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RONALD
PURSER

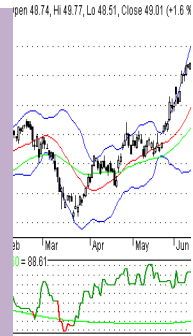


SAN FRANCISCO
STATE UNIVERSITY

<http://www.lomotion.ch/index.php?MINDFULNESS-&lang=en>

CORPORATE MINDFULNESS IN CONTEXT

- U.S. Corporations \$300 billion losses/year stress-related absences; \$550 billion losses “employee disengagement” – Britain £110 billion/year
 - Gallup only 13% global workforce “engaged”
 - Only 20% employees “engaged” in N. America & Europe
- Workplace resistance no longer unions, strikes – but apathy, chronic stress, absences, low level depression
- Significant threats to productivity and capitalism
- Dominant market logic: Discourse of economics as value neutral science -No need to consider questions of the good (Michael Sandel)



WHY CRITIQUE?

- Why be critical of individualized corporate mindfulness (ICM)? Surely, these programs do offer forms of stress relief, helping employees to cope with less than ideal circumstances at work, even building up their resilience. Isn't this making the perfect the enemy of the good? Why throw the baby out with the bathwater?
- Workplace stress is similar to childhood obesity, black lung disease, or victims of industrial accidents – conditions which still need to be treated, and ICM admirably serves its intended purpose in this regard.
- But what is missing in this picture, and in the mindfulness discourse in particular, is that chronic stress, like most chronic diseases and occupational accidents, has a social and political content.

McMINDFULNESS



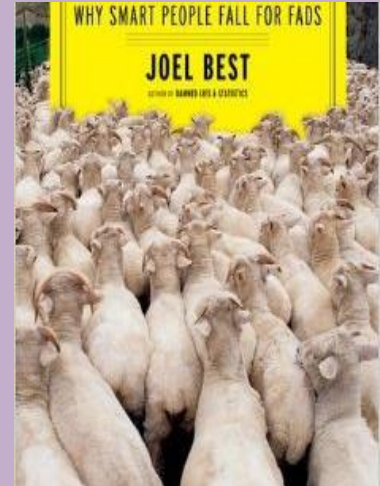
- Decontextualized self-help technique
- Stress viewed as an individualized dysfunction
- Ethically neutral
- Palliative coping method
- Little or no challenge to institutionalized greed, ill will, delusion
- Evolution of a historical narrative of managerial control to maintain the status quo

CORPORATE MINDFULNESS: STATE OF THE RESEARCH

- Few empirical field studies (None in top-tiered academic journals in Management/Organizational Studies field-a few in occupational health area, limited to stress reduction measures)
- Mix mash of definitions/measures: mindfuleless as a trait, state, practice, etc
- Single case studies and/or conflicts of interest
 - Bill George “Under the leadership of CEO Mark Bertolini, Aetna has done rigorous studies of both meditation and yoga and their positive impact on employee healthcare costs.”
- Or popular books/consulting sites point to “all the science” (clinical and neuroscience research on mindfulness)

IS CORPORATE MINDFULNESS AN INSTITUTIONAL FAD?

- Institutional Fads
- Social and economic costs
- The Illusion of Diffusion (enthusiasm = evidence)
- Why do smart people fall for fads? Hopeful panacea for wildly divergent problems, gain credence well known corporation adopts, bandwagon jumping



MEANING OF 'FADS' AND 'FASHIONS'

- Fads are solutions which are transient/temporary.
- Gurus/best-sellers/scholars popularise these 'Management Fashions':
 - **'transitory collective beliefs that certain management techniques are at the forefront of management progress'** *Abrahamson 1996*
- Past management fads included human relations, quality circles, total quality management, reengineering and self-managed teams.

THE MARKET FOR MANAGEMENT FASHION

- Demand for fads generated by managers seeking rational, ‘cutting-edge’ solutions to persistent organisational problems
- Managers in turn try to pacify stakeholders, to conform, find legitimacy or fulfil own psychological needs
- Environmental pressures also drive demand in an ‘open system’
- Fads and fashion are adopted at different speeds, follow a life cycle
- Fads preceded by dormancy, followed by a bell-shaped life cycle
- Decline of one fad is interdependent with the development and increasing popularity of another fad that replaces it

HAWTHORNE EXPERIMENTS

Relay Assembly Test Room Experiments, 1927-1929 Harvard research team set up experiment with 5 females from Relay Assembly area to test impact of incentives and work conditions on worker fatigue

There is no conclusive evidence that these affected fatigue or productivity.



HAWTHORNE INTERVIEWS

- Plant-wide Interview program, 1928-1931
 1. Western Electric implemented a plant-wide survey of employees to record their concerns and grievances. From 1928 to 1930, 21,000 employees were interviewed.
 - 2. Elton Mayo and his colleagues concluded work improved when supervisors began to pay attention to employees, even when



INDIVIDUALIZED PERSPECTIVE ON STRESS

- David Gelles, *Mindful Work*, “Stress isn’t something imposed on us. It’s something we impose on ourselves”
- David Smail refers to this philosophy as “magical voluntarism”, where the burden and locus of both psychological distress depends on the will (or, now, mindfulness) of the individual
- “Insourcing” responsibility – individual is completely free to “choose” (held accountable for their own stress/wellbeing) – implicit “blaming the victim” message
- Focus on individual behavior and mentality of people, critique turns inward (bio-morality)

CRITICAL-CIVIC MINDFULNESS

- Stress is embedded in social, political and economic institutions and policies
- Community psychology, social epidemiology, sociology
- Stress as a socio-political-economic problem
- Focus on structures of power, critique turns outward
- Greater attention and awareness to how applications of mindfulness is being shaped by a complex set of interacting forces involving power relations, networks of interests, and explanatory narratives- cultural forces which often remain submerged and hidden from public discourse.

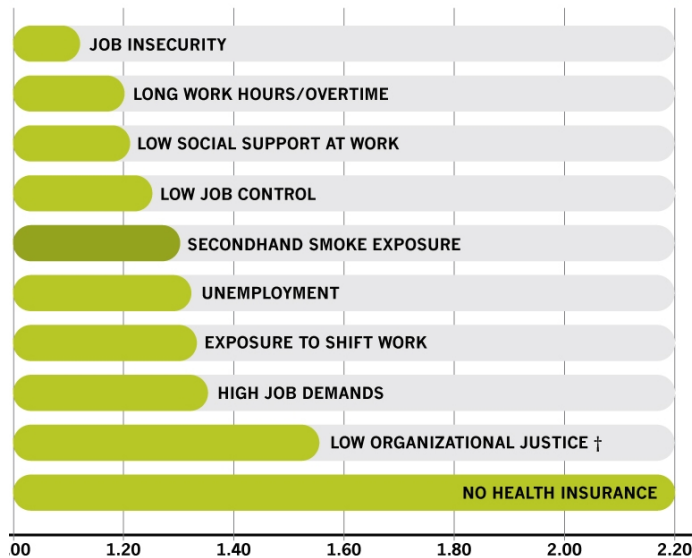
STANFORD/HARVARD STUDY

(GOH, PFEFFER & ZENIOS, 2014)

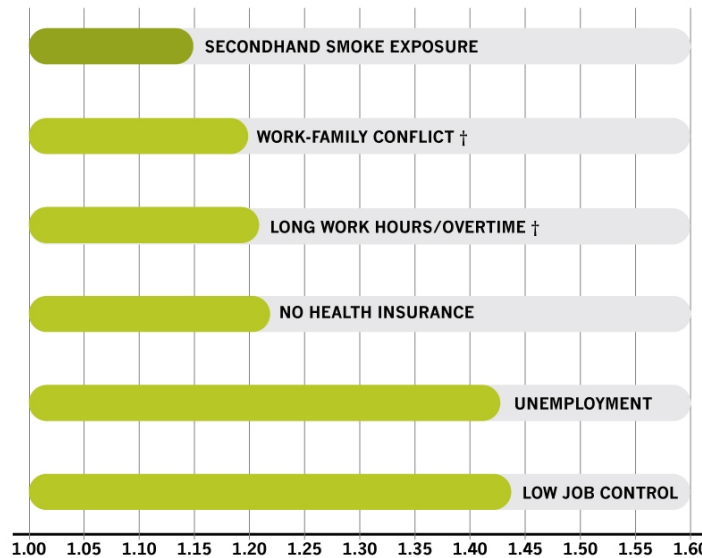
- Meta-analysis of 228 studies identify locus of workplace stressors
- Locus was not individuals (lack of mindfulness), but corporate policies, practices and cultures
- Lack of health insurance, threats of constant lay-offs (job insecurity), low organizational justice and autonomy, long work hours, unrealistic demands, etc
- Job insecurity accounted for an increase of 50% in reporting of poor health; long work hours increased mortality rates by 20%. (GS - 17hrs interns)
- In many respects, individual-directed stress reductions programs nothing new (1970s/80s) - even then calls were made for the potential injustices of offering such programs to employees while leaving the source of workplace stressors unchanged.

WORKPLACE STRESSORS BIGGEST IMPACT

TOP STRESSORS ON DOCTOR-REPORTED ILLNESSES



TOP STRESSORS ON MORTALITY



EXAMINING THE MAJOR CLAIMS

- Mindfulness is inherently ethical (“built into” the practice), “naturally” leads to right action, livelihood, etc.
- Mindfulness “naturally” leads to kindness, compassion, investigation, and wisdom
- Mindfulness will “naturally lead to all things good (“practical benefits”, career success, etc.)
- **Mindfulness is a Trojan Horse – works insidiously from within, eventually leading to corporate transformation and reform, even social activism**

TROJAN HORSE ARGUMENT



- Mindfulness training will transform companies and corporate cultures – eventually making them more compassionate, wise, environmental and socially responsible, etc.
- A subversive, disruptive technology?

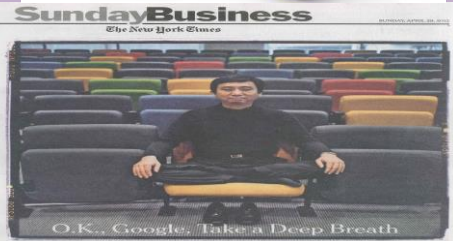
Goldman Sachs




GENERAL MILLS



Google



Sunday Business
The New York Times

UNACKNOWLEDGED ROLE OF FAITH

- Trickle-down theory: Mindful leadership, Davos,
- Thousand points of light theory: Corporate transformation and institutionalized forces of greed, ill will and delusion will be “changed one mindful individual at a time” (Stanley, 2015).
- The notion that individualized corporate mindfulness training will effect systemic corporate change resembles the pseudo-scientific “experiments” and dubious claims by Transcendental Meditation (TM) devotees that groups of practitioners meditating together could lower crime rates in Washington, D.C.

TWO HYPOTHESES

H1: Corporate Trojan Horse

- Corporate mindfulness programs will encourage whistleblowing, wise decision-making, ethical behavior, greater organizational citizenship behaviors, and culture change leading to more social and environmental responsibility.

H2: Corporate Quietism

- Corporate mindfulness programs will provide privatized glimpses of stress reduction and focused attention (“integrity bubbles”) for individual employees, with no significant turning of focused attention to systemic, structural or cultural conditions that are causes of stress and anxiety in the workplace and society.

WHO KNOWS?

- Advocates typically respond to critics of corporate mindfulness by asserting that no one can say for certain what these programs may lead to, or that such programs *might* in time prompt individuals to develop greater social and ethical conscience and act for the common good.
- These retorts are effectively saying: WHO KNOWS?
 - **“Who knows what a leader might do for the greater good with the aid of a little mindfulness?” – Barry Boyce, Editor, *Mindful* magazine, Dec. 2014**
- Isn't this also an act of and appeal to faith? An appeal to faith in the face of limited knowledge and unforeseeable change?
- “WHO KNOWS” is an open question, underscoring the need to interrogate the dynamics of power that circumscribe corporate mindfulness – change for the common good (rather than change simply for individual benefit or personal wellbeing) must come through the disruption of prevailing regimes of power, inequality, exploitation and injustice.

THE JURY IS STILL OUT...

Cultural Accommodation?



Social Transformation?

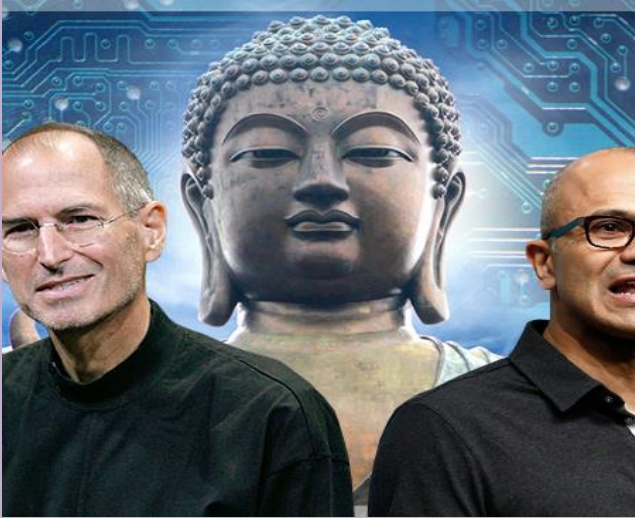


CAPITALISM IS A GIVEN?

- **Pinsker:** You provide plenty of examples of how mindfulness has led to, or at least played a role in, creating socially responsible corporate behavior. But another argument that's running throughout the book seems to be that it's a good business decision. You save money on health costs, and you gain a lot in productivity, for example. Is there anything contradictory about harnessing the power of mindfulness, which is in part meant to diminish the importance of worldly pursuits, to improve the bottom line?
- **Gelles:** We live in a capitalist economy, and mindfulness can't change that. I think what it can do, hopefully, is give individuals, influencers of organizations, and **maybe** even companies themselves the perspective that's needed to make decisions and changes, even, that are beneficial, not just to the bottom line but to our emotional, physical, and social well-being.

SPIRITUAL MERITOCRACY?

“The Dangerous Myth of Corporate Spirituality”



“If we are mindful enough...then...”

- Microsoft's Nadella: Don't question the systemic sexism of corporate America, just trust in “good karma” to get you ahead.
- The implicit idea here is that our professional and financial growth depends on our spiritual merit, not on the presence or absence of social structures and biases. We are told that if we are grateful enough, if we put enough happy energy into the universe, then we will be rewarded with material wealth and earthly pleasures. (Think “The Secret”) We are told that we actually *can* have it all: a rich spiritual life, leading to a rich material life. --S. Van.

BIG DATA SCIENCE: THE NEW CORPORATE MANAGEMENT UTOPIA

- Under the façade and benign intentions to improve “happiness” and “wellbeing”, mindfulness may become subservient and complementary to the mass surveillance technologies (Synthesis of neuroscience + big data analytics)
- Wearable boom (Apple Watches), quantified self movement, apps, face recognition software (actively cooperate in self-surveillance)
 - <http://www.sociometricsolutions.com/>
- Merger of utilitarianism and behaviorism, psychic optimization and profit optimization
- Scientific utopia that can bypass human voice, measure directly happiness, moods (Subjective realm of ethics and human values disappears)
- Eventually dispense with human and social sciences (economics, management, sociology, philosophy) – “data science” – radical, theoretical agnosticism

OCCUPY MINDFULNESS

“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?” (Forbes, 2012).



CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CORPORATE MINDFULNESS, WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AND WELLBEING

- EUROPEAN GROUP FOR ORGANIZATION STUDIES (EGOS) CONFERENCE, JULY 3-5, 2016, NAPLES, ITALY
- Hugh Willmott (Cass Business School), Ron Purser (SFSU), Massimo Tomassini (Roma) – Co-Chairs
- www.egos.org
- SUBMISSIONS OF ABSTRACTS DUE IN EARLY JANUARY 2016