatives have favored a corporate-friendly understanding of mindfulness that perpetuates structural injustice” (Healey, 2015). Hence, the overall goal of this paper is to address the mechanics behind the popularity of commodified mindfulness practices and to address the possibility for a more socially sustainable alternative. The following sections of the Introduction chapter will discuss the research inquiry, its relevance and also present a roadmap for the rest of the paper.

I-2. Research inquiry in a more detail

In this thesis, I am going to critically look at the way mindfulness practices are evolving in the context of western capitalistic development with the goal to address the issue of ‘mindfulness mania and commodification’ (Thompson, 2020). The research question that I am going to investigate in my paper is *how to transition mindfulness practices from the current commodified version to a more meaningful and socially beneficial one*. It will be investigated by analyzing theories of consciousness and embodiment. It will be argued that the current neuroscientific approach with roots in modernity and enlightenment that takes a dualistic stance on body and mind, emotions and rationality of an individual is the major constraint that brings forth an individualistic perspective to fixing problems and leaves out the broader idea of cognitive ecology (Thompson, 2020; Varela, 1998; Merleau-Ponty 2013). Therefore novel, interdisciplinary approaches such as neurophenomenology (Varela, 1998; Thompson, 2020; Singh Sikh, & Spence, 2016) and somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2008) are needed to assure a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes embedded in social and cultural environments (Thompson, 2020). Neurophenomenology is the new branch that combines neurosciences together with phenomenology of embodiment of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (Owen & Morris, 1999; Moran, 1999; Wehrle & Doyon, 2020), and somaesthetics is Shusterman’s philosophy of combining analytical, pragmatic and practical components to study embodied cognition (Shusterman, 2008, 2015). The chapter will present next the outline of the structure of the rest of the paper and argue for the relevance of this research inquiry.

I-3. Relevance of this research

Increased attention to mental well-being is a positive societal trend – it examines and enters into public discourse a social ill previously ignored. However, the way it is operationalized and turned into a ‘shallow fad’ is problematic (Thompson, 2020). Commoditization of mindfulness practices translates them into sellable individual projects that one can practice in an office cubicle when stress strikes or before going to bed to have a more productive day afterwards (Thompson, 2020; Hayes, et al. 2017; Trungpa, 2002). Meditation becomes a tool for the sake of increased productivity, instead of productivity becoming an ancillary byproduct. Meanwhile, Theravadan Buddhism from which mindfulness stems emphasizes that an environment one is embedded into plays a vital role, and this is conspicuously often left out from the modernized version of mindfulness (Trungpa, 2002; Sikh 2012). By environment, it means the social setting and cultural lens one is using (Thompson, 2020). Thus, taking the social and cultural environment into consideration via adopting a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach (Singh Sikh, & Spence, 2016; Thompson, 2020; Varela, 1998), the paper will try to present a realistic ground between two extremes: namely, the current version of commodified and marketable mindfulness as an easy fix for those ‘who are too busy to meditate’ (Gonzalez, 2014), and the more encompassing original Buddhist deep submersion into meditation (Sikh, 2012; Thompson, 2020).

The practical outlook is necessary if one wishes to bring about sustainable societal change (Shusterman, 2008; Thompson, 2020; Gallagher, 2012; Kirmayer and Gold, 2012).

I-4. Presenting the roadmap of the paper

The paper is going to be structured by first making the reader familiar with the origins of mindfulness, which will be then used to show the drastic changes in how recent corporate applications of the practice are developing. The critique regarding the blind spots and negative social impact of workplace meditation are going to be addressed by looking at how research and models from neuroscience have been embraced by the capitalistic drive of workforce efficiency optimization to bring more profits (Atkins, 2015). Hence, making corporate mindfulness as a ‘soft’ tool for work intensification (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). The alternative research streams will be covered then to see how the impact of uncritical neuroscience can be reduced by adding the phenomenological layer and cognitive ecology to it. Finally, the paper will address how corporate mindfulness can be transitioned to a more societally beneficial practice by moving away from the egocentric and individualistic implementation to a practice that strives to change the corporate relational structures (also known as corporate climate) from the base (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Here is a more detailed overview of the roadmap chapter-wise.

In **Chapter II**, the reader will be made familiar with the origins of mindfulness practices, namely Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist traditions and perspectives about situatedness in the world, by covering the *dharma* path of righteousness comprised of 8 elements: right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right diligence, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The Philosophical coverage of mindfulness will be presented by also describing the western side, by addressing hermeneutics and phenomenology. Specifically, using publications that show a non-dualistic approach to the ‘subject and object’, and ‘mind and body’, and deal away with such divides (Singh Sikh & Spence, 2016). Namely, Heideggerian ‘*Dasein*’ and care in “Being and Time” (Heidegger, 1962) are going to be discussed to show mindfulness as the practice to a live life full of awareness of oneself in the world (Singh Sikh & Spence, 2016). The formation of habits that meditation and mindfulness help fostering (Thompson, 2020; Goleman & Davidson, 2017) will be also looked at from the perspective of Merleau-Ponty (2013). As in his work ‘The phenomenology of Perception’ (2013, part I) he discusses the importance of habits in forming habitual body in addition to physical body schema, which together make it possible for humans to simultaneously live in the world and towards the world by forming one milieu with it (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, part III). Investigating the writings in phenomenology of embodiment (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 2013) which tackle human cognition, perception and behaviour as situated in the spatial, temporal and social contexts is helpful to further the understanding of intersubjective and social elements (Gallagher, 2012; Kirmayer and Gold, 2012; Wehrle & Doyon, 2020). In the case of this thesis, such are going to be applied to meditative practices.

It will be portrayed that the original mindfulness practices are not the same as they are being implemented now (Thompson 2020). And in **Chapter III**, issues with commodification and corporatization of mindfulness practices are going to be addressed (Thompson 2020). Commodification will be explained here from the perspective of Szasz's (2007) work "Shopping our Way to Safety" where he portrays how mass consumption of products diminishes well-being as people surround themselves with commodity bubbles and self-perpetuating ignorance. In a similar way, Thompson (2020) shows how consumption of products and services related to meditation and mindfulness practices cannot aid in improving mental health on the public level. That is because a contemporary mindfulness approach is focused on fixing individual mental health, which is similar to erecting the bubble around oneself while the social environment is mentally straining. And if in Szasz (2007) this is about environmental pollution induced by commodity bubbles of consumers, then Purser and Milillo (2015) show that in the context of corporation it is about management's 'integrity bubble' that they jump into with mindfulness 'soft' solutions, ignoring the surrounding mentally straining corporate climate. It will be critiqued that commodified mindfulness practices are becoming shallow and 'easy problem fixes'. This critique is going to be based on addressing the classical models that are in use in neuroscience, having an impact on the idea of meditation as the process 're-wiring' the brain, and hence making 'mindfulness' as an individualistic cognitive endeavour, leaving out the aspect of 'cognitive ecology' which is about the impact of societal links on cognition (Thompson, 2020; Varela, 1998; Goleman & Davidson 2017; Bahl et al., 2016). More specifically, the reason for forgoing the impact of the social surroundings in commodified mindfulness practices results from 'misguided ideas': "One is that mindfulness is an essentially inward awareness of your own private mind. The other is that the best way to understand the effects of mindfulness practices is to look inside the head at the brain" (Thompson 2020, p. 82). Then readers will get acquainted with views of Malabou (2008) and Borck (2012) that the reductionist stance of neurophenomenology on neuroplasticity is the main root of the issue, while an encompassing more critical way to use the notion of plasticity, would allow for neural liberation that meditations could provide. This will be explained by following theoretically the usage and understanding of the term 'neuroplasticity' in a more holistic interpretation than just flexibility of the neural connections (Malabou, 2008). The cases, to illustrate this will touch upon the field of psychiatry and meditation practices that have been uniquely transformed to fit western 'neuroculture' (cf. Thompson, 2020; Borck, 2012) and will portray the need to more critically address how neuroscience unwittingly led to the 'spiritual materialism' (Trungpa, 2002).

As the reader will see in **Chapter IV**, in order to shift a current take on mindfulness, the move away from classical neurosciences is suggested to incorporate the ecology (social, built, and natural) in which meditation occurs. However, it would be methodologically unsound to simply discard the ways of inquiry and research of the cognitive science field (Singh, Sikh, & Spence 2016). Hence, it will be argued for combining neurosciences with phenomenology using the basis of 4E cognition as embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (Thompson, 2020; Shusterman,

2008; Varela, 1998; Newen, Gallagher, & De Bruin, 2018) and two new dimensions - ecological and affective - as introduced in the 5EA framework (Hendlin, 2020). And the recent models of 7E with emotional, evolved, and exoconscious levels added as a response to Malabou's strive to enrich the notion of plasticity in cognitive sciences (Geisshuesler, 2019).

In **Chapter V**, it will be discussed how harnessing the supportive and empathetic social environment instead of just 're-wiring' individual brains is more beneficial (Gallagher, 2012; Kirmayer & Gold, 2012, De Waal, 2010). That would mean fostering the idea of the link between the environment and cognition (Thompson, 2020; Petitmengin & Bitbol, 2009). The findings from longitudinal psychiatric epidemiology will be used to portray that it is not the genome alone that could drive the psychopathologies in adults but socio-economic and political factors such as immigration and conditioning of the neighbourhood (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). Hence, inducing individualised counter-measures is not sufficient. Those measures are either medication or 'soft' measures as acceptance and commitment therapy built upon mindfulness meditation (see appendix B for Hexaflex model). This would help to suggest that including social aspects into the equation is a way to start moving towards de-commodifying mindfulness meditative practices and to infuse a broader societal meaning and the inexorable ecological connection into them (Thompson, 2020). The four-stage model build up by Qiu and Rooney (2019) (see appendix C) will be used to describe how corporations can implement this in practice to help their workforce instead of straining people. Finally, the work of Szasz (2007) will be used to conclude that when it comes to societal and environmental issues, an individualistic consumption is not an answer, while a collective action is. His thought will be used to illustrate how futile can the current trends be when people purchase subscriptions for mindfulness courses, buy meditation books, and install apps while decoupling them from the change in the intersubjective social environment (milieu).

Chapter II – Origins of Mindfulness: Crossroads of East and West

As mindfulness practices have been gaining support in the west, a number of writers tried to popularize the definitions that would be both intuitive to the western mindset and yet capturing the Buddhist roots of the practice. Widely known and cited is the definition by Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 5) that mindfulness "is a nonjudgmental focus of individual's attention on the experience that occurs in the present moment". Langer (2000, pp. 131) formulated it as "a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context with active distinction-making and differentiation". Both early research by Langer and Kabat-Zinn laid the ground for therapeutic applications of mindfulness, leading to the creation of courses and training under the overarching name 'mindfulness-based stress reduction' (MBSR) or also known as 'mindfulness-based cognitive therapy' (MBCT) (Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Purser & Milillo, 2015), which in turn helped 'acceptance and commitment therapy' (ACT) to gain popularity over time (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012; Prevedini, et al., 2011).

Thus far, the perspective on mindfulness as a state of mind of non-judgmental awareness to the present has been embraced by most of the organizational behaviour and psychology researchers, and the aforementioned trainings strive for their participants to reach that ‘state’ with a help of exercises and simplified meditations (Allen et al., 2015; Purser & Milillo, 2015; Qiu & Rooney, 2019). However, when looking into the origins of Mindfulness, it has never been portrayed as a psychological state of mind, but always as a practice and a process engrained into a bigger value system of ethical and spiritual development (Purser and Milillo, 2015). According to Purser and Milillo (2015, p. 4) “the scientific and clinical literature have virtually ignored the rich theoretical descriptions of mindfulness practice contained in the Buddhist canon”. Therefore, in this chapter we will cover the Buddhist underpinnings behind mindfulness to begin with, then look into western philosophers Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, whose writings have similarities to the original Buddhist thought. Care and empathy in Merleau-Ponty will be brought to show the connection between his intersubjectivity and ego-transcending ideals with the ideals of *Dharma* (Buddhist path of righteousness). Then Heideggerian situatedness in the world and care from “Being and Time” will be tied into mindfulness practices from Theravada as well. By looking into Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, to show misconceptions of the commodified version of mindfulness would allow to form a better critique of mindfulness therapy and training (see Chapter III) and provide suggestions for its change later on in the paper (see Chapter IV and V).

II-1. Mindfulness in a Buddhist traditional thought

To begin with, as of now there is a number of Buddhist branches that slightly differ in a way they portray mindfulness (Purser and Milillo, 2015), this paper however will focus on the more prominent and older traditions of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. Mindfulness in Theravada and Mahayana scriptures is coined as *samma sati*, which is one of the elements of *dharma* - a path of righteousness. Together 8 elements of the path are right view, thinking, speech, action, livelihood, diligence, mindfulness, and concentration. Together they provide the way to reach ego transcendence, that is to reduce own preoccupation with one’s personal problems, dissatisfaction and suffering and instead bring about compassion, enlightenment and emotional balance (Bodhi, 2011; Thompson 2012). According to Purser and Milillo (2015) practicing path factors together

not only serve as a necessary support for the practice of right mindfulness [7th factor], but also underscores how the entire soteriological system of the Buddhist path is aimed at effecting deep transformations of mind and behavior toward greater psychological well-being, ethical behavior, and social responsibility (Purser and Milillo, 2015, pp. 6-7).

Important to note here, is that right mindfulness is not a state to reach, but a continuous process practiced in a holistic manner within an ethical framework, side by side with other Buddhist practices (Thompson, 2012).

In Theravada, one of the ground texts providing guidance to mindfulness meditation practice is *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (The Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness) (Bodhi, 2011; Ṭhānissaro,

2012). Purser and Milillo (2015) have organized the fundamental insights from *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* in a Triadic model (see appendix A), which summarizes the Buddhist mindfulness according to Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism. According to the Canon, the Buddhist spiritual growth and development are based on three interconnected stages “(a) the development of ethical discipline, integrity, and virtues (*sīla*); (b) the development of concentration (*samādhi*); and (c) the attainment of wisdom (*paññā*) leading to liberation (*nirvāna*)” (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p. 6). Overall, elements of *Dharma* path foster the cultivation of harmony and balance and aid with developing ethical intentionality in accordance with compassion and care.

As mentioned above, right mindfulness (*samma sati*) is the seventh element of the path. In *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* right mindfulness is about “subduing greed and distress with reference to the world”, which means restraining personal egoistic desires for the sake of reducing suffering (Ṭhānissaro, 2012, p. 17). Therefore, the scriptures point to mindfulness practices as a way to amplify the well-being of a community by the means of altruistic and compassionate ways of engaging with the world (Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Purser & Milillo, 2015). That comes by distinguishing the skillful (*kusala*) from unskillful (*akusala*) qualities, habits or actions and practicing the former, while abandoning the later (Ṭhānissaro, 2012; Bodhi, 2011). By skillful (*kusala*) it means all the actions that are wholesome, healthy and not harmful both to the self and others (Purser & Milillo, 2015). Regarding the importance of remembering and importance of actively distinguishing and following the *kusala* in your behaviour, Ṭhānissaro (2012) points out that:

Mindfulness—whether right or wrong—is a factor present in any experience where memories from the past are brought to bear on what is happening within that experience. [...] The Buddha, in including right mindfulness in the path, takes the role that mindfulness plays in any experience where memory is brought to bear on the present and points in a skillful direction. Instead of telling you to abandon past memories so as to approach the present with totally fresh eyes and bare awareness, he’s [Buddha] saying to be selective in calling on the appropriate memories that will keep you on the path to the end of suffering (Ṭhānissaro, 2012, p. 21).

In other words, right mindfulness is about performing the judgement on how to behave in accordance with past experience and memories to make right decisions and bring forth right outcomes in the present moment. (Bodhi, 2011; Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Hence another big misconception in the commodified version of mindfulness is about the non-judgmental awareness of the present, while we see in the Canon that the judgement is constantly performed by distinguishing skillful from unskillful in order to minimize the suffering (Purser and Milillo, 2015). The right view (*sama ditthi*) is what aids the person in making that distinction, so to say it plays a role of an ethical compass, and right effort (*sama vayama*) aids in the actual implementation of the behaviour (Purser and Milillo, 2015). Together those are linked by *sati* (mindfulness) or a process of remembrance and recollection (see Appendix A, figure II). Moreover, the *sati* as mindfulness is a compound notion itself which brings together awareness of the four elements “the

body (*kāyā*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and objects (also called *dhammas*, or phenomena)” (Purser and Milillo, 2015, p. 5, see Appendix A, Figure I). The mindfulness practice is thus aimed at observation of the arising and passing of the present experience (build on the 4 elements) and acting towards this experience in a skillful (non-harmful) manner based on the remembered experiences and teachings from the past (Ṭhānissaro, 2012).

Therefore, we see that in the original scriptures Buddhist mindfulness is a holistic practice that reintegrates and reinforces the elements from the spiritual/developmental path of righteousness and brings together physical (bodily), emotional (feelings), cognitive (mind), and ethical (skillful/unskillful) elements to endorse right societal and spiritual development (Purser and Milillo, 2015). Only by bringing all the factors of the *Dharma* path and elements of *sati* together a life of a right mindfulness practitioner and community around him can reach balance and harmony. Meanwhile, practicing mindfulness in isolation from ethical underpinnings as well as using it individualistically without considering the social consequences of personal conduct strips the practice of its effectiveness and originally intended outcomes (Bodhi, 2011; Purser and Milillo, 2015).

Lastly, it is important to note regarding the process of self(ego)-transcendence that right mindfulness stimulates. As was mentioned, the end goal is the reduction of suffering for the person and the world around him. Practicing right mindfulness allows to overcome greed and egoistic wishes by using power of memory and inference to reflect upon the realization that each individual’s “inner experiencing is common to all beings” (Ṭhānissaro, 2012, p. 119). That is done by contemplating and considering the following:

‘I am not the only one subject to death, who has not gone beyond death. To the extent that there are beings—past & future, passing away & re-arising—all beings are subject to death, have not gone beyond death.’ When one often reflects on this, the path takes birth. [...] As one sticks with that path, develops it, & cultivates it, the fetters are abandoned, the obsessions are destroyed.

(Translation of Angutara Nikaya scripture from Pali Canon in Ṭhānissaro, 2012, p. 119).

The primary purpose of such contemplations is about developing a sense of *samvega* for the universality of suffering and stress (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Thence, abandoning fetters is about reaching the state of the humble realization of the self, and dissolving rigid boundaries between self and other (Purser & Milillo, 2015). Since *samvega* is a feeling of dismay to suffering, one is ought to bring in the right effort and concentration to abandon the causes of worldly suffering and oppression (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Notably, it is misleading to think that the practice is about quick remedies and full eradication of suffering. However, it is about reaching the state of awareness and alertness that would aid with pinpointing the causes of suffering and dealing with those (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Purser and Milillo (2015) also show that realization of commonality of suffering among living beings helps to feel warmth and compassion to the existence of others, and after ‘awakening’ one can be socially engaged more pro-actively, due to understanding how illusory is personal disconnectedness from others. In other words: “those who have gone through

significant ego-transcendence facilitated by meditation may engage with others more empathetically with their new realization and insights” (Noble in Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

II-2. Corporeality in Merleau-Ponty - care and empathy towards the other

Similarly to Pali Canon in Theravada Buddhism, Merleau-Ponty in his perspectives on body, intentionality and intersubjectivity allows for individuals to ontologically share a spatial, temporal situation thus feel compassion for one another. That is due to the fact that an approach of Merleau-Ponty steers away from Cartesian Ego centrism, to the phenomenology of embodiment which allows for shaping social environment with empathy.

Turning to Merleau-Ponty (2013) on human situatedness in the world. He portrays it not as the static environment but changing milieu that also has the *other* in it. Merleau-Ponty shows the critique against scientific reductionism and mechanistic approach to perception and behaviour portrayed as responsive reactions of the brain, as well as a critique to describing individual consciousness only as unembodied Ego (2013, pp. 76-91). His critique is built upon an argument that “there is no hard separation between bodily conduct and intelligent conduct; rather, there is a unity of behavior that expresses the intentionality and hence the meaning of this conduct. In habits, the body adapts to the intended meaning, thus giving itself a form of embodied consciousness” (Mayo, 2014 p. 1). He argues so by exemplifying the ability of people to remember and anticipate movements of others, and the ability to form personal and social habits based on past experiences; hence, showing that cognition should not be decoupled from the body meanwhile social should not be underplayed either (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, pp 1-67). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment and intersubjective relations then allows for “a more holistic conception of embodiment that also draws on empirical sciences and other philosophical traditions such as Buddhism” (Wehrle & Doyon, 2020, p. 2).

For Merleau-Ponty, the confirmation of the existence of *other* is not necessary, since his view does not present a body as a medium for Ego, but as a situated subject and a primary mode of existence (Moran, 1999; Wehrle & Doyon, 2020). Merleau-Ponty (2013, part I) portrays a body as having perception not in a mental sense but as practical motor intentionality. Put otherwise it is a body schema that updates itself based on the past and present. The past is manifested through the formation of a ‘habitual body’, that is used for routine actions, and lacks spontaneity that the actual body has. The actual body is what feels and reacts in the present moment in “a skillful bodily responsiveness and spontaneity in direct engagement with the world” (Merleau-Ponty 2013, p. 103). Meanwhile both of them (actual and habitual) are parts of ‘lived-body’ situated in the world and acting towards the world through intentional arcs. This means that “perception is always both passive and active, situational and practical, conditioned and free” (Merleau-Ponty 2013, p. xiv). Thus, this makes consciousness not ‘*I think*’ in the Cartesian sense, but ‘*I can*’ and ‘*I do*’ due to usage of past memories and experiences (Merleau-Ponty 2013, p.139).

Here we see the similarity to Canon that by remembering the past experience one can build the right response to the present situation. Although Merleau-Ponty does not focus on the ethicality of actions per se, nonetheless, his dynamic intentionality, makes it possible to closely perceive the *other*, which is vital to explain empathy and care. Importantly, relation with other is an immediate link, because in his portrayal of habitual and actual body Merleau-Ponty (2013) deals away with problems of Husserl's Ego that first needs to perceive the (facial) expression of happiness or anger of the other and then requires an empathic effort to understand the other (Wehrle & Doyon, 2020). The implication from this is that for Merleau-Ponty, there is not only a joint milieu of situated subject and the world but also 'corporeality' wherein subjects can mutually and directly interact with one another given that they ontologically share a spatial, temporal situation due to the peculiarities of the body schema (Merleau-Ponty, 2013). To clarify this point:

“One can have a social horizon such that my world is enlarged to the extent of the collective history that my private existence takes up and carries forward. The solution to all the problems of transcendence is found in the thickness of the pre-objective present, where we find our corporeality, our sociality, and the preexistence of the world, that is, where we find the starting point for “explanations” to the extent that they are legitimate – and at the same time the foundation of our freedom.” (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p. 457).

This has direct consequences for grasping current trends in mindfulness and meditation that tries to foster certain habits to reduce the stressful response of a body or psyche toward some situation. Using the terms of Merleau-Ponty (2012) that would mean training the habitual body only, which is not a very dynamic part of the entire situated lived-body that forms a milieu with the world (social, spatial, and temporal). By solely training habitual body - (because current mindfulness crash-courses only address forming habits as a reactive mechanism to reduce stress) – does not produce yet an active intentionality to bring change. Again connecting Merleau-Ponty to Pali Canon we see that practices should be applied holistically and in a way that allows to bring past remembrance to shape the present in a skillful (helpful) manner. In that respect, Rosenbaum (2003, p. 149) for instance addresses that any human intervention and communication is enacted “within meeting fields, [...] where we are inextricably joined”. He explains his view with Merleau-Ponty's idea that touch is self-reflexive, since when we touch “we feel not only the other, but also ourselves, we touch ourselves touching” (Rosenbaum, 2003, p. 149). Based on this, Rosenbaum (2003) builds an argument that:

We can experience the other through ourselves touching; we can experience ourselves touching through the other. We need something outside ourselves to develop our inner experience. Thus individuality arises from interdependency; interdependency arises from individuality. And acknowledgment of the interdependency of beings is crucial to both Buddhism and all fields of psychotherapy that adopt an intersubjective stance (Rosenbaum, 2003, p. 149).

If one accounts intersubjectivity as sharing a milieu directly as in Merleau-Ponty (2013), that would mean that commodified workplace mindfulness should not just be about fostering personal habitual response to some stressful stimuli, but also about re-shaping that corporate milieu. At the end of ‘Phenomenology of Perception’ Merleau-Ponty (2013, p. 469) illustrates this with an example of the possibility to be compassionate even across social classes and engage in reshaping institutional framework, by saying that “we coexist in the same situation and we feel ourselves to be similar, not through some comparison, as if each one of us lived above all in isolation, but on the basis of our tasks and gestures.” That is given three conditions of (1) I am born, (2) I exist in order to experience my life as difficult and constrained, (3) I do not choose to experience it this way (2013, p. 469). In this, we also see the Buddhist awakening that the life of all beings is constituent of suffering and hence the strive to address the causes of it (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Merleau-Ponty continues that social issues come about through the reductionist idea of equating your-self to your state, that is ‘I am a worker (poor)’ or ‘I am a bourgeois (rich)’ that limits the intentionality for change, meanwhile perception of existence so ‘I exist as worker/bourgeois’ shows that “determinism rests upon the subject’s constituting activity” (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p. 470). Again we see a similarity in Theravada, where right effort (activity) in combination with right mindfulness practice allows to reach outcomes of non-greed, non-delusion, compassion and care (see Appendix A). Finally in Merleau-Ponty (2013) that is expressed in a passage:

Neither the economy nor society, taken as a system of impersonal forces, determine me as a proletarian, but rather society or the economy such as I bear them within myself and such as I live them; nor is it, for that matter, an intellectual operation without any motive, but rather my way of being in the world within this institutional framework (p. 470).

This gives the possibility to commit to the change as we are both psychological and historical structures, who receive our ontological existence from birth, and receive the way (style) of existing historically as an overlay from the past. Thence, opens the possibility for a meaningful life that is not restricted by access to the world, but realized through communication with it through a reformation of habits based on experience and active spontaneity and engagement of ‘lived body’. As he put it “it is by being what I am at present, without any restrictions and without holding anything back, that I have a chance at progressing” (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, p 483). These insights will be later applied in Chapter V to show a possibility to change corporate climate and redirect workplace mindfulness to reshape the current institutional frameworks.

II-3. Situatedness in the world and care in Heideggerian Dasein, and care in ACT

The remembrance of the past is one part of the puzzle, still the right effort is needed to produce care and reduce suffering. What Merleau-Ponty strived to avoid is mechanistic and reductionist explanations regarding pathologies and relation to ones’ own existence that operate under the influence of capitalistic economic development. Unfortunately, current models of pathology and psychological health could not avoid the pitfall and now largely objectify and dehumanize others, by following the economic perceptions on human capital/resources (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson,

2012). Subsequently, “[h]uman beings inflict misery onto one another continually as the world community is literally staggering and reeling under the weight of objectification, with all of its attendant human and economic costs” (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson 2012, p. 4). The most popular models that are in use by cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) barely consider the “human suffering and its infliction on others as general human problems” (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson 2012, p. 6). The issue is that Western medical and behavioral sciences - when it comes to their accepted and tested models and paradigms - choose to ignore and so-to-say develop a myopia to the situations and problems that could have been addressed otherwise. Proponents of renewing current methods show the need to imbed a more holistic take on mindfulness in a stream of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), as Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson (2012, p. 6) write that “despite overwhelming evidence, we too readily conceptualize human suffering through diagnostic labels as though it were a product of biomedical deviations from the norm, it is hard to have compassion for ourselves and for others this way. It is hard to be a human being”. The ‘widening the circle of caring’ to the patients in therapeutic meditations is addressed as the key need by Goleman & Davidson (2017). Thus ACT began to foster awareness and mindfulness therapy practices (see Appendix B) which have similarities with ideals of care and compassion from *Dharma* righteous path in Buddhism. Instead of trying to propel a diagnostic treatment, the ACT is “tied to practical consequences (committed actions) and not to ontological assumptions - being sick, having a chronic disease, having a depressed disorder” (Prevedini et al., 2011, p. 54). In other words, the therapist is not focused on the deliberate elimination of intrusive emotions and guided thought-suppression (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). In ACT, the therapist is giving patients an ability (a skill-set) to embrace those unwanted emotions and experiences on their own, importantly at their own pace, which helps them to pursue a committed action in a valued (meaningful) direction for them personally, but not from the narrow perspective of therapy alone (Prevedini et al., 2011, p. 57). Meaningful direction here is about accepting (embracing) the negative/unpleasant emotions, then seeing self as a situational present context instead of being attached to a past rigid conceptualization of oneself and thence follow a committed action in line with own values (rf. Predevini et al. 2011, see appendix B). Nonetheless, in the currently wide-spread traditional therapy the objectification of the patient still remains. The therapist or the trainer (in the case of corporate context) is working under the framework of re-wiring the other, which prevents the person under the therapy to progress on their own.

From philosophical perspective discussion of problems that such a situation induces can be found in Heidegger’s ‘Being and Time’ (1962) where he portrays the “they” and being-in-the-world. First, according to Heidegger the Being (*Dasein*) is both ontical and ontological form of existential thrownness in the world. So, *Dasein* is the form of being realised through its situatedness-in-the-world, and since *Dasein* is a thrown project in the world it realises the possibility of impossibility of its own existence in understanding its own being towards death. . Similarly to the Theravada Canon as described in section II-1 above (rf. Ṭhānissaro, 2012), Heidegger (1962) shows that

through realisation of the temporality of existence as the being-towards-death, Dasein gains its ontological meaning of care. That is according to Heidegger (1962):

Through the unity of the items which are constitutive for care - existentiality, facticity, and fallenness - it has become possible to give the first ontological definition for the totality of Dasein's structural whole. We have given an existential formula for the structure of care as "ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (a world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)". (Heidegger, 1962, p. 364, par. 64).

In other words care is about showing concern towards others whom we encounter alongside our own existence, as well as concern towards one-self (as Dasein is always ahead of itself ontologically). Important to note is that Care is also not something that is traceable back to an urge or some willingness to act, but comes a priori out of the existential thrownness of the Dasein, it is a necessity of Dasein (Heidegger, 1962, p. 238). However, when addressing the care, "the environment which lies closest to us, the public 'environment' already is ready-to-hand and is also a matter of concern" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 164). There we observe the everydayness that can be portrayed as 'levelling down' of Dasein. The publicness, depicted with the notion of the "they" in Heidegger (1962, p. 165) can present a counter-pressure whenever Dasein presses for a decision, "it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability", and so:

[i]n Dasein's everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that "it was no one". [...] And because the "they" constantly accommodates the particular Dasein by disburdening it of its Being, the "they" retains and enhances its stubborn dominion. Everyone is the other, and no one is himself (Heidegger, 1962, p. 165).

Relating this passage, to an uncritical use of workplace mindfulness and therapy that makes decisions for the patient disallowing his own growth, the problem lies in that the person under the guidance of the "they" would not step up towards responsibility. Since responsibility (answerability) is diffused among the players of the public. The ACT practitioners show that it is limiting when a therapist, trainer or manager dictate a person to employ suppressive lenses (blindness) of inaction and avoidance instead of letting that individual develop a personal skill-set to perform a committed action (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). Wheeler (2011, para. 2.3.2) notes that in Heidegger lostness in the 'they' is presumably when "[b]y succumbing to - but without making any real commitment to - the patterns laid down by the 'they' (i.e., by uncritically 'doing what one does') inauthentic Dasein avoids owning its own life". This inauthentic self is coined as 'they-self', or Self of everyday Dasein (Heidegger, 1962, p. 167), and as they-self, Dasein "gets 'lived' by the common-sense ambiguity" (p. 345). What signifies "letting be summoned out of one's lostness in the 'they' " is resoluteness (p. 345), which is also

called *wanting-to-have-a-conscience* [*Gewissenhabenwollen*]. Resoluteness¹ can be summarized as discovering what is factually possible without withdrawing from ‘actuality’ to achieve the ownmost potentiality, and resoluteness is also the authenticity of care (Heidegger, 1962). Meanwhile, inauthentic care could be close to what happens when trainers and managers push behavioural choices onto employees, who then uncritically follow.

Chapter III – Problem: Mindfulness Mania and Corporatization of Mindfulness

In this chapter, the current implementation of mindfulness practices will be covered, by addressing the spread of commercialized and sellable mindfulness guides, books and training sessions without providing a proper immersion into the practice. In the next sections it will be explained how the commodification of meditation practices occurred, what does this change entail and also what has been inducing such a trend to continue growing.

III-1. Mindfulness Mania, what is going on in corporations?

Generally speaking, mindfulness is now viewed as a pretty broad notion associated with things ranging from a conscientious and stress-free lifestyle, to a very specific set of meditative practices in clinical psychology (Bahl et al., 2016; Armstrong, 2012; Singh Sikh & Spence, 2016). Currently in the west, it is becoming kind of a ‘buzz-word’ (Gonzalez, 2014) and it is propelled as the solution to dissatisfying results of growing consumerism (Armstrong, 2012) and materialistic striving for the life-success often narrowly defined in terms of utilities and payoff optimization (Thompson, 2020; Armstrong, 2012; Shusterman, 2008). This is the idea carried over from economics and operational resource management, which is about minimizing the investment and optimizing the resource usage to reach some specific results (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). For individuals that would mean optimizing the methods to reach the desired state, and that is increasing the work efficiency, productivity without psychological setbacks. The fast-paced mindfulness training support such a strive by promising the client to transition to the desired state of calm awareness and psychological maturity (at least this is how most of the courses are being marketed) (Healey, 2015; Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Meditation and the reflective approach are argued to be the way of bringing inner peace and re-wiring brains to be more perceptive, flexible and creative (Goleman & Davidson 2017; Bahl et al., 2016).

¹ In Heidegger (1962, pp. 346-348) we close-read: “Resoluteness is what first gives authentic transparency to Dasein. In resoluteness the issue for Dasein is its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, which, as something thrown, can project itself only upon definite factual possibilities. Resolution does not withdraw itself from ‘actuality’, but discovers first what is factually possible; and it does so by seizing upon it in whatever way is possible for it as its ownmost potentiality-for-Being in the “they”. [...] Resoluteness, however, is only that authenticity which, in care, is the object of care [*in der Sorge gesorgte*], and which is possible as care - the authenticity of care itself.”

The problem which has arisen henceforth is commodification of the deep-rooted practices that gain very superficial coverage but the wide implementation (Thompson, 2020, p. 81; Goleman & Davidson, 2017). This was subsequently coined by Thompson (2020) as ‘mindfulness mania’, and he writes: “mindfulness mania is rampant...[m]indful living, mindful parenting, mindful eating, mindful sex, mindful leadership, mindful coloring books, the list goes on” (Thompson, 2020, p. 81). What Thompson (2020) tried to portray is that mindfulness practices are now being commodified and corporatized; a means to profit off of selling inner-peace. Such an occurrence when natural products or items that were in the past freely available, but have become monetized and infused into the cycles of mass-consumption is coined by Szasz (2007) as commodification.

The trend of selling mindfulness as a fast and effective stress cure and enhancer of productivity is being spread with the aid of developments in Human Resource policies in corporations. Now, it is broadly required from employees to go through ‘mindfulness trainings’ or ‘resilience trainings’, and intelligence metrics are shifting from merely IQ-tests to looking into emotional intelligence (EQ) of the working staff (Rosenberg, 2004; Armstrong, 2012). The popularity of mindfulness trainings is spread out not only across departments in a corporation, but it has gained leverage across industries with digital giants of Silicon Valley leading the hype (Healey, 2015; Wang et al., 2016). For instance, Wisdom 2.0 is the yearly conference, which became a “hotbed for mindfulness at work [that] draws thousands of spiritually minded technologists from among others, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, who trade tips on how to stay calm in the digital age” (Gelles, 2012). The Wisdom 2.0 conferences, support the growing research on the usefulness of the workplace mindfulness implementation (Healey, 2015). This induced big corporations to jump onto the trend and to start implementing mindfulness trainings. For instance Google’s “Search inside yourself” mindfulness programme is being yearly promoted to thousands of employees (Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

With that the stream of research in the area of organizational psychology has turned to examine the effectiveness of mindfulness implementations, to support managerial decisions with evidence build on the research data (Huffman, et al., 2015; Allen, et al., 2015). Researchers speculated and theorized that mindfulness training in the workplace “could potentially improve mental skills that were generalizable across tasks domains, be of wide organizational benefit, and also be conducive to a sustained focus on organizational goals” (Purser & Milillo, p. 3). And as the result: “new research in the emerging field of contemplative neuroscience has found that mindfulness meditation induces “process-specific learning” (Purser & Milillo, p.4). The process-specific learning is about gaining effective improvement of performance not only in the specific domain or task that is carried out during the training of a particular corporate department, but it is an ability of an employee to transfer his knowledge and efficacy to the different tasks and domains (Dane, 2011; Dane & Brummel, 2014). This is especially relevant in the context of cross-departmental

teams, or during rotations to the new job position within a corporate structure (Dane, 2011; Kersemaekers, 2018; Dane & Brummel, 2014).

However, despite the growing literature stream which provides sugar-coated evidence on the successful implementation of mindfulness trainings in the corporate context, the negative impacts are being majorly ignored and often brushed away (Atkins, 2015; Huffman et al., 2015). The negative impact of workplace mindfulness is due to the training being implemented as a crash-course technique to deal with a limited number of issues like stress, and tiredness. The courses are usually, aimed at better meeting the corporate goals in terms of team building, increased productivity, and reduced employee turnover (Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Kersemaekers, 2018; Dane & Brummel, 2014). Those trainings largely ignore the value of an ethical framework behind the original practice (see Chapter II, section 1). While, Buddhist mindfulness is all about “no-gain approach and realizing an egoless state of existence that is not self-centered and that reduces human suffering and dissatisfaction that are products of ego” (Epstein in Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Now, in the corporate workplace context, all the programmes are always in place “for-gain” in most cases narrowly defined by economic key performance indicators (KPIs) like the growth of sales, and productivity. When mindfulness is brought in the workplace under such circumstances it can detrimentally impact the person who implements the practice (Sahni & Kumar, 2012).

III-2. How mindfulness mania can be damaging

Qiu & Rooney (2019) carried out the analysis of the ‘workplace mindfulness’ research stream, and they have identified four groups of issues that can damage the workers in the long run. Those are (1) unveiling of traumatic memories, (2) depression caused by deceleration, (3) existential meaninglessness, (4) anxiety caused by conflicts between mindfulness practice and corporate requirements. Let us address those one by one.

The first issue of *unveiling traumatic memories* is commonly addressed in the mindfulness based training and therapy, when meditation could induce the stream of locked/repressed memories and emotions (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). In cases of properly devised acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), this does not place a big strain on the individual as they are under the longitudinal support. However, in case of corporate trainings it often happens that those are completed in a short period of time and hired trainers do not remain to provide such long-term support (Jamieson & Tuckey, 2017; Allen et al., 2015). Also, the fast-paced nature of those workshops and programmes might hinder obtaining trust and the full emersion from all the participants in the group (Atkins, 2015).

The second issue regarding *depression* could occur to individuals who were exhibiting the habit of keeping themselves busy with work at all times to avoid anxiousness to surge up (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). With the mindfulness practice, employees are usually told about how to induce efficiency and productivity during their day while gaining more moments of awareness and deceleration. The

slowed down pace, while feeling the need to continuously perform well, might negatively impact employees (Sahni & Kumar, 2012).

Next are the group of issues around *existential meaninglessness* and *conflicts with corporate values*. Those are the third and the fourth issues found by Qiu and Rooney (2019). They are both connected to the fact that mindfulness practices should be originally aimed at leaving the ego-centric mindset behind to promote attention of care to the outside world (Purser & Milillo, 2015). However, the trainings in the corporate context are far from the original ideal, as said they are far from spreading the care and mostly aimed at driving up corporate performance indicators in the short term (Laasch & Conaway, 2014). That can push workers to start experiencing confusion and self-doubt regarding their job position and corporate environment that doesn't fit with the ideals of care and support, instead filled with toxicity of the competitiveness and greenwashed corporate values (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Purser & Milillo (2015) write that:

unskillful behaviors—such as hurtful speech, lying, bullying, violence, and deceptive business practices—fall under this rubric. Harmful behaviors, if ignored, forgotten, or denied, creates a barrier or block in memory—which weakens the depth and strength of mindfulness. These path factors are tied to conscience; thus, a “bad conscience” has the effect of weakening vigilance and alertness, which in turn diminishes self-monitoring and self-awareness. The tendency to examine one's motivation and actions is likely to be suppressed, thereby making it difficult to establish right mindfulness. (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p. 8).

Overall, the studies of workplace mindfulness show across industries that the goal of management is to use mindfulness trainings as means to enhance performance and competitiveness, putting it under the slogan of building “a better you” (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). This is connected to the ego-centric values and drives, which are conflicting with the original purpose of *samma sati* (right mindfulness) and *sila* (moral conduct). “Buddhism's orientation of letting go of attachment to ego and egotistical endeavors” is the core of the mindfulness practice where the most benefits and enhancement can be achieved (Qiu & Rooney, 2019, p. 726). Originally mindfulness practices strive to reach a calm and serene state of sustained emotional balance, harmony and well-being by attentively staying in the moment. Notably, when one arrives at such a state, the ability to show care to the outside world and others is central to the practice (Purser & Milillo, 2015). Unfortunately, compassion and ego-transcendence, are neglected in the corporate setting both by practitioners and researchers. That is due to the fact that workplace mindfulness has been implemented to reach different goals; its core is productivity enhancement and stability of each individual player, and thus personal instruments for coping and self-improvement (Huffman et al., 2015). According to Szasz (2007, p. 67) once people get focused on avoiding the problem instead of reaching a solution, it would lead us to “inexorably diminish the initiative and imaginativeness of our search for alternatives”. Here, we see management being too focused on enhancing productivity results by reducing employees anxiety and stress, hence, trying to fix mental states of

employees on the individual level, while they completely forget the corporate climate is at fault and needs reshaping in the first place (Sahni & Kumar, 2012).

A thing still left to address in this section is how viable it is to reintroduce the mindfulness practice in its original form and values into a current organizational context, as it does not sound very attainable given the profit-maximization mantras of management and shareholders (Atkins, 2015; Sahni & Kumar, 2012). There are, however, new developments and trends in the business sphere such as partnership economy, community-based business models (CBE), and social entrepreneurship (Tan et al., 2005; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Wolf & Troxler, 2016). In literature, those trends are portrayed to be guided by altruism, reciprocity and fairness as governance principles with the introduction of profit-sharing (Wolf & Troxler, 2016) and value chain optimization instead of a narrow supply chain focus (Molenaar, 2020). In the context of those new business models, implementation of non-commodified mindfulness could happen since integrity, social sustainability and responsibility are not just buzz-words in those enterprises (Wolf & Troxler, 2016). Nonetheless, currently it would be too idealistic to argue that corporate mindfulness will soon transition to be implemented as an ego-transcending practice that strives for the improvement of social environment (Healey, 2015). That is because it requires a systemic change of not only an internal corporate climate of a company (Sahni & Kumar, 2012), but also an external change in capitalistic market relations, as we know them now. For example, it could be a transition into full partnership and/or sharing economy, commons-based peer production (Pedero & Chrisman, 2006; Tan et al., 2005). Nevertheless, a need for a big systemic change does not mean that there is no room for some ‘baby steps’ and workplace activism in regards to transitioning corporatized mindfulness, for it to become a social-friendly practice (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Those possible steps and suggestions will be addressed in Chapter V in more detail to show that now the key is not to succumb to an individualized response of seeking the imaginary refuge inside the [integrity]/commodity bubbles but try to change something in our social environment - even though incrementally (Szasz, 2007, pp. 173-194).

III-3. Why did Mindfulness Mania hype occur?

As we see, there are a number of research findings that point out the well-being issues of implementing mindfulness thoughtlessly in a corporate context (Huffman et al., 2015; Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Atkins, 2015). However, their reach is not strong enough for the trend to get critically addressed and changed appropriately. In this section, let us look into what induces the corporatization of mindfulness to continue speeding up.

According to Purser & Milillo (2015, p. 5) “[o]rganizational theorists who have attempted to incorporate Buddhist-inspired theories of individual-level mindfulness have relied primarily on the research being conducted by psychologists, cognitive scientists, and clinicians”; hence to see how workplace mindfulness became popular we need to turn to psychology and neuroscience.

In the late 70s, Kabat-Zinn (2003) has worked on the implementation of interventions called ‘Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction’ (MSBR), which gained success in therapy as a treatment for psychopathologies and psychosomatic issues. After some time it became the “widely taught secular form of mindfulness” and allowed for enhancing clinical and corporate context implications to progress more (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Since, western approach to mindfulness is seen mainly as techniques for stress relief, it is thus being put side by side with psychological therapy and even included in it as a part of the treatment. Prior to that, the traditional approach in clinical psychology called cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) was aimed at identifying and eradicating unpleasant memories, feelings and any kind of traumatic experience (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). That approach is now being substituted by acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which speaks for recognizing and accepting the lurking unpleasant residue of the past or present events and hence through making terms with them allowing a patient to move along to get a sense of stability, calmness and mental maturity (Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). The growth of scientific evidence of successful ACT treatment using psychological flexibility model ‘Hexaflex’ (see appendix B). This model assisted the patients’ amelioration and made the ACT therapy into a progressive alternative (Prevedini et al., 2011). The big impact was generated by the scientific evidence that mediation changes your brain allowing for greater flexibility of neural pathways and hence inducing more creative problem-solving skills and a more stable parasympathetic response of the body to stress (Goleman & Davidson, 2017). So, the ACT coupled with neuroscientific research has been carried over to the managerial studies that are now being actively sponsored by the corporations with the research around effectivity of mindfulness in a workplace (Wang et al., 2016; Qiu & Rooney, 2019). To understand the attractiveness of the neuroscientific evidence and models in the promotion of corporate mindfulness research let us now cover the developments in the field of brain studies.

The brain research throughout its history has been employing a lot of different models and metaphors (which will be discussed a bit later in this chapter), the most recent one has been of a plastic neural network (Borck, 2012),. Using this model, neuroscientists fall back on the idea that there is a certain genetic base that aids the neuroplastic brain in arriving (or coming back) to a pre-determined state either during the development when a child is growing up, or during the remodelling after a patient had a brain stroke for instance (Malabou, 2008; Rose, 2012; Gallagher, 2012). The idea of neuroplasticity gives a room for scientists to promise fixing the mental state and behaviours of patients and people in general by remodelling the neural pathways in the head. A growing number of research findings provided support for this (Goleman & Davodson) and in turn, made it possible to promote the importance of the term brain plasticity and its usage in changing therapy and training (Borck, 2012; Gallagher, 2012). The key takeaway here would be the saying from Borck (2012, p. 130) that “[m]etaphors are more than just a rhetoric; they are linguistic tools for finding orientation in complex worlds”. And so this in relation to neuroscience and meditation can be understood as follows. Despite the new findings in the field of neuroscience we need to be critical about popularizing them and infusing them into other fields without

considering the reductionist nature of models employed, as the latter can have an impact on daily social and political practices as a result (cf. Rose, 2012, p. 54).

In cognitive sciences, this notion of plasticity itself is pretty recent and modelling brain structures as flexible neural network started around 2000s (Borck, 2012). As Borck (2012) shows that in comparison with other fields of medicine and natural sciences, research around the brain and neural functioning has been using models and metaphors in “a particularly active dynamic” (Borck, 2012, p. 114). By dynamic he means that change in theoretical models has coincided with historical evolution of technological devices. That is whenever the new machine or apparatus was introduced into the society, the portrayal of the brain mechanism started to be expressed in a similar way as the technology (Borck, 2012). To illustrate, he gives examples of scientists comparing the brain and neurons with camera imagery, then with telephone and TV. And whence the computers and internet connectivity came around, they replaced previous models as representing analogies on how a brain functions. All the models in turn left an impact on the way epistemologies and methods of the field got shaped (Borck, 2012). Currently, the idea of a brain as a computing machine is no longer prominent, instead, it is now the metaphor of the flexible hyperdynamic network (that is similar to the online web). That had led to the perception of the brain as a tool that is genetically hardwired, and can be fixed with the help of the molecular bio-chemistry knowledge just like software can be reprogrammed (Borck, 2012; Kirmayer & Gold, 2012).

Thenceforth, the term brain plasticity gets its basis in the model of brain studies as a flexible network, that can be remoulded with the help of chemicals (Borck, 2012). Nowadays, such a portrayal is pretty intuitive to most people even far from the neuroscientific field (Malabou, 2008a). People are acquainted with the idea that their brain is built of neural connections, that memory and learning lies in making the links stronger through repetition, many even have a general idea about how diseases as Alzheimer’s take effect (Malabou, 2008; Thompson, 2020). Subsequently, neuroscience has evolved into one of the fast developing and impactful research streams amongst other life sciences (Rose, 2012, p. 53). As said, this field has brought about a number of breakthroughs in terms of understanding brain activity and as a result reshaping the way we view ourselves as brains with hands and legs (Gallagher, 2012, p. 86). That is with the magnetic resonance imaging technologies (fMRI-scans) that provide a real-time representation of the neural activity, experiments in neuroscience made it possible to, figuratively speaking, equate a human being to its brain (Rose, 2012; Gallagher, 2012; Malabou, 2008a). Even though the neuroscientific approach is armed with methodologies and rigorous experimental designs that stem from the fields of biology, physics and chemistry (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012), yet a new batch of evidence to the hypothesized models and research are based on a number of limiting assumptions concerning causal relationships between neural functionality and subjective mental states and experiences (Rose, 2012; Malabou; 2008). Despite the research limitations and a big number of white spots in this field, neuroscientific discoveries continue to leave behind an impact on our social and political systems at large, since findings are often used across various fields (Rose, 2012; Malabou; 2008).

Before addressing the neuroscientific impact on the corporatization of meditation and mindfulness, it is important to take a detour to see how applied psychology and psychotherapy got to change. The insights from those two fields can be used to show the carry-over effect on mindfulness trainings in the workplace.

So, the clear shift that has been observed in psychiatry and therapy recently is the movement away from psychoanalysis to more bio-chemical treatments to fix the neuron paths in order to help patients (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). The impact of reduction of a human to his brain reacting towards some stimulus has found its way to pharmaceuticals, wherein research is now majorly focused on biochemical solutions for brain cure against different psychopathologies, anxiety, depression, and in general happiness enhancement with stress reduction (Rose, 2012). According to Borck (2012) this has led to a creation of a “neuroculture”, that is too fascinated with ‘happy pills’ that allow to manage and change neural activity as a way to solve mental problems. We owe this enthusiasm to the efficacy of imagery, and enticing metaphors that are abundantly used by the neuroscientists and are then transferred to the public through media. As Borck writes: “fascinating brain images invite us to take false-coloured pictures from the interior of thinking as an answer to the question of what thinking and being is” (Borck, 2012, p. 129).

To illustrate why reductionism can be problematic, Malabou (2008a,b) in her book “*In What Should We Do with Our Brain?*” discusses that political and social stagnation and status quo can be harnessed among the uncritical public due to the appeal of an easily generalizable narrative of re-wiring, which disallows for deliberate neural liberation. So, she notes that most of us are familiar with at least some major neuroscientific terms, and it is not hard at all to see our brains as a flexible system that we need to do something with. And yet, she continues, we are not conscious of the fact that with the predominant focus on technicalities of the brain functionality in a standalone manner, we lose the awareness of what we can devise with this incredible biological neural system. The reductionist approach moves us away from realising the impact of personal agency and the possibility for neural liberation (Malabou, 2008). Merleau-Ponty back in the day also showed his uneasiness toward the scientific reductionism and mechanistic approach to perception portrayed as responsive reactions of the brain, since he actively critiqued describing individual consciousness only as unembodied transcendental Ego, which ontologically cannot engage with others in changing institutional frameworks as it lacks spatio-temporal embeddedness in a shared milieu (pp. 470-483).

Unfortunately, neural liberation is far from being realised, due to the fact that the neuro plasticity is majorly used in a narrow sense as a synonym of being flexible in a bio-chemical sense only. In research that means that there is a belief in some genetic baseline towards which the brain can go back, readapt (remodel) or develop towards, as in the case of children’s development (Malabou, 2008). However, this directly signals some sort of ‘rigidity’ the brain needs to return to or be rewired to fit in, and this is where the issue occurs according to Malabou (2008). Plasticity isn’t just flexibility. From the etymology of the word, one can see that plasticity can be understood as

twofold - (1) as an ability to receive the form and to give the form and (2) a capacity to annihilate form (Malabou, 2008, p. 5). This means to see our brain not only as clay to shape but also “an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model.” (Malabou, 2008, p. 6). This is the ‘neural liberation’ that one can bring forth in their life, which is also connected to the idea that the brain is not genetically wired to some fixed correct schema, but is malleable, moreover the change within the brain is affected by many external factors of the social, cultural and natural environments and not just a DNA blue-print (Malabou, 2008).

In her book, this is exemplified by Malabou with the process that personal experiences, socio-cultural environment leave traces during the brain development, as well as throughout lifetime endlessly, instead of being preconfigured to some genetic ideal. What Malabou (2008) presents next is that unawareness among masses of the actual workings of the brain plasticity occurs due to popularization of the simplistic metaphor on plasticity being equal to the flexibility of rewiring.

To explain this she uses the ‘naturalization effect’ metaphor from Boltanski and Chiapello (in their “*The New Spirit of Capitalism*”). That is “neuronal functioning and social functioning inter-determine each other and mutually give each other form” (Boltanski & Chiapello in Malabou, 2008, p. 9). In day to day setting that occurs when we understand our survival as the personal capability of ‘modulating one’s efficacy’ in the network society. That is the idea that we should fit in it by adapting and moulding our own internal neural networks, otherwise leading to a personal failure and incompetence. Merging that with western capitalistic reality, Malabou (2008) shows how problematic can be the simplistic take on plasticity. So, to illustrate, consider for instance someone with Alzheimer. In the eyes of society, he is likely to be perceived similarly as someone who is unemployed, as both would invoke associations with sadness and pity – that is in the best-case scenario. The most common societal projection on those two individuals would be that of uselessness, dissatisfaction and burden. This is what makes plasticity into some sort of ideology, in a sense of a requirement to flexibly fit into some rigid standard be it bio-genetic or social one. Now it becomes vivid that the meaning behind brain models and metaphors in neuroscience have a direct impact on political, social and as well as other scientific domains (Rose, 2012).

We already touched upon the changes in mental health treatments in psychiatry that comes to promote pills. However, there is more to it than just a research-driven ambition for finding a cure, and hence heavily relying on the findings of neuroscience, when attempting to treat patients with psychopathologies. In recent years psychiatry saw a shift towards becoming a discipline of “clinically applied neuroscience” due to economic reasons and capitalistic drive (Insel & Quirion in Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). In essence, this boils down to an increase in promoting medical drugs to induce the required correct neural firing of a patient in response to situational stimuli, which coincides with the growth of purely capitalistic profit interests of the pharmaceutical industry that propels the development of the field in this direction (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012; Rose, 2012). The issue with such a development is that in a political sense such methods tend to elevate even more the privileged population in a two-fold manner. First, all those who cannot afford the medicine or

psychiatric help are denied other types of cure as they cannot be conceived under the prevalent epistemology of the field. And secondly, such development puts up social categories of normality and anomaly which is quite stigmatizing in the light of capitalistic society organization (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012) – here it is insightful to recall the earlier example of Malabou (2008) about the unemployed and the Alzheimer’s patient.

In the light of such a development what to do with the brain is a pretty inviting question, given the ideological view that brains needed to be medically rewired to fit some standard (Malabou, 2008). Such a rigid way of putting the initially ‘plastic’ phenomena, gets us into trouble. A narrow perspective on neuroplasticity coupled with the capitalistic system can form a sort of ideology that leads people to view themselves to be in need of rewiring and do something with the brain to fit social standards (Malabou, 2008). To showcase the ideas of Malabou (2008) we saw how neuroscientific research has transformed the ways to address mental health and stress handling. In this part let’s turn to popularized phenomena of mindfulness meditative practices as a helpful technique to rewire the brains, and issues with that view (Thompson, 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Based on the corporate practice evidence presented in section III-1 the way meditation practices have been uniquely transformed to fit western ‘neuroculture’ (cf. Thompson, 2020; Borck, 2012) and hence neuroscience unwittingly led to the ‘spiritual materialism’ (Trungpa, 2002).

Stress handling in the corporate and institutional setting is dealt by implementing meditation and mindfulness practices in order to help people rewire their brains to fit in (Thompson, 2020). The issue with such an approach is that mindfulness practices and meditations become ad hoc fixes to the bigger societal problem of overwork, alienation and burnouts that ought to be solved on a group level instead of individual one (Thompson, 2020; Trungpa, 2002). Here we clearly observe the situation wherein the health of an individual is being addressed and improved, nonetheless, the overall outside environment remains mentally exhausting and unhealthy (Sahni & Kumar, 2012; Huffman et al., 2015). A mismatch between the improved mental health of an individual placed in a negative (sick) environment pushes an individual to try and shield himself instead of engaging and fostering the change. The shielding is seen in a form of growing mass production of surface level mindfulness related materials, trainings and apps. This is the basis of what Szasz (2007) calls an inverted quarantine. Originally, he applies inverted quarantine to the situation where pollution in the environment leads to the industrial production of ‘safe, chemical-free’ products that actually cause even more pollution, and a never-ending cycle continues when people purchase more to safeguard themselves while ruining the environment deeper and deeper. To illustrate one could think of ongoing sales of bottled water, whose plastic causes more pollution, hence making people even more sceptical of drinking from the tap. In the case of mindfulness, the same can be observed, but in terms of selling the safety solutions against ‘mental hazards’, while the social environment continues to degrade. That is, we see managers and workers all together turning a blind eye to the corporate climate instability (Sahni & Kumar, 2012; Atkins, 2015). Meanwhile, the investments of human resource management into yoga and meditation trainers for their employees just allows to preserve the self-perpetuating ignorance of the commodity bubble (Szasz, 2007). And in this

situation the notion ‘integrity bubble’ would apply just as well, that is managers and workers who are introduced to the workplace mindfulness are captured in the uncritical mindset that by increasing their productivity they would help economic development, and as the corporation gains more strengths and power, later management would be able to engage in some more sustainable practices (Purser & Milillo, 2015). Nonetheless, this is a big misconception as we saw in the number of life-cases in Chapter I; under the current framework the strive for growth is more and more salient, while sustainable social change is put on hold (Sahni & Kumar, 2012; Purser & Milillo, 2015).

With this, many academics start to call for the need for critical neuroscience, which would go beyond reducing human functioning and experience to neural response to a stimuli, and will venture into taking into consideration surrounding environment and social contexts (Slaby, 2012; Rose, 2012; Gallagher, 2012; Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). The two new research streams that are promising to find an alternative development are neurophenomenology and somaesthetics, which are going to be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter IV – Addressing the problem: Neurophenomenology and Somaesthetics

This chapter will address raised problems within mindfulness mania with the literature that argues for the growth of new fields as neurophenomenology (Varela, 1998; Thompson, 2020; Gallagher, 2012) and somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2008) that build on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodied consciousness. Both fields are going to be defined and it will be explained how their methodologies help in moving mindfulness to a more meaningful and societally beneficial state. That will be done by describing how those fields slowly start incorporating social elements, even though they still employ a focus on the individual subject.

IV-1. Neurophenomenology

In Chapter II we addressed the warning of Merleau-Ponty towards the reductionist portrayal of body and perception in an Ego-centric manner, as that restricts the personal ability to relate to the other without reducing them, as well as hinder the progress and change of social environment, which is allowed through a skillful application of the past habits/experiences to spontaneous present. Although at the time Merleau-Ponty wrote this, neuroscience did not exist, however, the mechanistic explanations of a reaction to stimuli were already in place (Moran, 1999). Now, neuroscience has propelled these mechanistic views with new evidence and technological advancement (rf. Chapter III) and made academics to allege for a more critical stream of research. More specifically, current cognitive sciences were bringing functionalist and neurobiological views which “tended to ignore the role of body and environment and focused on internalist explanations of brain function, set the stage for the emergence of contemporary views on embodied cognition.” (Neuwen, Gallagher & Bruin, 2018, p. 2). Coupling neuroscience and phenomenology together is believed to help addressing the issue of reductionism of plasticity (Varela, 1998). That

led to the development of embodied (Varela, 1998) and later affective perspective on cognition (Hendlin, 2020), that is describing cognitive human perception as embodied, embedded, enactive and extended (4E) and two added dimensions ecological and affective (5EA). According to the 4E and 5EA models of cognition “meaningful perceptual items, rather than being internally represented in the form of a world-model inside the head, are enacted or brought forth as a result of the structural coupling of the organism and its environment” (Noe & Thompson, 2002, p. 5).

More specifically, the embodied cognition is related to inseparability of our perception from our body, embedded is about our situatedness in the world (environment), enactive cognition is about perceptual-motor specificities of an organism that allow to perceive an environment intentionally and not as a simple and direct input-output encoding of environmental properties (Noe & Thompson, 2002, p. 5). Extended cognition is also related to intentionality and the ability to derive meaning out of the environment, and hence engage in creative utilization of the environment (for instance birds building nests, Chimpanzees using sticks, and humans with our varied technological applications) (Geisshuesler, 2019). The ecological dimension in Noe and Thompson (2002, p. 3) is described as “the act of perceptually guided exploration of the environment, not an occurrence that takes place in the brain of the perceiver”. As the result, both environment and a living being are impacting one another. The affective dimension is about the component of feeling and emotion as the part of cognitive perception (Hendlin, 2020).

Putting 4E and 5EA frameworks side by side with the original mindfulness practices we see that cognitive ecology integrates together 4 elements of *svila* cognition, body, feelings (emotions), and the perceived objects in the environment. Moreover, in 4E cognition “embodied self not seen as a given, but a continued transformative process of self-creation and the environment” (Geisshuesler, 2019, p. 6), which goes hand in hand with Merleau-Ponty’s (2013) take on the possibility to progress and change. Notably, Geisshuesler (2019) tried to implement Malabou’s take on plasticity as the ability to give and receive the form as well as annihilate the form (cf. Chapter III, Malabou, 2008) and he came up with three additional Es as the result, that is emotional, evolved, exoconscious.

Here emotional dimension is similar to affective dimension from 5EA, and it stresses the importance of feelings that play an evolutionary role in cognitive processes, and allow to exercise altruistic motives and compassion as a part of engagement with the environment and other species (Geisshuesler, 2019). For corporatized mindfulness, this dimension opens up a possibility to consider a more humane take on emotional intelligence (EQ) in the workplace context (Allen et al., 2015). That is moving away from training an ability to push down emotional components and remain unaffected as a part of resilience trainings (Elias, 2020). Instead, this would allow promoting care and hence better moral compass when it comes to managerial decisions regarding customers, co-workers, and impacted stakeholders of the company, that are social players (like

communities who are affected by production facilities), and non-social stakeholders such as environment and eco-systems (Laasch & Conaway, 2014).

The next new dimension is evolved cognition, which is about an ability to deal with conflicting sources of motivation to solve an internal genetic conflict. That occurs when the “self is subject to frequently conflicting motives, such as selfishness and altruism, competition and collaboration, short-term pleasures and long-term health” (Geisshuesler, 2019, p. 11). Evolved cognition each time aids in making a right choice to avoid sub-optimal life-regulation based on impulsive genetic influence (Geisshuesler, 2019). In regards to mindfulness practices it is essential to realize that several intentions could be present at a time, hence to reach more beneficial decisions requires more involvement and informed judgement instead of non-judgmental inactive awareness (Purser and Milillo, 2015).

Lastly, is exoconscious cognition that according to Geisshuesler (2019) is about automated lower-processes of human cognition, which were formed as a result of evolutionary development, and are below the threshold of conscious awareness yet with a potential impact on decision making. Such processes are like heart rate, blood pressure, secretion brought by the interaction of parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems (Geisshuesler, 2019). In more detail those processes are undressed by behavioral economics (Geisshuesler, 2019) by the means of the dual-processing cognitive system, which consists by fast impulsive decision making and slow deliberative decision making (rf. Tversky & Kahneman, 1980). Implementing the insights from the dual-processing cognitive theory, contemporary advertisement always has an effect on the exoconscious cognition of people to make them more stimulated to make a purchase (Barrett, 2010). Managers and marketers knowledgeable in this area should proceed with more caution when developing campaigns and be trained in an ethical manner, to ensure that they do not end up in the corporately induced integrity bubbles (Purser & Milillo, 2015; Szasz, 2007).

IV-2. Somaesthetics

So far we have seen that “contemporary culture increasingly suffers from problems of attention, overstimulation, and stress. We are further plagued by a growing variety of personal and social discontents generated by deceptive body images.” (Shusterman 2008, p. ix). In such a light somaesthetics comes as “critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning.” This has a direct connection to Malabou (2008, p. 30), since for her “[t]he concept of plasticity has an aesthetic dimension (sculpture, malleability), just as much as an ethical one (solicitude, treatment, help, repair, rescue) and a political one (responsibility in the double movement of the receiving and the giving of form)”. The aesthetic, ethical and political dimensions are brought up and connected in somaesthetics as well (Shusterman, 2008). This allows to introduce somaesthetics as a way to switch from the usage of meditative practices as reductionist re-wiring

of the brain to a practice that raises the attention to our embodiment and plasticity in a more holistic view instead.

Nowadays, people are pushed to perceive their bodies as tools we have a command over to perform various tasks. The view stemming from neuroscience makes this even more vivid as the brain is what has the command over the body through a system of nerves and neural connections (Golemann & Davidson, 2017). Shusterman (2008, p. 19) writes the following regarding the use of the body: “I must command to perform what I will but that often fails in performance, something that distracts, disturbs, or makes me suffer. Such discord encourages somatic alienation and the familiar denigrating objectification of the body as just an instrument”. The raising attention to the fashion and dietary trends are used by Shusterman (2008, p. 6) to showcase how personal embodiment has pushed “[...] vast populations to oppressive feelings of inadequacy that spur their buying of marketed remedies.” Somaesthetics, however, try to redeem such an impact by turning the attention of the individual to the appreciative somatic-self-consciousness of their own body as well as others.

To Shusterman (2008) meditative practices are one of the ways to reach such a state. Therefore, the attentive somatic self-consciousness propelled by Shusterman (2008) can be used as the practice going against the reductionist neuroscientific view regarding meditation as a tool for re-wiring the brain. As such this would help to embrace the mediation from a more holistic perspective. The somatic self-consciousness in Shusterman bares the resemblance to the Merleau-Ponty. Since for the first author, it is the move away from instrumentalizing the body and seeing it as something limiting and defective, and for the other, the “notion of bodily intentionality defies philosophical tradition by granting the body a kind of subjectivity instead of treating it as mere object or mechanism” (Shusterman, 2008, p 62). In Chapter II we saw how Merleau-Ponty (2013) focuses on the idea of embodied perception as a way to face others with compassion and to be able to change the situation with skillful progress led by intentional arcs of habitual and actual body schemas connected in the experience and re-shaping of the present by a living body. Shusterman (2008), makes a further move to emphasize appreciation and aesthetics of embodied change and development of a person, that could lift the feelings of inadequacy and aid with mutual support to each other. That is “[a]s disciplined habit-body extends far beyond the personal ethical efforts of self-improvement, it sustains the entire social structure through which habit is itself shaped and in which individual efforts find their place and limit” (Shusterman, 2008, p. 141).

Chapter V – Practical Applicability and Focusing on the Social Element

So far in the paper, issues with corporatized mindfulness have been pointed out. The reductionist neuroscientific approach of re-wiring the brain was shown to be ethically restrictive when implemented in the context of therapy and structuring of the workplace climate, and limiting for providing solutions for sustainable societal change. Two perspectives of embedded cognitive

ecology and somaesthetics were used to see ways to change the impact of neuroscience and implement changes in the corporatized mindfulness. In this chapter, we will further look into the importance of the cognitive environment that surrounds the person to show that an individualistic approach to mindfulness would impede the progress of the one who is trying to practice it. The environment here will be mostly treated in a sense of social surroundings of a person (Gallagher, 2012; Kirmayer & Gold, 2012).

Interestingly, the new branch of social neuroscience tries to look into relational aspects between individuals, like the link between their psychosocial interactions and brain activity (Gallagher, 2012; Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). In the recent evidence collected in the longitudinal studies of psychiatric epidemiology by Cantor-Graae and Selten, it was found that the population of immigrants have an increased rate of acquiring psychopathologies later in their life compared to the native population of the country they migrated to as well as the population of their own home country (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). These findings pointed to the conclusion that there should be:

“the perspective of the subject and the role of their agency in constructing both their own experience and the larger social world, but also the emergence of many aspects of mind and self through that self-constituting interaction with the social world.” (Kirkmayer & Gold, 2012, p.316).

Hence, the point of Malabou (2008) on a need to be aware of a more complex notion of neuroplasticity, instead of just flexibility to return to the genetic hardwired schema, is empirically supported by the findings of psychiatric epidemiology (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012) Otherwise immigrants wouldn't have had different levels of brain activity and psychological deviations compared to their countryman. The societal environment that immigrants got surrounded with had an impact on their psyche, making medication and therapy into tools that only are aimed at healing the symptoms without addressing deep rooted social issues (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). The branch of cultural psychology also helps to address that "[h]uman cognition is not everywhere strictly the same and it is far from being simply hard-wired" (Nisbett, 2004, p. 191). A number of studies revolve around scientifically measuring and comparing the behaviour of individuals, who come from different backgrounds (Henrich, Heine, & Norezayan, 2010), and those studies also often engage in a cross-cultural longitudinal analysis as discussed above (Kirmayer & Gold, 2012). Now, a growing number of repeated-measure experiments look into how bilingual people, people of multiethnic origins, expats and/or immigrants show differences in their behaviour and decision making as compared to locals (those with predominantly single background be it western or eastern) (Laketa et al., 2021; Nisbett, 2004). Previous experiences stemming from social and cultural backgrounds have an impact on problem-solving approaches and behaviour one decides to engage in, especially when a person is faced with ambiguous or complex tasks (Funke, 2014). Thus, it is hard to ignore at this point, that neuro-scientific evidence decoupled from social and cultural environment is rather limiting in the context of globalized and dynamic workplaces. This supports the worries of authors that have been calling for critical neuroscience to emerge in order

to address the reductionist consequences of implementing meditation as a tool to make someone fit in and enhance their problem-solving skills (Rose, 2012; Slaby, 2012; Gallagher, 2012).

Let's add to this, the issues addressed in Chapter III, when discussing the negative impacts on the workers when mindfulness was used as a 'carrot' measure to induce work productivity (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). The 2018 report by AMRA (American Mindfulness Research Association) shows that mindfulness as an industry yearly has been generating over a billion US dollars on a global scale, and "by the beginning of 2018, 44% of all US companies had offered mindfulness training to employees" (Levey & Levey, 2019). The hidden 'carrot' of the mindfulness industry is not only aimed at employees as receivers of those trainings, but mainly at the HR departments and top-tier management who engage in cost-benefit decision making. For example, the American insurance giant Aetna shared data that after implementing mindfulness programmes, the company managed to save \$2,000 per employee in healthcare costs, whilst gaining \$3,000 on average per employee in productivity (Pinsker, 2015). Such a positive return on investment clearly fosters the growth of the mindfulness industry, and helps to explain the profit-driven reasons of management to push employees to go through mindfulness crash-courses (Purser & Milillo, 2015; Levey & Levey, 2019).

While corporate mindfulness becomes a tool to push forth a greedy framework that is mainly focused on the enhancement of capital and unsustainable economic growth (Sahni & Kumar, 2012), the aim of traditional Buddhist mindfulness is based on the "a universal and transcendent purpose: human flourishing, virtuous behavior, and an altruistic concern for the welfare of all sentient beings" (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p 7). Hence, the aim of Buddhist mindfulness is not to simply promote and strengthen the quality of attention and awareness of an individual, nor to aid in the reduction of stress that is induced by a heavy workload, but "to transform the human mind by lessening, and ultimately eliminating, toxic mental states rooted in greed, ill will, and delusion" (Purser & Milillo, 2015, p 7). The big issue with this, however, is that average working individuals at some point start facing the cognitive dissonance from having embraced the transformation towards non-egoistic compassion and open awareness of the world through mindfulness (see III-2), and yet being forcefully imbedded in the 'mentally unhealthy' environment of corporate competitiveness and lacking ethics (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Hence, the problem needs to be addressed on the organizational (group) level too and not just from the perspective of the individual employees.

The research by Qiu and Rooney (2019) has been aimed at creating a model to address the issues of corporatization of mindfulness, which can allow for practical ethical implementation of original values in current companies (see appendix C). For that authors have determined three areas where corporatized mindfulness can be improved. First, they came to a conclusion that workplace mindfulness programmes, in general, are missing the ethical framework underlining original values behind meditation in *dharma*, which makes a commodified version of mindfulness less

purposeful both for the individual who is involved in practice and the society. Notably, that ethical framework of care and compassion can be secularized, and is not necessarily religious. (In chapter II, it was shown how notions of care in Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and care in ACT take a similar stance as the compassion and care portrayed in *dharma*). So, the ethical layer can be imbedded in the western take on mindfulness too. The second problem with corporatized mindfulness was the length of most of the programmes. Corporate mindfulness trainings were too short to be impactful enough, meanwhile, the mindfulness psychological therapy counterparts were longitudinal and hence more supportive in case anxiety or depression relapsed (Hayes, Stosahl, & Wilson, 2012). Hence, the second correction needs to be about transforming the trainings into a longer journey, with a supportive trainer to be in place to aid employees after the course has been finalized. The last issue is the hardest one to address as it addresses the mismatch between corporate values and environment with the values of practicing attentive awareness, care and compassion. Authors (Qiu & Rooney, 2019) suggest companies review their corporate culture and ethical codes of conduct, since by remaining stagnant they risk that ethically wired employees would leave, and overall the corporate climate won't remain enticing for productive, creative and collaborative work (Sahni & Kumar, 2012) despite all the efforts to organize more mindfulness trainings. Bringing such a change would require courage from corporate leaders, but as the result will lead to a sustainable societal change in the workplace (Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Huffman et al., 2015).

Based on these insights and suggestions the four-stage model was structured for promoting ethically enhanced workplace mindfulness (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Authors have relied on the work by Brown (1977, 1986) to construct their “systematic progression of spiritual development” whilst practicing mindfulness in a corporate setting (Qiu & Rooney, 2019, p. 721). The full model is depicted in the appendix C. Hereunder let us address each of the four stages one by one.

The first stage of the training is called “Preliminary concentration” and it tries to achieve two goals. The first goal is to introduce ethical education regarding integrity in a workplace. At this stage employees need to be introduced to the importance of responsible management practices and steering away from green-washed labels of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Laasch & Conaway, 2014). This part of the practice will be made to ensure that the ethical component (*sila*) is in place. The second goal of Stage 1, is to allow the participants to slowly get used to being immersed into the practice of awareness. They will be taught the ways of right concentration (*samma samadhi*) at this stage. That should allow workers to obtain skills of ethical self-regulation, and the ability to channel their attention in a proper manner.

After that comes Stage 2 called “Deep concentration”, which continues to involve people with the practice by giving support from teachers. The deep concentration stage would allow to distinguish the skillful from unskillful effort (*vayama*) when acting upon insights from the mindfulness practice (*samma sati*). At this stage, the positive effects from previous practices of stage one should be amplified. However, in case employees are rushed and pressured to show results, it could

negatively affect them as some might abandon the mindfulness practice all together. It is vital that mindfulness does not translate into a ‘soft’ work intensification tool, the ethical considerations that were brought up during stage 1, supposedly should prevent this from occurring (Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

Stage 3 of the practice is “Self-transcendence” and it is aimed at bringing the participants to the state where they themselves can engage in the right mindfulness and gain wisdom (*panna*). At this stage, the goal is to attain improved mental well-being and life meaningfulness on the level of departments/teams and not individually as at the stage 1. That would allow to further improve team spirit and cross-departmental support. However, there are some changes that could occur with employees on an individual level as well at this time. That is an emerged possibility to redefine the life purpose and be more critical towards corporate values that are still in place (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Managers fear this, as it could increase the employee turnover as more ethically wired and responsible employees could no longer wish to remain in the company if they see that organization fails to change over time (Dane & Brummel, 2014). Therefore, a high tear management ought to move the whole corporation along the ethical and mindful trajectory, that is by rethinking corporate values and changing the company’s practices to be more inclusive and caring towards the external stakeholders affected by the business (Laasch & Conaway, 2014).

The Stage 4 of the process is called “Reengagement”, and is about transitioning the company climate to a level of a sustainable social change. That is when employees and managers foster the connectedness with the company’s stakeholders in a proactive and compassionate way opening up to the business initiatives that have altruistic purpose and components of partnership economy and community-based management (cf. Wolf & Troxler, 2016). The stage is also characterized by authentic and ethical leadership as well as enhanced assertiveness and self-sufficiency among employees to nudge the leadership to change old hierarchies with agile teams and redefine values in line with values of care, compassion and reduction of suffering (Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

All in all the four stages of redefined and enhanced workplace mindfulness (Qiu & Rooney, 2019) should allow managers and employees to face the challenge of getting out of their personal ‘integrity bubbles’ (Purser & Milillo, 2015) and ‘commodity bubbles’ (Szasz, 2007). That is because the model helps to address the change of the social climate within an organization in the earlier stages and at the last stage even address the issues with social impact that a corporation has through its business practices (Qiu & Rooney, 2019).

Chapter VI – Conclusion

This paper was aimed at addressing the developments and trends behind the 21st century mindfulness practices, which became a hype especially in the context of the workplace where managers strive to improve the performance of the employees and deal with mental hazards like

stress and burnout (Sahni & Kumar, 2012; Thompson, 2020). The problem with such an approach to mindfulness however is that first it does not address the root of issues, and only tackles the symptoms. And secondly, it leads to a misconception of what is really a hazard in that context (Purser & Milillo, 2015; Szasz, 2007). The hazard is neither the burnouts, nor the stress, but the corporate climate (or in other words social environment) that induces unnecessary competitiveness and pressure to obtain better performance metrics (Sahni & Kumar, 2012). Here in this final chapter, we will summarise the overall findings of the paper and present implications for the future philosophical research on the topic.

First, in the paper it was addressed that original Buddhist mindfulness practices in Theravada and Mahayana scriptures are presented within a coordinated ethical framework, and are aimed at reducing ego-centrism, and reach ego-transcendence (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). The end stages of the right practice open up the person to exercise care and compassion towards others. The right mindfulness (*samma sati*) was described not just as an awareness of the moment, but as a holistic awareness of mind, body, feelings and environment (Thompson, 2020; Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Such awareness was described as an aid to skilfully implement past experience to reshape the present in a way that allows to diminish causes of suffering. The writings of the western philosophers in phenomenology were used to connect Buddhist scriptures to similar writings in the West. It was discussed how Merleau-Ponty's (2013) embodied perception allows for intersubjective milieu to form between people, who can exercise empathy towards one another and re-shape that spacio-temporal environment, hence influencing the development of their common history and institutional structures. The notions from Heidegger from 'Being and Time' (1962) were then used to illustrate how being-towards-death induces care in beings, while 'publicness' can level-down the state of care, since responsibilities are attributed to the mass (the 'they').

With that the paper moved to discuss the issues with contemporary mindfulness which ignores the original Buddhist values and ignores social environment, making managers and employees seek individualised treatment that is not helpful but damaging to the well-being (Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Atkins, 2015; Huffman et al., 2015). It was portrayed that the enthusiasm around corporatized mindfulness stems from a managerial appreciation of the result-driven research and their willingness to implement the findings in the organizational domain (Dane, 2011; Kersemaekers et al., 2018). Specifically, those were findings from neuroscience that delved into studying the therapeutical implementation of mindfulness (in ACT and MBCT), and showed the changes that meditation has on the brain (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). It was then formulated that mindfulness can be a tool to re-wire the brain, and such a view gained popularity, because the promise to fix the problem by fixing the plastic and malleable neuron networks in the brain looked quite straightforward and appealing (Malabou, 2008).

This paper then addressed the issues of reductionist view regarding brain plasticity and equating the individual to their brain, which of course ignores the body and social structures around them

(Malabou, 2008). It was shown that uncritical approach of the neuroscience can induce societal problems inflicting discrimination towards less privileged masses who cannot afford therapy, and so-to-say failed in re-wiring in order to meet the social standards of a competitive capitalistic corporate environment (Malabou, 2008; Borck, 2012; Kirmayer, and Gold, 2012). The alternative streams of research were then discussed to critique the myopia of the neuroscientific approach and mechanistic models of the reaction of the brain towards stimuli (Varela, 1998). Among the first approaches cognitive ecology was described (Varela, 1998; Gallagher, 2012; Newen, Gallagher, & Bruin, 2018). This stream of cognitive science (cf. Noe & Thompson, 2002) portrays perception as embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended (4E), also ecological and affective (5EA) and in the case of 7E, three new dimensions of emotional, evolved and exoconscious are added (Geisshuesler, 2019). These models allow to point corporatized mindfulness into the direction of an inclusive practice that fosters emotional, bodily, ethical and social (environmental) components, instead of a focus on enhancing cognitive skills and cognitive resilience of employees alone (Prevedini et al, 2011; Dane & Brummel, 2014). The second approach to change neuroscientific influence on corporate mindfulness was somaesthetics (Shusterman, 2008), the field that promotes somatic self-consciousness and allows to steer away from the body as an instrument, to the body as a driver for embodied realization of the societal change, which would subsequently go in a more ethical and responsible direction (Shusterman, 2008).

Finally, the paper looked into the ways to practically shift corporate mindfulness from the practice with no ethical underpinnings and result-driven ego-centric principles to a responsible and socially helpful engine (Qiu & Rooney, 2019; Purser & Milillo, 2015). This was done by looking into a four-stage enhanced model of corporate mindfulness that addresses the critique raised throughout the paper (Qiu & Rooney, 2019). Therefore, it was shown how longitudinal training with responsibility and ethics as the backbone can be useful to transition a ‘better you’ solution that induces individualistic commodity and integrity bubbles to a ‘better society’ implication. The practical four stages build on the original Buddhist path of righteousness (*Dharma*) were shown to be aimed at making the workforce and management more attentive to one another within corporate structures, and show attention, care and compassion towards external stakeholders as well (Laasch & Conaway, 2014). The model was structured to induce corporations to redefine their values in order to include social elements for sustainable change, and encourage responsible leadership which steers in the direction of community and partnership frameworks (Wolf & Troxler, 2016).

Appendices

Appendix A

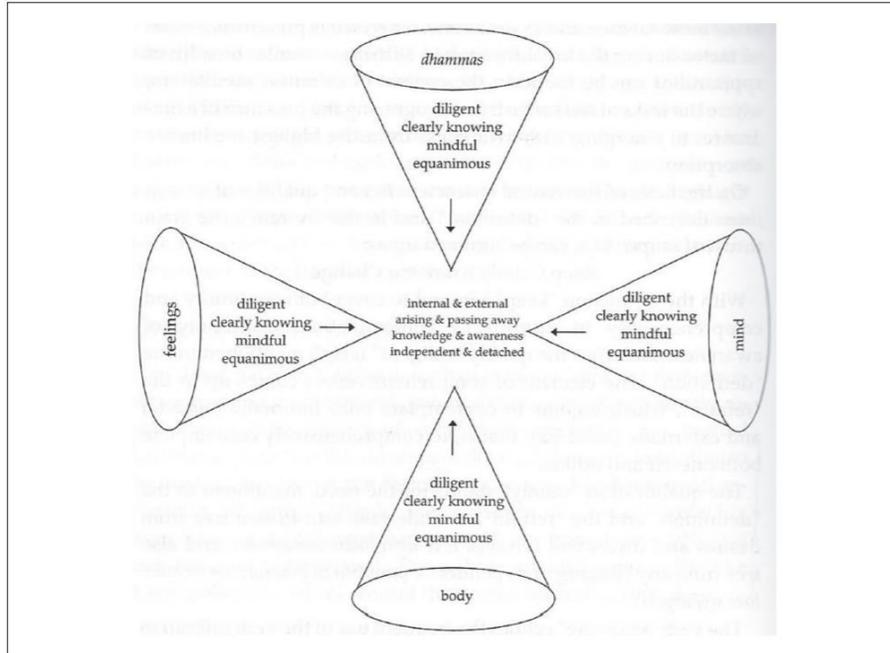


Figure 1. Central features and characteristics of *satipatthana*.
Source. Adapted from Anālayo (2010, p. 268).

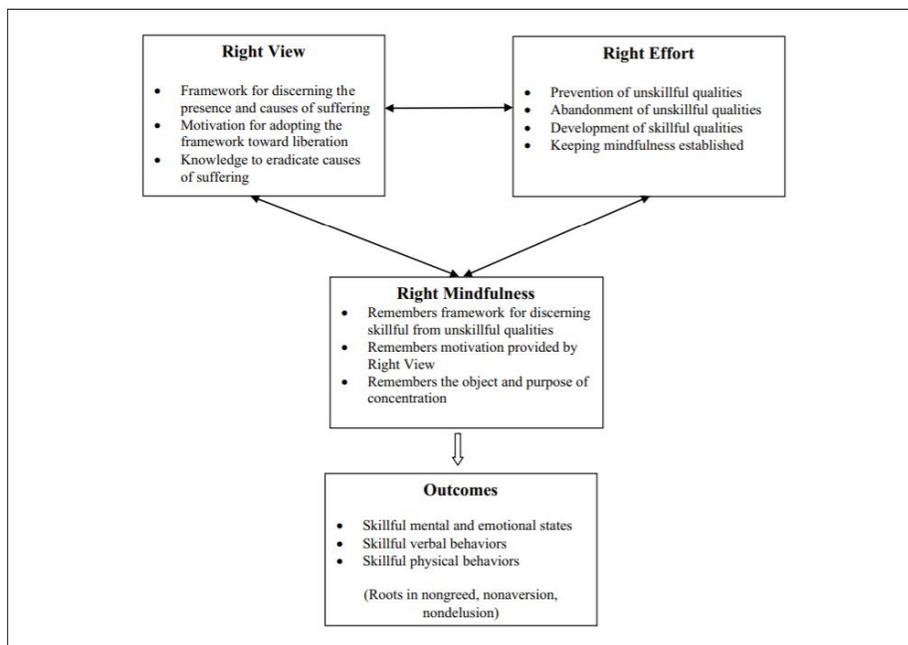
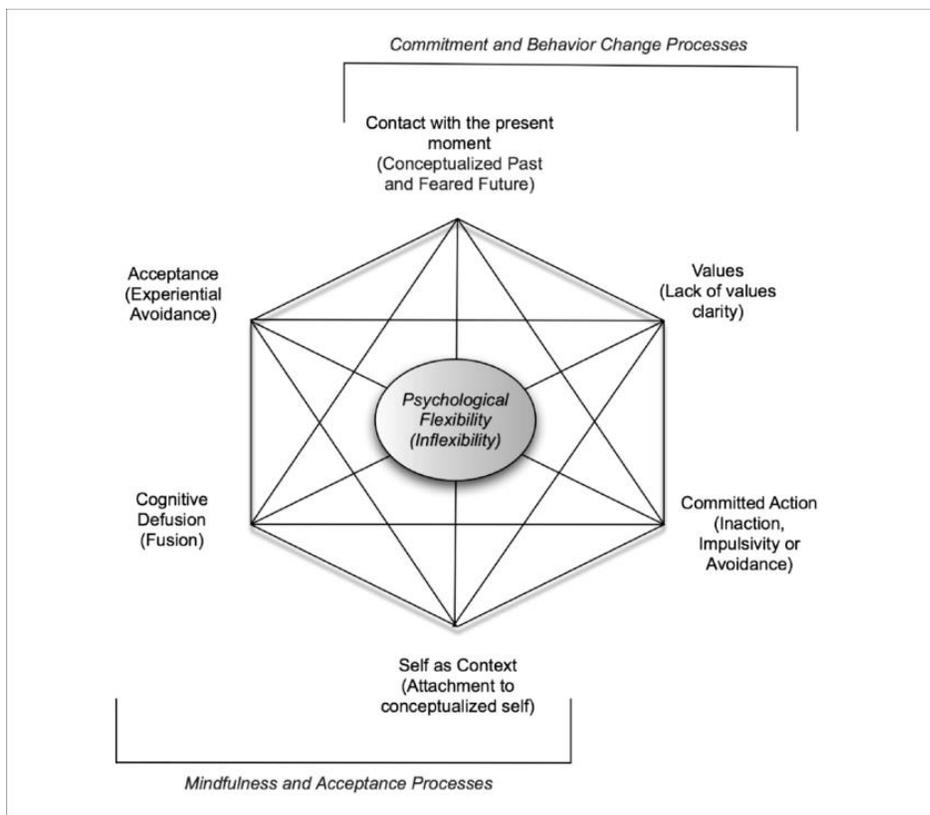


Figure 2. The triadic model of Buddhist mindfulness.

From Purser, R. E., & Milillo, J. (2015). Mindfulness revisited: A Buddhist-based conceptualization. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 24(1), 3-24.

Appendix B

The Hexaflex model of ACT for psychological flexibility and inflexibility



From Prevedini, A. B., Presti, G., Rabitti, E., Miselli, G., & Moderato, P. (2011). Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT): the foundation of the therapeutic model and an overview of its contribution to the treatment of patients with chronic physical diseases. *G Ital Med Lav Ergon*, 33(1 Suppl A), A53-63.

Appendix C

Enhanced Four-stage model of workplace mindfulness which takes into consideration dealing with the negative impact on workforce and changing the corporate climate ethically.

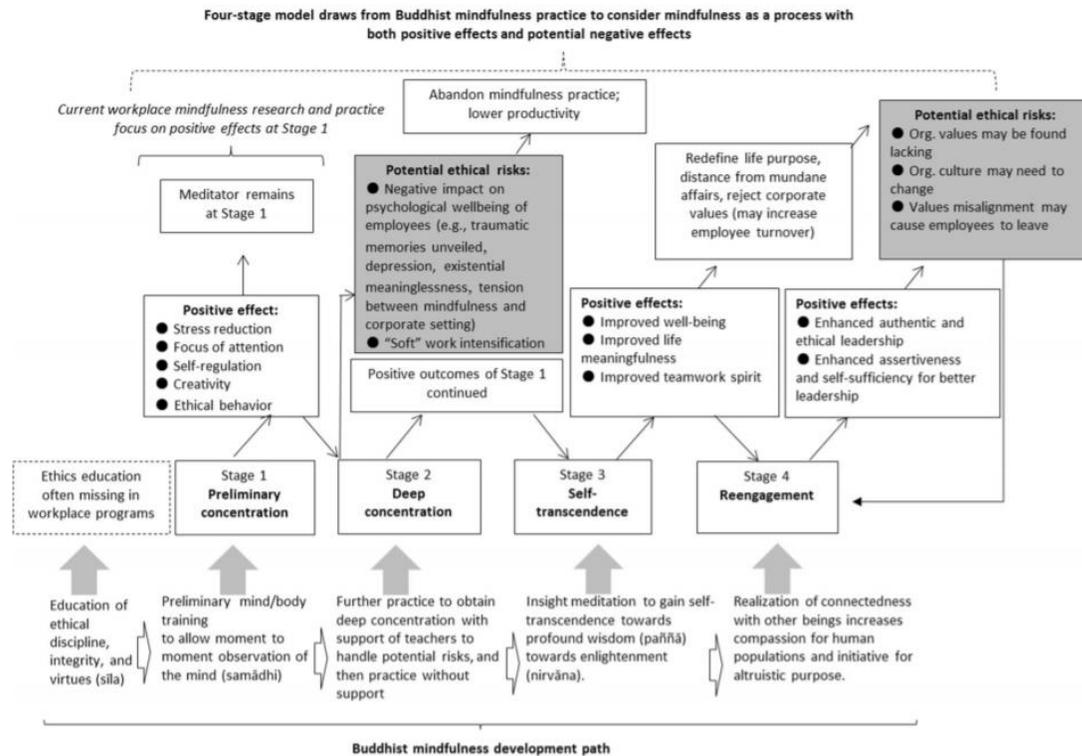


Fig. 2 Four-stage model of workplace mindfulness development informed by Buddhist perspectives

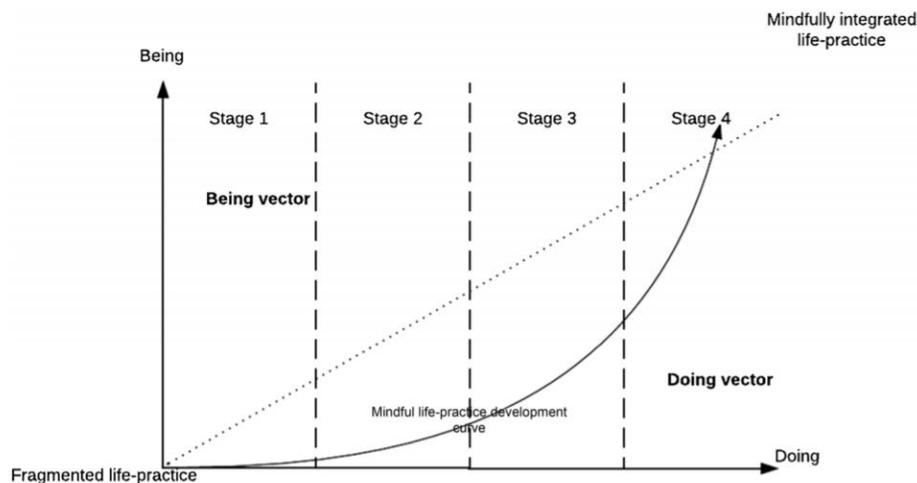


Fig. 3 Mindfully integrated life-practice doing-to-being trajectory

From Qiu, J. X., & Rooney, D. (2019). Addressing unintended ethical challenges of workplace mindfulness: A four-stage mindfulness development model. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 157(3), 715-730.

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