

Waking Up at Work: Action Research on Mindfulness, Awareness, and Presence

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I maintain that there is an irreducible core to the quality of experience that needs to be explored with a method. In other words, the problem is not that we don't know enough about the brain or about biology, the problem is that we don't know enough about experience. ... We have had a blind spot in the West for that kind of methodical approach. ... this notion implies a going back to work with experience, the importance of taking seriously first-person experience....
Francisco Varela (In conversation with Otto Scharmer)

WAKING UP: DOORWAY TO MINDFULNESS AND PRESENCE

People have tried for centuries to develop practices that bring them present to the fullness of life. Many spiritual traditions have called this “waking up,” regarding such an experience as the portal to living a full and meaningful life. For us, *waking up* refers to the fleeting moments when people notice they are more present to what is happening within or around them than they were a moment before. Some call this being “mindful”: being highly attentive to one’s experience and surroundings. Over the last decade, much scholarly research in this area has been carried out under the label of research on “mindfulness,” a term that comes in part from ancient Buddhist meditation practices (Grossman, 2010; Grossman, 2011; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Tsoknyi Rinpoche, 2012; Weick & Putnam, 2006). We consider our project to be a part of the larger body of mindfulness research, but it is unique with regard to both our focus on the moments of becoming mindful (as contrasted with the state or trait of mindfulness, which is more typically what has been studied) and the fact that we approached the topic from the perspective of people’s own reflections on their experiences, which is known as a “first-person” approach in the context of action research.

As Varela and other foundational thinkers have affirmed, such a first-person foundation is fundamental for studying experiences relating to human awareness, as nothing else gives insight into what they actually are (Varela & Shear, 2000). Most mindfulness research has presumed either that people know when they are mindful and can accurately label such experiences on a scale (Grossman, 2010, 2011) or else that what should be studied is the impact of training in mindfulness through measuring workplace performance or levels of stress before and after such training (eg, Hulsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). Instead we wished simply to understand what people actually experience when they wake up to the present moment. We are interested in deepening understanding of the experience of moving from distraction or unawareness to awareness — the fleeting moments of transition between these states and what enables people to elicit them with more ease and frequency. In our analysis of the data, we sought to describe the structure that such moments have in common, and then to portray the

themes we saw across the participants and explore implications for leadership and organizational health.

Goldman Schuyler and Skjei designed the project to focus on *moments*, rather than presence or mindfulness as ongoing states of being, because as longtime practitioners, it does not seem to us that people can sustain such present-moment awareness for extended periods of time. Although people may wish to be ongoingly mindful or present, our personal experience suggests that for most people, such states last usually for mere seconds and must be refreshed again and again. Thus, the study is grounded in practice: our training and practice of meditation and other awareness practices for over 40 years.

By shifting attention to investigating the moments of transition from distraction or absence to presence, and doing so in the first person, we hoped to create a lived understanding of the experience itself as something that occurs naturally, yet can be encouraged and deepened through intention. Even with training in meditation or mindfulness (viewing them generally and leaving specific definitions of these aside), people often find that they do not bring these practices into their daily life and work. In addition, our interest is in exploring how people can be fully present to whatever is happening, be it chaotic change in a start-up organization, the highly analytical process of grading student papers or doing research, or the pressured interactions of leading a political campaign. While most research studies of mindfulness define it either as a method of calming the mind or a way to focus it intently on one thing, some wisdom traditions (primarily Buddhism, but perhaps also Sufism) seek ways to enable their practitioners to sustain a more expansive form of awareness. From this perspective, what is often considered to be the whole of mindfulness—being attentive to components of physical reality within or outside of oneself—is instead regarded as only the first part of it (see Tsoknyi Rinpoche, 2012, pp. 114-115). The further and more important portion is sensing the mind that is becoming aware of the objects of attention, its clarity, spaciousness, and fluidity, which can be called *open awareness*. We consider this project to have gone back to the foundations on which mindfulness as a discipline or practice depends.

THE STUDY

Project Launch

There has been a great deal of talk about the value of being present or mindful in the workplace (Dane, 2013; Dane & Brummel, 2013; Hulsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013), as well as considerable research on its value in clinical settings (Allen, Blashki, & Gullone, 2006; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009), but the literature from a first-person perspective seems to be limited (Bradbury, 2013; Bruce & Davies, 2005; Torbert & Taylor, 2008). This two-year collaborative action research project was designed to explore whether simply intending to be present could make a difference in participants' quality of experience at work and also to find out whether this would impact people with whom they worked. We knew of tantalizing preliminary data that the practice of meditation affects not only the therapist's inner state in a positive way, but also the progress of the clients (Grepmaier, Mitterlehner, Loew, Bachler, Rother, & Nickel, 2007), so we decided to also address the impact on our professional work, moving from first person inquiry to third person analysis (Reason & Torbert, 2001).

The study grew out of Goldman Schuyler and Skjei's longtime focus on the importance of meditation practice and "presence" for leadership development. After working for decades training people in various approaches to mindfulness and awareness, they became curious about

what would enable a person to simply become present. Rather than look at the practice of mindfulness or the training for it, they wished to engage actively with the intention to be present. The question came out of their years of experience with particular meditative practices that arrive, after extensive training, at inviting people simply to be present to their minds, people, and the space around them. The root teachings for such practices focus on open awareness, as alluded to above. Such a capacity to intentionally bring oneself into the present moment is the foundation for what we consider to be the most exciting organizational change projects being undertaken that aim toward systemic, global change (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004).

Having presented sessions on embodied learning and awareness in relation to leadership and consulting for several years at the Academy of Management, Goldman Schuyler and Skjei wanted to find a creative way to bring together their research and personal practice while also building community among practitioners who shared these interests. In planning a submission for the 2011 AOM Annual Conference, they sought to extend the experience of “awareness” beyond workshop sessions and individual contemplative practices, in order to actively cultivate a collective shared process of year-round inquiry. The aim was to make visible and discuss the invisible, liminal moments that allow people to shift their attention and live with such open awareness.

They invited everyone who attended their session to participate in a project studying their own experience. Originally, participants were asked to notice and take notes (either recorded or written) about moments that they regarded as “waking up” two to three times a week over a four-week period. All participants would have access to the data they generated, which would be used to write a paper together. During the first year 12 people completed a pre-and post-test, wrote their observations, and participated in follow-up focus groups reflecting on the impact of their participation in the project. Instead of writing a paper after the first year, the researchers collectively reported on the project in a symposium at the Academy, having decided to continue for a second year to allow for more people and depth of experience. During the second year 15 people completed all phases of the project, of whom 9 were participating for a second time. The participants were from North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. At the time of the project, many worked in countries outside of their birthplace. Some were experienced mindfulness practitioners while others were novices. In showing the participants in Table 1, we collapsed two categories related to level of experience in order to better protect their identities, as some categories had two or less participants. All appear in this paper with pseudonyms that will be used consistently in this and other publications based on this data. Because of the small size of the sample, to reveal additional data about specific participants would reduce the confidentiality.

We regard the overall project as participatory action research because our interest in understanding this phenomenon, at both personal and professional levels, was to generate not only knowledge but also support for our personal and professional practices (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). We find it intriguing to do “action” research on a process that is at the juncture between internal experience and visible action: it is not something that others can perceive, which is usually what we consider to be action. We therefore regard the foundational portions of our research and analysis as first person inquiry (Torbert, 1976), which are the portions addressed in this paper. We made this a collaborative, community-building project (second person) because we sought to be part of a global community of practice of people interested in this lively interface between professional research and personal contemplative practice. Finally,

it has major third person components as we investigated the impact in the workplace. Without this latter, the project cannot serve as intended as a foundation for better understanding how being awake makes a difference for leaders and for everyone at work. These latter portions of the project will be addressed through other analyses, some of which are already in process.

The aim was to invite each participant, and ourselves as the designers of the project, to suspend the knowledge that we brought to the experiment, so we could be open to whatever might happen in such moments and to develop new ways to do research that would make visible such evanescent experiences which happen to people naturally all over the world across cultures and centuries, yet are much like bubbles that burst when one tries to hold onto them.

TABLE 1
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Participation	Contemplative experience
Aaron	Year 1	> 1 year
Ariele	Both years	> 10 years
Cassandra	Year 2	1-9 years
Cynthia	Both years	> 1 year
Damian	Both years	> 1 year
Eliza	Both years	> 10 years
Elizabeth	Both years	> 1 year
Eva	Both years	> 10 years
Frank	Year 2	> 10 years
Georgia	Both years	> 10 years
Greta	Year 2	1-9 years
Larry	Year 2	> 10 years
Michelle	Year 2	1-9 years
Miriam	Both years	> 10 years
Rona	Both years	> 1 year
Simone	Year 2	4-10 years

Research Questions

The study focused on the following questions. We will be addressing the first two questions in this paper. The others will be addressed in analysis that is now in process.

1. What is *waking up*, as an experience and what is my experience of such moments during my work, described as “moments of waking up”?
2. How do such moments seem to affect others, such as students or clients? What is the impact of these moments on my experience of work?
3. How do our experiences during such moments relate to traditional mindfulness practice, as it has been taught through Buddhist-based structured meditative practices?

4. How does this practice affect my sense of burnout and stress in my life?
5. What has been the impact of participating in this project?

Data Analysis

Initially, as a collaborative author team we brought a phenomenological approach to exploring the data, grounded in Bentz and Rehorick's (2008) *transformative phenomenology*, which has roots in Shutz's (1962-66; 1967) writings. We discovered that there was considerable variety in how the participants responded to the initial guidelines. This did not surprise us, as our aim had been to explore the range of ways people interpret and act upon having an intention to wake up. Over a period of eight months, the four of us analyzed the initial reflections, working individually, in pairs, and as a team.

We began by reading through the data and allowing ourselves to simply receive it. We noticed patterns and themes and made a few notes. As we continued reading we realized that there were many different ways to determine themes and we noticed the "mental models" that were familiar to us and tried to deliberately bracket these--resisting the urge to simply categorize things according to an existing model. For example, the data could be looked at thematically, sequentially, or developmentally—all of which were of interest. We noticed that we were becoming overwhelmed by choices but continued to resist the urge to categorize content, and instead, tried to stay present and attentive to providing a space or *clearing* in which patterns could be discerned. We each read through the participant data multiple times, wrote memos that we shared with one another, and discussed the data and our memos both through emails and in virtual meetings where we could see one another and feel like we were talking personally, despite being globally distant. This enabled us to look for the essential structure of the experience and also to identify the key themes that we perceived in the data. At the same time, we looked for quotes that would express the participants' unique variations on these themes. What follows is our perception of the essential structure of the experience followed by the themes.

Essential structure.

Waking up in the workplace is experienced as a shift that can happen gradually or suddenly. The gradual experience occurs when I simply notice that I have been preoccupied, and I become aware of my momentary experience. The sudden experience can be triggered by an external event or relationship that is unusual, surprising, disruptive, irritating, beautiful or awe inspiring, or by noticing my own physical or emotional reactions to an event. In either case, there is an interruption to the status quo, which provides a gap in my habitual way of being in the world. Sometimes I respond to these gaps with delight and humor. Other times I react with defensiveness and stress. However, when I can embrace and suspend these reactions, I relax into the experience and open to a deeper level of present moment awareness.

One way to do this is to focus on my sensory experience which allows me to shift from "thinking" to "sensing and feeling". Sometimes just taking a few breaths brings me back into the present moment. It can be challenging when I am experiencing painful sensations or emotions that I want to avoid, but if I can stay with whatever feelings arise, the claustrophobia lifts, and I feel more space both mentally and physically. I may experience heightened sensory awareness and a feeling of connectedness that is often accompanied by insight and gratitude. However, these feelings do fade with time and I realize that waking up is a continual journey that must be refreshed again and again. When I am awake I appreciate nature, people, and other beings, and I seem to have more choice about how I behave. I find that I am able to engage with work situation and relationships more peacefully, creatively, empathetically, and skillfully.

Themes.

The themes that we identified in the data were 1) Waking up as either a gradual or sudden shift, 2) Heightened experience of bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts, 3) Connectedness, safety, appreciation, and gratitude, 4) Empathy, relationships, and meaning, and 5) Creativity, flow, and effectiveness.

Theme #1: Waking up as a gradual or sudden shift

The first theme that we identified in the data had to do with a shift in attention that initiates the moment of waking up. This shift can be experienced as gradual or sudden and can be triggered by a variety of events, both internal and external. The gradual experience may be a feeling of “coming to” after being preoccupied. Ariele described it this way. “Although I had been walking, my attention was captured by the problem and I had lost all mindfulness of my environment or my body. When I noticed this, I came back to my senses.”

For Aaron the experience of waking up was triggered by an external event.

Suddenly I came to full alertness when I saw a small bird walking in the middle of the road junction looking for food. It was an unusual sight because I don’t expect a bird to look for food in the middle of the road . . . My full attention was on the bird. I felt concern for its safety.

For some the experience of the shift was pleasurable and intensely meaningful, as in this example from Cynthia.

My attention focus changed from my reading to me, to my experience of being there at that moment. I felt so lucky and had a true joy feeling being there. I felt healthy, fortunate. I listened to the rain, tasted the sweetness of my coffee and observed other people around me and the rain in the window.

Waking up moments can also occur when a person simply asks, “Am I present?” as in this example from Georgia. “To bring myself present, first I am silent. Then I notice the first thing I do is look around and get my bare orientation in space. Then I take a few breaths and notice how I feel.”

While for others, being aware of negative experiences also triggered a moment of waking up, as in this observation from Larry. “To be awake is not just to awaken to the higher states but also awaken to the negative. It is much more challenging to observe what is stressing emotionally, mentally, and physically.” He went on to describe his physical sensations. “The sharp feeling that comes in the gut, the tension in the legs, tightening in the mind, contracting of the heart.” These sensations, painful as they were, also stimulated a moment of waking up for him.

Theme #2: Heightened awareness of bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts

The second theme had to do with a heightened awareness of bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts during the moment itself. Rona had this comment: “By focusing my attention on identifying moments of waking up, I get a better sense of my bodily sensations and realize faster and more intensely when I get overwhelmed by choices or stimuli.” In this example, Eva described her heightened sensory experience in a meeting with her business partners.

As I listened, the colors in the room and her clothes seemed to brighten and come into a strong focus. Everything about her was deepening and brightening. I could hear everything she,

and others, were saying, and I could also contribute minimally to the conversation while remaining aware of the colors in the room and particularly everyone's clothes.

An example of heightened emotional feeling was described by Miriam.

When my consciousness started to be "here and now" I felt that my emotions started to move fast. Suddenly I noticed that the tears were running down my face, but I was not sad. It was nice, grateful feeling to be alive, to be here and now, surrounded by all of my stuff: papers, books, notes and pictures, surrounded by all of that chaos. I felt I was in the middle of my life, in the middle of something important which is difficult to describe

Some participants became aware of new thoughts and a different relationship to their minds and came up with colorful analogies as in this example from Damian. "My mind is like an eel slipping all the time. How do you manage an eel?" Another example is from Georgia.

My mind is like a little puppy running from one input to another and delighting in it, the coffee smell, and the sounds. If it were birds it would like that. If there were blue sky it would like that or not like things it doesn't like. It's just running around noticing and getting all excited about sensory input and what it seems perhaps that I'm trying to train it to do is to just rest and then rest more and settle and notice what doesn't move and change.

In each case, remembering that they had committed to journaling about these experiences brought in a discipline of self-awareness that was in the background and allowed them to see the process of waking up, in addition to the mental content or physical experiences that were there upon waking up. Larry described it this way.

The mind feels like a pile of icy snow at times—translucent to the light but surrounded by a sea of impressions: the stereo streaming an old Beatle's song, my left thumb pointing upward for no apparent reason, the taste of oatmeal and yogurt in my mouth, the thought of my guest coming today from IBM in Abu Dhabi to speak to my ... class, what mini-lectures do I add to his sharing of IBM strategy and Leadership. The flux of thoughts, feelings, and sensations keep pouring through the mind.

Theme #3: Connectedness, safety, appreciation, and gratitude

The third theme was about the experience of connectedness, safety, appreciation, and gratitude that participants felt during the moments of waking up. Here is an example from Eva. "Gradually the most incredible sense of relief filled me and I felt as if I was being held, literally held, and lulled and kept safe. It was almost overwhelming. I felt tearful with the grace and loveliness of it." She said that the words "being nobody, going nowhere" kept arising spontaneously and they felt reassuring and positive.

An example from Eliza shows a shift in awareness that brought about a feeling of connection with nature. "The tree just stood there, splendid, adorned. My spirit was deeply refreshed, and I completed my grading, energy renewed. Suddenly, the work I was focused on spoke meaningfully to me and my spirit was restored." Similarly, at one point Rona was sitting at her desk, working on a grant, when she looked up and noticed "the snow reflecting in the bright sunlight and some deer right in front of my window. They look me straight in the eye, it is an honest look. The peace and the beauty of nature remind me why I am here."

Many participants also described a strong feeling of connectedness in urban environments as well and how this experience was related to their work. Here is an excerpt from Miriam.

Suddenly I'm realizing that everything is connected to everything. The beautiful sky with the dark colors of sun setting (which is almost over), fast clouds rushing through the horizon, the sounds of other passengers when they're talking on their mobile phones and organizing upcoming weekend with their friends and lovers.

Georgia described a heightened sense of clarity both external and internal. "In doing this process of paying attention to the moments, of noticing the relationship between my state and the environment, it helps me have a sense of the wholeness, the integrity of me and the space around me." Often this extended to the workplace as well, as suggested by Michelle's comment:

I am working on a strategy document, and suddenly I feel exactly the same as I did in yoga this morning. ... My body and my work has become the same. There is no difference. Just a feeling of wholeness.

Theme #4: Empathy, relationships, and meaning

Overall, participants reported that they were more empathic and their relationships with others seem more workable and meaningful during and after a moment of waking up. The shift often began with an experience of self-compassion that resulted in a different way of engaging others. Aaron described the impact of taking a deep breath and relaxing.

I then took another deep breath. This time I could sense that my body became less tense and I was more ready to read the email again. To my surprise, I found this time the email did not appear to be as antagonistic as the first reading and I became more receptive to what my ... [student] was trying to tell me in the email.

During a conversation with a client, Ariele had a sudden experience of waking up and a feeling of spaciousness in her interaction. She also perceived a feeling of trust developing between her client and herself.

Suddenly I felt that there was more space for me to hear what my client had to say. Instead of anticipating his comment, I was able to wait to hear what he would actually say. I noticed the tension in his face and shoulders and felt empathy for him and the difficulty he was experiencing at work ... I felt that he was beginning to trust me and was opening up more in our conversation.

Eva tried a different way of being in a meeting and found that her contributions were more meaningful and relevant.

I noticed my breathing and for a few minutes counted my in and outbreaths to become more present in the room. I only spoke when I had something really significant or additive to say. When the minutes of the meeting were circulated I could see that my few contributions had been well-received and noted by the chair.

Theme #5: Creativity, flow, and effectiveness

One of the most frequently mentioned themes in the participants' notes was a sense of returning to one's creative self and inventive flow in a moment of waking up. Mind, body, and spirit were all in alignment, and there was a freedom of expression and heightened sense of awareness and knowing just what to do next. Eva said, "I felt a deep sense of doing the right thing and of being in a flow." She gave a specific example of this occurring as she was giving a talk during a conference.

As I began to speak I felt connected with the audience, was able to speak primarily without my notes, and felt “in flow”. The words came, I ad-libbed and even told two jokes which were actually laughed at! . . . I shared from the heart and I could tell that the audience was with me.

Participants also described their willingness to “let go and let come” so that something new can emerge. The new comes into being by letting go of old intentions and refocusing attention on an emerging future identity and purposes. As Eliza said, “In the process of sharing these past experiences, we had been able to let go of them . . . It made for a feeling of great cohesion and becoming part of a larger whole.” Elizabeth described her experience this way. “I felt so peaceful. I am in the middle of facing my fears. And there I am, all of a sudden. I feel how calm it is inside the storm. I regained trust in everything. Whatever will be, I will be here and face that.”

The sense of flow and effectiveness also connected many participants with their sense of being part of the natural world. As Miriam commented,

Feeling my whole body and my feet against the ground. Walking on the path without hurry. Connectedness to the Nature. Feeling love and gratitude that I have allowed to live here, now, at this time of the humanity and Earth. Knowing that I am doing what I can to help the Earth this time. Sure knowledge inside of me that everything will go all right, that I am on the right path with my walking, doings and life.

Ariele described her experience of effectiveness and choice as she was able to see the bigger picture and not get caught up in personal concerns. “I was so grateful that I was awake to my feelings in the moment and was able to suspend actions until I could see the one that would actually help the situation instead of the one that would help me feel better about myself.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

We noticed that participants responded differently from one another to our initial guidelines for the study. For many of them, the mere invitation to be present and “wake up” was sufficient, but for others it was not. Most of those who completed the process immediately began reflecting on their experiences, but two opted instead to buy and read books on mindfulness, and some asked for more detailed instructions. For a few, the practice made painfully apparent the gap between how they wanted their lives to be and how they were. For example, although Rona saw the practice as something that could really only be done in nature or when not under stress, Cynthia, Ariele, Cassandra, Larry, Eva, Miriam, and Aaron noticed that stress and pressure could also lead to moments of waking up. Some in the latter group are long-time practitioners, but some are not, so that is not the differentiating factor. They also come from and work in different parts of the world, so it doesn’t seem (although of course the numbers are too small to generalize) that national culture plays a deciding role.

We do not know what makes for such differences in the way that people responded to the project. Since one intention of the action research is to see whether this may be a useful practice in many assorted settings and populations, particularly with people who are not interested in studying meditation or following a spiritual path per se, this topic should be explored in future studies.

In the Tibetan culture in which these practices were honed over the centuries, there is a well-known folk story (Lipmann, 1985) about a poisonous tree. Some people attempted to destroy it by cutting it down and tearing out the stump. Others thought it better to “kill the tree

in one blow by striking to its very core,” while a third group thought it wrong to destroy the tree, because its fruit could be used, if handled properly, to produce a great medicine. While they debated, a peacock arrived and ate the fruit with no ill effects. In Indian and Tibetan traditions, peacocks are considered to have their impressively colored plumage because of their ability to transform poison into food. This story is an allegory that suggests that there are varied types of people who need different types of awareness practice. Perhaps this waking up process works best with people who are naturally like peacocks and is less effective for those who need to destroy the tree: to remove the imputed sources of their suffering. We don’t yet know what the difference is among types of responses, but this would be interesting to investigate in the future.

It does seem that the process of noticing waking up moments only works for those willing to engage with it. The task, as approached in this project, required a certain willingness to face ambiguity and create one’s own process. Because the observations had to be sustained over several weeks, those who completed it had to be both comfortable with a certain amount of ambiguity and to apply some self-discipline, so this combination of underlying skills may be a factor. Of course, we only conducted our experiment with a small number of people. Finally, since all of the note-taking and interviews were done in English, even though this is an international project, perhaps we’ll discover different patterns if future iterations let people do their observations in their native language. It may be that although the participants came from ten countries on four continents, cultural differences are less among people who are well-enough versed in English to conduct such activities in English, whereas if there were a larger sample and they used any language they wished, there might perhaps be more culturally-rooted differences.

With regard to future research, some data analysis is already in process using this data. A study is being done of the second-person aspects of the project, as well as of the integration across 1st-2nd-3rd person perspectives, plus analysis as to whether the participants’ views changed over time. That study will analyze both the initial first-person reflections that were used for this paper, plus the interviews and focus group data of our original project. In addition, we are planning to write a separate paper on the implications in the data relating to sustainability, since this is such an important practice-based issue, with far-reaching implications for leadership development. It would also be interesting to compare and contrast this data with what is known about shifting awareness from absencing (Scharmer, 2009) or inattention to presencing or awareness, if there is usable qualitative data for such a project. It would be fascinating to compare and contrast this data with what is understood about stabilizing mindfulness from mindfulness research and from wisdom teachings, if comparable qualitative data could be identified.

With regard to practice implications, major growth has been taking place over the last ten years in including contemplative practice as part of education in many fields. This is shown by the creation of The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) in 2008 and its new (2013) peer-reviewed journal, *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* and the journal *Mindfulness*, launched in 2010. The University of Virginia launched a Contemplative Sciences Center in 2012 with a \$12-15 million grant, and intends to develop programs across all 11 schools of the university, making it “a model for the transformation of higher education,” according to its website (<http://uvacontemplation.org/content/contemplative-grounds>). In this context, we see potential for building on this project in a variety of settings. We continue to believe that the notion of focusing on the intention to wake up and be present holds promise for a secular practice that is easy to incorporate into an active life without extensive time set aside for trainings or involvement in a particular spiritual tradition. Since some of those who participated

did so at the invitation of one participant who decided to incorporate it into her teaching, we have reason to suspect that others can use the approach relatively easily in their teaching or consulting.

LOOKING FORWARD

Despite increasing discussion among consultants, scholars, and leaders of the potential outcomes of being more mindful or aware at work, as recently as 2013, mindfulness researchers have continued to state that empirical research in this area remains limited (Dane, 2013; Dane & Brummel, 2013; Hulsheger, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013). While Waddock and Steckler's (2009, 2013) intriguing study of "difference makers" that was presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting in 2009 showed the importance for successful entrepreneurs of "some combination of *practices* integrating *mind, body, spirit and heart*," few have followed up on this line of research. Having conducted this preliminary research, we feel that the cultivation of moment-to-moment awareness in the context of mindfulness may have the power to evoke transformational shifts.

Our research project was grounded in Chris Argyris' admonition to practitioners always to make research a part of practice, as well as his deep interest in the critical contribution of authentic behavior to organizational and management change. There are not many research projects on spiritual practice from the perspective of practitioners, as many spiritual practitioners who also do research try to keep these two arenas separate in their lives. In contrast to the notion that the two ways of thinking and seeing might confound one another, we wished to see how such a process might offer richer insight into the contributions of awareness practice in our own lives and those of others at work. The inner world is typically relegated to the margins of leadership discourse because of its ineffable nature. Although on the surface, this research appears to be about passing moments and internal awareness, we believe that this project begins to put in place an empirical foundation for affirming the value of awareness practice for leaders. Unless leaders sustain some ongoing awareness practice, they are not likely to have the steadiness and flexibility needed for addressing the "adaptive problems" (Heifetz, 1998) of our world. We regard moments of waking up as doorways to the kind of presence that Scharmer (2009) sees as essential for addressing the complex societal issues that cannot be resolved within existing institutions and structures.

COLLABORATORS / PARTICIPANTS

The following professors, executives, and consultants participated actively in this action research. This list shows how international and cross-cultural these first two stages of project have been: **Kathryn Goldman Schuyler**, Alliant International University (US); **Anne Kallio**, Lappeenranta University of Technology (Finland); **Maria Katsarou**, Our World Group (Greece); **Virpi Koskela**, Lappeenranta University of Technology (Finland); **Mark Kriger**, Norwegian Business School (Norway); **Elisabeth Schramm**, University of Freiburg Medical Center (Germany); **Jyotsna Sanzgiri**, Alliant International University (US); **Lynne Sedgmore** CBE, 157 Group of FE Colleges (United Kingdom); **Susan Skjei**, Naropa University (US); **Shankar Shankaran**, University of Technology, Sydney (Australia); **Emma Stenstrom**, Stockholm School of Economics (Sweden); **Gilbert Tan**, Singapore Management University (Singapore); **Lorna Cortes Urrutia**, Universidad Adolfo Ibanez (Chile); **Chulguen (Charlie) Yang**, Southern Connecticut State University (US). The remaining participants choose to remain anonymous.

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