

Mindfulness Revisited: A Buddhist-Based Conceptualization

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Ronald E. Purser¹ and Joseph Milillo²

Abstract

Recent scholarship on mindfulness has narrowly focused on attention enhancement, present-moment awareness, and its stress reduction effects. Moreover, current operational definitions of mindfulness in the literature differ considerably from those derived from classic Buddhist canonical sources. This article revisits the meaning, function, and purpose of Buddhist mindfulness by proposing a triadic model of “right mindfulness.” A Buddhist-based conceptualization of right mindfulness provides both a theoretical and ethical corrective to the decontextualized individual-level construct of mindfulness that has informed the organizational theory and practitioner literature. We argue that a denatured mindfulness divorced from its soteriological context reduces it to a self-help technique that is easily misappropriated for reproducing corporate and institutional power, employee pacification, and maintenance of toxic organizational cultures.

Keywords

mindfulness, ethics, organization theory

Over the last decade, the construct of mindfulness has garnered considerable theoretical interest among organizational scholars (Dane, 2011; Fiol & O’Connor, 2003; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Ray, Baker, & Plowman, 2011; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Vogus & Welbourne, 2003; Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2008). Drawing mainly from Western conceptualizations and psychological studies of mindfulness from the early work of Ellen Langer and her colleagues (Chanowitz & Langer, 1981; Langer, 1989a, 1989b, 1994; Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000), this stream of literature has adhered mainly to the “conceptual mindfulness” framework which is conceived of as being aware of the contents of experience—employing cognitive functions such as attention, distinction-making, and associations (deCharms, 1997; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Vogus & Welbourne, 2003; Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006; Weick et al., 2008). While there is considerable variance in descriptions of mindfulness in the organizational theory literature, Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld’s (1999) characterization of Western mindfulness has long been the mainstay:

[an] enriched awareness . . . [through] active differentiation and refinement of existing categories and distinctions . . . creation of new discontinuous categories out of the continuous stream of events . . . and a more nuanced appreciation of context and alternative ways to deal with it. (p. 90)

Such theorizing, however, has been limited to Langer’s theories of mindfulness. Weick and Sutcliffe’s (2001)

conceptualization that mindfulness induces “a rich awareness of discriminatory detail and a capacity for action” (p. 88) exemplifies this form of conceptual mindfulness.

Recognizing the limitations of Western conceptualizations of mindfulness, Weick and Putnam (2006) have called for organizational theorists to draw more directly from Eastern (Buddhist) forms of nonconceptual mindfulness, what they describe as “mindfulness-as-process” (p. 286). They went on to speculate that mindfulness meditation 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. Their speculations have proven to be fruitful. New research in the emerging field of contemplative neuroscience has found that mindfulness meditation induces “process-specific learning,” which they characterize as “learning effects that do not only improve performance on the trained task or tasks, but also transfer to new tasks and domains (Green & Bavelier, 2008), i.e., learning that is not specific to the trained stimuli or tasks” (Slagter, Davidson, & Lutz, 2011, p. 2). Process-specific learning is the neurological correlate to

¹San Francisco State University, CA, USA

²Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Ronald E. Purser, Department of Management, College of Business, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Ave., San Francisco, CA 94044, USA.

Email: rpurser@sfsu.edu

Weick and Putnam's (2006) call for organizational theorists to place more emphasis on mindfulness-as-process.

Organizational 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 (Arch & Craske, 2006; Baer, 2003; Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Lau et al., 2006; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). This stream of literature originates most notably in the pioneering work of Jon Kabat-Zinn in behavioral medicine beginning in the late 1970s (Kabat-Zinn, 1982) with the introduction of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) interventions, a therapeutic and clinical application of mindfulness-based practices for the treatment of many psychological and psychosomatic problems. Over the last 20 years, interest among scholars and clinicians in MBSR has grown exponentially (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011), and it is now the most widely taught secular form of mindfulness practice in academic medical centers and clinics throughout North America and Europe (Davidson & Begley, 2012). In addition, "mindfulness-based cognitive therapy" (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) was recently spawned for preventing relapses of depression; a combination of Western cognitive science and a clinical use of Buddhist-influenced meditative practices.

Gethin (2011) pointed out that although Buddhist-inspired mindfulness practices were key influences in the development of both MBSR and MBCT, an accurate reading of Buddhist theories of mindfulness has been lacking, resulting in an extremely selective and incomplete understanding. Because MBSR was developed for clinical applications in medical settings for subjects suffering from chronic pain and other stress-related disorders, a close examination of Buddhist theories informing mindfulness practice was not expected. The few organizational theorists who have attempted to incorporate Buddhist-inspired conceptualizations of individual-level mindfulness (Dane, 2011; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007; Weick & Putnam, 2006) have drawn mainly from popular Buddhist texts by Western teachers of modernized mindfulness "insight meditation," along with Kabat-Zinn's MBSR method. However, even these attempts to draw from Buddhist-inspired sources have resulted in operational definitions of mindfulness that differ considerably from Buddhist canonical descriptions (Bodhi, 2011; Gethin, 2001; Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Indeed, the scientific and clinical literatures have virtually ignored the rich theoretical descriptions of mindfulness practice contained in the Buddhist canon (Davis & Thompson, 2014).

Because research on mindfulness is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is not surprising that a careful and clear understanding of the hermeneutic meaning of mindfulness

within the context of Buddhist contemplative practice is sorely lacking in organizational studies. We agree with Bodhi (2011) that mindfulness as a concept has become, as he put it, "so vague and elastic that it serves almost as a cipher into which one can read virtually anything we want" (p. 22). Accordingly, the aims of this essay are to (a) provide a corrective to the theory of individual-level mindfulness based on authoritative canonical Buddhist sources; (b) explore how a Buddhist-based conceptualization of right mindfulness challenges existing operational definitions which are primarily concerned with enhancing focused attention and, more specifically, provide an ethically based view of mindfulness; and (c) discuss how the increasingly popular trend of allegedly "Buddhist-inspired" mindfulness training and interventions in corporations runs the risk of being co-opted and exploited for maintaining the status quo rather than effecting transformative change.

Mindfulness Within the Buddhist Tradition

In this section, we present a brief summation of the classical Buddhist literature on mindfulness as a comparative basis for examining how modern and secularized definitions of mindfulness in the organizational studies literature differ considerably. The Buddhist textual tradition is voluminous, dating back to the early Pāli Canon¹ (the Pāli Tipitaka) purportedly as early as the 1st century BC. In addition, the spread of Buddhism both geographically and temporally over the last 2 millennia has produced a plethora of theories, descriptive accounts, and commentaries for traversing a path for systematic mental training and human development. Mindfulness, even within Buddhism and its various schools, is also a contested concept, subject to varied understandings and applications, depending on the time period and context. Furthermore, mindfulness training represents only a sliver of the plethora of Buddhist meditation methods (Lopez, 2012). As Dunne (2011) had so succinctly put it, "the Buddhist tradition is not monolithic" (p. 71). Our exposition is not intended to privilege the early Buddhist canon's conception of mindfulness but to provide a more finely grained account of how the aims and outcomes of Buddhist mindfulness diverge from current clinical and secularized approaches.

Despite the variety of understandings both within and across the Buddhist traditions, there is a clear area of common ground as to the ultimate purpose and function that mindfulness meditation practices play in psycho-spiritual development: (a) a soteriological goal of Buddhist practice is the elimination of the root causes of suffering and (b) in-depth meditative training alleviates and ultimately eliminates suffering by inducing significant and sustainable changes in one's cognitive and emotional states, leading to dramatic and irreversible changes in behavioral and psychological traits. This process of psycho-spiritual development involves a path

of meditative and contemplative inquiry aimed to identify and transform the root causes of suffering, “a set of correctable defects that affect all the mental states of an untrained person” (Gethin, 1998; Lutz, Dunne, & Davidson, 2007, p. 503).

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta

Developing a fuller understanding of mindfulness and the role it plays in the Buddhist tradition requires a closer examination of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, a highly revered discourse of the Buddha which is considered an exact instruction on the practice of mindfulness meditation (Anālayo, 2010).² The discourse is divided into four sections, pertaining to mindfulness of the body (*kāyā*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*), and mind-objects (also called *dharmas*, or phenomena). In addition, the instructions also include contemplations directed toward observing the arising and passing away of these phenomena in the stream of experience.³

Most Buddhist scholars agree that *sati* (*smṛti* in Sanskrit) is derived from the verb, “to remember” or the act of “calling to mind” (Anālayo, 2010; Davids, 1881; Gethin, 1998; Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2005; Ṭhānissaro, 2012).⁴ A wide range of meanings have been associated with *sati* in the early *Abhidhamma* literatures, such as recollection (*anussati*), recall (*patissati*), remembrance (*saranata*), keeping in mind (*dharanata*), absence of floating (*apilapamata*), and absence of forgetfulness (*asammussanata*) (Gethin, 2011). However, in the meditative context, *sati* is not the equivalent of the function of memory but of “recollecting” and a particular way of remembering (Gethin, 2001; Ṭhānissaro, 2012). As the purpose and function of *sati* within the context of the Buddhist path is to put an end to suffering, canonical descriptions differentiate between two types of *sati*, “right” (*sammā*) and “wrong” (*micchā*) [Majjhima Nikaya (MN) 117; MN 126; Samyutta Nikaya (SN) 10:108; Ṭhānissaro, 2012, p. 12]. Right mindfulness (*sammā sati*) signifies a faculty of mind that is able to remember both skillful and unskillful actions, expanding the temporal field of vision. Thus, mindfulness is not merely a passive and nonjudgmental attentiveness to the present moment exclusively but an actively engaged and discerning awareness that is capable of recollecting words and actions from the past as well. As we shall explain shortly, right mindfulness, when properly cultivated and supported by other mental factors, can remember and know skillful as well as unskillful phenomena, in the past and in the present—with the intended purpose of abandoning those which lead toward suffering and stress in the future (Gethin, 2001; Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Thus, right mindfulness is not simply bare attention to the present moment but “includes both retrospective memory of the past and prospective memory of the present and future” (Kang & Whittingham, 2010, p. 165).

Another dimension of *sati* is that it must be established or set up (*upatthāna*). What this implies is that *sati* generates a particular stance or orientation toward one’s present

experience, which is characterized by observation or watchfulness (*anupassanā*). According to Gethin (2001), the faculty of mindfulness can be conceived as “standing near” or manifests as “guarding” the mind (p. 32). As Anālayo (2010) pointed out, *sati*, or mindfulness, involves “an enhancement of the recollective function, by way of expanding the breadth of attention” (p. 63). Another reading shows that *sati* is the immediacy of one’s experience—or a *presence of mind*—that amounts to a close and repeated observation applied to the four domains of contemplation. In this respect, mindfulness can be viewed as the act of establishing “firm presence of mind” in relation to the object of contemplation, “and this firm presence entails a capacity for clear recollection of past experiences” (Bodhi, 2011; Wallace & Bodhi, 2006, p. 9).

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* also provides a comprehensive set of contemplations that requires the application of mental qualities as key supports for the cultivation of mindfulness. As the *Sutta* itself makes clear, these are deep concentration (*samādhi*), clear knowing (*sampajañña*), balanced and sustained effort (*atapi*), and an equanimous mind free from desires and discontent. Figure 1 below illustrates the essential features and key mental functions that are involved in *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Sampajañña is usually translated from the Pāli as “clear comprehension,” or “alertness,” which has a reflexive monitoring quality. In this sense, it is fair to translate *sampajañña* as introspection, which should be done with clear comprehension. *Sati* (mindfulness) and *sampajañña* (clear comprehension) are the tools not only for training the mind but proper investigation of it as well. Mindfulness is supported by the mental factor of *sampajañña* through the latter’s ability to be aware of whether the mind is focused on the intended object or whether it has lost the object (Lutz et al., 2007). *Sampajañña* can also be understood as a faculty of mind that is able to fully grasp and comprehend what is actually taking place in one’s own mind and experience (Anālayo, 2010). The degree and level of *sampajañña* can range from basic forms of knowing to discriminative understanding, the latter of which is able to discern wholesome from unwholesome thoughts and behaviors. Highlighting some of the key aspects of *satipaṭṭhāna*, Anālayo (2010) stated,

One of the central tasks of *sati* is the de-automatization of habitual reactions and perceptual evaluations. *Sati* thereby leads to a progressive restructuring of perceptual appraisal, and culminates in an undistorted vision of reality “as it is.” The element of non-reactive watchful receptivity in *sati* forms the foundation for *satipaṭṭhāna* as an ingenious middle path which neither suppresses the contents of experience nor compulsively reacts to them. (p. 267)

Based on the Buddhist canonical literature, four key elements are associated with *sati*, as Gethin (2001) summarizes below:

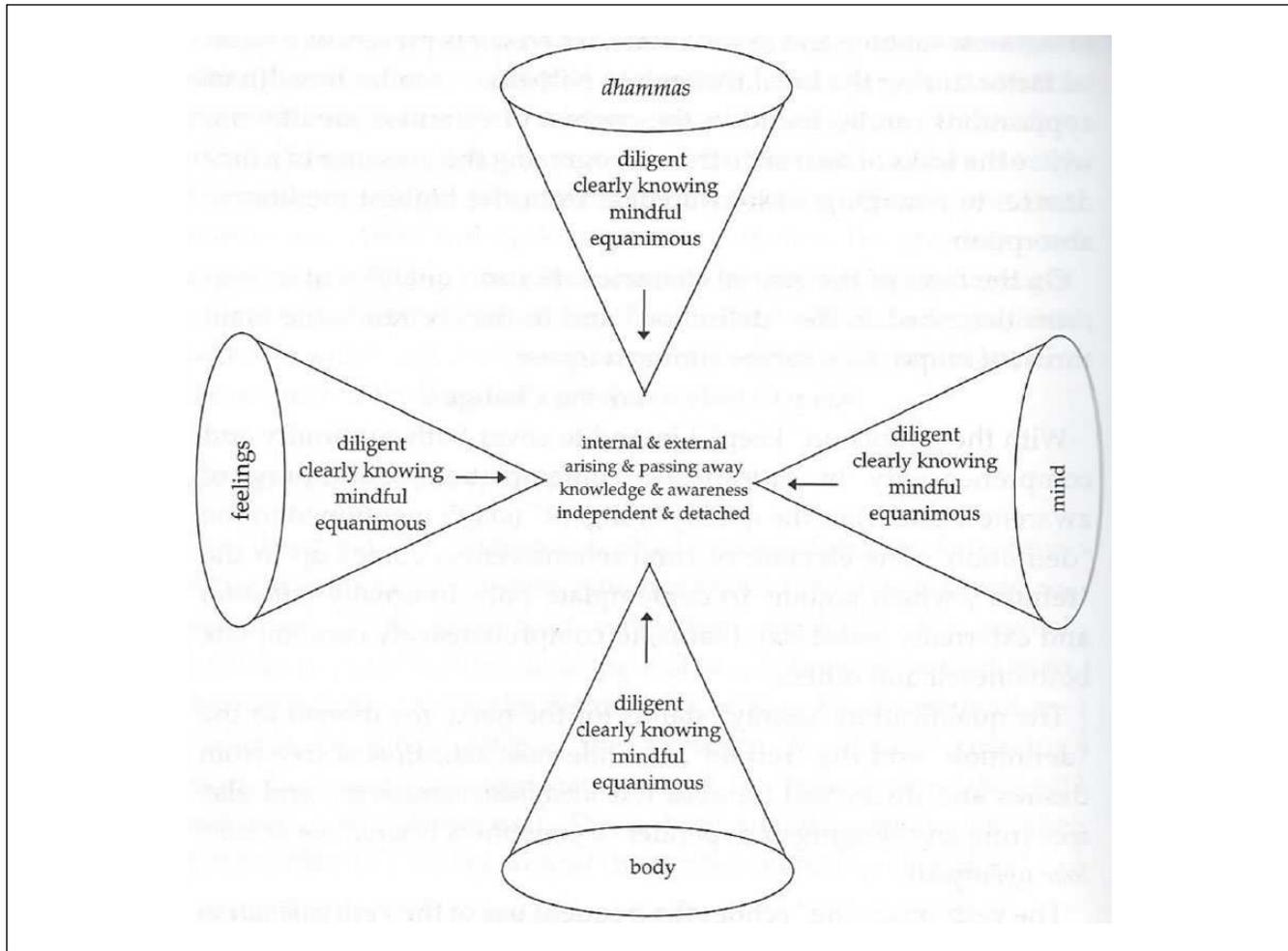


Figure 1. Central features and characteristics of *satipatthāna*.
Source. Adapted from Anālayo (2010, p. 268).

(i) *Sati* remembers or does not lose what is before the mind; (ii) *sati* is, as it were, a natural “presence of mind”; it stands near and hence serves to guard the mind; (iii) *sati* “calls to mind,” that is, it remembers things in relationship to things and thus tends to know their value and widen the view; (iv) *sati* is thus closely related to wisdom; it naturally tends to see things as they truly are. (p. 44)

Right Mindfulness

It is important to clarify not only the meaning of *sati* as described in both the *Abhidhamma* and the early *sutta* literatures but also the role and function it plays in larger scheme of the Buddhist path of liberation. Buddhist spiritual development can be categorized into three progressive and inter-related 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*). These stages of development

are inextricably bound together and cannot be separated from each other (Gethin, 2001). In this respect, ethical judgment is intimately tied to the practice of right mindfulness (Kang & Whittingham, 2010). Most importantly, organizational scholars should be cognizant of the fact that Buddhist mindfulness serves as a key function within what is known as the noble eightfold path.⁵ Integrated within an eight-factored path, “right mindfulness” (*sammā sati*) is the seventh path factor, informed and developed in conjunction with the prior path factors, most of which require the exercise of mental restraint and behavioral ethical disciplines (*sīla*). These path factors not only serve as a necessary support for the practice of right mindfulness (Brahm, 2006) 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. In fact, a key instructional guideline from the *Satipatthāna sutta* formula for establishing mindfulness is “subduing greed and distress with reference to the world,”

meaning that a certain degree of restraint is required to set aside these obstacles (Ṭhānissaro, 2012, p. 17). Contrary to popular definitions, Buddhist mindfulness is not necessarily devoid of discrimination, evaluation, or judgment—a common misinterpretation which obscures the role mindfulness plays as an integrated path factor, when properly cultivated and developed, can discern wholesome/skillful (*kusala*) and healthy states of mind from those which are unwholesome and harmful (*akusala*) to self and others (Bodhi, 2011). Noting the misconceptions in modern and secular interpretations of mindfulness, Ṭhānissaro (2012) stated,

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. This is an important point to note. Instead of telling you to abandon past memories so as to approach the present with totally fresh eyes and bare awareness, he's saying to be selective in calling on the appropriate memories that will keep you on the path to the end of suffering. And instead of telling you to watch passively as things arise and pass away on their own, he's saying to keep remembering the need to complete any uncompleted tasks required by the path, and to protect any attainments that have already been attained. In other words, there are some things you have to remember to *make* arise and to *prevent* from passing away. (p. 21, emphasis in original)

Because the eight path factors are interpenetrating and mutually reinforcing, right mindfulness is elevated to a form of ethics-based mind training. While much is made of the attentional enhancement benefits of mindfulness in the organizational literature, the path factors of right speech, right action, and right livelihood have received little or no attention, yet they are also influential in establishing right mindfulness. Indeed, this trio of path factors has to do with the quality of behavior enacted, or the ethical discipline segment of the path (*sīla*), which makes them relevant to expanding our notions of mindfulness as applied to organizations. Unskillful behaviors—such as hurtful speech, lying, bullying, violence, and deceptive business practices—fall under this triadic 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 (Ṭhānissaro, 2012).

In the *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 45.8), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) is described as livelihood through abandoning dishonesty. The *Mahacattarisaka Sutta* (the *sutta* of the great forty) in *Majjhima Nikaya* points out that right view (*sammā diṭṭhī*) is considered the forerunner of right livelihood as it assists one in discerning right from wrong

(MN 117.8). This *sutta* further states that right effort sustains an individual in cultivating a wholesome lifestyle and that it is right mindfulness that brings success to all of the other factors, thereby establishing right livelihood. Cultivation of right mindfulness is then closely related to wisdom, and by that, we mean a discerning mental factor that clearly comprehends

the causes, conditions, effects, and implications of experiential process, content, behavior, in terms of the ethical consequences (e.g., “does it lead to suffering or genuine happiness?”), purpose orientation (e.g., “does it lead to the goal of liberation and enlightenment?”), and universalizability (e.g., “can this be applied to others and across different contexts?”), resulting in a valid conclusion of how things really are. (Kang & Whittingham, 2010, p. 164)

These acts of discernment ensure that the type of mindfulness that is developed is “right” (*sammā*) mindfulness.

As mentioned above, the development of Buddhist mindfulness is contingent on a balanced and integrated application of the eight path factors.⁶ This formula shows that mindfulness is not merely a compartmentalized tool for enhancing attention but is informed and influenced by many other factors—our view of reality; the nature of our thoughts, speech, and actions; our way of making a living; and our effort in avoiding unwholesome and unskillful states while developing those that are skillful and conducive to health and harmony. As Grossman and Van Dam (2011) pointed out, Buddhist mindfulness is one aspect of a transitional path that is complex and multifaceted, embedded in affective, behavioral, cognitive, ethical, and social dimensions. Maex (2011) concurred by emphasizing that Buddhist ethics is defined in relation to suffering and the elimination of its causes. Thus, the aim of Buddhist mindfulness is not merely to enhance the quality of attention or the reduction of stress but to transform the human mind by lessening, and ultimately eliminating, toxic mental states rooted in greed, ill will, and delusion.⁷ Indeed, the telos of Buddhist mindfulness has a universal and transcendent purpose: human flourishing, virtuous behavior, and an altruistic concern for the welfare of all sentient beings (Flanagan, 2011; Forbes, 2012).

Triadic Mindfulness Model

The Triadic Mindfulness Model presented in Figure 2 illustrates the interdependent, bidirectional interactions between right view, right effort, and right mindfulness—key path factors that are especially important in understanding how Buddhist mindfulness is a path leading toward skillful mental states and ethical behavior. Our model of mindfulness can be viewed descriptively and prescriptively, suggesting that when all path factors are operating in their “right” or virtuous mode of functioning, mindfulness leads toward skillful and wholesome

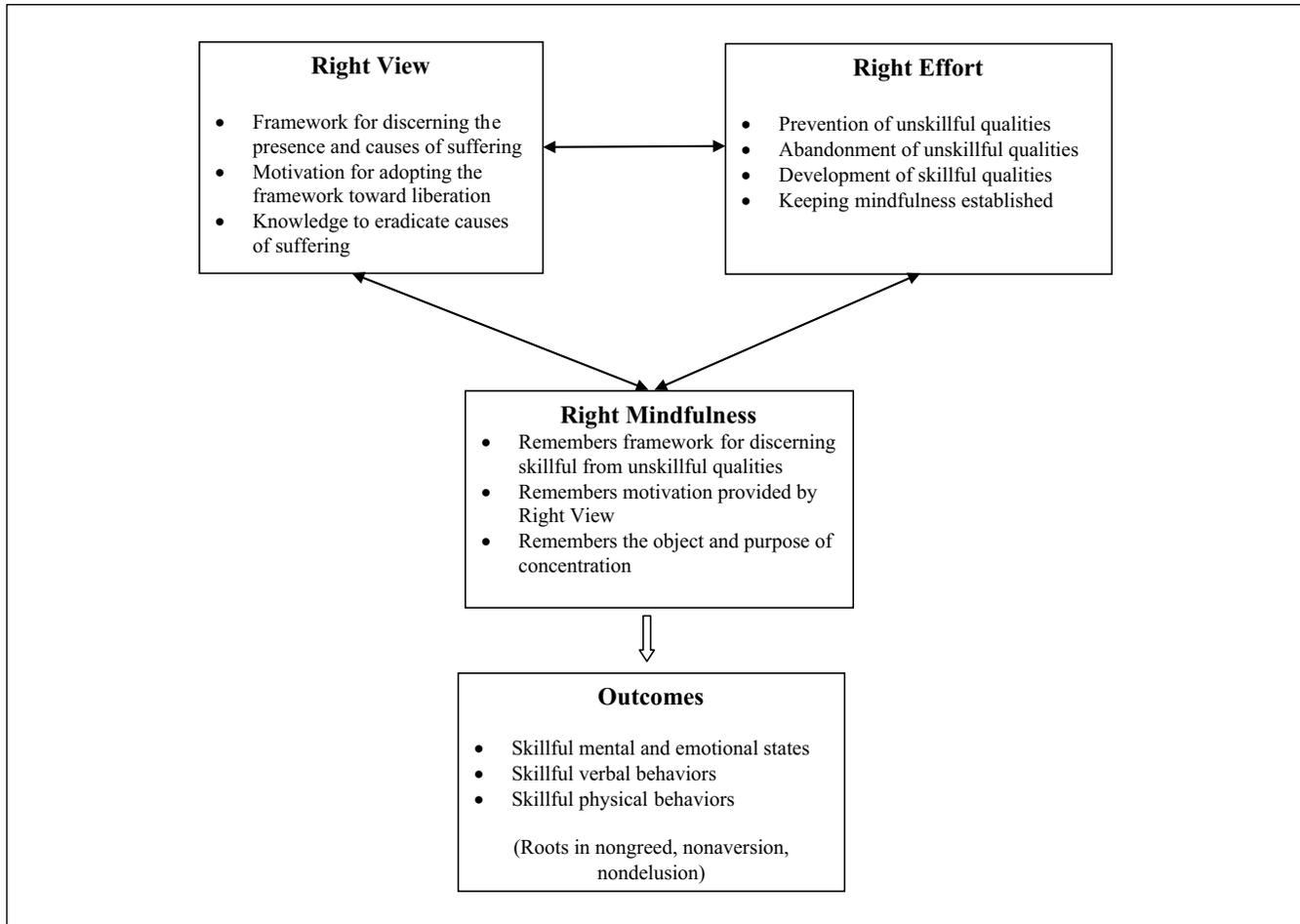


Figure 2. The triadic model of Buddhist mindfulness.

behaviors. When the path factors are absent or weak and right mindfulness is not sufficiently established, unskillful states and behaviors are the outcome. As Gethin (2001) explained, “how one speaks, acts and thinks at any time is dependent on one’s vision of oneself and the world” (p. 221).

The first path factor, right view, figures prominently as the ethical foundation within this theoretical framework. There are three dimensions of right view: (a) establishing the motivation for a desire for liberation and freedom from suffering, (b) a framework for viewing experiences in terms of the existence and causes of suffering and stress, and abandonment of such causes, and (c) discernment as to what should be done in light of the framework (T̃hānissaro, 2012). The recollective function of right mindfulness keeps right view in mind, remembering and applying these dimensions to the present experience. In turn, right mindfulness directs right effort as guided and informed by right view. As right mindfulness becomes stabilized, right effort is applied to prevent the arising of unskillful qualities, abandoning those which have already arisen, and directing effort toward the development of skillful mental states.

Right view serves as the foundation or support for the remaining path factors. The importance of establishing right view is key, for without an ethical compass to discern right from wrong as well as the presence of suffering in all its manifestations, mindfulness becomes nothing more than an instrumental tool: a heightened, value neutral form of concentrated attention. The model also suggests that as right view is cultivated and maintained, it also influences all of the prior path factors. With right view established, right thinking emerges; with right thought in place, right speech manifests; with right speech, right action follows; with right action, right livelihood comes into being; with right livelihood in place, right effort arises.

In the Buddhist canonical literature, right view is classified into two levels: the mundane and the supramundane. Mundane right view has a clear and correct grasp of the moral efficacy of action (Bodhi, 2011), and, as we pointed above, is the capacity to clearly discern wholesome from unwholesome actions. The Buddhist canon lists 10 courses of unwholesome actions, which are classified into three categories: bodily actions, verbal actions, and mental actions.

Unwholesome bodily actions include destroying life, taking what is not given (stealing), and wrong conduct in regard to sense pleasures (e.g., rape, sexual harassment). Unwholesome verbal actions include false speech (lying), slanderous speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter. Unwholesome mental actions include covetousness, ill will, and wrong view. Within this classification scheme, any unwholesome/unskillful actions can be traced to their underlying motives that have roots in either greed, aversion, or delusion (the primary mental poisons). Wholesome/skillful actions are rooted in their opposites (nongreed, nonaversion, nondelusion). For example, nongreed manifests as detachment and generosity; nonaversion as loving-kindness, compassion, and gentleness; nondelusion as wisdom.

Right view not only conditions future actions, choices, and goals, but it also represents what Bhikkhu Bodhi (2011) referred to as an “ontological commitment” (p. 16), which has to do with what is regarded as real and true (Bodhi, 2006). Being in accordance with what is real and true is a function of wisdom, which involves developing mindfulness as a support for the cultivation of penetrating insight (*paññā*). This is a very specific form of insight-wisdom, which is the culmination and aim of the Buddhist path. Supramundane right view is linked to a deep understanding of Four Noble Truths, which amounts to a diagnosis of the presence, causes, and interventions necessary to eliminate suffering. In the *Digha Nikaya* (DN:22), the Buddha states, “What now is right view? It is understanding suffering (*dukkha*), understanding of the origin of suffering, understanding of the way leading to the cessation of suffering (p. 348).” Right view, right effort, and right mindfulness, when fully cultivated, leads to right concentration (*samma samādhi*) or “wholesome one-pointedness.”⁸ The inner unification of the mind prepares the ground for directly penetrating and experientially realizing the truth, causes, and cessation of suffering. This is what is actually meant by the statement “seeing things as they truly are,” which manifests as wisdom-insight into the nature of reality. Thus, right mindfulness serves as a support for right concentration, which is a precursor to development of wisdom—a profound experiential insight into the nature of suffering, impermanence and the lack of an enduring, independent self.

Right effort (*sammā vāyāma*) is a direct, complementary factor to right view. It is a key path factor to Buddhist mental training and functions to stabilize right mindfulness and sustain right concentration. Furthermore, right effort provides the necessary wholesome energy to assure mindfulness is directed toward liberation from suffering and unskillful states. Indeed, effort is required to establish any semblance of mindfulness, but *right* effort entails preventing and abandoning unskillful states while also arousing and maintaining skillful states. Right effort amplifies and develops positive mental states and skillful qualities. In the language of positive psychology, right effort functions to encourage positive

deviance (Bright, Stansbury, Alzola, & Stavros, 2011; Cameron, 2003). However, the application of effort in the service of mindfulness is also not value neutral. Mindfulness can be used for good or ill, and effort can just as easily be fueled by aggression, violence and ambition.

The Concept of Mindfulness Within Organizational Theory

In this section, we argue that the concept of individual-level mindfulness in the organizational literature has been informed by three limiting misconceptions: (a) Mindfulness is a psychological trait that does not require meditative training and/or sustained practice, (b) mindfulness as being defined primarily as a function of bare attention, and (3) mindfulness is equated with nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment, often associated with stress reduction. We explain how these misconceptions have led organizational theorists to unwittingly subscribe to a view of mindfulness as an ethically neutral performance enhancement technique. Buddhist mindfulness, as we have pointed out, is neither a value free instrumental technique nor an ethically neutral practice (Chiesa, 2012; Maex, 2011).

Organizational scholars (Dane, 2011; Hede, 2010; Hunter & McCormick, 2008; Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006; Weick et al., 2008) have relied primarily on a highly selective and confusing admixture of Buddhist sources (drawn from a few popular books), together with Western conceptions inherited from Langer and other clinical psychologists (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Shapiro et al., 2006). These sources subscribe to the frequently cited operational definition of mindfulness used in MBSR as put forth by Kabat-Zinn (1994: “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p. 4). While Kabat-Zinn’s 25-year-old contemporary model of mindfulness has received an inordinate amount of attention in the scientific literature, a number of clinicians and neuroscientists have recently called for more clarity in operationalizing the construct of mindfulness by turning directly to the 2,500-year-old historical models that are rooted in the Buddhist tradition (Brazier, 2013; Davis & Thompson, 2014; Dreyfus, 2011a; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Ṭhānissaro (2012) concurred, stating quite eloquently,

One of the most striking features of mindfulness as taught in the modern world is how far it differs from the Canon’s teachings on right mindfulness. Instead of being a function of memory, it’s depicted primarily—in some cases, purely—as a function of attention to the present moment. Instead of being purposeful, it is without an agenda. Instead of making choices, it is choiceless and without preferences. (p. 59)

There is a growing awareness that contemporary views of mindfulness are at best partial understandings, which have

downplayed or even ignored the cognitive dimensions involving judgment and discernment as well as the contingent role that ethical conduct plays in fostering the development of mindfulness (Ruedy & Schweitzer, 2010; Shapiro, Jazaieri, & Goldin, 2012). As Dreyfus (2011a) so eloquently pointed out, “. . . contemporary authors are in danger of leading to a one-sided understanding of mindfulness as a form of therapeutically helpful spacious quietness” (p. 52).

Mindfulness Is Not Reducible to a Psychological Trait

According to Dane (2011), the outpouring of empirical work by Western scholars is leading to a convergent and collective understanding of mindfulness. However, recent reviews in the clinical and contemplative neuroscience literatures point to large differences and disparities in the way mindfulness is conceptualized, operationalized, and practiced (Chiesa, 2012; Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011; Dorjee, 2010; Grossman, 2008, 2011; Malinowski, 2008; S. Stanley, 2013). Dane’s claim appears to be a premature and false sense of convergence. One reason for this is that the majority of such empirical work which Dane is referring to is based on psychological questionnaires which purport to measure mindfulness (Baer, 2011; Baer, Samuel, & Lykins, 2011; Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Lau et al., 2006; Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmüller, Kleinknecht, & Schmidt, 2006). To date, there are at least nine different psychometric questionnaires, all of which purport to be defining and measuring mindfulness differently (S. Stanley, 2013). In addition to the numerous problems of reliability, construct validity, and self-reporting biases associated with various mindfulness questionnaires, there is a basic underlying assumption that discrete psychological characteristics that can be measured and quantified are equivalent to mindfulness (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). In their insightful critique, Grossman and Van Dam (2011) summarized some of the major weaknesses of this empirical stream of work:

There exists no gold standard of reference that can be used to evaluate questionnaires purporting to measure mindfulness. Thus we cannot know whether a questionnaire reliably measures some aspect of mindfulness The situation opens the door for definitions of mindfulness that are in danger of losing any relationship to the practices and teachings that gave rise to MBSR and MBCT. It may sometimes result in hybrid definitions and operationalizations of mindfulness possibly far afield from the original Dharmic roots of this way of being. (p. 231)

Contrary to Dane’s claim, there is actually a high degree of divergence in how mindfulness is conceptualized, defined, and operationalized between various questionnaires (Grossman, 2008). Western psychological interpretations have conceived of mindfulness as a single and

multifaceted trait as well as a state-like quality (Chiesa, 2012; Lau et al., 2006). For example, Brown and Ryan’s (2003) Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), perhaps the most widely used of the mindfulness scales, is based on the assumption that mindfulness is a single-faceted construct based on “present-centered attention” (Chiesa, 2012). The MAAS relies heavily on the notion that mindfulness can be measured by how individuals *think* they experience lapses of attention—what Dane has termed “*mind-wandering*” (Dane, 2011; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). This popular scale also relies completely on reversed scoring items, assuming that measuring the low end of a scale is accurately assessing the construct of interest. In contrast, the Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) views mindfulness as a multifaceted trait. The FFMQ includes such sub-scales as “describing” which measures the extent to which individuals believe they can express themselves in words, self-criticism, and moderation of emotions (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). Only one of the factors, close observation of experience, correlated negatively for nonmeditators (Baer et al., 2006).

Self-report mindfulness measures also are prone to overly simplistic language, which not only fails to capture the multifarious factors and mechanisms of mindfulness but can also be interpreted quite differently by different groups (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). This has resulted in a number of absurd and questionable findings between nonmeditators and experienced meditators. A classic example is a mindfulness self-report questionnaire study between binge-drinking college students compared with experienced meditators following an intensive meditation retreat (Leigh, Bowen, & Marlatt, 2005). Based on results from the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI), binge-drinkers scored significantly higher on mindfulness than experienced meditators (normal college students were in the middle). Furthermore, these scales do not assume that mindfulness training is required, because such self-reports are usually based on ordinary states of awareness without any expectation for engaging in deliberate acts of attention (Grossman, 2011).

Rosch (2007) contended that self-report mindfulness scales are not “measuring either mindfulness in the narrow Buddhist sense or enlightened awareness in the broadest sense” (p. 262). Kabat-Zinn (2013) admitted that mindfulness cannot be accurately measured using survey-based instruments. In addition, numerous scholars have taken issue with existing mindfulness questionnaires as potentially misrepresenting and distorting classical conceptualizations of Buddhist mindfulness (Chiesa, 2012; Grossman, 2008; Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2009). In their excellent critique of this current trend in psychological research on mindfulness, Grossman and Van Dam (2011) made a very strong point, which we believe organizational scholars should take heed of:

One viable option for preserving the integrity and richness of the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness might be to call those various qualities now purporting to be mindfulness by names much closer to what they actually represent (“experienced lapses of attention” in the case of Brown & Ryan, 2003). (p. 17)

How then can mindfulness be measured and studied without trivializing the concept or assuming a priori assumptions? Grossman and Van Dam (2011) offered several plausible possibilities, such as the use of in-depth interviews, a focus on outcome measures and the specificity of the effects of mindfulness, and a careful examination of psychological and physiological changes that occur as a result of the practice and process of mindfulness. In addition, new research initiatives—such as the Mind & Life Institute’s “Mapping the Mind” project and “The Contemplative Development Mapping Project” at Brown University—are attempting to develop more complex measurement methods by critically engaging with the Buddhist textual tradition and experienced Buddhist meditators (Britton, Lindahl, Cahn, Davis, & Goldman, 2014; Mind & Life Institute, 2013). These initiatives involve a cross-cultural collaboration among neuroscientists, clinicians, and contemplative scholars/practitioners to develop new research protocols that will utilize both first- and third-person approaches as a means for articulating a more detailed and complex Buddhist phenomenology of the mindfulness construct. Such neurophenomenological methods employ rigorous and refined first-person descriptions of subjective experience as a heuristic for mapping, interpreting, and quantifying distinct cognitive processes and neural substrates as well as neurodynamics links between networks (Lutz & Thompson, 2003; Thompson, 2006, 2007, 2014; Vago, 2013; Varela, 1996).

Dane (2011) contended mindfulness does not require meditative training—a notion he inherits from academic psychology’s psychometric approach. Clinical psychologists have assumed, a priori, that mindfulness is an inherent psychological state and stable trait. The psychometric approach, at least to date, has not based on any concrete evidence that subjects are actually engaged in mindfulness. Rather, mindfulness is assumed to be measurable by the subject’s descriptions and responses on brief questionnaires (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011).

Clearly, Dane’s (2011) formulation of mindfulness as an inherent psychological state is in stark contrast to the practice of developmentally oriented Buddhist conceptualizations. Dane also claimed that meditation and mindfulness “have become somewhat conflated such as that they are often used interchangeably” (p. 998). He goes on to argue that mindfulness does not require any form of cultivation or meditative practice, as it merely involves paying attention to events. However, this claim can be considered patently false by the standards of any Buddhist text, scholar, or teacher, as mindfulness is not considered a trait or inherent psychological

state, but as a *practice*. Buddhists have always spoken either in terms of the “practice of meditation” or the “practice of mindfulness,” which involves an active and disciplined engagement over a prolonged period of time (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Meditation and mindfulness have always been joined together; separating them decontextualizes both.

Dane (2011) also ignored the fact that the attention and range of cognitive abilities derived from his formulation to simply focus attention—which amounts to an informal and highly idiosyncratic process—will be narrowly limited to content-specific learning. Although paying attention in specific contexts through deliberate practice and repeated experience produces neural changes in the brain, these changes are limited to training on a particular task and are not transferable, nor equate to, improved performance on novel tasks in other related contexts. A classic example is the study of London taxi drivers who possess expertise in navigating the maze of London streets. Neuro-images of these taxi drivers’ brains showed that they had larger-than-normal posterior hippocampi—the brain structure that plays a major role in spatial representation of the environment (Maguire, Woollett, & Spiers, 2006). These taxi drivers exhibited a high degree of “content-specific learning”; the ability to remember and recollect the spatial locations of various London streets. Follow-up research with London taxi drivers demonstrated that their spatial memory skills were not transferable to other tasks involving memory (Woollett & Maguire, 2009). In other words, the benefits derived from training in expertise—whether it be learning a musical instrument, driving a taxi, or playing chess—are not typically generalizable to domains outside of a specific domain of expertise or context.

Mindfulness Is Not Equivalent to Bare Attention

Organizational scholars, like their counterparts in psychology, have fallen prey to “a highly restricted interpretation of mindfulness, narrowing in on the cognitive capacities of attention and awareness” (Hayes & Plumb, 2007, p. 243). Current constructs of mindfulness in the organizational literature have selectively focused on the role of attention as the key component of mindfulness (Dane, 2011; Weick & Putnam, 2006). Dane (2011, p. 998) purportedly attempted to define “what mindfulness is and is not” by relying on Brown and Ryan’s (2003, p. 822) conception of mindfulness as “being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present.” He went on to summarize mindfulness as “a state of consciousness in which attention is focused on present-moment phenomena occurring both externally and internally” (Dane, 2011, p. 997). Similarly, Weick and Putnam (2006) conflated mindfulness with preconceptual awareness, what is often referred in the popular meditation literature as “bare attention” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Thera, 1962). This can be traced to the neo-*vipassanā* movement which serves as the theoretical foundation for both Kabat-Zinn and Weick. A

popular neo-*vipassanā* teacher describes mindfulness in these terms:

There is one quality of mind which is the basis and foundation of spiritual discovery, and that quality of mind is called “bare attention.” Bare attention means observing things as they are, without choosing, without comparing, without evaluating, without laying our projections and expectations on to what is happening; cultivating instead a choiceless and non-interfering awareness. (J. Goldstein, 1976, p. 20)

Making use of extensive passages from the influential book, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyaṇaponika Thera (1962) along with the popular book *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Gunaratana (2002), Weick and Putnam (2006, p. 277) selected these quotations:

In its elementary manifestation, known under the term “attention,” it [mindfulness] is one of the cardinal functions of consciousness without which there cannot be any perception of object at all. (Thera, 1962)

When you first become aware of something, there is a fleeting instant of pure awareness just before you conceptualize the thing, before you identify it. That is a state of awareness . . . That flowing, soft-focused moment of pure awareness is mindfulness. (Gunaratana, 2002, p. 138)

Both of these passages, however, are attempting to convey the experiential flavor of mindfulness to novice meditators. In this context, the practical instruction given to novices is that mindfulness is often compared metaphorically with “bare attention” (Bodhi, 2011).⁹ This metaphor signifies a form of attention which is not colored by habitual emotional reactions, rumination, discursive thoughts, and narrative commentary. Certainly, the emphasis on nonelaborative “bare attention” has therapeutic benefits (Dorjee, 2010). However, as all forms of attention can never be completely free of conditioning, valence, and elements of evaluation, equating mindfulness (*sati*) theoretically to bare attention is not only misleading but also inconsistent with classical Buddhist sources. Bhikkhu Bodhi, a Theravadin monk, Buddhist scholar, and translator of major texts from the Pāli Canon, as well as a long-time student of Nyaṇaponika Thera (whom Weick and Putnam rely on for many of their descriptions), noted that Nyaṇaponika never intended for mindfulness (*sati*) to be translated as “bare attention.”¹⁰ He goes on to question whether such “bare attention” is even possible:

. . . I doubt very much that there is such a thing as “bare attention” in the sense of mindfulness completely devoid of ethical evaluation and purposive direction. In the actual development of right mindfulness, as I understand it, *sāmma sati* must always be guided by right view, steered by right intention, grounded in the three ethical factors, and cultivated in conjunction with *sāmma vāyama*, right effort; right effort necessarily presupposes the

distinction of mental states into the wholesome and the unwholesome. (Bodhi, 2006, p. 7)

One consequence of associating mindfulness with bare attention is that it obscures the range of cognitive functions and correlative mental factors involved in the conceptualization of mindfulness (Dreyfus, 2011a). Even a cursory examination of the two passages Weick and Putnam cited as their basis for describing mindfulness—“a cardinal function of consciousness” and “pure awareness”—does not correspond or even resemble the classical Buddhist definitions of mindfulness. Clearly, these passages describing bare attention omit the recollective and information retention functions of mindfulness (*sati*).

To dispel this theoretical confusion, we turn to a Buddhist phenomenology of attention, based on a precise mapping of momentary mental states as elucidated in the scholastic commentarial sources such as the *Abhidhamma*, the *Visuddhimagga* (Buddhaghosa, 2010), and a classical text known as *The Questions for King Milinda* (Rhys Davids, 1890).¹¹ These classical texts are key to understanding mindfulness as they contain a detailed theoretical model to what occurs in both the untrained mind as well as to what accomplished meditators experience in the highest stages of mental development.

One of the basic premises is that each moment of awareness is conditioned by a series of momentary mental states that arises on dependence on a host of conditioned mental factors. According to the *Abhidhamma*, every moment of consciousness has a mental object and an associated emotional attitude and intention by which an object is cognized (Olendzki, 2010). This is because, in any particular moment of consciousness, there are either wholesome or unwholesome mental factors present in awareness; these mental states are mutually exclusive and cannot co-arise together. For example, one cannot feel loving-kindness and hatred toward the same object in any given moment of consciousness. And, as one might suspect, both wholesome and unwholesome states of mind are correlated to the way we respond and react to phenomena.

In Buddhist terminology, “bare attention” is associated with *manasikāra*, often translated as “attention” or “mental engagement.” Anālayo (2010) described *manasikāra* as “the initial split seconds of bare cognizing of an object, before one begins to recognize, identify, and conceptualize” (p. 59). This description of *manasikāra* is remarkably close to the selected passage by Gunaratana (2002) above and which Weick and Putnam (2006) characterized as the “thin slices of perception that precede conceptualizing” (p. 277). However, it is important to emphasize that *manasikāra* is not classified in the *Abhidhamma* as a wholesome mental factor and is considered ethically neutral—an area which Weick and Putnam seem to overlook. As a neutral mental factor, *manasikāra* has an orienting function that selects certain features of the

objective field for closer focus (Anālayo, 2010; Bodhi, 2011; Olendzki, 2011; Wallace, 2007b). In other words, *manasikāra* is operative at a preconceptual level of awareness and functions at the very earliest stages of attention. This may correspond to what Parvizi and Damasio (2001) conceived as a bottom-up, basic alerting function, or the pre-attentive capacity of the mind to orient itself to the objects of perception.

Manasikāra can orient attention to an object and even focus on it, whereas it is mindfulness (*sati*), which, according to Dreyfus's (2011a) reading of the *Abhidhamma*, "retains the object and keeps the mind from losing the object" (p. 49). Clarifying this point, Anālayo (2010) maintained that mindfulness (*sati*) "can be understood as a further development and temporal extension of this type of attention [*manasikāra*], thereby adding clarity and depth to the usually too short fraction of time occupied by bare attention in the perceptual process" (p. 59). Thus, mindfulness can be used to sustain bare attention, which can certainly reduce elaborative thinking, rumination, and emotional reactions—therapeutic benefits which accrue in the early stages of the path. However, there is a distinct difference between preconceptual awareness and that of deliberately cultivated mindfulness, or *sati*. The Buddhist canon's deliberate use of *sati*, or remembrance to characterize mindfulness, versus that of *manasikāra*, or attention, is no accident. In this context, *sati*, or memory, is more akin to establishing a stance of *watchfulness* toward one experience (Thānissaro, 2012). Furthermore, *right* mindfulness is contingent on the presence and support of the path factors as described in our model. Given these clarifications, we can see that mindfulness is not merely bare attention, neutral in tone, but its arising is conjoined with a particular attitude or emotional stance toward the object of awareness.

In this respect, "bare attention" is "ethically indeterminate" and can be operating in "the thief or the saint, the toddler and the thinker, the sensualist and the yogi" (Bodhi, 2011, p. 28). In a similar vein, Anālayo (2010) took issue with Western Buddhist meditation authors that conflate concentration with mindfulness.¹² As the *Abhidhamma* texts point out, even a person committing a premeditated and heinous crime can be exercising single-minded concentration (e.g., a sniper assassin, terrorist, white-collar criminal). There is no doubt that development of concentration enables practitioners to sustain their attention—a useful skill that can be applied to a variety of tasks—whether flying navy fighter jets, fighting forest fires, or driving taxi cabs.

Contrary to popular belief, the exercise of bare attention and concentration alone do not constitute right mindfulness or even meditation (Olendzki, 2010). Buddhist mindfulness practice involves much more than simply training the mind to focus on an object of attention. Rather, mindfulness is a *distinct quality of attention* that is not automatically present in all moments of conscious experience. This may come as a surprise to most organizational theorists who have become

enamored with concepts of Buddhist mindfulness. But the fact is one can be highly attentive without meditating (a thesis which Dane has subscribed to), and one can even be practicing meditation without necessarily cultivating mindfulness (Olendzki, 2010). Similarly, Weick and Putnam's (2006) appropriation of bare attention, which results in an ethically neutral form of mindfulness, overlooks the importance of introspective vigilance (*sampajañña*), which, as we discussed earlier, is a key component of Buddhist mindfulness. The *Abhidhamma* distinguishes bare attention (*manasikāra*) from "wisely directed attention" (*yonisomanasikāra*), which is contingent on introspective vigilance to monitor the presence or absence of wholesome from unwholesome mental states. Wisely directed attention is another way of conceptualizing the mutually supportive interactions between right view, right effort, and right mindfulness.

Mindfulness Is Not Equivalent to Nonjudgmental Awareness

Modern and clinical operational definitions associate mindfulness with a purely receptive, passive, unbiased, and nonjudgmental form of awareness (Thānissaro, 2012). For example, Weick and Putnam (2006, p. 277) drew heavily from Jon Kabat-Zinn's description of mindfulness:

Formally, "Mindfulness is moment-to-moment, nonreactive, nonjudgmental awareness . . . You don't seek such an experience or turn it into a concept. You just sit, not pursuing anything, and insights come up on their own timetable, out of stillness and out of spacious open attention without any agenda other than to be awake" (Kabat-Zinn, 2002, p. 69)

This popular definition of mindfulness clearly has therapeutic benefits and appears to be helpful in the early stages of a meditation practice. Quietening the mind and dispassionately observing the flow of experience is conducive to the deautomatization of habitual reactions (Vago, 2013; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). **This understanding (and practice) of mindfulness, however, lacks any reference to discerning skillful from unskillful actions or any type of striving to either abandon unwholesome states or cultivate wholesome ones. Indeed, Kabat-Zinn's (1990) foundational book on MBSR, *Full Catastrophe Living*, makes no mention of any need to do so.**

The experiential flavor of this form of mindfulness is paying attention to present-moment experience by cultivating an "acceptance of what is." The assumption is that mindful cultivation of a neutral, nonreactive stance is equivalent to a nonconceptual, unfabricated experience—or clear awareness, free of any judgment. However, Kabat-Zinn's "nonjudgmental" characterization of mindfulness has little resemblance to another text on mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition, *The Questions of King Milinda* (Rhys Davids,

1890). In this classic text, a monk Nagasena provides explicit advice to the Greek King Milinda on the ethical dimensions of mindfulness, noting that the function of mindfulness is not only to pay attention to the present moment (or whatever the meditation object may be), but to “not drift” away from discerning wholesome from unwholesome mental states. As Dreyfus (2011b) pointed out, classical Buddhist texts highlight the cognitive and evaluative functions of mindfulness, understanding it more in terms of a retentive ability of the mind, an active (rather than passive), deliberate intention of “holding” or keeping in mind the objective of attention. Summarizing these points, Dreyfus stated,

Mindfulness is then not the present-centered nonjudgmental awareness of an object but the paying close attention to an object leading to the retention of the data so as to make sense of the information delivered by our cognitive apparatus. Thus, far from being limited to the present and to a mere refraining from passing judgment, mindfulness is a cognitive activity closely connected to memory, particularly to working memory, the ability to keep relevant information active so that it can be integrated within meaningful patterns and used for goal directed activities. (pp. 8-9)

These issues are not merely semantic. If mindfulness is simply equated with passive, nonjudgmental awareness of present experience, the original meaning of mindfulness—*sati*, as remembrance and recollection—as clearly defined in the Buddhist canon, can potentially be overshadowed and displaced. Moreover, a purely passive state of mind would also seem to preclude the exercise of memory (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). Furthermore, introspection is not passive but active, especially in the activation of memory. This is not to say that the process of “remembering to remember the object of interest” cannot include paying attention to the present moment or to what is actually occurring in one’s immediate experience (Wallace & Bodhi, 2006). However, phenomenologically, attending to the “present moment” is problematic as this presupposes an unexamined linear view of time based on a past–present–future temporal structure. The injunction to attend to the fleeting, so-called “present moment” is in actuality the recent past; designating “present-moment” experience as an object of attention itself requires duration. Approached in this way, mindfulness practice can degrade to an effortful activity “to be in the present,” or to grasp at, or freeze, “present-centered” experience, as if this were the ultimate goal of mindfulness practice. More importantly, operationalizing mindfulness as “paying attention to the present moment nonjudgmentally,” besides being theoretically divergent from classical Buddhist formulations, displaces the importance that is usually given to the contextual values—that is, the motivation, intention, purpose, and soteriological goals of Buddhist mindfulness practice—along with a sense of moral continuity to the past and future (Hickey, 2010). Forethought and responsibility, vigilant awareness of

the consequentiality of one’s actions, and striving to eradicate unwholesome mental qualities can potentially take a back seat to simply “being here now” and a passive acceptance of “what is.” The personal serenity and contentment derived from immersion in bare attention to momentary experience may be therapeutic, but it is not liberating or equivalent to wisdom from the Buddhist perspective (Wallace, 2006, 2007b).

Brazier (2013) referred to this valorization of the present moment as “here-and-nowism,” where the practice of mindfulness takes a subjective turn toward sensual romanticism. Bazzano (2013) went so far to say that the mindfulness movement’s reification of the present moment has become the “magical *telos* of practice” (p. 179). Such everyday attentiveness and appreciation of the present moment appears more as an attempt toward re-enchantment, sensory enhancement, and “radically accepting” (Brach, 2004) the vicissitudes of modernity (Brazier, 2013; McMahan, 2008) rather than transforming them. In other words, the rhetoric of non-judgment, appreciation, and acceptance is a Western Romanticist rearticulation that is orthogonal to Buddhist mindfulness training, at least as understood from within the early canonical literature. As Kang and Whittingham (2010) pointed out,

Buddhist training unequivocally espouses the conscious skillful counteracting of such afflictive emotions (*kilesa*) with their opposites, mediated by mindfulness and introspective vigilance. For Buddhism, certain psychological states are rigorously discerned to be toxic to the mind and clearly identified as “poisons” to be nullified. (p. 171)

Commenting on this trend to diverge from the Buddhist canon, Ṭhānissaro (2012) stated,

There’s a tendency, even among serious scholars, to mine the Canon for passages presenting a more spacious, receptive picture of mindfulness. But this tendency, in addition to ignoring the basic definition of mindfulness, denies the essential unity of factors of the path . . . This suggests that the tendency to define mindfulness as an open, receptive, non-judging state comes from a source other than the Canon. It’s possible to find Asian roots for this tendency, in the schools of meditation that define mindfulness as bare awareness or mere noting. But the way the West has morphed these concepts in the direction of acceptance and affirmation has less to do with Asian traditions, and more to do with our cultural tendency to exalt a pre-verbal capacity as the source of true spiritual inspiration. (p. 27)

Given the emphasis on attending to the present moment, which figures prominently in MBSR and clinical definitions (Brown & Ryan, 2003), it is not surprising that many organizational theorists and practitioners have also focused on present-moment awareness in their theoretical formulations (Dane, 2011; Tan, 2012; Weick & Putnam, 2006). This analysis is not, in any way, discounting or denying the

therapeutic and instrumental benefits that can be derived from such clinical and secular reformulations of mindfulness as technique for enhancing attention and mental hygiene. Rather, it is that such attention-enhancement conceptions of mindfulness in organizational theory and the clinical literatures are limited in their transformative capacity to effect normative changes ethical and moral behavior, as well as the more traditional soteriological goals of full liberation from the mental afflictions.

Denaturing Mindfulness: Trends in Current Practice

We have described the purpose and function of mindfulness within the early Buddhist canonical tradition, stressing how its emancipatory and ethical efficacy is derived from being integrated holistically with other complementary path factors, particularly right view and right effort. The de-ethicized theories of mindfulness in the clinical and organizational literatures are reflected in the current trends in corporate mindfulness practice. Unfortunately, the stripping away of mindfulness from its ethical and soteriological context, whether explicitly or implicitly, comes at a cost. Uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical roots is myopic, promoting an overemphasis on technique. Driscoll and Wiebe (2007) aptly termed this trend as “*technical spirituality*,” where spiritual practices are extracted from their soteriological context, instrumentalized, and applied as tools for improving efficiency, productivity, and gaining tangible results.

The trendiness and increasing popularity of mindfulness training in corporations, which Purser and Loy (2013) characterized as “McMindfulness,” is a replica of such technical spirituality. Similarly, David Forbes (2012), in his eloquent essay, “Occupy Mindfulness,” put the matter this way:

My concern is that mindfulness may fall victim to its own success. Mindfulness is not about stress reduction, maintaining a steady state of bliss, helping an individual act with more control or an organization run more smoothly and efficiently. Even after we’re de-stressed and feeling great, we still need to ask: *how do we live now?* We’re in control and are more efficient, but toward what end?

Buddhist mindfulness is not merely a technique for reducing stress and improving the quality of attention, mental focus, or concentration—yet these tangible human performance benefits are heralded as the sine qua non of mindfulness and major reasons for adoption by modern corporations. Consider a recent article in *Wired*, which likens mindfulness to “the new caffeine, the fuel that allegedly unlocks productivity and creative bursts. Classes in meditation and mindfulness—paying close, nonjudgmental attention—have become staples at many of the region’s most prominent companies” (Shachtman, 2013). In their branding efforts, there is a cachet

when proponents of mindfulness market their corporate training programs as being “Buddhist-inspired,” but they are adamant to dismiss any ties or allegiances to Buddhism itself. For example, in a widely read *Financial Times* article, “The Mind Business” (Gelles, 2012), Janice Marturano who leads one of most extensive corporate training programs in mindfulness at General Mills is not shy in acknowledging her Buddhist training: “I’ve learned a great deal from studying with some wonderful Buddhist teachers over the years.” This full disclosure, however, is qualified by the standard disclaimer,

Nor are General Mills, Google, Aetna or Target trying to convert their employees to some new religion. Instead, it seems that eastern wisdom—stripped of its religiosity and backed by scientific research—is becoming an accepted part of the corporate mainstream. (Gelles, 2012)

These advocates claim to offer a modernist adaptation of mindfulness for a corporate context—that such stripping away is a necessary means of extracting the essence of Buddhist mindfulness from its outdated historical and cultural trappings. This form of decontextualization is symptomatic of what Buddhist scholar Luiz Gómez (1996) identified as an “Orientalist bias and unavowed colonial stance.” Yarnall (2003, p. 307) described how this occurs in three movements—recognition, appropriation, and distancing. Corporate advocates recognize Buddhist mindfulness has inherent value, but they must remove the practice from its cultural and historical context as a way of repurposing it for their own instrumental aims and goals—in effect, distancing themselves from any remnants of what is deemed “religious.” However, rather than simply assuming Buddhist understandings of mindfulness are nothing more than “religiosity,” quaint cultural baggage, and ideological overlays, corporate mindfulness trainers should reconsider what is being left out in their attempts to sell their goods. Furthermore, preserving the integrity and ethical efficacy of Buddhist mindfulness requires respect, humility, and sensitivity among organizational scholars and practitioners as well as a willingness to engage with the Buddhist canon and its associated teachings on mindfulness on its own terms, rather than as a means to appropriate select concepts for instrumental purposes. This orientation toward Buddhist teachings is aligned with what Dyck and Wiebe (2012) characterized as a “theological turn” (p. 320), allowing scholars to draw respectfully from the great religious traditions for revitalizing an emancipative management theory.

In contrast, presenting mindfulness as a neutral technology compartmentalizes the practice, reducing it to yet another commodified, faddish, self-help technique. Indeed, the compartmentalization of mindfulness as a neutral technology ensures that the benefits will be limited and confined to that of stress reduction and improvements in attention. Curiously,

the mindfulness movement has yet to engage in seriously questioning as to why stress is so pervasive in modern corporations.¹³ Instead, corporations have jumped on the mindfulness bandwagon because it conveniently shifts the burden on to the individual employee; stress is framed as a personal problem, and mindfulness-based interventions are offered as means of helping employees cope and work more effectively and calmly within such toxic environments. Cloaked in an aura of care and humanity, this corporate takeover refashions mindfulness as a safety valve, a way to let off steam and as a way of coping and adapting to the stresses and strains of corporate life. What we are left with is an atomized and highly privatized version of mindfulness training, which is easily co-opted and confined to, what Carrette and King (2005) referred to as an accommodationist orientation. Mindfulness training has wide appeal because it can be utilized as a method for subduing employee unrest, promoting a tacit acceptance of the corporate status quo, and as an instrumental tool for keeping attention focused on corporate goals.

Indeed, a key claim among mindfulness training practitioners is “The idea is that calmer workers will be less stressed, more productive and even become better leaders, thereby benefiting the entire organization” (Gelles, 2012). But what exactly is meant by such benefit? More docile workers who are enabled to fully participate, as Zizek (2001, quoted in Loy, 2013) argued, “in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity?” In many respects, most corporate mindfulness training programs—with their promises that calmer, less stressed, and happier employees are more productive—have a close family resemblance to the now debunked human relations fad and sensitivity-training movements which were all the rage in the 1950s and 1960s. These corporate training programs were criticized for their manipulative use of counseling techniques, such as “active listening,” deployed as a means for pacifying employees by making them feel as if their concerns were heard while existing conditions in the workplace remained unchanged. These methods came to be referred to as “cow psychology,” given the notion that contented and docile cows give more milk (Bell, 1956; Purser, 1999).

Bhikkhu Bodhi, an outspoken Western Buddhist monk warned, “absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a reinforcement of consumer capitalism” (Eaton, 2013, p. 2). Christopher Titmuss (2013), a leading figure in the socially engaged Buddhism movement concurred, “When mindfulness consultants/coaches tell practitioners to look at the present moment in a non-judgmental way, the participants might well lose the opportunity to bring mindfulness to causes and conditions that contribute to stress, exploitation and suffering, near or far.” Ironically, the narrow scope, coupled with the lack of an explicit and integrative ethical framework in current applications of corporate mindfulness training, may be actually perpetuating and enabling

institutional blindness. Strong institutional structures and market pressures have the capacity to co-opt and appropriate mindfulness to their own ends (Healey, 2013). As Carrette and King (2005) pointed out, corporate interests “exploit the transformative power of traditional ‘spiritual disciplines’ by reorienting their fundamental goals” (p. 23). Unfortunately, a more socially responsible and ethically informed view of mindfulness has been dismissed by some consultants as an unnecessary politicizing of what is considered to be a strictly privatized and personal journey of self-transformation (E. Goldstein, 2013; Hunter, 2013; Yeganeh, 2013).

Rather than considering that their approach to mindfulness training may be lacking ethical efficacy, especially in companies that have questionable reputations in terms of corporate social responsibility, consultants instead turn conveniently to the “Trojan Horse” argument. The claim is that as mindfulness-based training is introduced and diffused, it will foster greater awareness of interconnectedness and compassion, infiltrating the organization to such a degree that corporate values and decision making will be transformed. Jeremy Hunter (2013), for example, proposed that mindfulness training can act as a “disruptive technology” as more people within the organization become “more open and inquisitive,” and by searching inside themselves, become agents for large-scale change. According to Hunter (2013, p. 59), Monsanto—widely criticized for its genetically modified crops, patenting of seed stock, domination of the world food supply, and production of Agent Orange—is supposedly, because of its recent adoption of individual-oriented mindfulness training, on its way to becoming a more compassionate and sustainable organization. The corollary to this argument is that transformational change starts with oneself; if one can change one’s mind to be more calm, peaceful, focused, and equanimous, social and organizational transformation will naturally follow. The problem with this formulation is that the three unwholesome roots—greed, ill will/aversion, and delusion—are no longer confined to individual minds but have been amplified by the forces of neoliberalism and globalization (Loy, 1997, 2002, 2008, 2013).

The corporate mindfulness movement, as Healey (2013) astutely pointed out, is caught in an ironic paradox: Mindfulness training may offer employees some relief and personal benefits in the form of stress reduction and improved concentration while mindlessly ignoring the externalization of macro-tensions and structural inequalities. This myopic use of mindfulness training, Healey noted, is creating “integrity bubbles,” which “create glimpses of integrity—enough to enhance employee satisfaction and brand image—even as they undermine the achievement of integrity in the broader context.” Google’s “Search Inside Yourself” program (Tan, 2012), one of the most successful and widely publicized mindfulness training programs, is a prime example of how “integrity bubbles” can exist within a corporation which is, as Carr (2010) argued, “quite literally in the business of

distraction” (p. 157). Such myopia illustrates what can occur when mindfulness training is extracted from a contextual, interdependent, and complex whole (Rosch, 2007).

A more extreme example of the denaturing and misappropriation of mindfulness is the U.S. Marines “Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training (MMFT)” (Associated Press, 2013; Nauert, 2010; Stanley & Schaldach, 2011; Stanley, Schaldach, Kiyonaga, & Jha, 2011). The “MMFT for Warriors,” or “M-fit,” is a predeployment mindfulness training program tailored for developing stress response regulation skills that “are relevant to the contemporary battlespace, including the counterinsurgency environment” (Nauert, 2010). Having received nearly US\$2 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Defense, this program began with a field experiment in which 160 Marines were taught mindfulness stress reduction techniques, and they practiced the calming methods while “being immersed in a mock Afghan village with screaming actors and controlled blasts to expose them to combat stress” (Watson, 2013a). And, of course, the standard disclaimer is used to justify this misappropriation of mindfulness: “Some people might say these are Eastern-based religious practices but this goes way beyond that,” said Jeffery Bearor, the executive deputy of the Marine Corps training and education command at its headquarters in Quantico, Virginia. “This is not tied to any religious practice. This is about mental preparation to better handle stress” (Watson, 2013a). In fact, it is not surprising the technocratic language describing the benefits of this program are couched as “attentional control training,” “stress inoculation,” and better “mental armor.”

Elizabeth Stanley (2010), a former Army captain, who is a champion and key researcher for the MMFT program views mindfulness as quite compatible with the military’s existing objectives, as she stated,

Incorporating mind fitness training into existing military training would not require much additional time on the training schedule. For example, the military already incorporates mindfulness training—although it does not call it this—into perhaps *the* most foundational soldier skill, firing a weapon. Soldiers learning how to fire the M-16 rifle are taught to pay attention to their breath and synchronize the breathing process to trigger finger’s movement, “squeezing” off the round while exhaling. This synchronization has two effects. The gross motor effect is to steady the soldier’s aim so that the round is more likely to hit the target. (p. 264, emphasis in original)

The MMFT program defines mindfulness as a “mental mode characterized by full attention to present-moment experience without judgment, elaboration or emotional reactivity” (Stanley et al., 2011, p. 566). This definition is derived from the standard operational definition for MBSR, and it is no coincidence that the academics involved in the design of the MMFT program trace their roots to MBSR (E. A. Stanley & Jha, 2009). This extreme example illustrates how an

ethically neutral conceptualization of mindfulness as defined by “bare attention” and “non-judgment” is vulnerable to radically reductive interpretations and decontextualized applications (Bazzano, 2013, p. 180). Indeed, only such a highly decontextualized and de-ethicized form of mindfulness training would be compatible with the mission of the U.S. Marines, whose soldiers who are indoctrinated from boot camp to inflict harm and pain on the enemy.

One of the principal investigators for MMFT program, Amishi Jha, defends the MMFT research program on the grounds that the “prophylactic benefits” soldiers receive from mind training “prevents the kind of degradation and mental decline as a result of being in a very high-stress situation,” which in turn could prevent poor judgment, overgeneralizing and overreactions (Kalb, 2010). Differentiating clearly between an enemy combatant and a civilian or child is a skill that apparently can be enhanced with M-fit training. S. Stanley (2013) rightly pointed out that while the cognitive and therapeutic benefits that military personnel have received from such training—improvements in psychological resilience, mood, and working memory—are significant (Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong, & Gelfand, 2010; E. A. Stanley & Jha, 2009), these benefits, heralded by the researchers and the media, shifts attention away from the broader ethics and politics of employing mindfulness training in the service of war and killing. And while MBSR has been characterized as “the universal dharma” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 290), from which MMFT is a derivative, traditional Buddhist teachings (*Dharma*) prohibit killing and warfare.¹⁴ MMFT needs to be differentiated from *right mindfulness*—where the aim is not calming the breath to improve marksmanship, but to develop compassion, wholesome mental states, and skillful behaviors (nonharming) for all sentient beings, including those perceived as “enemies.”

Contributions and Conclusion

The rush to dissociate mindfulness from its Buddhist roots and context is not necessary to be palpable and acceptable to our modern sensibilities. We believe that a truly “Buddhist-inspired” form of mindfulness is possible without denaturing it to such a degree that it becomes a privatized, therapeutic self-help technique. Instrumental and de-ethicized forms of mindfulness might be better represented by shedding the term *mindfulness* altogether and relabeling their programs as some form of attentional control training. Theorists and practitioners need to take heed that a mindfulness that is “Buddhist-inspired” cannot be divorced from its civic aspect that represents the wider ethical, social, and political dimensions.

Numerous studies, both in the world of neuroscience and psychology, have amply shown the various beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation (Baer, 2003; Dimidjian & Linehan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Kabat-Zinn & Davidson,

2011). While this is a positive direction, it should also give pause to the importance accounted to science as the official arbiter and epistemic authority for legitimizing the efficacy and value of mindfulness (Dumit, 2004; Faure, 2012; Flanagan, 2011; Lopez, 2008, 2012; McMahan, 2008). In this respect, these studies have also played a role in creating the predicament mindfulness finds itself in today: a one-sided focus on the physical, emotional, and cognitive advantages. These results could be seen as mere “side-effects,” as it were, of mindfulness, because its main purpose from a Buddhist perspective is to reach a state of deep insight and compassion, not attentive stoicism. Rather than seeking legitimation of the dharma through science, we have relied directly on reading from the *suttas* themselves.

A Buddhist-inspired understanding of mindfulness not only offers a corrective to current misconceptions in the literature, but it has contemporary relevance for progressive social movements to alleviate poverty and radical management theories with emancipatory aims. Buddhist ethics have always regarded poverty as a hindrance to human development, with an equal emphasis on an ethical means of wealth accumulation. However, Buddhist ethics does not view wealth as evil, but it is concerned as to how wealth is earned, used, and distributed (Harvey, 2000). Buddhist mindfulness is predicated on finding a middle path between the extremes of debilitating poverty and the crass pursuit of wealth for its own sake. Thus, the soteriological goals of Buddhist mindfulness practice offers a counterbalance to conventional management values which valorize profit-maximization, competitiveness, and a zero sum “winner-takes-all” ethos.

We have emphasized that Buddhist mindfulness is not merely a privatized spirituality oriented toward personal salvation. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist mindfulness is always socially engaged, focused on remedying the causes of worldly suffering and oppression. And because its aims are concerned with the collective alleviation of suffering through the reduction of greed, hatred, and delusion, Buddhist mindfulness can serve as a supportive practice for a more inclusive capitalism (Hart, 2010) as well as a prophetic force for challenging the structural and economic inequities that have enslaved the poor and hungry (Pralhad & Hart, 2001). Thus, rather than accepting shareholder capitalism as a given, along with its view of employees as being defined as “homo-economicus,” an ethically informed practice of Buddhist mindfulness has the potential of calling into question economic materialism, which relies on the valuation of acquisitiveness and unbridled consumption. Drawing on the work of Max Weber, Dyck and Shroeder (2005) described conventional management as being informed by a moral point of view (MPV) grounded in materialism and individualism, a direct legacy of a secularized Protestant Ethic (Dyck & Weber, 2006). Because most applications of corporate mindfulness have failed to make their MPV transparent, they have been easily co-opted to support the dictates of conventional

management. However, as our corrective has shown, Buddhist mindfulness is not ethically neutral. Rather, the theory and practice of Buddhist mindfulness is based on an explicit MPV that is oriented toward the cultivation of ethical conduct and inner virtues conducive to one’s own awakening and that of all other sentient beings. In this sense, Buddhist mindfulness is orthogonal to materialism and individualism as it is centered on counteracting greed, ill will, and the delusion of a permanent, independently existent self. A Buddhist MPV, guided by right mindfulness, may then serve as a basis for emancipatory, radical management (Dyck & Shroeder, 2005). Buddhist mindfulness can confront exploitative systems of management and power structure but with attitudes of loving-kindness, compassion, and skillful attentiveness (Slott, 2011). A radical management perspective aimed at emancipation can benefit from Buddhist mindfulness by reducing ego-based desire, anger, and delusion—the core defilements underlying power, domination, and callous indifference.

A more ethically informed view of corporate mindfulness, which we have outlined here, offers the potential for reorienting and enlarging the scope of practice toward critical engagement, discernment, and reflection on the causes and conditions of suffering in the corporation as a whole. Rather than merely being seen as a technique for personal stress reduction, this expanded view of mindfulness enhances awareness of how particular corporate policies, practices, and products may be the causes of suffering, stress, and harm—whether internally or externally. Future research may assess the effectiveness of corporate mindfulness programs in terms of whether the scope of practice is narrowly limited to personal stress reduction (integrity bubbles) and whether such programs enable participants to utilize their wise attention to challenge the status quo and initiate corrective actions to reduce corporate harm. For example, Google’s widely acclaimed corporate mindfulness program would be seen as extremely limited in scope and as failing the integrity test. 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-hr 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.

Future theory development is needed to reframe corporate mindfulness as a socially engaged practice, more expansive and inclusive in scope, so that the causes and conditions of institutionalized greed, ill will, and delusion can be addressed. Thus, future research on corporate mindfulness must include both individual and institutional analysis (Healey, 2013). The current trend, as our critique has shown,

is that mindfulness practices have been co-opted to further and reproduce corporate interests, perhaps even increasing institutional blindness with regard to the externalization of harm. Building on our triadic model of mindfulness, scholars could further explore how the presence or absence of the path factors of right effort, right view, and the right mindfulness influence prosocial and ethical behaviors as well as other virtues such as positive deviance. Along these lines, researchers can study how variations in operational definitions of mindfulness in corporate programs lead to either an expansion or narrowing of attentional boundaries, ranging from personal stress reduction and self-interested concerns for better concentration and focus to the empowerment of tempered radicals (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), toxic handlers (Frost & Robinson, 1999), and corporate whistleblowers.

In summary, Buddhist mindfulness has a clear soteriological purpose: liberative cognitive transformations that dramatically lessen self-centeredness by removing mental afflictions and unhealthy states of mind, while enhancing ethical sensitivity, moral development, and an altruistic concern for the welfare of all sentient beings. Right mindfulness is grounded in an embodied, first-person, and ethically informed theory and practice. By recovering early Buddhist textual understandings, we have offered a corrective to contemporary definitions and practice of mindfulness that are currently in vogue, emphasizing that Buddhist-inspired understandings of mindfulness involve a holistic and ethically sensitive mode of remembering (S. Stanley, 2013).

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Notes

1. The Pāli word, *Tipitaka*, literally means “the three baskets,” reflecting that the canon is divided into three divisions. The first part is known as the *Vinaya Pitaka* and contains all the rules that the Buddha laid down for monks and nuns; the second part is called the *Suttanta Pitaka* and contains the Discourses, which are the teachings proper of the Buddha; the third part is known as the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, a scholarly reorganization of the teachings presented in the previous two works, which deals mainly with presenting and commenting on Buddhist theory of ethics and mind. The *Abhidhamma* texts are also referred to commonly as Buddhist psychology.
2. The *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* is arguably one of the most important *suttas* of the *Theravāda* tradition and is found in both the *Dīghanikāya* and *Majjhimanikāya*. It outlines the Buddhist meditation of mindfulness that will lead to *nirvāna*.
3. Mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) comprises 14 subjects of meditation, with mindfulness of the breath (*anapanasati*) being the most popular. Mindfulness of feeling (*vedanānupassanā*) is of three types, pleasant, painful, and neutral, referring to both material and spiritual feelings. Mindfulness of mind (*cittānupassanā*) is differentiated into contrasting states of mind, namely, with and without lust, hatred, delusion, a mind contracted or distracted, exalted or unexalted, surpassable or unsurpassable, concentrated or unconcentrated. Finally, mindfulness of mental objects or phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*) consists of five categories: the five hindrances, the six internal and external senses, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the four noble truths.
4. Within a Buddhist context, the term *mindfulness* first appeared in 1881 in Max Müller’s book, *Buddhist Suttas*, translated by Thomas W. Rhys Davids. Sir Monier Monier-Williams, a Sanskrit scholar at Oxford University, also deliberately used the term in his 1889 book, *Buddhism in its Connexion With Brahmanism and Hinduism*.
5. Right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
6. We have not mentioned the last of the eight path factors, right concentration, as this will be addressed later in the article.
7. These are traditionally referred to in Buddhism as the “three mental poisons.”
8. Much is made of the connection between mindfulness and concentration, though this connection is murky at best. Again, the Pāli Canon goes to great lengths to clarify this connection. In the *Dvedhavitakka Sutta* [Two kinds of thinking] (MN 19), it states that when mindfulness is established the mind becomes concentrated. Mindfulness, in tandem with effort and correct views, leads to concentration but it is also an integral part of concentration itself (Ṭhānissaro, 2012). In the *Anguttara Nikaya* (8:63), establishing mindfulness is actually described as a type of concentration. Nonetheless, right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) in the Pāli Canon is always regarding the *jhānas*. The *jhānas* are only developed in meditation and are meant to lead to *nirvāna*. While this is an important matter for one on the path to liberation according to Buddhism, in organizations, *sammā-samādhi* does not play a role. Instead, the practices of mindfulness, in meditation and daily activities, do increase the power of attention (*manasikāra*), which, as this article will show, has been mistaken for mindfulness itself as well as its main benefit, within neuroscience, psychology, and organizational studies.
9. The concept of bare attention, with its “noting” practice, has been limited primarily to the Burmese School under the auspices of the Theravāda monk Mahasi Sayadaw. Bare attention does not figure prominently, and in many cases is completely absent in the majority of *Theravāda*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana* Buddhist traditions.
10. Bhikkhu Bodhi (2006) recalled that when Ven. Nyaṇaponika would read statements about “bare attention” as interpreted by some of the neo-*Vipassanā* teachers, he would sometimes shake his head and say, in effect, “But that’s not what I meant at all!” (p. 7).
11. The *Visuddhimagga* (the Path of Purification) is a 5th-century encyclopedic manual on meditation written by Bhaddantacariya Buddhaghosa and is revered as key commentarial text in the *Theravāda* Buddhist tradition.

12. Gethin (2010) noted that modern scholars have misread or misinterpreted the meaning of the Pāli term *apilapeti*—which should not be read as “plunging into the object” but as “calling to mind” or “reminding one of something” (pp. 38-40).
13. According to a recent *Wall Street* journal article, corporations are losing an estimated US\$300 billion annually due to employee stress in the form of lowered productivity, absenteeism, and health care–related costs.
14. While Buddhist ethics prohibits the taking of life, killing, and warfare, historically there have been numerous incidents where Buddhist leaders, especially in countries where Buddhism was an official state-sponsored religion, sanctioned violence and war. Such compromises are regarded as in direct opposition to the ethical absolute against killing. For more in-depth historical accounts of such lapses in Buddhist ethics, see Jerryson and Juergensmeyer's (2010) *Buddhist Warfare* and Victoria's (2006) *Zen at War*.

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Author Biographies

Ronald E. Purser, PhD, is a professor of management at San Francisco State University and former chair of the Organization Development and Change division of the Academy of Management. In 1981, he began studying Buddhist psychology and practicing meditation at the Tibetan Nyingma Institute in Berkeley. He began formal Zen training at the Cleveland Zen Center in 1985 under Koshin Ogui Sensei, who had been Shunryu

Suzuki's personal assistant in the early 1960s. After returning to San Francisco in 1997, he continued to study and practice with Zen teachers and Tibetan lamas. In 2013, he received ordination as a Dharma instructor in the Korean Zen Buddhist Taego order. His research focuses on the application of Buddhist psychology and mindfulness practices to management and organizations, exploring the challenges and issues of introducing mindfulness into secular contexts, particularly with regard to its encounter with modernity, Western consumer capitalism, and individualism. His recent articles on these issues have appeared in such outlets as *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion, Organizational Aesthetics, Tamara*, and *The Humanistic Psychologist*. His *Huffington Post* blog (with David Loy), "Beyond McMindfulness," went viral in July, 2013.

Joseph Milillo is a master's student at Harvard Divinity School focusing on South Asian Buddhism. His specific research is on Theravāda Buddhism and the commentarial tradition of Buddhaghosa.