Engineering Mindfulness: Translating Contemplative Practice from Silicon Valley

by

Katie Temple

A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Political Science

Dissertation Committee:

Gerald Berk, Chair

Anita Chari, Core Member

Joseph Lowndes, Core Member

Matthew Norton, Institutional Representative

University of Oregon

Fall 2024

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Katie Temple

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

Title: Engineering Mindfulness: Translating Contemplative Practice from Silicon Valley

In this dissertation project, I examine the multiple relational processes establishing modern mindfulness as a legitimate corporate service in the twenty-first century United States. Existing literatures explain the industry's formation through profit maximization yet growing evidence challenges the programs' economic benefits, leaving our understandings of this stabilization underdeveloped. Using news stories, popular and academic texts, and in-depth interviews with corporate mindfulness trainers, I trace the cultural history of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI)—an educational nonprofit founded at Google and the first corporate mindfulness program in the U.S. I argue that SIYLI's curriculum served as a critical site where Buddhist practice and corporate work were reconciled. Using formal lectures and partner exercises, SIYLI's courses stabilized Buddhist practices such as lovingkindness meditation into a coherent corporate service.

After the 2008 financial crisis, SIYLI expanded beyond Silicon Valley to sectors like manufacturing where it became a tool for employees to adapt to finance-driven restructurings. Detached from its Silicon Valley origins, where engineers used mindfulness to foster peer collaboration, mindfulness associated itself with the nexus corporation to help workforces metabolize precarious work conditions. On the ground, however, instructors encountered an "everyday politics" of workplace mindfulness where, in some settings, the practice reinforced corporate control, while in others, it offered the potential for more democratic and embodied forms

of contemplation. This project contributes to debates on the financialization of work in the contemporary United States

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Katie Temple

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Political Science, University of Oregon, December 2024.
M.S. Political Science, University of Oregon, June 2019.
B.S. Political Science, Southwestern University, 2017, Phi Beta Kappa.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Sole Instructor of Record **(**University of Oregon)
Feminist Political Theory (400 level, 25 students, Summer 2023; Winter 2024)
Women and Politics (300 level, 65 students, Spring 2023; Spring 2024)

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

2022 William C. Mitchell Graduate Summer Research Scholarship, Awarded by the Department of Political Science, University of Oregon. $4,000.

2021 Graduate Research Fellowship, "Making Work *Work,"* Awarded by the Wayne Morse Center, University of Oregon. $3,000.

2017 Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Department of Political Science, University of Oregon.

AWARDS AND HONORS

2021 Klonoski Teaching Award, Awarded by the Political Science Department, University of Oregon. $500.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2024 Tracing Mindfulness, Financialization, and Uncertainty," presented at the Western Political Science Association Conference, Vancouver B.C., April 2024.

PUBLICATIONS

"Gender," in *Encyclopedia of Critical Political Science*, Vol. 1, ed. Clyde W. Barrow (Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.), 2024.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Member, Political Science Graduate Council, University of Oregon, 2019-2021.
Chair, Political Science Graduate Research Workshop, University of Oregon, 2019-2021.
Union Steward, Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation (GTFF), 2018-2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful to the many who held me up during this process. First, thank you to Professor Gerald Berk for his mentorship and friendship, and for the many cherished conversations in his garden. I want to express gratitude to Anita Chari for her loyalty. Thank you to Joe Lowndes for his kindness and support.

Thank you to Olivia Atkinson, Alex Farrington, Mary Follo, Dustin Ellis, Jess Reanne, Parichehr Kazemi, Brett Scott, Sarah Stach, Selina Vega, and Esteban Woo Kee for making the unbearable bearable; to my mother and father Dee and Janell and my sister Alex; and to the Willamette National Forest.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

I. INTRODUCTION: CORPORATE MINDFULNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

After the 2007-09 financial crash, mindfulness became a mainstream employee offering in U.S. corporations. Companies like JP Morgan Chase and Salesforce provided mindfulness-based workshops and constructed meditation rooms in their headquarters.[1] By 2015, mindfulness had emerged a common employee benefit for well-paid professionals in high technology and finance. "I am being stalked by meditating evangelists," one *New York Times* journalist wrote in 2015. "They approach with the fervor of a football fan attacking a keg at a tailgate party."[2] The question is how? How were mindfulness and meditation made into such a dominant corporate service in the early twenty-first century? What does its formation reveal about rising corporate power and socioeconomic inequality in the contemporary United States?

At first glance, mindfulness and meditation appear at odds with corporate life. Rooted in modern Buddhist traditions, mindfulness involves the nonjudgmental awareness of thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations in the present moment. Since its entry into twenty-first-century mainstream U.S. culture, mindfulness and meditation have been adopted into secular domains including education, healthcare, government, and business. While often marketed to reduce stress, Buddhist social theories also conceive of mindful awareness as a spiritual or ethical practice. Mindful attention of the present moment enhances one's perceptions of the social world, including the deep interdependence between all living things.

Mindfulness was integrated into corporate life after the 2007-09 financial crash, a historical period of crisis and intensifying social inequalities, but the exact reasons for its appeal

[1] Burton and Effinger, "To Make A Killing on Wall Street, Start Meditating"; Kim, "Salesforce Put A Meditation Room on Every Floor of Its New Tower Because of Buddhist Monks"; Kelly, "JP Morgan Is Channeling Its Inner Google With an Eco-Friendly New Headquarters Offering Yoga and Meditation Spaces."
[2] Grant, "Can We End the Meditation Madness?"

are not immediately clear. Existing literatures attribute its popularity among executives, investors, and entrepreneurs to its cost-saving benefits. Neoliberal accounts in organizational studies (as well as its corporate advocates) suggest that mindfulness increases productivity and reduces indirect organizational costs like healthcare expenses.[3] Cultural critiques, meanwhile, emerged in popular media around 2013 condemning the corporate co-optation of mindfulness for productivity and profit.[4] Yet research has begun questioning the economic benefits of mindfulness programs altogether. Mindfulness programs are reportedly costly, inefficient, and make no impact on organizational performance,[5] making their widespread popularity not entirely self-evident.

Nevertheless, in the period following the global financial crisis, mindfulness and meditation emerged as an employee wellness perk, a leadership philosophy, and trading strategy. A cottage industry of corporate mindfulness trainers emerged who catered to corporate clients like General Mills, Ford, and Goldman Sachs. Media coverage from outlets like *Harvard Business Review,* the *New York Times*, and *Bloomberg* was largely positive and uncritical. Routledge published its first *Companion to Mindfulness at Work* [6] in 2021, firmly establishing its position in the corporate mainstream. How? How were Buddhist practice transformed into coherent corporate services within the U.S. corporation? What kinds of power dynamics did these practices brush up against? And what does their wholesale adoption teach us about recent transformations in U.S. political economy?

---

[3] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*; Dhiman, *The Routledge Companion to Mindfulness at Work.*
[4] Purser and Loy, "Beyond McMindfulness."
[5] Goyal et al., "Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis"; Hafenbrack and Vohs, "Mindfulness Meditation Impairs Task Motivation but Not Performance"; Berinato, "Mindfulness Is Demotivating."
[6] Dhiman, *The Routledge Companion to Mindfulness at Work.*

Political and Social Theories of Modern Mindfulness

Despite the extensive research on mindfulness in modern organizational life, including in religious studies, critical social theory, and sociology, the historical formation of the corporate mindfulness industry remains underexplored. Below, I synthesize several contributions from existing literature including mindfulness as a medical practice as well as an ideological formation. Despite this work, as I demonstrate, the exact processes stabilizing Buddhism with financial capitalism remain underexamined.

Buddhism's Adaptation to Modernity

Research in religious studies has explored the historical interaction between Buddhism and modernity in the previous 150 years. Buddhism, a classical religion beginning in contemporary India around the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E., spread outside Asia into Western countries through travelers and missionaries in the 1800s.[7] According to religious scholar David McMahan, in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism,* religious traditions like Buddhism adapted to new contexts based on what "resonated" with dominant social practices of the time.[8] Practices associated with what McMahan calls "Buddhist modernism," the dominant contemporary form of Buddhism, were shaped by European Enlightenment values like the prioritization of individual authority, empirical observation, and freedom of thought.[9] McMahan suggests that features commonly associated with modern mindfulness, such as the focus on intuition, are more indicative of Western intellectual culture than classical Buddhism. These hybrid forms were most apparent in the U.S. during the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 70s. Eastern

[7] Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 56.
[8] McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 15.
[9] McMahan, 18.

spiritualities like Zen Buddhism merged with the artistic cultures of San Francisco and New York City.[10]

In the twenty-first century, mindfulness and meditation emerged as secular stress reduction techniques. Literature on mindfulness by Asian and American Buddhist teachers like Thich Nhat Hanh and Jack Kornfield as well as the rise of mindfulness apps like Calm and Headspace made mindfulness into a formidable consumer market.[11] Within dominant discourses, religious studies scholar Jeff Wilson notes that classical Buddhist concepts like karma or nirvana were "decontextualized" from their original religious, cultural, and historical contexts.[12] This detachment took place through the medicalization of mindfulness by figures like Jon Kabat-Zinn. Kabat-Zinn, professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, developed his mindfulness-based stress reduction program (MBSR) in 1979. This eight-week MBSR course uses secularized practices like body scans, breath work, and yoga postures to improve stress and chronic pain.[13] Medicalized models of mindfulness were tailored for secular, non-Buddhists, which helped it gain entryway into like hospitals, clinics, and corporations.

This popularity was the result of "the contemplatives,"[14] a group of elite scientists, educators, and spiritual practitioners that integrated contemplative practices into broader U.S. society since the 1970s. In *The Mindful Elite*, sociologist Jaime Kucinskas traces the contemplative movement to dialogues between Tibetan Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama and the Mind and Life Institute, a nonprofit founded by Francisco Varela in the late 1980s.[15] Rooted in

---

[10] Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 62.
[11] Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*, 147–48.
[12] Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*.
[13] Van Dam et al., "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," 45.
[14] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*.
[15] Van Dam et al., "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," 37.

the modern Buddhist tradition, the contemplative movement used practices like mindfulness, body scans, tai chi, yoga, and numerous types of meditation included transcendental, breathing, and compassion[16] for personal and social benefit. As with other spiritualized forms of mindfulness, the underlying assumption was that increasing awareness of one's thoughts as well as of life's interconnectedness positively shaped a person's development.

Kabat-Zinn, as well as other "institutional entrepreneurs,"[17] as described by Kucinskas, institutionalized these practices across the U.S. using "consensus-based tactics." With data-driven evidence, this professional movement worked within the status quo and assimilated into dominant institutions. Religiously focused literatures like Kucinskas's contribute to our understandings of mindfulness's adaptation into modern, institutional life. However, they provide few tools to make sense of these interactions in the context of the financial sector's dominance in the U.S. In *The Mindful Elite*, for instance, Kucinskas's account of Google's Search Inside Yourself mindfulness program[18] examines connections to the wider secular contemplative movement but without an in-depth analysis of how U.S. corporate and financial dominance influenced the practice.

Critical Theories of Mindfulness

As Buddhism gained visibility in the United States, cultural critiques analyzed mindfulness in the context of neoliberal domination. In 2001, five years after *Time Magazine*'s feature "Buddhism in America,"[19] philosopher Slavoj Žižek predicted "Western Buddhism's"

[16] Bruce et al., "Contemplative Practices: A Strategy to Improve Health and Reduce Disparities."
[17] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*.
[18] Kucinskas, 59–60.
[19] Van Biema, "Buddhism in America."

rise as the "hegemonic ideology of global capitalism."[20] Western forms of meditation, he argued, "'let oneself go,' drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference toward the mad dance of accelerated process."[21] Once mindfulness programs like Google's had matured, a so-called "mindfulness backlash"[22] emerged in popular media outlets. In 2013, scholars Ronald Purser and David Loy published an article titled "Beyond McMindfulness"[23] in *The Huffington Post* critiquing its workplace usage. "Savvy business consultants," they argued, had stripped Buddhism of its "original liberative and transformative purpose,"[24] reducing it to a secular practice curated for corporate needs.

Critical scholarship on employer-sponsored mindfulness continued, conceptualizing capitalism as a discursive or cultural logic operating beneath conscious awareness. Ronald Purser's *McMindfulness*[25] critiqued workplace mindfulness programs for optimizing workers' productivity rather than spiritual development. The courses produced a "mindful subject" with "eyes closed" who's "blissfully detached from the outside world"[26] while also "willfully productive and responsible for their own self-care."[27] Drawing from Foucault's concept of biopower, Zack Walsh detailed the cultivation of neoliberal subjectivity through mindfulness's "internal conditioning processes."[28] In these contexts mindfulness promoted a form of neoliberal individualism: by instructing workers to meditate and focus "on the present moment," social problems like stagnant wages were internalized as personal responsibilities. This was tied to

[20] Zizek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism."
[21] Zizek.
[22] North, "The Mindfulness Backlash"; Rocha, "The Dark Knight of the Soul."
[23] Purser and Loy, "Beyond McMindfulness."
[24] Purser and Loy.
[25] Purser, *McMindfulness*.
[26] Purser, 22.
[27] Purser, Forbes, and Burke, "Preface," xiii.
[28] Walsh, "Mindfulness Under Neoliberal Governmentality: Critiquing the Operation of Biopower in Corporate Mindfulness and Constructing Queer Alternatives."

neoliberal changes in U.S. political economy like deregulation and reductions in social safety nets. Workplace wellness programs, though marketed as "win-win"[29] solutions for both employees and employers, ultimately reinforced the existing hierarchies between workers and owners. These wellness narratives are suspect, as Marx's theory of class conflict suggests, because the interests of capital and labor are fundamentally irreconcilable.

Despite these insights, structuralist approaches like Purser's attribute corporate mindfulness's formation to the core logics of profit maximization. These accounts do reveal how mindfulness sediments existing relations between capital and labor, but studies have already challenged narratives about mindfulness's positive return on investment. By focusing on mindfulness as a tool of thought control, these accounts also dismiss workers' epistemic authority. Indeed, related accounts describe corporate mindfulness as a form of "delusion,"[30] an "ideological cloak,"[31] an "ideological lubricant,"[32] or form of "thought control"[33] that reinforced corporate interests instead of personal liberation. Even when workplace mindfulness generated empowerment in these literatures, such as quitting or demanding better working conditions,[34] they were framed as the exception rather than the rule.

[29] Nopper and Zelickson, *Wellness Capitalism: Employee Health, the Benefits Maze, and Worker Control*.
[30] Driver, "From Empty Speech to Full Speech? Reconceptualizing Spirituality in Organizations Based on Psychoanalytically-Grounded Understanding of the Self."
[31] Kamoche and Pinnington, "Managing People 'Spiritually': A Bourdieusian Critique."
[32] Drougge, "Notes Toward A Coming Backlash: Mindfulness as an Opiate of the Middle Classes."
[33] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*.
[34] Driver, "From Empty Speech to Full Speech? Reconceptualizing Spirituality in Organizations Based on Psychoanalytically-Grounded Understanding of the Self"; Islam, Holm, and Karjalainen, "Sign of the Times: Workplace Mindfulness as an Empty Signifier"; Cortois, "Expressive Individualism in the New Spirit of Capitalism: Mindfulness and Outdoor Management Development."

Capitalism and Well-Being

Sociological literature draws more attention to the social processes producing the corporate mindfulness industry. This included work on authenticity and its relation to economic production but tended to narrowly focus on the commodified product itself. In their seminal work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,[35] French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello build on Max Weber's premise from *The Protestant Ethic* that capitalist economic systems, inherently absurd, require a justificatory ideology —a "spirit"—to keep people participating in the capital accumulation process. For example, their analysis of French management texts revealed "network capitalism," the dominant spirit in the 1990s, repurposed the aesthetics of 1960s radical politics, such as freedom of thought and egalitarianism. These features emerged through organizational culture including flat management hierarchies and a focus on personal "authenticity" via wellness programs or employee resource groups.

Boltanski and Chiapello conceive of the relation between social and economic domains with more fluidity, drawing attention to social critique and other forms of social agency that influence the capital accumulation process. Aspects of their analysis, as well, speak to mindfulness's proliferation in Silicon Valley but they omit discussion about *how* capital accumulation commodifies which authentic practices. In their discussion of the "commodification of the authentic," they illustrate how corporate managers "penetrate[d] domains (tourism, cultural activities, personal services, leisure, etc.) which had hitherto remained comparatively external to mass commodity circulation"[36] but the local level conditions of this commodification are neglected.

[35] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.
[36] Boltanski and Chiapello, 446–47.

Contemporary social research has continued to explore the cultural shifts between capitalism and authentic life via wellness and self-care. In her chapter "The Madness of Mindfulness" from *Natural Causes,*[37] journalist Barbara Ehrenreich draws criticism against workplace mindfulness and its origins in Silicon Valley. She describes such programs like Google's Search Inside Yourself as "Buddhism sliced up, commodified, and drained of all reference to the transcendent" for mental fitness.[38] By drawing parallels between mindfulness and other "biohacking" movements like dietary supplements, Ehrenreich overlooks the interactions making mindfulness legible in Silicon Valley in the first place.

In *The Happiness Industry*, British sociologist William Davies, likewise, examines the wellness consulting circuit as part of the broader "happiness industry." Drawing from the utilitarian philosophical tradition, he analyzes the measurement of positive affects like "happiness" created by modern governments and research bodies. Davies's historical account of modern happiness sciences is illuminating but, like other criticisms, reverts to framing workplace mindfulness programs as an instance of capitalism's core logics scaled down. The programs are understood as micro-level replications of capitalism's broader principles. For instance, Davies notes the wellness circuit, a "cocktail of neuroscientific rumours and Buddhist meditation practices" promotes "one ideal form of human existence: hardworking, happy, healthy, and, above all, rich."[39] Such programs help "expand corporate rationality further into everyday life" so "simply going for a walk can be viewed as a calculated act of productivity management."[40]

[37] Ehrenreich, *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live*.
[38] Ehrenreich.
[39] Davies, *The Happiness Industry*, 77.
[40] Davies, 78.

Davies's account focuses on mindfulness as an instrument for profit maximization, overlooking the other contextual factors in its adoption.

Ultimately, these literatures in religious studies, critical theory, and sociology contribute to our understanding of corporate mindfulness as an institutional project through "entrepreneurs" like Jon Kabat-Zinn, as well as the social and political hierarchies embedded in workplace wellness. Still left unexamined, however, are methods, ideas, and practices through which Buddhist practice was made into a coherent corporate service after the 2007-09 financial crash. The existing focus on profit maximization alone cannot explain its widespread capture.

Becoming Corporate

This dissertation project examines the multiple, relational processes that stabilized Buddhism inside U.S. corporate life in the twenty-first century. I will argue that corporate mindfulness programs were constructed and legitimized in Silicon Valley in part through the efforts of Google software engineer Chade-Meng Tan. Tan's internal mindfulness courses at Google evolved into a powerful educational nonprofit called the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI) in 2012.

I argue that SIYLI served as a powerful site of reconciliation for Buddhism and corporate practice. The curriculum it created was supported by neuroscientists who used brain scanning technologies throughout the 2000s to study meditation. Their work reconstructed the psyche as a complex circuitry of nerve cells that meditation optimized. These constructs helped corporate mindfulness first develop in Google's local high tech startup culture in the early 2000s, where corporate mindfulness was introduced to enhance creative work among software engineers within Silicon Valley's flat organizational forms.

Following the 2007-09 crash, however, SIYLI expanded beyond Silicon Valley to sectors like investment banking, manufacturing, and retail. Here, mindfulness courses shifted focus: no longer purposed for high tech's creative demands, it emerged as a market-based technique for employees to cope with precarious working conditions.

SIYLI-certified trainers were pivotal to diffusing Tan's curriculum into a wide range of corporate clients. Finally, through in-depth interviews with SIYLI's corporate mindfulness instructors, I demonstrate how these trainers adapted, negotiated, and at times contested the standardized curriculum, identifying moments for mindfulness practice to open up democratic possibilities among participants.

Why study the corporate elite? What makes Google engineers' interest in mindfulness worthy of analysis? Examining workplace mindfulness from an anthropological perspective offers a window into understanding evolving corporate forms and work processes in the U.S. As I will argue, corporate mindfulness programs were embedded within the broader shift toward shareholder capitalism, the dominant economic model in the U.S. since the 1980s. This new normative theory of the form prioritized maximizing shareholder value for investors, completely rearranging work organization.

Shareholder capitalism is closely related with the rise of finance in the late twentieth century. This took place in the 1970s and 80s, according to Greta Krippner, as U.S. regulators eased federal restrictions, making financial investments the dominant source of corporate activity in the U.S.[41] Cultural anthropologist Karen Ho defines as these processes of financialization as the growing translation of financial modes of understanding into other social dimensions like politics, the environment, education, work, and retirement; all of which form in contingent and

[41] Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance*.

uneven ways.[42] These conversion processes have shaped day to day life—like retirement security—in taken-for-granted ways. For example, retirement security, once sponsored in-house by employers, shifted to individual 401(k) plans, a finance-based form of individual savings, in the 1980s and 90s.[43] Due to this financialization, individual 401(k)s were put into serious peril during the financial crash and suffered substantial losses.[44] This is part of a broader tension between prioritizing financial dominance over workers' material security in the contemporary U.S. Today, the U.S. economy is immersed in these processes of financialization that corporate mindfulness emerged within.

The shift to shareholder capitalism contributed to historic levels of socioeconomic inequality in the United States.[45] In this context, studying corporate mindfulness as a cultural practice offers insight into growing financial dominance and its reconfiguration of work processes in the U.S. As shareholder capitalism established dominance, so too did the "nexus corporation," a corporate form identified by U.S. business historian Gerald Davis.[46] Unlike traditional corporations, which offered stable, long-term employment and comprehensive benefits, the nexus corporation conceived of the firm as a "nexus" of at-will employment contracts. In this model, corporate activities are increasingly attuned to fluctuations in financial markets. Corporations were restructured through mergers, acquisitions, downsizings, and layoffs, all driven by share price valuation. Long-term employment was replaced with short-term, temporary work. In industries like service and retail, unpredictable scheduling and sudden layoffs grew more common, leaving workers increasingly insecure about their futures.

---

[42] Ho, "Anthropology of Finance," 171.
[43] Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*, 133.
[44] Munnell, "The Financial Crisis and Restoring Retirement Security."
[45] Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*; Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*.
[46] Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*.

Corporate mindfulness reached its height in 2015 coinciding with this prolonged drop off in job security. Situated in these historical shifts—shareholder capitalism and the reorganization of work through the nexus corporation—corporate mindfulness becomes more than a flash-in-the-pan wellness technique. It serves as a cultural marker of finance's growing influence over workers' power and autonomy.

Mindfulness Programs as an Ongoing Process

How was modern mindfulness, a spiritual contemplative practice, reworked into a sellable corporate service in the 2010s? Existing literatures tend to focus on narratives of profit maximization for explanation, analyzing mindfulness services as a commodified product instead of the associations and processes merging them. To address this gap, I draw on a variety of theoretical perspectives including Jane Bennett's work on process philosophy as well as insights from constructivist sociology. From this, I build a cultural anthropological approach to study corporate mindfulness as a practice of reconciliation between the heterogeneous life practices of modern Buddhism and financialization.

Jane Bennett articulates a process-oriented philosophy in her work *Influx and Efflux* (2020).[47] Drawing from the new materialist tradition, Bennett uses Walt Whitman's writings to explore democratic practice and culture. Drawing from Whitman, she examines how bodily postures and configurations can generate moods conducive to democratic practice.[48] Her work breaks down conventional boundaries between body and mind and, instead, illustrates their borders as porous with fluid movement between them.

[47] Bennett, *Influx & Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman*.
[48] Bennett, 16.

Bennett's concepts of process apply to the larger social world, where movement or action occur beyond the typical bounds of human-centered agency. She describes the social world "from within an ongoing process," using what she calls "middle-voice verbs"[49] found in Whitman's work. These verbs represent actions "undertaken *within* a field of activities, rather than decisions of subjects who enter a field either to do something (active voice) or to be acted upon (the passive voice)."[50] This notion of agencies, as neither fully controlled by agents nor entirely passive, directed me away from normative judgments about who or what controlled corporate mindfulness. Instead, I searched for instances of reconciliation in its everyday use where different modalities fused into new forms.

Constructivist sociologists Bruno Latour and Michel Callon and their approach to science and materiality, as well, informed my theoretical orientation. My focus on Buddhism and neuroscience, for instance, led me to examine mundane material technologies like electroencephalogram (EEG) sensors used by neuroscientists to document Tibetan monks' brain wave patterns in 2002. As I demonstrate below, science, technology, and economic production are more actively constructed than static essences. Informed by these processual accounts of social reality, this project defines corporate mindfulness as practices that are contested and constantly in-the-making through multiple relational processes.

Studying corporate mindfulness at the local level posed multiple challenges. Firms with high-profile mindfulness programs, such as Goldman Sachs or Meta, showed no interest in my work as a social researcher. Unsurprisingly, these firms were not willing to give me access to private internal memos, observe meetings, or fraternize with their workers. Concerns over

[49] Bennett, xix.
[50] Bennett, 112.

proprietary information, combined with many corporate professionals' busy schedules, left most managers and human resources departments unwilling to participate. This common dynamic in elite settings involved what cultural anthropologist Hugh Gusterson terms "studying up."[51] In such unwelcome settings, where gaining access proves difficult, gathering data takes place through "polymorphous engagement" from "a disparate array of sources" including "formal interviews" as well as "extensive reading of newspapers and official documents" or "careful attention to pop culture" to "even the balance of power" when direct access was not feasible.[52]

My research took me to Silicon Valley, the birthplace of corporate mindfulness programs where they took root within Google's information technology culture. Berkeley and the broader Bay Area, less than fifty miles north of Silicon Valley, have been central to modern Buddhism's growth in the U.S. since the 1960s. The first Zen Center in the U.S., the San Francisco Zen Center, was founded there by Shunryū Suzuki,[53] where Apple co-founder Steve Jobs studied throughout the 1970s.[54] Central California's countercultural elements would make the region's future fusion with mindfulness make intuitive sense.

A corporate mindfulness program originating at Google called the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute became the primary focal point of my research study. SIYLI (pronounced like "silly") was founded by software engineer Chade-Meng Tan in the late 2000s during Google's meteoric rise shortly after its IPO in 2004. SIYLI was an ideal case study for several reasons: first, SIYLI is, without a doubt, the largest workplace mindfulness supplier in the United States. Its collaborators and administrators essentially created the industry's template.

---

[51] Gusterson, "Studying Up Revisited."
[52] Gusterson, 116.
[53] Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 70.
[54] Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*, 74.

Smaller certification bodies, like Jon Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program, exist but none were implemented in the corporate world quite like SIYLI's.

Second, SIYLI's origins at Google have granted it an immense cultural power. Its board members have been well-connected and high-profile. Its current C.E.O., Rich Fernandez, held positions at major corporations like eBay, JP Morgan Chase, and Bank of America. Its Silicon Valley origins are also a significant part of SIYLI's self-identity. Google and SIYLI both use the same brand aesthetic of minimalist white, blue, red, green, and yellow graphics. Thanks to these connections, SIYLI has a large digital footprint including a wealth of publicly available documents, curriculums, and information about their trainers, positioning it as a rich site for research.

Finally, SIYLI's significance comes from its work as an educational project. Once spun off from Google in 2012, SIYLI developed a teacher certification program. After being certified, trainers received access to SIYLI's proprietary materials and taught Tan's formal curriculum nationwide. This teacher training model diffused Tan's courses to a broad range of corporate clients after the financial crash including CapitalOne, Comcast, Deloitte, Procter & Gamble, Salesforce, Toyota, and more.

To gather data, I consulted a wide range of cultural texts and media sources spanning from 2000 to 2024 to make sense of SIYLI's formation. Chade-Meng Tan's 2012 book *Search Inside Yourself*, which outlines the program's basic structure, as well as SIYLI C.E.O. Marc Lesser's *Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader,* and other works by SIYLI collaborators like Richard Davidson, Mirabai Bush, and Daniel Goleman offered windows into the construction process.

Luckily, Tan's program was widely popular and covered by the media. Media coverage from sources like the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Time Magazine*, and *Tricycle* helped make sense of the larger social understandings of meditation and mindfulness during corporate implementation. Literature on Google's company culture, like *Planet Google*,[55] *In the Plex*,[56] and *How Google Works*,[57] provided important insight into SIYLI's developmental culture. Research on the neuroscience of mindfulness and meditation was consulted as well. A substantial body of literature, including magazine articles, interviews, conferences, and published anthropologies, exists on contemplative neuroscience, produced through organizations like the Mind and Life Institute.

In 2022, SIYLI launched "SIY Global," a public benefit corporation to continue their professional education work on corporate mindfulness. The Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute was redesigned for community-based projects with civil workers, mental health professionals, nonprofits, educators, and more.[58] Despite this restructuring, for the sake of continuity I use Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute or "SIYLI" in my empirical narrative to refer to all the organization's for-profit work.

My understanding of SIYLI was supplemented by in-depth interviews with their instructors. They were important agents for how Tan's courses were enacted on-the-ground. I conducted interviews with several through 2022 to record their direct experiences teaching in corporate workplaces. SIYLI's large online presence gave me access to the names and contact information of SIYLI instructors based in the United States, focusing on instructors with

[55] Stross, *Planet Google*.
[56] Levy, *In The Plex*.
[57] Schmidt and Rosenberg, *How Google Works*.
[58] SIY Global, "Announcing SIY Global."

distinctly corporate backgrounds as opposed to backgrounds in education or psychology. This cold-emailing approach was surprisingly successful. Interviews were conducted via Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic, each lasting between forty-five minutes to an hour. Research questions focused on their perceptions and experiences teaching in corporate spaces. Zoom video conferencing limited my observation of research subjects' non-verbal cues like body language but nevertheless allowed for in-depth conversations with corporate mindfulness instructors across the U.S.

Most SIYLI instructors I interviewed were white, affluent, and well-educated, with backgrounds in finance, banking, software engineering, and psychology. Typically, they were self-employed teaching SIYLI's curriculum as corporate consultants while others held administrative positions in SIYLI itself. Most showed considerable social and emotional intelligence in our brief interviews, smiling and using my first name frequently in conversation more than a general sample of the corporate world would.

Instructors were very enthusiastic to speak with me. Many assumed I shared the same goal of promoting contemplative practice wholesale within dominant institutions despite explaining my perspective as a detached social researcher more interested in contemporary U.S. work culture. Nevertheless, my status as a researcher was valuable in their eyes and helped build rapport. Several informants even requested a digital recording of our interview for their own various projects. Contacts snowballed as SIYLI instructors recruited other subjects for me on their informal social media pages like Facebook. Interviews gave me valuable data on the local cultures of SIYLI instructors and the curriculum design process while also informing my larger conceptualization of mindfulness as constantly in-the-making.

Rather than evaluating how mindfulness "should've" been practiced, I sought to understand what mindfulness accomplished for these instructors, including the meanings they invested into their professional work. Their personal experiences helped translate abstract claims about mindfulness into how these practices were practically used in their day to day lives. Drawing on Lee Ann Fujii's relational interviewing techniques,[59] I approached their various perspectives in their fullness to avoid reductionist interpretations. My analysis was based interpretive research methods, using instructors' own experiences as the foundation for my analysis.[60] With participants' consent, all interviewed were recorded and fully transcribed. Identifying information was removed and names changed to pseudonyms.

Engineering Mindfulness

This dissertation project situates corporate mindfulness within a process-oriented framework, drawing from Jane Bennett's work, to explore how mindfulness emerged as a marketable service in Silicon Valley and beyond. Combining in-depth interviews with SIYLI instructors with analysis of cultural documents allowed for a deeper understanding of how mindfulness was adopted, enacted, and contested in corporate environments.

The rest of this project continues as follows, drawing attention to numerous processes in the industry's creation: in Chapter One, I argue that developments in the field of meditative neuroscience were key to building corporate mindfulness's legitimacy. Scientists like Richard Davidson conceptualized the brain as a plastic circuitry built with neurons that could be optimized through meditation practice. I analyze several peer-reviewed scientific studies from

[59] Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research*.
[60] Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*; Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research*.

2000 to 2020 by scientists later involved in creating SIYLI's first formal curriculum. There, the neuroscience of meditation helped reconcile Buddhist meditation in corporate spaces. Using neuroscience and software engineering principles, SIYLI's curriculum stabilized Buddhist practices like lovingkindness into a trainable corporate curriculum.

Chapter Two examines corporate mindfulness's the multiple forms corporate mindfulness took and the different organizational forms it associated with. Here, I argue that mindfulness initially functioned for Silicon Valley's unique high tech culture that prioritized flat management and teams-based innovation. After the financial crash, however, SIYLI's courses spread outside of Silicon Valley and into industries like manufacturing and investment banking. There, financial market-based understandings of mindfulness proliferated in the nexus corporation as a reaction to corporate restructurings like layoffs.

In Chapter Three I examine the relational processes taking place at the level of SIYLI's curriculum between instructors and participants. Drawing from political theories of mindfulness and perception and one-on-one interview data collected from workplace mindfulness instructors, I make the argument that SIYLI's trainers played a mediating role for mindfulness courses on-the-ground, encountering tensions between the standardized course and local classroom conditions. Finally, in the Conclusion, I remark on the political implications of corporate mindfulness, including the shift towards financial market-dominated forms of work organization. I also examine areas for future research, including work on contemplative practice in alternative forms of economic organizations like worker cooperatives, which potentially offers a more democratic application of workplace mindfulness than possible within shareholder capitalism.

II. CHAPTER ONE: BUILDING THE NEUROSCIENCE OF MEDITATION

Many discussions of mindfulness focus on its medicalization in U.S. culture. Scholars like Jeff Wilson, for example, note how medical technologies such as fMRI contributed to dominant narratives about its effectiveness. Buddhism grew "more enmeshed in medical, psychological, and scientific frameworks" in the twentieth century, according to Wilson, "with correspondingly less stress on supernatural, transcendent, or nirvanic elements."[61] Through this process of secularization, as C. G. Brown notes, dominant discourses increasingly made binary distinctions between mindfulness as a "scientific technology" and as a "religious ritual."[62] Conceptualizing Buddhism and scientific modalities as inherently closed off from each other, however, runs the risk of oversimplifying the work done making them stable.

In this chapter, I argue that the cultural work of meditative neuroscience constructed corporate mindfulness's legitimacy in the early 2010s. Situated in their local contemplative cultures, neuroscientists used laboratory research to construct the psyche as a plastic circuit of neurons optimized through meditation. Neuroscience research played a critical role in the development of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI), the first formalized corporate mindfulness program. There, SIYLI's courses reconciled Buddhist practices like lovingkindness with corporate life. Its curriculum mediated between Buddhism, neuroscience, and software engineering principles drawn from Tan's background at Google, making mindfulness into a coherent corporate service in 2012.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first, I examine how Buddhist modes of consciousness were translated into scientific modalities through the field of meditative

[61] Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*, 102.
[62] Brown, "Can 'Secular' Mindfulness Be Separated from Religion?," 77.

neuroscience. This field, emerging in the early 2000s, used brain scanning machines like fMRI and EEG to measure the effects of meditation on the brain's neurophysiology. Using constructivist sociological theories, I analyze peer reviewed and popular publications in this field between 2000 and 2015 by scientists in close relation with SIYLI years later. Their contributions represented the brain as a collection of functional parts like a circuit board, turning meditation into a form of mental training to optimize the mind.

In the second section, I analyze the use of Buddhist principles and practices in SIYLI's standard corporate curriculum. Using SIYLI's promotional materials, interview data, and founder Chade-Meng Tan's 2012 book, I demonstrate how SIYLI's formation was a site of reconciliation, rendering mindfulness commensurate with economic activity.

The Meditative Neurosciences

A formative process for the corporate mindfulness industry was the development of meditative neuroscience, a field that used brain scanning technologies to study meditation as well as contemplative principles like compassion and self-awareness. Two interrelated principles from this field would help build SIYLI's curriculum: neuroplasticity and the notion of neural circuitries. These insights were not passively discovered by researchers but, rather, created through vast interpretation processes between researchers, meditation practice, contemplative culture, and scientific technology.

The Emergence of Meditative Neuroscience

Buddhism has collided with medical technology throughout the modern period. These interactions date back to the nineteenth century, culminating today in a large body of literature

synthesizing Buddhism and modern science.[63] Throughout the 2000s, a group of contemplative neuroscientists, including Jon Kabat-Zinn, Daniel Goleman, and Richard Davidson, began configuring radioimaging to observe and record meditation's effects on the brain. These investments were crucial to making mindfulness culturally acceptable in social sites like Google. A primary institution responsible for this synthesis was the Mind and Life Institute, a contemplative sciences nonprofit organization co-founded by the Dalai Lama and Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela in 1987.[64] The Mind and Life Institute merged contemplative wisdom with research, archival work, and think tanks. His Holiness the Fourteenth Dala Lama's engagement with the scientific community paved the way for more serious dialogues between Buddhism and contemporary neuroscience.[65] The Dalai Lama participated in academic conferences and research studies, famously noting in 2005 that "if scientific analysis were conclusively to demonstrate certain claims in Buddhism to be false, then we must accept the findings of science and abandon those claims."[66] His enthusiastic stance towards scientific inquiry helped translate Buddhist contemplation into biomedical and psychological frameworks.

Contemplative scientists continued integrating meditation into medical contexts. In the late 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, developed his mindfulness-based stress reduction technique (MBSR). This eight-week program was designed to use breath work, yoga postures, and meditation to treat stress and

[63] Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*; Wilson, *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*; Davidson and Harrington, *Visions of Compassion*; Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*.
[64] Van Dam et al., "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," 37.
[65] Johnson, "Dalai Lama Donates to Center in Wisconsin"; Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*.
[66] Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom*.

chronic illness.[67] While inspired by works of Buddhist monks like Thich Nhat Hanh, Kabat-Zinn's approach was grounded in biomedical frameworks and designed for non-Buddhists in secular settings.[68] Kabat-Zinn's work, well-renowned, was associated with the rise of mindfulness in the twenty-first century, where it remains a common part of secular life. According to a 2022 study from the U.S. National Institutes of Health, the percentage of U.S. adults who meditated doubled from 7.5% in 2002 to overly 17%.[69]

The contemplative sciences movement, through the work of figures like Kabat-Zinn and the Mind and Life Institute, set the groundwork for meditative neuroscience to emerge in the 2000s. Brain scanning technologies like electroencephalography (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) were adapted to document the effects of contemplative practice on the brain's neurophysiology. Much like dominant neuroscientific theories of the time, this scientific subculture conceived of the brain as a collection of material, functional components. Human experience was generated through activity in neurological structures like the amygdala and cerebral cortex, electrical signals from neuron synapses, the flow of arterial blood, and the release of neurotransmitters. The brain functioned like a circuit board, according to this conception, and human consciousness was clearly documented through radioimaging.

Neuroplasticity

Neuroimaging technologies like EEG and fMRI made meditation a favorite object of scientific study. Electroencephalography (EEG), first developed in the 1930s, captured electrical

[67] Van Dam et al., "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation," 45.
[68] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*, 33.
[69] National Institutes of Health, "Meditation and Mindfulness: Effectiveness and Safety."

brain waves produced from the firings of billions of neurons. Though used throughout the twentieth century, EEG analysis was computerized in the 1990s around the same time functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) was developed. fMRI detected changes in iron in the brain's blood flow,[70] giving researchers a "spatial resolution"[71] denoting where in the brain these changes occurred. Together, these scanning technologies helped scientists capture the notion of "neuroplasticity," the brain's capacity to change over time through practice and experience.

Richard Davidson, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, played a key role translating meditation into a scientifically legible practice. Born in New York, Davidson received his formal psychology training at Harvard University. He was interested in the contemplative tradition as a graduate student but was dissuaded by peers and superiors from researching it seriously, as it was still on the fringes of Western psychology in the 1970s.[72] In 1992, Richard Davidson first met the Dalai Lama, later describing the meeting as a "coming out of the closet" moment of his career.[73] The Buddhist leader told him to study positive qualities of the mind like kindness or love that modern Western psychology typically neglected.[74] Davidson, a formative member of the contemplative sciences movement by the 1990s, with his clinical psychology training, studied those positive affects stimulated by Buddhist practice.

The first high-profile neuroscientific study on meditation happened in 2002. Davidson and the Dalai Lama collaborated to study meditation using EEG technology. Several Tibetan monks were recruited from Nepal to travel to Davidson's lab in the U.S. They were fit with EEG skullcaps with 256 electrodes to record their brain's electric currents while practicing a

---

[70] Dorjee, *Neuroscience and Psychology of Meditation in Everyday Life*, 29.
[71] Dorjee, 29.
[72] Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*, 25.
[73] Harris, "Neuroscientist Richie Davidson Says Dalai Lama Gave Him 'a Total Wake-Up Call' That Changed His Research Forever."
[74] *Richie Davidson on Meeting the Dalai Lama*.

meditation known as lovingkindness.[75] Lovingkindness meditation, widely popular in Western Buddhist literature, involves cultivating a deep sense of compassion and love for all sentient beings. For the study the Tibetan monks were instructed to practice an "objectless" form of lovingkindness meditation, where "feeling[s] of loving-kindness and compassion permeate[d] [their] mind[s] without directing attention towards a particular object."[76] Their brain waves were recorded by EEG sensors and later compared to the electrical activity of a non-meditating control group.

The results of the study were optimistic. Findings showed the Tibetan monks had more pronounced "peaks of energy" during lovingkindness meditation—specifically, "high amplitude gamma oscillations" in the brains' electrical currents.[77] These "dramatic burst[s] of electrical signal," characterized by calmness and presence, were much more pronounced in comparison to the non-meditators.[78] Davidson's experiments proved the notion that meditation physically altered the brain but these were not passive discoveries made by him and his team. His immersion in his local, contemplative culture influenced his understandings of meditation and the brain's plasticity. Davidson's analysis was also guided by Buddhist theories of the self, which hold the notion of an atomistic individual—a concept common to liberal social theory—as an illusion. Instead, the self was seen as fluid and constantly evolving, a perspective that Davidson's brain data reflected. Here, new interpretations of meditation were constructed as a form of mental circuit training.

[75] Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*, 115.
[76] Lutz et al., "Regulation of the Neural Circuitry of Emotion by Compassion Meditation," 16372.
[77] Lutz et al., 16370.
[78] Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*, 168.

His research was published in both academic and popular venues, solidifying his reputation as a "celebrity neuroscientist"[79] in the United States. Davidson's findings with the Dalai Lama were covered in outlets like *Tricycle Magazine*,[80] the *New York Times*,[81] and *Time Magazine*,[82] amplifying the notion that meditation was a form of mental training to improve the flow of information in the brain. This narrative would continue to find purchase in industries like Silicon Valley's high tech region at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Neural Circuitries

The concept of neuroplasticity was central to neuroscientific understandings in the 2010, especially within the study of meditation, closely linked to the idea of the brain as a network of circuits. Neuroplasticity was an organizing principle for meditative neuroscience following Davidson's pivotal 2002 study. By 2010, he had established the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin Madison, staffed by over a hundred statisticians, neuroscientists, and psychologists, to continue this work.[83] Specialized institutions like this one, along with the related Mind and Life Institute, helped sediment meditation as a scientifically credible, secular practice.

This work redefined the relation between spirituality and science. In a positivist paradigm, neuroimaging data, produced through expensive technologies like fMRI, were considered more reliable than subjective, first-person accounts of meditative experiences. Because these technologies were also inaccessible to the general public, researchers could claim

[79] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*, 47.
[80] Glickman, "The Lama in the Lab."
[81] Gyatso, "The Monk in the Lab."
[82] Pickert, "The Mindful Revolution."
[83] Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*, 9.

authority over their scientific interpretations of meditation. By following positivist norms and conducting research controlled, laboratory settings, institutions like Davidson's helped distance meditative neuroscience from New Age metaphysics.[84]

The discourse of circuits mediated between scientific technology and dimensions of human consciousness. Neural circuits first came from scientists Warren McCulloch and Walter Pitts in 1943 who used computer technological principles like binary logic to describe the brain's functions.[85] As the quality of radioimaging improved throughout the 1990s and 2000s, however, "neural circuits" were visualized with greater clarity. The brain, now seen as a dense web of millions of neurons transmitting information, was researched using fMRI. It was used in research to record the brain's activation during task performance like learning to play the guitar or sitting through a sad movie.[86]

In 2008, Davidson used scanning technologies to record what he called the brain's "empathy circuitries," a functional representation of the brain while experiencing the emotion of empathy. In 2008, his lab studied the effects of long-term meditation on a person's capacity for empathy (Figures 1 and 2). According to meditative neuroscientists, empathy as a dimension of human behavior had received little attention. Like his 2002 study, expert and novice meditators were compared during a lovingkindness meditation. Subjects' brains were observed via fMRI while distressing sounds were played, like the sound of a woman screaming.[87] The scientists hypothesized that lovingkindness meditation would "enhance" a person's affective response to people in pain. The results found greater activation in the insular cortex region, an area of the

[84] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*, 79.
[85] Borck, *Brainwaves: A Cultural History of Electroencephalography*, 248.
[86] Rose and Abi-Rached, *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind*, 74; Borck, *Brainwaves: A Cultural History of Electroencephalography*, 16.
[87] Lutz et al., "Regulation of the Neural Circuitry of Emotion by Compassion Meditation," 2.

brain associated with empathy, in the group of expert meditators.[88] Compassion meditation, Davidson concluded, optimized the brain's "empathy circuitries."[89]

Figure 1. Richard Davidson (right) and Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard (left) participating in EEG tests at University of Wisconsin.[90]

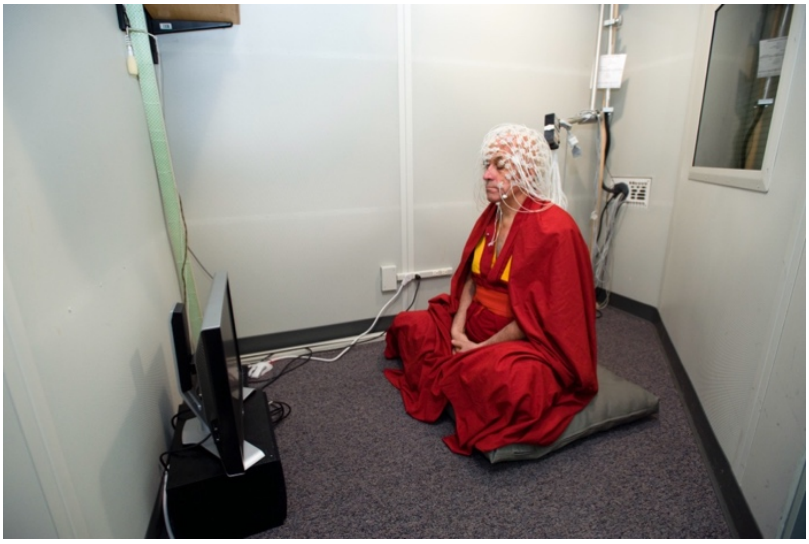

Figure 2. SIYLI collaborator Ricard monitoring brainwaves during lovingkindness meditation.[91]

[88] Lutz et al., "Regulation of the Neural Circuitry of Emotion by Compassion Meditation."
[89] Lutz et al.
[90] Miller.
[91] Miller.

Meditation as a Cultural Phenomenon

The brain science of meditation took to public life as well. The findings of Davidson and other scientists were publicized in academic journals but also in mainstream media and national publishing houses, cementing meditation's status as a scientifically validated and culturally acceptable practice in the U.S. Other studies associated Buddhist lovingkindness meditation practice with physical changes in gray matter volume in the brain[92] or a reduction in the sensation of physical pain.[93] *Mindfulness*, the peer reviewed psychology journal, was launched in 2010. In 2014, *Time Magazine's* cover story "The Mindful Revolution" outlined meditation's popularity among corporate executives, Pentagon chiefs, and U.S. Congresspeople like Tim Ryan as a form of self-improvement or attention training.[94]

Davidson and his lab played a key role in shaping public understandings of neuroscience and meditation, as research continued linking mindfulness with structural changes in the brain. This strengthened the cultural acceptance of neuroplasticity in the U.S. In a 2014 article in *Time Magazine,* Kate Pickert noted that "Brains can change based on experiences and are not, as previously believed, static masses that are set by the time a person reaches adulthood." Citing Davidson's research with Tibetan monks, Pickert continued: "A growing field of neuroscientists are now studying whether meditation can counteract what happens to our minds because of stress, trauma and constant distraction."[95] At the same time, funding for mindfulness research surged. Between 2000 and 2010, funding for research on mindfulness from the National

[92] Leung et al., "Increased Gray Matter Volume in the Right Angular and Posterior Parahippocampal Gyri in Loving-Kindness Meditators."
[93] Zeidan et al., "Brain Mechanisms Supporting the Modulation of Pain by Mindfulness Meditation."
[94] Pickert, "The Mindful Revolution."
[95] Pickert, "The Mindful Revolution."

Institutes of Health increased from 2 to 128 grants.[96] The U.S. Federal government spent almost $51 million funding research on meditation between 2008 and 2009.[97]

The development of meditative neuroscience by well-connected professionals, specifically their findings on brain plasticity and circuitries translated Buddhism into a form later associated with Silicon Valley's high tech culture. Meditation's effects on the brain were not out there waiting to be uncovered. The work of contemplative practitioners like His Holiness the Dalai Lama and neuroscientists like Richard Davidson transformed them, building new hybrid forms.

Search Inside Yourself

Radioimaging of the 1990s helped form the brain sciences of meditation and give it social purchase. How did it enter into the corporate form? I argue that this stabilization work happened at Google, at the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. First developed among software engineers, SIYLI spun out as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2012, providing mindfulness programming for for-profit firms across the U.S. SIYLI's formal curriculum emerged from multiple processes of reconciliation that integrated Buddhist and corporate modalities. In the analysis that follows, I examine the formation and design of SIYLI's curriculum. I examine how these reconciliation processes are manifested in the course's lectures and exercises, which drew on neuroscience and software engineering principles to embed mindfulness within corporate contexts. For example, SIYLI's lectures incorporated color fMRI images from neuroscientific studies on meditation,

[96] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*, 52.
[97] Hickey, "Meditation as Medicine: A Critique," 170.

presenting these visuals to participants as a form of "nonjudgmental awareness." These processes helped stabilize mindfulness practice inside the unique culture of Silicon Valley.

The Formation of Corporate Mindfulness

Multiple attempts to establish mindfulness in the corporate world failed before SIYLI's neuroscientific approach. Monsanto, the agrochemical firm, piloted a short-lived meditation program in the late 1990s.[98] The first successful program emerged in 2007 at Google. Chade-Meng Tan, a Taiwanese immigrant and Google employee #107, began teaching mindfulness to his colleagues around 2008. He called the courses "Search Inside Yourself" as a playful reference to Google's search engine. Tan's status as a Google employee was enough to embed him within the powerful social networks permeating Silicon Valley: Tan had previously rose to fame in a 2007 New York Times article for capturing photos with the many celebrities and elites who visited Google like Madeleine Albright, Hillary Clinton, Colin Powell, Gwyneth Paltrow, and George Soros.[99]

By 2012, over a thousand Google employees had taken his mindfulness course,[100] prompting Tan to launch the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI) as a nonprofit. It spun out of Google and developed mindfulness programming to teach in other corporations. During this period, Tan standardized his original courses with the help of meditative neuroscientists and contemplative leaders. In a 2012 *New York Times* feature celebrating the program, Google engineer Bill Duane described the courses as "organizational WD-40, a necessary lubricant" between "ambitious employees" and Google's "demanding corporate

[98] Van Biema, "Buddhism in America."
[99] Lohr, "Hey, Who's He? With Gwyneth? The Google Guy."
[100] Kelly, "O.K., Google, Take a Deep Breath."

culture."[101] Tan's book overviewing the course, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World Peace)*, was endorsed by everyone from Jimmy Carter to the Dalai Lama,[102] solidifying its cultural status.

Building the Curriculum

The development of SIYLI's curriculum was an achievement through the work of different group members, closely connected, many from the neuroscience and contemplative tradition. To scale the program, Tan standardized his courses to make them adaptable to other workplaces while retaining the same core elements from his original course. The first transcripts of his courses were revised by contemplative practitioners Mirabai Bush and Norman Fischer, both of whom had deep-rooted Buddhist practices.[103] Bush was a well-known contemplative practitioner who had co-founded the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society in 1997 and had also piloted Monsanto's 1990s meditation program.

The program was embedded in networks of contemplative researchers and scientists. To shape the curriculum, Tan also consulted Daniel Goleman, a Harvard psychologist introduced to Tan through Mirabai Bush.[104] Goleman had become an academic celebrity in psychology and business circles for his 1995 best-seller, *Emotional Intelligence.* As a Harvard graduate student alongside Richard Davidson, Goleman studied under Ram Dass and wrote about meditation's impact on consciousness in his first book, *Varieties of Meditative Experience*.[105] Bush had

[101] Kelly.
[102] Giang, "Inside Google's Insanely Popular Emotional-Intelligence Course."
[103] Lesser, *Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader: Lessons from Google and a Zen Monastery Kitchen*, 27.
[104] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*, 60.
[105] Goleman, *The Varieties of Meditative Experience*.

previously worked with Richard Davidson on integrating mindfulness into the U.S. Army.[106] Tan also collaborated with Nepalese monk and neuroscientist Matthieu Ricard (pictured in Figures 1 and 2 from the previous Chapter), formerly a French interpreter for the Dalai Lama and translator for Davidson's research with Tibetan monks. Neuroscientist Philippe Goldin from the University of California, Davis was another known collaborator.

In designing SIYLI's programming, staff openly acknowledged the complexities involved in merging Buddhist practices with corporate norms. As one SIYLI staff explained to me, "the program was inherently a new thing. Now there's a bit more of a template for how this is done…but [SIYLI] was one of the first in the business world on a larger scale."[107] Asked if there were conflicts during the curriculum design, one of SIYLI's program developers laughed, responding, "That was my entire job. Managing conflict."[108] He described the tensions as inevitable, explaining "You had people involved with 40 years of Buddhist meditation training" and then, "on the other hand, people from the business world." They also had "a number of scientists that were involved in the beginning of the program." Each approached the curriculum from wildly different perspectives, resulting in "so many different tensions."[109]

Contemplative practitioners like Mirabai Bush saw corporate mindfulness as a potential avenue for enacting larger social change, though her engagement was not without ambivalence. Reflecting on her time teaching meditation at Monsanto, a controversial U.S.-based agrochemical firm, in the 1990s, Bush noted: 'I thought I was so compassionate, and I was comfortable no matter who I was with. But when I went to Monsanto, I realized, 'Oh my God, I

[106] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*, 68.
[107] Klein, Interview with Jonathan Klein.
[108] Klein.
[109] Klein.

had this whole category of people qualified as the 'other.'"[110] Bush was ultimately persuaded to work within corporations due to their significant influence. She noted she was "persuaded to work with Monsanto because so many people work inside corporations" and because of their "increasing power." However, Bush noted "I would not enter a corporation that is doing things that are not within right livelihood, such as making weapons or mining coal. But after that, it's a difficult ethical matter."[111] Bush's ambivalence and selective involvement working within firms is a tension SIYLI's instructors must navigate in their courses—a dynamic discussed in Chapter Three.

Despite these tensions, SIYLI's collaborators reached a consensus on a standardized format. The developer explained the importance of "finding the center where you can incorporate and adapt as it needs to be adapted, but also hold together the network of people that have supported the program."[112] These processes of adaptation and integration were fundamental to SIYLI's success.

While neuroscience lent scientific credibility to SIYLI's curriculum, Buddhism's influence is unmistakable. Key SIYLI collaborators like Mirabai Bush and Norman Fischer brought decades of Buddhist practice to the program. Tan's 2012 curriculum overview referenced Asian and American Buddhist figures like Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mingyur Rinpoche, and Lao Zi while including quotes from classical Buddhist scripture. Traditional meditation practices, such as sitting meditation and metta bhavana or lovingkindness meditation typical of a traditional Buddhist center, were incorporated alongside neuroscientific validation from figures

[110] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*.
[111] Asgar, "Revisiting Corporate Meditation."
[112] Klein, Interview with Jonathan Klein.

like Davidson. [113] The curriculum also incorporated traditional sitting meditation instruction as well as includes metta bhavana or lovingkindness practice typical of what one would see in a traditional Buddhist center.[114] Tan's accessible language, pairing with its scientific backing, stitched together these heterogenous elements into a cohesive program that resonated with Silicon Valley's corporate environment.

After becoming an independent nonprofit, SIYLI formalized its offerings, starting with a teacher certification program. SIYLI's teacher training program helped diffuse Tan's curriculum across the U.S. For a fee of $12,000 USD, applicants underwent six months of training, gaining access to SIYLI's proprietary materials, including Tan's standardized curriculum and detailed slide decks.[115] The certification model guaranteed that SIYLI's curriculum was delivered consistently and uniformly regardless of instructor, firm, sector, or country. Certified SIYLI trainers typically operated as fee-for-service instructors, hired by corporate managers or human resources departments looking to solve staff burnout or improve employee well-being.

SIYLI's most common corporate offering was their two-day course. These were led by two certified instructors, either in-person or virtually, for groups between 20 and 80 people. The two-day course was structured around six key modules: mindfulness, self-awareness, self-management, motivation, empathy, and leadership. Each module combined formal lectures with experiential exercises and partner activities like body scans, mindful walking, and lovingkindness meditation.[116] SIYLI also offered shorter versions, including one-day and half-day programs, as well as their "Adaptive Resilience" program, which consists of three 90-minute

[113] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*, 92.
[114] Kucinskas, 92.
[115] SIYLI, "SIY Organizational Teacher Certification Applicant's Guide," 21.
[116] SIYLI, "Search Inside Yourself Program Guide."

sessions. Additional services include keynote talks and pro bono courses for nonprofits with fewer than 500 employees.[1] After a company's workforce completes the course, workers receive weekly emails with mindfulness resources and daily exercises like "take three mindful bites of your next meal" for a twenty-eight-day follow-up period.

Neuroscience as Cultural Translation

How was neuroscience stabilized in courses on mindfulness and emotional intelligence? In SIYLI's curriculum, neuroscience was more than a cosmetic supplement. It helped translate emotions like stress or anger into biological brain processes. This was done through SIYLI's formal lectures which taught participants how mindfulness "worked" at the neurological level.

In SIYLI's classrooms, neuroscientific data was integrated into lectures, using colorful visual aids like fMRI and EEG scans from contemplative research showing workers how mindfulness alters the brain. These images encouraged participants to adopt a detached, meta-cognitive perspective of emotional life, observing these thoughts and sensations without labeling them as "good" or "bad."

Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence, a critical scaffolding for SIYLI, applied a bio-evolutionary perspective to conceive of emotional life in the same detached manner. Goleman's concept of the "amygdala hijack" from his 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence* featured prominently in Tan's curriculum: stress, Goleman argued, trigged the amygdala, almond-shaped brain structures responsible for processing emotional memories. A flood of hormones like adrenaline are released in the body that override rational thinking, located in the prefrontal cortex.[117] "In modern life stressors are mostly psychological, not biological,"

[117] Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*.

Davidson and Goleman wrote in their co-authored book, "like a horrific boss or trouble with family."[118] Such stressors trigger the same primal biological reactions. SIYLI's courses used these insights to demonstrate to participants that these ancient brain mechanisms could be managed, or "hacked," through mindfulness.

SIYLI's curriculums presented Buddhism and neuroscience as compatible modalities. Using scientific language and visual evidence like fMRI brain scans, SIYLI facilitated mindfulness's cultural translation to the corporate firm.

Engineering the Mind

Tan used software engineering metaphors while designing the curriculum to appeal to Silicon Valley's local culture. Using these analogies translated mindfulness practice into language familiar to the tech industry. Tan, a Google software engineer, described emotional awareness, a key practice in the contemplative tradition of learning to read or understand one's emotional and sensory landscape, as "perceiving the process of emotion at a higher resolution,"[119] much like increasing the pixel density of an image, letting engineers "see" emotions more vividly. Like Davidson, Tan's course presented mindfulness as a form of "circuit training," [120] suggesting that the brain, much like an information system, could be rewired for optimal performance. This reinterpreted mindfulness not solely as a spiritual practice, but a method of cognitive enhancement grounded in the principles of brain plasticity.

Daniel Goleman cemented these synchronicities in his 2007 talk at Google on social intelligence shortly before he was brought in to collaborate on SIYLI's curriculum. Addressing

[118] Goleman and Davidson, *Altered Traits*, 47.
[119] Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*, 14.
[120] Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*.

an audience of software engineers, he used similar circuit-based metaphors, describing the brain as a piece of "elegant machinery" shaped for survival.[121] Such circuits could be disrupted by stressors like an "amygdala hijack." This hijack, Goleman explained to the crowd, produced a "very fuzzy picture of what's going on," disrupting the way "the brain prioritizes information,"[122] much like a bug disrupting an otherwise efficient piece of software. Both Tan and Goleman's use of metaphors like "circuitry," "memory," and "information processing" constructed mindfulness as an opportunity to reshape brain circuits in ways as methodical as coding or debugging software.

By aligning mindfulness with software engineering principles, the programs were reframed as a way to reprogram one's neural circuits. Tan's approach extended into his practical applications like "mindful emailing." Recognizing that emails often lack essential non-verbal cues, Tan articulated how the brain can "fabricate missing information about the emotional context of the sender,"[123] leading to potentially disastrous emotional misinterpretations. His curriculum outlined actionable steps to improve the quality of email interactions: "begin by taking one conscious breath" and "mindfully reflect that on the receiving end, there are one or more human beings. Human beings just like me."

After typing the e-mail, Tan suggests putting oneself in the receiver's shows to "revise your email" to make sure the emotional context is unambiguous and clear.[124] After taking another conscious breath, the sender presses Send. Mindfulness helped upgraded the brain's "operating efficiency" during these day-to-day work practices by "increasing the bandwidth"

[121] Goleman, *Daniel Goleman on Social Intelligence*.
[122] Goleman.
[123] Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*, 226.
[124] Tan, 226.

between emotion and regulation "so that we get better information flow between them."[125] Through this configuration, mindfulness was a tool for engineers to optimize their own neurological "code." The concept of brain plasticity—that millions of neurons could be reshaped through sustained mindfulness practice—paralleled their jobs optimizing information systems for greater efficiency.

Buddhist Lovingkindness

While neuroscience lent SIYLI scientific legitimacy, Buddhist principles of compassion were equally foundational. Its partner exercises aimed to foster positive social relationships in the workplace. This was stabilized by employing neuroscientific constructs related to the "social brain."[126] According to Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached, theories about the social brain gained prominence in the late 1990s. This research claimed a capacity to locate humans' "capacities for sociality" in specific regions like amygdala or prefrontal cortex.[127] While some of the foundational research, such as that on "mirror neurons," has been debunked, neuroscientific understandings of social connection helped bolster the credibility of SIYLI's program. Social brain theories, according to Rose and Abi-Rached, broke down the human capacity of intersubjectivity:

> When I observe your actions, or the visible signs of your inner states, areas of my own brain activate that enable me to understand the intentions or feelings that lie behind those observable features, and hence to feel a tiny trace of what it would take…for me to act or feel that way myself.[128]

[125] Tan, 115.
[126] Rose and Abi-Rached, *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind*, 143.
[127] Rose and Abi-Rached, 143–44.
[128] Rose and Abi-Rached, 147.

SIYLI's founder, Chade-Meng Tan, asserted that this capacity for intersubjectivity, or what he termed as "empathy"—the ability to share in another person's feelings—was "an ability we were born with" as part of the "standard package…installed as part of our social brain."[129] This organic capacity that could be enhanced through mindfulness. "Mirror neurons," his curriculum explained, were a brain cell response when someone performs and watches someone else perform the same activity.[130] He argues that the brains were "pre-wired for empathy and compassion,"[131] using a scientific authority to advocate for pro-social behavior. Goleman echoed this perspective in his 2007 talk at Google, where he described empathy as "intimate brain to brain connection"[132] through the synchronization of two people's heart rates, their autonomic responses, and other biological markers. This neurobiological view that compassion are innate, physiological functions made it more acceptable for corporate contexts.

Exercises like the "Just Like Me" lovingkindness meditation were incorporated in the curriculum to cultivate compassion at work, using neuroscience to contextualize the practices. After the curriculum explains the scientific underpinnings of empathy using Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence, participants are led through a "Just Like Me" lovingkindness meditation in its two-day course. In this exercise, participants sit face to face with a partner, maintaining eye contact while silently sending "metta," or lovingkindness, to each other. A leader guides the meditation with phrases designed to emphasize shared humanity, such as "this person is a human being with a mind and body, just like me," and continuing with "This person wants to be happy and lead a good life, just like me, this person wants to be loved, just

[129] Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*, 239.
[130] Tan, 160.
[131] Tan, 161.
[132] Goleman, *Daniel Goleman on Social Intelligence*.

like me." It concludes with a wish for others-well-being: "As much as I can I wish that this person be happy, be able to do good work in this world, have the support that he needs in order to be happy."[133] The practice lasts around fifteen minutes. The practice reconciles a traditional Buddhist meditation into a trainable workplace curriculum with the help of the neuroscience of meditation.

To actualize these theories of social connection, SIYLI designed exercises that generated compassionate and empathetic interactions. One core exercise from their two day course is "mindful listening," where participants take turns speaking for three minutes while their partner listens attentively without interruption.[134] The listener refrains from asking questions or interjecting, instead offering nonverbal cues like nodding or facial expressions to demonstrate their engagement. Guiding participants through empathetic reflections reinforces the neural and emotional connections in social brain theory. Doing this repeatedly "create[s] the mental habit of kindness," according to Tan,[135] suggesting that much like physical exercise strengthens one's muscles, lovingkindness meditation strengthens neural circuits responsible for compassion. These neurobiological framings of contemplative values like compassion helped build their compatibility with workplace trainings.

Conclusion

Critics of corporate mindfulness often focus narrowly on medical technologies like fMRI as explanatory factors, which can obscure the complex processes of mindfulness's scientific validation. Cederström and Spicer, for instance, contest the Search Inside Yourself's

[133] Bush, *Working With Mindfulness*, 45.
[134] Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*, 52.
[135] Tan, 227.

neuroscience backing, contesting that the neuroscientific data created by Richard Davidson merely "feels true" by having "the aura of science."[136] This may be true but top-down accounts like this neglect the significant investments and cultural work put in by scientists, Buddhist practitioners, and software engineers at Google who collaboratively crafted them.

In this chapter, I argued that the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute functioned as a powerful site of reconciliation between Buddhism and corporate practices. Central to its curriculum was the creative integration of findings from neuroscientists like Davidson, who re-interpreted the boundaries between technology and spirituality by studying Buddhism's effects on brain function. Neuroscience was more than a backdrop but a vital site in building corporate mindfulness's legitimacy as a workplace technique.

At SIYLI, Buddhist principles were made coherent through neuroscience and software engineering concepts that deeply resonated with Google's employees. For instance, the contemplative practice of emotional awareness was understood as a means to "enhance the resolution" of one's emotional landscape, drawing technological notions of image resolution. These processes let participants perceive mindfulness not just as a spiritual or wellness practice but as a way to enhance cognition. In the next chapter, I examine SIYLI more broadly as a historical and cultural institution, delving deeper into the resonances between software engineering culture and the mindfulness program that grew at Google in the 2000s

[136] Cederström and Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome*, 24.

III. CHAPTER TWO: ADAPTING MINDFULNESS OUTSIDE OF SILICON VALLEY

In the previous chapter, I argued that meditative neuroscientists like Richard Davidson were pivotal in legitimizing the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI) by offering a scientific foundation. Neuroscience and software engineering principles were recruited in SIYLI's formal curriculum to stabilize Buddhist practice inside corporate cultures. These constructs of the brain's plastic circuits would become crucial cultural resources in Silicon Valley and help corporate mindfulness diffuse across the U.S.

In this chapter, I argue that corporate mindfulness took on multiple forms. In Silicon Valley, mindfulness emerged to enhance collaborative, project-based work. Immersed in this culture, Chade-Meng Tan, SIYLI's founder and software engineer, built mindfulness as a tool for engineers to collaborate on large projects. After the crash, corporate mindfulness was redirected within the nexus corporation. There, mindfulness functioned as a financial market-based practice in sectors like manufacturing and investment banking.

Within this context, corporate mindfulness can teach us about processes of financialization in the U.S. and their effect on the organization of work. In sectors like manufacturing and financial services, were layoffs and restructurings were more prevalent, mindfulness shifted from a tool for creativity for a mechanism to manage job insecurity. This broader understanding challenges dominant critical literature's portrayal of corporate mindfulness as a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, I demonstrate below that its forms were contingent on the social and economic contexts in which it was situated in.

This chapter continues in two parts. First, I trace the emergence of corporate mindfulness within Silicon Valley's high-tech culture. I use software engineering manuals from the 1990s as

well as material on Google's formation to make sense of SIYLI's situatedness within this culture.

In the second section, I explore the diffusion of SIYLI beyond high tech. There, mindfulness programs were adapted to serve as personal investment techniques in industries facing employment conditions increasingly determined by financial market fluctuations. At sites like Amazon's warehouses and General Mills, I argue that the political potential of mindfulness programs there were ultimately constrained—not due to mindfulness in and of itself, but due to workers' lack of power and autonomy within the shareholder corporation.

Twenty-First Century Silicon Valley

Mindfulness originated in Silicon Valley, associated with high tech's organizational form and cultures. There, mindfulness was envisioned to optimize emotional attunement between engineers. In the early twenty-first century, Silicon Valley, located south of the San Francisco Bay Area, was revitalized. Traditionally recognized as a hub for information technology since the 1960s, the region experienced a resurgence fueled by the dot-com boom of the late twentieth century. The period attracted an influx of venture capital and skilled labor not only from the U.S. but Asian and European countries.[137] This led to the rise of high-tech firms like Google, Meta, and Apple, which either established or relocated their headquarters to the region.

What set Silicon Valley apart from other industrial centers beyond its technological innovation was its unique organizational culture. Unlike traditional corporate hierarchies seen in post-war industrial corporations like General Electric, Silicon Valley had developed through

[137] O'Sullivan, *Contests for Corporate Control: Corporate Governance and Economic Performance in the US and Germany*, 226–27.

dense, informal networks of relationships.[138] Engineers, entrepreneurs, and investors often convened in casual settings like coffee shops or co-working spaces which served as "creative nodes"[139] for peer collaboration. These decentralized forms of interactions created an open flow of ideas. The emphasis on informal, network-based collaboration paved the way for mindfulness to eventually become an essential component of Silicon Valley's workplace culture.

As companies like Google rapidly scaled up in the early 2000s, managing their increasingly complex projects became a significant challenge. These projects often involved hundreds of highly specialized workers across multiple departments, requiring entirely new approaches to management. In distinction from the top-down, centralized innovation processes of major post war industrial corporations,[140] Silicon Valley startups adopted flat organizational structures. These structures gave engineers greater creative autonomy be decentering the work process into specialized "teams" or "projects" that cut across traditional firm boundaries. This flat structures rarely granted workers profit-sharing or formal decision-making power, but they did encourage greater employee participation in innovation.

The emergence of self-managed, informal teams within Silicon Valley not only helped with its rapid growth, but also shifted the skill set required of engineers. In this production culture, technical proficiency was insufficient. Engineers needed to be able to navigate these complex, interpersonal networks. The ability to maintain these rich connections became a managerial skill in its own right. Prior to Google's founding, influential software engineering management manuals from the 1990s, such as Tom DeMarco and Tim Lister's *Peopleware,*[141]

[138] Saxenian, *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*, 30.
[139] Harris, *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World*, 319.
[140] O'Sullivan, *Contests for Corporate Control: Corporate Governance and Economic Performance in the US and Germany*, 152.
[141] DeMarco and Lister, *Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams*.

advised managers on building close-knit teams. Effective management, they claimed, was fundamentally about "sociology:" optimizing the type and quality of one-on-one human interactions by experimenting with, for instance, an office's furniture layout.

These approaches were a sharp divergence from traditional hierarchical management, which was criticized by such texts for stifling creativity and collaboration. DeMarco and Lister cautioned against "teamicide,"[142] managerial practices like excessive bureaucracy and paperwork, rigid control over work hours, and physical separation of workers that constrained team formation.[143] Instead they argued for a warm, supportive work environment where motivation sprang from emotional attunement, not surveillance or monetary reward. "Here's a radical idea," another management consultant Karl Wiegers, U.S. software engineer from Eastman Kodak, wrote "Think of you, as a manager, working *for* the people who report to you."[144] This service-oriented approach to management emphasized coaching, problem-resolution, and career development. In his text *Creating a Software Engineering Culture*, Wiegers also emphasized the importance of managers performing small acts of recognition like team lunches, handing out small treats like M&Ms, or small complements:

> If you are a manager, don't wait until performance appraisal or salary adjustment time rolls around to pass along some positive feedback. Tell the individual exactly what he or she did well and why you appreciate it. A mumbled 'Keep up the good work" in the hallway is more likely to confuse than motivate the recipient.[145]

Clear from such texts was the desire for emotional attunement in these workplaces at the multiple levels of language, tone, and presence.

[142] DeMarco and Lister, 133.
[143] DeMarco and Lister, 133.
[144] Wiegers, *Creating a Software Engineering Culture*, 39.
[145] Wiegers, 36.

A relational, sociological understanding of work was also visible at the level of material office design. The shift toward a more relational and emotionally attuned approach to management was visible in Silicon Valley's material office design. Floor plans opened up, emphasizing communal spaces. Built in 2004, Google's Mountain View headquarters, known as the Googleplex, was inspired by Stanford University's dormitories, where co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin attended graduate school before dropping out.[146] There were no assigned desks and no cubicles in order to facilitate activity-based work. "If there is no group space," DeMarco and Lister stated in *Peopleware*, there's "no chance of a group culture forming."[147] Thus, company culture became something actively engineered by managers encouraging "casual interaction"[148] through the arrangement of physical space. Google's campus did so through its range of luxury amenity offerings: coffee shops, organic gardens, volleyball courts, public sculpture gardens, and eighteen cafeterias.[149] Dan Cobley, Google's managing director, reported that the lines at Google's cafeterias were intentionally kept long to foster conversation.[150]

The rejection of the hierarchical, cubicle-dominated office model was not unique to Google. In 2000, Apple's Steve Jobs bought and converted an old Del Monte canning factory in Emeryville, California to create a large communal workspace bringing together computer scientists and graphic designers.[151] The space was designed to intentionally force human interactions. Jobs strategically placed mailboxes, coffee bars, and even bathrooms in the atrium.[152] Years later, Meta C.E.O. Mark Zuckerburg commissioned architect Frank Gehry to

---

[146] Levy, *In The Plex*, 135.
[147] DeMarco and Lister, *Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams*, 136.
[148] DeMarco and Lister, 136.
[149] Stross, *Planet Google*.
[150] Walker, "Perks for Employees and How Google Changed the Way We Work (While Waiting in Line)."
[151] Lehrer, "Steve Jobs: 'Technology Alone Is Not Enough.'"
[152] Lehrer.

design a single-room office space for nearly 3,000 employees.[153] These experiments in workplace sociology were part of the broader organizational culture of Silicon Valley of project-based networks, seen in both management style and office space.

Mindfulness & Silicon Valley

The geographic proximity of San Francisco and Silicon Valley played a large role in the region's affinity for mindfulness. San Francisco's Bay Area had long been a haunt for modern Buddhism and countercultural movements since the 1960s. Eastern spiritualities like Zen Buddhism found new expressions in the city's progressive, anti-establishment ethos. Sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello observed that the aesthetics of 1960s radical politics were repackaged in 1990s-era French managerial texts,[154] and the same took place in Silicon Valley. On the surface, tech's organizational form embraced democratic principles not unlike the contemplative tradition. This included a disdain for corporate hierarchy as well as their collectivist innovation process. A similar naïve optimism shaped early twenty-first century tech's slogans:

- Don't be evil (Google; changed to "Do the right thing" in 2015)
- Bring the world closer together (Facebook)
- Make tools that advance humankind (Apple)

By the late 2000s, Google software engineer Chade-Meng Tan, a practicing Buddhist, began offering mindfulness classes to his coworkers. These informal sessions quickly evolved into the into the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI), which became the foremost

[153] Kruse, "Facebook Unveils New Campus: Will Workers Be Sick, Stressed and Dissatisfied?"
[154] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

corporate mindfulness programming provider in the U.S. Mindfulness and meditation, once countercultural practices, were translated into high tech's collaborative production model. As covered in the last Chapter, SIYLI's courses fused neuroscience, engineering and Buddhist practice together. In this chapter, I argue that mindfulness emerged within Google's work culture, where empathy and emotional intelligence were virtues for the region's project-based work.

What work did mindfulness and meditation accomplish for high value software engineers in Silicon Valley? The curriculum fused the networked, project-driven culture of the tech industry with contemplative practice. Self-awareness and interpersonal skills—essential components of Silicon Valley's flat management structure—became vital tools for high tech firms in the absence of centralized managers. Core exercises in SIYLI's two-day courses, such as "Mindful Listening" and "Just Like Me" lovingkindness meditation, provided employees with opportunities to cultivate the empathy and attunement needed towards one another in such collaborative environments.

The notion of optimizing brain function appealed to this high tech milieu. Tan courses cleverly illustrated mindful awareness using software engineering principles. In his 2012 book, he frequently references the stereotype of engineers as introverted and logic-driven, describing himself as a socially awkward and "shy" engineer, using this persona as a point of connection with his audience.[155] The curriculum drew on computer sciences, as mentioned in the previous Chapter, such as describing mindful awareness as perceiving emotions "at a higher resolution."[156] Just as increasing an image's resolution adds more detail, mindfulness of bodily

[155] Tan, *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*.
[156] Tan, 23.

sensations generates what Tan referred to as "high-fidelity information about our emotional life,"[157] resulting in a more "vivid" understanding of the self. This portrayal likened the brain to an intricate network of circuits similar to software design in that both could be programmed and optimized for enhanced performance.

Ultimately, corporate mindfulness was borne out of Silicon Valley's distinct high tech culture, as a way to build richer social interactions in its networked environment. In its origins, it was not merely a wellness initiative but a deliberate response to the demands of this elite segment of the labor force. Highly skilled engineers at Google enjoyed six-figure salaries and luxury perks, such as free laundry services, childcare centers, hairstylists, and endless catered meals.[158] These efforts were necessary to retain and attract the industry's workers. They were also afforded significant autonomy, as the relaxation of corporate hierarchy provided workers more control over their daily schedules. Chade-Meng Tan's mindfulness courses at Google emerged from this creative autonomy through Google's famed 20% rule, a short-lived policy allowing employees to dedicate a fifth of their workweek to special side projects.[159]

Corporate mindfulness was a cultural creation of Silicon Valley, informed by the region's unique organizational forms (flat hierarchies, collaborative work) and IT culture. These practices, typified by the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute was more than a wellness initiative. It was strategically curated to the demands of this highly skilled workforce, enhancing the possibilities for collaboration in high tech industries.

[157] Tan, 117.
[158] Stross, *Planet Google*.
[159] Schmidt and Rosenberg, *How Google Works*, 225–27.

Diffusing Mindfulness Outside Silicon Valley

Corporate mindfulness started at Google, designed in its insular culture and flat management structures. Originally tailored to the collaborative, creative culture of high tech, mindfulness programs like SIYLI's adapted to the new realities of the U.S. economy, especially in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. After the financial crash, SIYLI's courses spread through the nation's workplaces through its instructor model. As it left Silicon Valley, mindfulness underwent significant changes. It became attached to other organizational forms like the nexus corporation. Here, mindfulness emerged a practice to metabolize the nexus corporation's disposal of workers in sectors like manufacturing, investment banking, and even tech. The economic instability of the post-crisis era—marked by corporate restructurings, job insecurity, and the rise of contingent, project-based work—created a demand for coping mechanisms, not creativity.

Mindfulness & the Nexus Corporation

The emergence of the nexus corporation, a novel form of corporate organization, fundamentally transformed work in the U.S. This history provides context to understand corporate mindfulness's growth out of Silicon Valley.

Shareholder capitalism began in the 1980s as a new model of the firm emerged, whose sole responsibility existed to maximize shareholder gains. The nexus corporation replaced the post-war conception of the firm. This firm, a "social institution" in the lives of many U.S. workers, provided workers with stable employment and retirement security throughout their lives.[160] During recessions, company managers of the managerial firm often collectively agreed

[160] Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*.

to minimize layoffs as much as possible for their employees' sake.[161] This pact between employer and employee dissolved with the rise of the shareholder corporation.

Fueled by antiregulatory cultures and the expansion the financial sector in the 1970s and 80s, the previous era of managerial capitalism shifted to shareholder capitalism. Corporate governance was geared towards maximizing shareholder value which led to a culture of corporate restructurings and hirings and firings dependent on financial market movements. The post-war corporation "collapsed," leaving in its place the nexus corporation. Work in the U.S. transformed, becoming more flexible and more short-term.

In its normative, legal form, the nexus corporation understood the corporation not as a long-term, stolid social institution but as a temporary collection of employment contracts. workers, for instance, were not there for permanent employment but, rather, to maximize their employability for better prospects down the road. In actuality, the shift towards the nexus corporation increased low-quality jobs. Sociologist Gerald Davis makes this clear: in 1960, leading U.S. employers like General Motors and AT&T provided family wages, health insurance, and job security with a medium tenure of seven to ten years.[162] By 2007, the largest employers were in sectors such as retail and food service, offering low wages, minimal benefits, and median employment of less than two years.[163]

The rise of the shareholder corporation coincided with intensifying socioeconomic inequality.[164] The global financial crisis of 2008 was a crisis-point for this transformation. Despite finance's growing power, there was no substantial reform in the wake. The Financial

[161] Dobbin and Kalev, *Getting to Diversity: What Works and What Doesn't*, 178.
[162] Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*, 90.
[163] Davis, 90.
[164] Davis, *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*; Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*.

Crisis Inquiry Commission's 2011 report resulted in no indictments and no federal financial regulations. As the nexus corporation was geared towards maximizing gains for investors, C.E.O. and managerial pay were increasingly tethered to the company's stock price. By 2000, returns on capital investments exceeded growth in output and income.[165] C.E.O. compensation skyrocketed, rising by 1,209% between 1978 to 2022, while the average worker saw only a 15% increase in pay. [166] By 2000, the top 10% of U.S. earners, particularly upper managers at large firms, claimed 50% of the nation's income.[167] Between 2003 and 2012, 449 publicly listed S&P 500 companies used 54% of their profits—$2.4 trillion—to buy back stock rather than invest in innovation or workforces.[168]

Silicon Valley's once-small startups grew in size and monopoly power. The innocent idealism of tech's early slogans—Google's "don't be evil"—lost their sheen by the mid-2010s as criticisms of Big Tech's misuse of data, privacy violations, and monopoly power grew in social consciousness. Mindfulness emerged in this context as a reaction to the divestment of workers under shareholder capitalism. In this context, I argue that mindfulness practices shifted from tools for collaborate peer production into tools for managing stress in precarious labor market conditions.

Mindfulness as a Corporate Strategy

Mindfulness programs like SIYLI's, initially designed to enhance teamwork in Silicon Valley, quickly became part of a broader trend to manage worker stress across industries. By the

[165] Piketty, *Capital In the Twenty-First Century*.
[166] Bivens and Kandra, "CEO Pay Slightly Declined in 2022."
[167] Piketty, *Capital In the Twenty-First Century*.
[168] Lazonick, "Profits Without Prosperity."

mid-2010s, mindfulness programs had been widely adopted by major firms in finance, manufacturing, and healthcare. It was framed as a solution for the widespread "burnout epidemic" sweeping middle- and upper-level professionals. "Health experts have begun talking about stress as an epidemic," Anne-Marie Slaughter wrote in *the New York Times:* "For many Americans, life has become all competition all the time. Workers across the socioeconomic spectrum, from hotel housekeepers to surgeons, have stories about toiling 12- to 16-hour days (often without overtime pay) and experiencing anxiety attacks and exhaustion."[169] "Your job is literally killing you," declared *The Washington Post* in 2015.[170] "The elephant in offices all around the world is that people are running on empty" claimed another business journalist.[171] In 2011, the American Psychological Association released its first "Stress in the Workplace" survey, reflecting the sensitivities towards workers' exhaustion. The survey found that 36% of U.S. workers regularly felt tense, 43% felt stressed, and only 50% felt valued at their job.[172] A 2014 survey by Monster, the employment search site, found that 61% of employees surveyed got physically ill from work-related stress.[173]

In response, mindfulness became increasingly integrated into corporate cultures. The so-called "Mindfulness Revolution" offered contemplative practice as a solution to the physical and emotional exhaustion plaguing workers. Magazines instructed readers on how to meditate. One *Time Magazine* journalist reporting that mindfulness made "smelling the air and listening to the soundtrack of the city" seem "richer and more important."[174] *New York Times* journalist David

[169] Slaughter, "A Toxic Work World."
[170] Swanson, "Your Job Is Literally Killing You."
[171] Schwartz, "When Employee Engagement Turns Into Employee Burnout."
[172] APA, "Stress in the Workplace."
[173] Dill, "Survey: 42% of Employees Have Changed Jobs Due to Stress."
[174] Pickert, "The Mindful Revolution."

Gelles called mindfulness an "effective remedy" for "feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and spread too thin."[175] In Wall Street investment banks, *Bloomberg* journalists Katherine Burton and Anthony Effinger reported in 2014, meditation helped corporate professionals let "thoughts such as 'book NetJets' or 'offload bitcoins' quickly pass like leaves floating on a stream."[176] During this period, mindfulness proliferated in digital apps like Headspace and Calm, on college campuses, and in peer-reviewed and popular presses.

From Silicon Valley to the Corporate U.S.

In 2012, Tan expanded his mindfulness training beyond Google to meet this demand. He spun it out to a 501(c)(3) nonprofit outside of Google. Marc Lesser was C.E.O., Tan as board chair, and neuroscientist Philippe Goldin as the third board member.[177] In 2013, they offered their first teacher training program for twelve Google employees.[178] SIYLI's first clients were primarily tech companies in sectors like software, biotech, and medical technologies. Google sets the region's work norms, sociologist Jaime Kucinskas argued based on interviews with Silicon Valley tech workers. Firms like Google and Meta normalize "experimental, playful cultures" to be adopted more broadly.[179] Billionaire Marc Benioff, C.E.O. of cloud software firm Salesforce, headquartered in San Francisco, embraced contemplative practice shortly thereafter. In 2016, Benioff installed meditation rooms on every floor of Salesforce's office building.[180] The idea

[175] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*, 70.
[176] Burton and Effinger, "To Make A Killing on Wall Street, Start Meditating."
[177] Lesser, *Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader: Lessons from Google and a Zen Monastery Kitchen*, 28.
[178] Lesser, 28.
[179] Kucinskas, *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*, 64.
[180] Clifford, "Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff: Why We Have 'Mindfulness Zones' Where Employees Put Away Phones, Clear Their Minds."

was inspired by Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh who, along with 30 other monks, briefly stayed with Benioff.[181]

As demand grew, however, the program was standardized to be taught uniformly in any context. By 2015, mindfulness programs based on SIYLI's model or others like it were adopted by major corporations like Aetna, American Express, Bose, Comcast, Deloitte, Disney, Ford, General Mills, Hyatt, Kaiser Permanente, New Balance, LinkedIn, Patagonia, Procter & Gamble, Salesforce, and Target spanning industries from manufacturing to finance. SIYLI's certified teachers were key agents in implementing mindfulness within these new contexts. Mindfulness was so ubiquitous in the corporate world that contemplative Jon Kabat-Zinn led guided meditation at the 2015 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.[182] The high-profile book *Mindful Work* by *New York Times* journalist David Gelles provided a wholly positive narrative of mindfulness as a "new way to work:"

> Mindfulness won't make a bad boss behave better (at least not right away), and it won't make difficult labor any less physically taxing. But by bringing mindfulness to work, we can change the way that boss affects us, and change how we respond to the prospect of tough hours on the job. And in turn, this can change the culture of an organization.[183]

Gelles's focus on an individual's experience of stress drew attention away from the legal and organizational structures, such as at-will employment contracts, that contributed to workers' instability. In these environments of precarious employment, workers shifted focus on optimizing their employability. The nexus corporation created a workplace where interpersonal skills like emotional intelligence and social adaptability were crucial to navigate the constant cycle of hiring and firing. Within these constraints, where employment, working hours and even

[181] Konrad, "How Monks Convinced Marc Benioff to Install 'Mindfulness Zones' Throughout Salesforce's New Office."
[182] Gelles, "Amid the Chattering of the Global Elite, a Silent Interlude."
[183] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*, 24.

scheduling is short-term and impermanent, mindfulness programs failed to live up to their transformative potential.

As SIYLI expanded into non-tech sectors, its curriculum encountered sectors of the U.S. economy with vastly different cultures and aligned with different segments of the labor market. Based on 1990s software engineering manuals, keeping high specialized, high-demand tech workers happy was a central managerial concern. Turnover, *Peopleware's* DeMarco and Lister claimed, was the consequence of dissatisfied workers who were in high demand, prompting managers to boost productivity through fun, positive means instead of coercive measures like surveillance.[184] High tech, however, is such an elite segment of the labor force. According to Gerald Davis, the combined global workforces of Google, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, Cisco, and Amazon at the—a little over 300,000 at the end of 2011—are smaller than the Kroger's U.S. workforce (339,000).[185]

Meanwhile, many mid-level employees who received SIYLI's curriculum were subject to the nexus corporation's unstable employment conditions. In service sectors, for example, workers dealt with unpredictable work schedules determined by employers without their input and frequent to change on short notice. Political theorist Elizabeth Anderson notes this causes chaos for workers arranging childcare, taking college classes, or those juggling a second job.[186] Growing student loan debt for many white collar professionals, too, constrains employment opportunities. The lack of autonomy is a far cry from the freedoms enjoyed by Silicon Valley's engineers like Google's 20% time rule for workers to pursue their own projects. Below, I examine several vignettes from corporate mindfulness's implementation in other sectors wrought

[184] DeMarco and Lister, *Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams*, 17.
[185] Davis, "After the Corporation," 294.
[186] Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives*, 136.

by restructurings and unstable employment. Together, they demonstrate the constraints of corporate mindfulness to live up to its democratic promises.

Mindfulness in the Nexus Corporation

Corporate mindfulness became a way for workforces to metabolize frequent layoffs. One example is mindfulness's adoption at General Mills, an early adopter of workplace mindfulness. Janice Marturano, former Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, began meditating to manage her stress during high-stakes negotiations with the Federal Trade Commission and Department of Justice over a $10.5 billion merger with Pillsbury.[187] After studying under Jon Kabat-Zinn, Marturano integrated mindfulness and meditation practices throughout the firm. She organized a five-day contemplative retreat for thirteen General Mills executives and established meditation rooms across the Minnesota campus.[188] Courses on gentle yoga and Buddhist-based meditation were frequently provided to employees.[189]

The limits of mindfulness as a response to restructurings is clear during rounds of merger-related layoffs at General Mills. Marturano led meditation sessions for employees, someone of whom had just lost their jobs (Figure 3).[190] "When we're in any kind of transition in our lives it's so easy to get into the swirl and get lost," she told her subordinates after ringing Tibetan prayer bells three times, "Use this practice to gain stability in the mind."[191] "Raw emotion" like "warmth" were on display among downsized workers, according to business journalist David Gelles who overviewed the scene in *Financial Times*, who comforted one

[187] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out.*
[188] Gelles, "The Mind Business."
[189] Gelles.
[190] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*, 14.
[191] Gelles, "The Mind Business."

another "more like friends than like coworkers" after the sessions.[192] Janice Marturano left General Mills and founded the Institute for Mindful Leadership, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, in 2011. After the successful Pillsbury merger, General Mills, a publicly traded company since 1928, acquired Yoplait International in 2011, bought out Annie's Homegrown in 2014, purchased Blue Buffalo Pet Products in 2018, and acquired Tyson Foods's pet treats products in 2021.

Figure 3. General Mills employees participate in a guided sitting meditation session.[193]

As mindfulness expanded into sectors like manufacturing, their inadequacy became more apparent at transforming workplace cultures where job security is already minimal, and labor conditions are determined by financial markets. Meditation was useful in Marturano's own job as

[192] Gelles, *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out.*
[193] Shambroom, "The Mind Business."

an elite executive making high-stakes decisions. Using mindfulness for laid off workers, while providing workers emotional support, they also reveal the limitations of mindfulness as a remedy for structural features of the nexus corporation. The "raw emotion" Gelles observed is a temporary emotional connection against the long-term precarity of employment. It cannot alleviate the stressors associated with at-will employment.

Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered other constraints that demonstrated its stark transformation from its Silicon Valley roots. Many large firms required mindfulness instructors to sign non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), restricting their ability to disclose details about the corporate environments they teach in. One U.S.-based manufacturer, for instance, prohibited its instructor from taking photos on company grounds or even listing the firm as a client.

Mindfulness continues to be implemented in manufacturing sectors. In 2021, Amazon rolled out its "AmaZen" booths, tiny kiosks for warehouse employees to use that played guided meditation videos. The booths were part of Amazon's $300 employee wellness program,[194] announced the same time as Amazon's exploitative warehouse conditions like worker surveillance techniques and contentious unionization efforts in Bessemer, Alabama dominated the news.[195] The AmaZen booths were superficial solutions without addressing the legal and structural causes of exploitation in Amazon's warehouses.

Investment Banking

Mindfulness's adoption on Wall Street, like in other sectors, was focused on managing the volatility of financial markets. The perceptions of mindfulness here were associated to the

[194] Cooban, "Amazon Is Installing Phonebooth-Sized Boxes for Exhausted Employees to Meditate."
[195] Leonhardt, "The Amazon Customers Don't See."

nature of financial fluctuations: "'Everything is impermanent, especially the market's level,'" remarked Brent Kessel, owner of Abacus Wealth Partners in Santa Monica, California, in a 2013 *Wall Street Journal* article.[196] Mindfulness practice was used by finance professionals allowed traders to cultivate an emotional awareness towards financial market movements.

In financial contexts, mindfulness emphasized the cultivation of emotion regulation and awareness towards external market movements, not towards self-awareness. Mindfulness practices in investment banking became indicators of market movements. In 2014, Sachs's in-house meditation instructor Elizabeth Sudler reported in a *Bloomberg* article that "one [Sachs] trader gets a twinge in his gut when he senses a move in the markets…. Meditating gives him an edge by tuning into that sensation more reliably."[197] Books on mindful trading taught traders to tune into the physical sensations in the bodies and use them as investment-appraisal techniques as indicators of movements in markets.[198] Practices like body scans[199] were encouraged by mindful trading literature for traders to develop their "market feel and intuition."[200] Billionaire investor George Soros is a well-known advocate of corporate meditation, citing back pain as a somatic signal of potential issues in his portfolio.[201]

Workers in financial services were also faced with obsolescence with the rise of algorithmic trading. In 2006, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) merged with electronic trading company Archipelago Holdings[202] to "cut costs, eliminate human error, and boost trading efficiency and productivity."[203] The NYSE merged with Pacific Exchange in 2006, acquired the

[196] Ensign, "Investing the Downward Dog Way? Advisor Suggests Deep Breaths."
[197] Burton and Effinger, "To Make A Killing on Wall Street, Start Meditating."
[198] Ward, *TraderMind: Get a Mindful Edge in the Markets*; Dayton, *Trade Mindfully*.
[199] Dayton, *Trade Mindfully*.
[200] Ward, *TraderMind: Get a Mindful Edge in the Markets*, xxii.
[201] Ward, 121; Harris, *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World*.
[202] NPR, "New York Stock Exchanges Announces Plans to Merge with an Electronic Trading Company."
[203] PR Newswire, "Research and Markets: The Era of Algorithmic Trading Is Here."

American Stock Exchange in 2008, and by 2013, was acquired by Intercontinental Exchange.[204] Black box trading, computer-generated trading practices, emerged in the early 2000s. Fear of algorithmic trading's rise led several London-based traders to contemplative practice, according to a 2012 Reuters article.[205]

When mindfulness was aimed at fostering emotional regulation in these settings, it did little to address the grueling work conditions in sectors like investment banking. Between 2013 and 2015, several deaths among U.S. and European investment bankers sparked global attention. In 2013, Moritz Erhardt, a 21-year-old intern at Bank of America, died after working seventy-two hours straight.[206] According to *the New Yorker,* Erhardt worked 8 all-nighters in two weeks, and worked until 6 am for three days in a row.[207] Two years later, Thomas Hughes, a 29-year-old Moelis & Company banker, and Saryshreshth Gupta, 22-year-old Goldman Sachs analyst, committed suicide.[208] According to Hughes's father, "the only explanation is that I know he's been working very hard and has been under a lot of pressure," he told *The Daily Mail*, "His work did not leave much time for enjoyment, but that's the nature of the assignment that he chose."[209] The media condemned Wall Street banks as "financial sweatshops" after what they termed the burnout deaths. "Is There a Suicide Contagion on Wall Street?" one *Fortune Magazine* journalist asked in 2014.[210] Six months after the tragic deaths, Wall Street unveiled a wave of work-life balance initiatives mandating workers take breaks. Goldman Sachs mandated undergraduate summer interns leave the office before midnight.[211] Barclays analysts were required to take

[204] NYSE, "The History of NYSE."
[205] Williams, "FX Traders Seek Coaching in Battle for Dominance."
[206] Kennedy, "Bank Intern Moritz Erhardt Died From Epileptic Seizure, Inquest Told."
[207] Margalit, "The Death of Moritz Erhardt, and Keynes's Mistake."
[208] Cohan, "More Details on Banker's Tragic Death, But Questions Persist."
[209] Bates, "Father of Investment Banker, 29, Fears Son Turned to Drink and Drugs to Cope with Stress."
[210] Wieczner, "Is There a Suicide Contagion on Wall Street?"
[211] Neate, "Goldman Sachs Restricts Intern Workday to 17 Hours in Wake of Burnout Death."

Saturdays off.[212] JP Morgan Chase's new "Pencils Down" initiative required the same.[213] Immediately after the suicides, JP Morgan spokesperson Joe Evangelisti sent employees reminders of the mental health-related resources available 24/7 to workers.[214] That same year, Goldman Sachs publicized the meditation instructor it retains for bankers' use in a 2014 *Bloomberg* article on Wall Street and meditation.[215]

The deaths coincided with the incorporation of wellness programs like mindfulness into the financial industry. Banks including Bank of America, BlackRock, CapitalOne, Citigroup, Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, UBS, and Wells Fargo offered employee mindfulness benefits in some form or fashion in the years afterwards. Morgan Stanley provided employees with OpenSeed meditation pods, a "womb-like isolated environment" for workers to relax.[216] JP Morgan Chase constructed meditation rooms for employee use.[217] Initiatives kept growing as greater publicity was shed on burnout in high-stress financial environments.

The broader tech sector, too, experienced the limitations of mindfulness as firms faced significant restructurings. In 2023 alone, major tech firms like Meta, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft collectively eliminated over 260,000 jobs across, as reported by *The New York Times*.[218] Meta laid off one-third of its workforce in 2023, and in early 2024, Google's C.E.O. Sundar Pichai announced hundreds of lay ffs in their engineering division.[219] The Alphabet Workers Union – Communications Workers of America Local 9009, established in 2021, called

[212] Gandel, "Barclays to Require Its Junior Bankers to Take Saturdays Off."
[213] Glazer and Huang, "J.P. Morgan to Workaholics: Knock It Off."
[214] Wieczner, "Is There a Suicide Contagion on Wall Street?"
[215] Burton and Effinger, "To Make A Killing on Wall Street, Start Meditating."
[216] Lynch, "Want More Engaged Employees? Let Them Meditate on the Job with Deepak Chopra, This Startup Says."
[217] Kelly, "JP Morgan Is Channeling Its Inner Google With an Eco-Friendly New Headquarters Offering Yoga and Meditation Spaces."
[218] Isaac, "Focused Cuts and Fewer Layers: Tech Layoffs Enter a New Phase."
[219] Grant, "Google Cuts Hundreds of Jobs in Engineering and Other Divisions."

the layoffs "unnecessary and counterproductive" in a press release January 12, 2024.[220] These mass layoffs coincided with the rollback of wellness perks, like Salesforce terminating its contract with a wellness retreat ranch in Scotts Valley, California.[221] *The Economist* mockingly called the 2023 cuts a "perkcession," making fun of white collar work's obsession with short-term employee "perks."[222]

Ultimately, as corporate mindfulness spread beyond tech to industries like finance and manufacturing, it shifted from a tool for creative peer collaboration to managing the human costs of restructurings. Mindfulness skills became marketable assets for workers navigating volatile job markets. According to a 2018 World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report, the "accelerating change" of the global workplace made emotional intelligence a trending work skill by 2022.[223]Positioning mindfulness as an adaptive, reactionary tool to market fluctuations demonstrates how limited they are at fundamentally restructuring shareholder capitalism.

Conclusion

The widespread adoption of mindfulness in corporate settings—from Big Tech to Wall Street—has transformed what began as a spiritual practice into a form of emotional regulation in high-stress work environments. In industries like finance, where burnout and extreme work cultures prevailed, mindfulness became a temporary remedy, offering workers short-term techniques instead of addressing the root causes of workers lack of power. Particularly apparent

[220] Alphabet Workers Union, "Alphabet Workers Union Members Oppose Unnecessary Layoffs."
[221] Penner, "Salesforce Cancels Contract with Retreat Center."
[222] Bartleby, "What Makes a Good Office Perk?"
[223] World Economic Forum, "The Future of Jobs Report," 8.

are the limitations of mindfulness in economic upheaval, like the tech layoffs of 2023, when wellness perks were stripped away alongside employment.

The multiple forms corporate mindfulness took reminds us that mindfulness is not a monolithic practice. Its form and function shifted as it moved across different organizational contexts, being created and recreated in different contexts. In many of these forms, mindfulness failed to deliver on its political promises because workers lacked power and control over their working conditions.

IV. CHAPTER THREE: THE POLITICAL POTENTIALS OF WORKPLACE MINDFULNESS

Introduction

In the last Chapter, I argued that workplace mindfulness practices morphed into investment strategies meant to support the precarious work arrangements of the nexus corporation. Ultimately, SIYLI's mindfulness's courses fell short of "humanizing" the workplace due to managerial incentives to prioritize shareholder value over workers' material security. In this chapter, I examine how mindfulness programs interacted with employee relations at the local level. What kinds of politics did these collisions generate?

Critical literature often portrays these programs as instruments of psychological control. In Ronald Purser's *McMindfulness*, for instance, courses like SIYLI's are understood as "programmatic attempt[s] to reshape the subjectivity of the employee"[224] Other analyses suggest that mindfulness served as forms of "delusion,"[225] an "ideological cloak,"[226] or form of "thought-control."[227] These accounts help recognize the power dynamics inherent in workplace relations but have the unintended effect of robbing workers of their critical consciousness at the same time. By conceptualizing the economy as closed off and determined by core logics, the workplace as a social site is left "depoliticized," where political capacities are always subordinated to market rationality.

In this chapter, I argue that a tension between SIYLI's standardized curriculum and the local conditions of its courses produced new terrains of workplace politics at the local level.

[224] Purser, *McMindfulness*.
[225] Driver, "From Empty Speech to Full Speech? Reconceptualizing Spirituality in Organizations Based on Psychoanalytically-Grounded Understanding of the Self."
[226] Kamoche and Pinnington, "Managing People 'Spiritually': A Bourdieusian Critique."
[227] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*.

SIYLI attempted to standardize its courses to be taught identically regardless of teacher or context but instructors still had to negotiate these local corporate settings. SIYLI failure to meet its stated goals but one-on-one interviews with SIYLI's instructors uncovered the agency they exerted to reshape the course for broader social change. In response, many instructors adapted, negotiated, and contested elements of Tan's curriculum, providing a different image that challenges a one-size-fits-all conception.

This chapter continues as follows: first, I propose an alternate conception of workplace mindfulness that moves beyond dominant views that denies workers their own epistemic authority. Drawing on Anita Chari's and Shannon Mariotti's work on mindfulness and perception, I build new understandings of workplace mindfulness with the potential for radical, democratic practice in everyday life. Alongside J.K. Gibson-Graham's criticism of capitalocentrist discourses as a scaffolding, I examine evidence from in-depth interviews with SIYLI's corporate mindfulness instructors to demonstrate how their negotiations represented another site of relational processes shaping corporate mindfulness, even on-the-ground at the classroom level.

Mindfulness and Perception

Mindfulness has been conceptualized as a political practice within social justice and democratic frameworks, helping us rethink its capacity in economic contexts. Though often critiqued in critical scholarship as a neoliberal discourse aligned with capital accumulation, mindfulness has also been recast as a politically engaged practice. For instance, the Engaged Buddhism movement, began by monk Thich Nhat Hanh, used contemplative practice to address

structural social problems like wealth inequality and climate crisis.[228] Mindfulness and meditation have also been embraced in social justice movements like Occupy Wall Street and have as well been explored in the works of Black feminists Angela Davis and bell hooks as a practice with anti-racist potential.[229]

Works of political theory have envisioned mindfulness as a tool for radical, democratic practice. Anita Chari, for instance, critiques mainstream mindfulness for focusing narrowly on passive observation of the body which, she argues, reinforces the mind-body dualism present in U.S. culture.[230] Instead, her concept of "mindful embodiment" invites participation in one's somatic experience rather than detached observation. Related is the notion of relational attunement, which encourages participants not only to watch their internal sensations but participate in the subtle movements alongside others, creating the potential for relational attunement, a heightened awareness of one's situatedness in the broader social world.[231]

This attunement holds the capacities to broaden political perceptions. One example relevant to our context of financial dominance is Chari's conception of the "people's mic" at Occupy Wall Street.[232] Occupy, a grassroots Leftist movement, emerged in 2011 in response to growing corporate and financial power where protesters occupied Zuccotti Park in New York's Financial District for numerous months. At their assemblies, participants used human microphones when amplification technologies like speakers were unavailable. Speakers broke up their remarks into small chunks which were then repeated aloud by the crowd so audience members further back to hear. Its practical function of information-sharing was significant but

[228] Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*, 117.
[229] Rowe, "Zen and the Art of Social Movement Maintenance."
[230] Chari, "The Political Potential of Mindful Embodiment."
[231] Chari, 236.
[232] Chari, 237.

for Chari, the experience of the people's mic generated a vibrant form of political communication through "the somatic and vibratory resonance of words, bodies, emotions, and affects."[233] These practice turned communication into a form of embodied, political attunement that carried a "collective sensing of possibility in relationship with others"[234] not unlike mindful embodiment can on both large and small scales.

The relation between mindfulness and perception is further interrogated by Shannon Mariotti, who examines Zen Buddhism's resonances with radical democratic theory. Zen Buddhism, according to Mariotti, enriches democratic culture by sharpening the perceptive capacities necessary for living in diverse communities. Like Chari, Mariotti's phenomenological approach focuses on the role of attention and perception in shaping us as political subjects. Democratic theories, according to Mariotti, hinge on these very perceptive capacities. Healthy, meaningful democratic cultures depend on our ability to perceive and engage with forms of difference in the world. When people are alienated from their senses and from one another, democracy loses its strength. Mariotti's concept of ideological production is not about the psychological control of others but a personal inventory about the political capacities of unlodging those preconceived notions about the world.

Zen offers democracy a "deconstructive practice," one that helps expose the ideological forces shaping us, rather than creating entirely new systems of domination.[235] Mindfulness pushes us to perceive and engage with everyday life in richer ways, beyond our default sensory perceptions. Introspection and attention at this ordinary level opens up "a place of tactics and

[233] Chari, 237.
[234] Chari, 239.
[235] Mariotti, "Zen and the Art of Democracy: Contemplative Practice as Ordinary Political Theory," 472.

small-scale forms of interruptive agency"[236] in "unspectacular" ways. Mindfulness and meditation help "dislocate default modes of perception."[237] bell hooks, in several pieces published in the *Lion's Roar,* a Western Buddhist magazine, proposed mindfulness for similar ends to dismantle "dominator thinking" by fostering awareness of one's position within gendered, classed, and racialized power relations.[238]

Together, Chari and Mariotti develop an understanding of mindfulness as a path towards everyday political transformation. Chari's concept of mindful embodiment bridges binaries between mind/body and self/other through relational attunement, creating spaces for collective political awareness. Mariotti, meanwhile, highlights Buddhism's role in cultivating the perceptive capacities necessary for democratic subjecthood. Together, they offer a template of contemplative practice that foster perceptual and embodied shifts to dislodge us from dominant, conditioned forms of thinking. These possibilities for social agency are otherwise overlooked by structuralist perspectives of corporate mindfulness.

Gibson-Graham's Economic Diversity

The work of J.K. Gibson-Graham enriches our understandings of critique and resistance in capitalist contexts. Their work critiques pervasive discursive constructions of capitalism in contemporary life which often present it as monolithic, totalizing economic system. Gibson-Graham challenges these portrayals of capitalism, arguing that such views obscure the diversity of economic activities happening alongside capital accumulation.

[236] Mariotti, 488.
[237] Mariotti, 485.
[238] hooks, "Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love."

In their seminal work *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*, J.K. Gibson-Graham challenge what they term "capitalocentrism." This term refers to the discursive practices prevalent in the late twentieth century that naturalize capitalism as the dominant, singular form of economic organization. In this representation, omnipresent in U.S. policy and social discourses, capitalism becomes more than a "specific economic form" but rather an archetype for economic activity itself.[239] Within these powerful constructs, noncapitalist forms of economic exchange like unionization, workers cooperatives, or household labor, are collapsed together and rendered invisible or deficient. Capitalocentric thinking presents capitalism as fixed and unchangeable, leading to the belief it is impervious to local attempts at transformation like regulation by political institutions.

Capitalocentric thinking is embedded in dominant neoliberal conceptions of the U.S. economy, presenting free market capitalism as a stable and coherent system despite its persistent crises. This portrayal is clear in cultural narratives that celebrate capitalism's perceived durability. In public school textbooks or policy discussions, for instance, capitalism is often framed as "the "'hero' of industrial development," according to J.K. Gibson-Graham, where it symbolizes modernity, universality, and humanity's emancipation from nature.[240] Capitalocentric thinking undergirds the financial sector's aggressive conversion of homes, retirement security, and natural resources like water into potential income streams in the contemporary era.

Totalizing narratives about capitalism not only enhance its power but also contribute to minimizing alternative economic practices that provide more democratic potential. One approach to dismantling capitalocentric thinking, as argued by Gibson-Graham, is the practice of opening

[239] Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*, 35.
[240] Gibson-Graham, 7–8.

capitalism's identity up to plural, shifting interpretations. Drawing on poststructuralist theorists like Judith Butler, Gibson-Graham conceptualize capitalism as having "no essential or coherent identity" and instead as "open, continually under construction, decentered, constituted by antagonisms, fragmented, plural, multivocal, discursively as well as socially constructed."[241] Studying capitalism "in difference"—as a set of concrete, local practices—enables us to see capitalism as contingent and uneven rather than monolithic. In Chapter Two, for example, I examined corporate mindfulness in multiple forms across time and industries, demonstrating how its purposes changed when associated with different organizational forms. Mindfulness practices and their implementation vary widely depending on these specific relational contexts.

In their subsequent work, *A Post-Capitalist Politics,* Gibson-Graham put forward a framework of "diverse economies" to discover capitalism's contradictory meanings.[242] They identify spaces where capitalism is inhabited by noncapitalist practices. Intentional communities, such as the Mondragón cooperative in Spain's Basque region, illustrate how alternative economic forms create different types of economic subjectivities. Such cases are important to challenging and displacing the dominant capitalocentric visions today.

By examining SIYLI's corporate mindfulness programs, it is clear that these initiatives frequently fell short of their stated goals of fostering "safe" and "supportive" workplaces. Instead, they often functioned as managerial responses to organizational restructurings like layoffs increasingly driven by fluctuations in financial markets. However, in this chapter, I qualify this statement by highlighting the new terrains of contestation that emerged in the local, specific contexts of SIYLI's courses. While these opportunities for resistance may not always be

[241] Gibson-Graham, 253.
[242] Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, 60.

immediately apparent, interviews with SIYLI instructors revealed their personal efforts to teach mindfulness in ways outside the bounds of the standard curriculum. These instructors actively sought to generate political transformation at the individual level, often unbeknownst to their superiors and corporate clients. Using J.K. Gibson-Graham's insights can help better appreciate the ways communities assert their agencies in the face of dominant capitalist structures.

Cases and Methodologies

To conduct a thorough study of the Search Inside Yourself's educational project, I conducted extensive in-depth interviews with certified instructors associated with the organization. These interviews gave me noteworthy insights into how trainers, at the local level, navigated and adapted SIYLI's courses, creating moments of political potential in different contexts. Upon completing their certification, instructors gain access to a library of SIYLI's licensed materials, including a standardized teacher guidebook and various resources developed by prominent figures like Mirabai Bush and Daniel Goleman. Teaching on a fee-for-service basis across the United States, these instructors played critical roles in disseminating the SIYLI curriculum across the corporate landscape, emerging as important mediation points for mindfulness education.

In 2022, I used SIYLI's online directory to identify and recruit U.S.-based instructors for interviews which I conducted via the video conferencing platform Zoom. These professionals, primarily affluent and highly educated, offered firsthand insights into adapting that SIYLI curriculum for diverse environments. Many were deeply committed to the "mindful cause," viewing contemplative practice as larger vehicles for social and cultural healing through compassion and self-awareness. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour and

focused on instructors' perceptions and experiences within corporate settings. I approached my interview data interpretively, using instructors' experiences as a place to create knowledge claims instead of reducing or evaluating their work. With their consent, all interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymized. Identifying information has been removed and all names changed to pseudonyms.

SIYLI, like many organizations, developed a standardized set of teaching materials to streamline the course's facilitation. The teacher guidebook in particular breaks down every aspect of Tan's curriculum into a step-by-step list of instructions much like a script. Chapter One provided an account of this formative process which one program designer described as "tense." Nevertheless, those reconciliation efforts created a standardized version of Tan's curriculum. Instructors are allowed to customize 10% of its content but must adhere to at least 90% conformity with the original slides to maintain the program's integrity and continue teaching under the SIYLI brand. These standardizing processes helped SIYLI scale its offerings and teach them identically across firms, sectors, and countries.

However, SIYLI is a small organization and has limited administrative capacity as well as minimal oversight over its instructors. This grants them a degree of autonomy in implementing Tan's curriculum. As a result of the course's situatedness within broader webs of social and cultural relations, the course takes on a different form each time it is performed. Many of these revisions and adaptations made by instructors are not captured in the course's standardized teaching script.

Previous research suggests that mindfulness suppliers like SIYLI's instructors are primarily aligned with the interests of large, multinational corporations.[243] While this perspective

[243] Purser, *McMindfulness*.

may hold some truth, it oversimplifies instructors' roles as mediators of SIYLI's curriculum. Through one-on-one interviews, I found that instructors navigate the tensions between SIYLI's standard courses and the local conditions they operate in. Below, I examine two areas: first, I overview instances where corporate mindfulness failed to meet its official goals and, second, I examine the adaptations made by instructors to address these challenges. Instructors sought out "entry points" to cultivate what Chari describes as mindful, embodied forms of "political communication" that, along with it, comes "the collective sensing of possibility" in economic contexts.[244]

Negotiating Mindfulness On-the-Ground

Despite good intentions, SIYLI's courses often failed to meet its stated objectives. While SIYLI's marketing suggests its courses are "human-centered," making work "psychologically safe," participants reported a stark contrast in their experiences. At the normative level, SIYLI aspires to create spaces for coworkers to assemble and connect across organizational hierarchy. Through intersubjective practices like "mindful listening" and Just Like Me lovingkindness meditation, courses promote the notion of a shared humanity regardless of merit or pay grade. While more accurate in SIYLI's origins in Silicon Valley among flat hierarchy structures, these spaces failed to achieve their goals.

The presumption of honesty in SIYLI's courses was frequently undermined by corporate hierarchy. As detailed in the previous Chapter, mindfulness initiatives faltered when embedded within the nexus corporation. Despite the pretense of openness, worker participants reported

[244] Chari, "The Political Potential of Mindful Embodiment," 239.

feelings of hypervigilance when attending the same mindfulness course as their boss. As one former employee at a Midwestern investment bank reported:

> When you're in a corporate context, you're very aware that your boss or your boss's boss or your friend's boss is sitting there with you. You aren't always able to speak as freely…. People are much more reserved because you don't want to be perceived as having something wrong with you.[245]

Although SIYLI's courses attempt to break these barriers down through practices encouraging intimacy like sharing personal goals or discussing difficult life situations, the capacity to candidly express these thoughts is deeply mediated by power hierarchies among participants. The embodied feeling of workers being "perceived" as having something wrong them demonstrates these relational power dynamics. These dynamics prevent attempts to build rapport among workforces, as an executive and a lower-level employee might experience the same mindfulness session from drastically different social positions. Paradoxically, this dynamic of self-censorship *inhibits* forms "political communication"[246] in the workplace. Disclosing mental illness, for example, can result in workers being assigned to lower-power jobs, as mental health stigma often leads to perceptions of lower professional competence. "Why would I ever tell my boss that I'm depressed?" this investment banker continued, "You just don't say things like that."[247]

The political sociology of the workplace is often overlooked in normative accounts of mindfulness, especially its interaction with broader status hierarchies in corporate organizations on racialized, gendered, and classed lines.[248] Many large corporations function similarly to

[245] Griffin, Interview with Anne Griffin.
[246] Chari, "The Political Potential of Mindful Embodiment," 237.
[247] Griffin, Interview with Anne Griffin.
[248] Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations"; Tomaskovic-Devey, "The Relational Generation of Workplace Inequalities."

authoritarian regimes, especially outside Silicon Valley's tech-focused environment, where workers' dignity and civil rights are frequently ignored.[249] This is evident in how swiftly firms liquidated employees based on share price valuation. "There's a paradox," one SIYLI certified manager in a large U.S. tech company expressed: "People work until they're burnt out but they're in structures that incentivize them to continue that practice"[250] Workers, fearful of burnout, also experience competing anxiety about sabotaging one's career.

Just Like Me

Mindfulness practices at work can hold political potential but those possibilities can be seriously undermined by broader social contexts. A notable example comes from SIYLI's "Just Like Me" lovingkindness meditation, discussed in detail in Chapter One. In this practice, coworkers sit face to face with each other while a facilitator guides them through a meditation, encouraging participants to repeat phrases like "this person is a human being with a mind and body, just like me."[251] At first glance, the goal of the practice is to foster empathy and attunement between workers. However, this universalization of the psyche, grounded in neuroscience, obscures the distinct material realities many workers face. It reduces diverse experiences into a singular human psyche. For instance, Davidson and Goleman's parallels between the brain's reaction to an "ancient predator" and "boss" fail to acknowledge that for many, work is fundamentally about material survival and that the psyche is shaped by context, identity, and genetics.

[249] Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives*.
[250] Buchanan, Interview with Nadine Buchanan.
[251] Bush, *Working With Mindfulness*.

While many instructors that I interviewed described the Just Like Me practice as "powerful," its universalizing tendencies also evoked frustration. One SIYLI instructor recounted guiding this meditation in a town outside of St. Louis marked by significant racial tensions. Several participants became "frustrated" and "angry" at the perceived "privilege" embedded in the practice.[252] Their reactions speak to limitations of SIYLI's attempts at political neutrality, where the uniformity of the curriculum takes precedence over the space's contextual power dynamics such as race or gender. As Saidiya Hartman notes, empathy can be "slippery," treading a "thin line" between "witness and spectator."[253] Corporate requests of empathy produce onerous forms of labor, where workers are expected to manage not only their own emotions but those of their colleagues all within the bounds of corporate expectations. SIYLI's Just Like Me practice, in particular, shows the frictions between the universalizing tendencies of SIYLI's corporate mindfulness programs and the local power dynamics that shape the workplace.

Adaptations by SIYLI's Instructors

Contrary to existing literatures, which portray these trainers as pure ideologues, my fieldwork revealed a more complex reality. Interviews with corporate mindfulness trainers revealed layers of contestation at the local level, highlighting SIYLI's transformative potential. Instructors' deep commitment to the contemplative tradition and their belief in its capacity to heal cultural divides drove their work. This commitment often transformed the approach of the courses outside the bounds of Tan's teacher guidebook, seeing them not merely as sources of income but as opportunities to facilitate political moments of change that challenged the

[252] Carr, Interview with Lionel Carr.
[253] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 19.

dominant order. I explore two cases below: first, teachers adapting the courses in search of "entry points," and second, examples of contestation that emerged within these contexts.

Navigating the Double Bind

The intricacies of teaching mindfulness in corporate environment revealed a deep internal conflict among instructors. One instructor articulated this tension as a "double bind,"[254] an internal struggle over the motivations behind the work as well as concerns about cultural appropriation and fears of "going native" in corporate settings. They expressed apprehension of "pushing into large, multinational corporations" and using mindfulness to cope with "oppressive" and "overworked" conditions, which inadvertently obscure the root causes of workplace stress. Paralleling the concerns of Mirabai Bush in her work with Monsanto, the instructor expressed his ambivalence: "Between those two poles" of corporate capitalism and Buddhism "is a question that I'm very much in."[255]

This double bind is compounded by the deep Buddhist practices many teachers maintain while simultaneously needing to distance themselves from direct references to Buddhism to continue their work inside firms. SIYLI's curriculum developers like Mirabai Bush, Daniel Goleman, and Tan himself were well-versed in Buddhist traditions yet strategically veiled these roots through the standardization process discussed in Chapter Two. Another SIYLI instructor expressed feeling fear during his teacher certification training, worried the program was "designed entirely to support raw corporate capitalism."[256] He described walking away from the teacher training thinking "'what am I gonna have to do to make this something that I can present

[254] Peters, Interview with Ray Peters.
[255] Peters.
[256] Sandoval, Interview with Jeffrey Sandoval.

and feel good about what I'm saying? What am I going to have to tweak so that I can still be authentic?'" He continued: "I can't deny the spiritual aspect of it, and I cannot get into anything that's going to tell cubicle workers to just be good cubicle workers, good little worker bees supporting the corporate capitalist libertarian infrastructure of the world."[257]

This was one exemplar of the political and spiritual autonomy many SIYLI instructors brought into their work. Even before their certification, the instructor above was already searching for "entry points" to invest their own personal meanings into the work regardless of SIYLI or the corporate client's wishes. Here, the instructor envisioned workplace mindfulness as a practice to dislodge dominant capitalocentric thinking. He recounted the remarks made by another SIYLI instructor at his own training that "pleasantly shocked" him:

> Now I've got to warn you, after my program, 10% of the people who participate in the program are gonna quit. They're gonna quit your company because they're going to realize their values aren't in alignment with your values no matter how good your values are, they're going to have enough internal revelation that they're going to change the way they're living their life.[258]

One SIYLI instructor described a common sentiment among them: "We have a terrible, cheesy little 'be careful with the B word' phrase" that comes up in conversations about pre-meetings with potential corporate clients.[259] Here, the "B word" refers to Buddhism, which must be sanitized for corporate consumption. However, the ultimate goal for many instructors remains finding entry points for more transformative, under-the-radar mindfulness practice.

[257] Sandoval.
[258] Sandoval.
[259] Peters, Interview with Ray Peters.

Seeking Moments of Dislocation

Despite SIYLI's shortcomings, its instructors sought to create moments of dislocation that helped them sharpen their critical capacities. In the liminal space of entering a new corporate client's workforce, instructors found themselves asking: "where are the entry points?"[260] According to interviews, many adapted their language and approach depending on their perception of the social field in front of them. One instructor, with a deep belief in mindfulness's power to "heal ourselves," "our culture," as well as "our planet,"[261] looked for conditions to engender a more radical kind of mindful embodiment: "Now guys trying to meet sales quotas don't want to hear me talk about righting the wrongs of our culture. You know that's a little unfair to them, but if I drift into [talking about] 'healing the culture, healing the planet,' I might lose some people."[262] Instead, he "pulls back the veil" on his goals of mindfulness "proportionally depending on where I sense the learning community is."[263] These instructors often act like yoga blocks, props of foam or cork blocks used to make yoga poses more accessible for beginners or those with limited flexibility. As one instructor explained, their task was to "find the right balance between invitation and evangelism."[264] They saw their work as making mindfulness accessible to facilitate cultural healing, easing participants into practices to avoid strain or injury.

Another instructor expressed a more pragmatic motivation for his work, stating, "I deliver to corporate audiences because, for the same reason John Dillinger robbed banks—that's where

[260] Peters.
[261] Peters.
[262] Peters.
[263] Peters.
[264] Peters.

the money is."[265] Here, the reference to Dillinger, the twentieth century gangster, suggests a particular pride in exploiting large corporations to teach mindfulness for a paycheck. The same instructor reported occasionally "sneaking in" deeper practices, like a Buddhist dedication of merit practice: "At the very end when we're done with the whole program and we're saying goodbye…I speak out loud that 'I didn't do this for my benefit, I did this for the benefit of all people in the world.' It's a very compassionate practice."[266] By adapting and improvising based on the situation, instructors gauge the receptivity of the classroom, making small tweaks like considering their choice of words to deliver their message most forcefully.

The Local Politics of Workplace Mindfulness

An exploration of Search Inside Yourself's courses demonstrate the contingent, unstable landscape of corporate mindfulness instruction. While mindfulness courses appear democratic on the surface, they often fall short in providing workers with long-term material security. These potentials for empowerment are constrained by workers' lack of control over work conditions under the shareholder model of the corporation. This is demonstrated by employees' self-censorship in these courses, where status hierarchies constrain the expression of emotional vulnerability.

Through in-depth interviews with certified instructors, I argue that instructors actively negotiated and adapted the standardized materials in relation to the specific cultural and social dynamics of their classrooms. This adaptable created opportunities for political engagement and deeper sense of connection among participants. However, despite these intentions, instructors

[265] Sandoval, Interview with Jeffrey Sandoval.
[266] Sandoval.

faced significant limitations, including entrenched corporate hierarchies. The balance between maintaining SIYLI's curricular integrity and addressing the local contexts underscores their role as crucial mediators in the translation of mindfulness practice.

V. CONCLUSION

Introduction

How did mindfulness and meditation become a dominant corporate service in the twenty-first century? Buddhist practices like lovingkindness aren't typically associated with modern office life yet they were packaged into coherent corporate services throughout the 2010s. Often understood in existing literatures as an instrument of profit maximization or ideological control, this project sought to open the "black box" of corporate mindfulness programs to understand its formation in the context of contemporary financial dominance. I investigated corporate mindfulness as multiple reconciliatory processes merging the diverse life practices of modern Buddhism with financialization.

I used a diverse number of texts and media sources to build a cultural history of the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, Google's foremost corporate mindfulness program, and its proliferation after the financial crash. Popular and academic texts on meditative neuroscience, media stories from *the New York Times, Bloomberg,* and *Financial Times,* as well as the published works by SIYLI's collaborators like Richard Davidson and Daniel Goleman provided a wealth of empirical evidence for exploration. These documents were supplemented by one-on-one interviews with SIYLI's certified corporate mindfulness instructors over their particularistic experiences teaching in corporate contexts.

Using process-based frameworks informed by Jane Bennett's work and interpretive methods, I traced the multiple associative processes that integrated mindfulness into corporate culture. Elements of these processes included the evolution of meditative neuroscience, the establishment of SIYLI at Google and its curriculum design, the diffusion of mindfulness into

broader corporate firms, and the dynamic interactions between SIYLI's instructors and their classroom contexts.

Buddhist practices were transformed into quantifiable brain data by scientists like Richard Davidson, who's research constructed meditation as a form of "mental training" to "synchronize" the mind's circuitry. [267] Radioimaging confirmed the notion of neuroplasticity which contemplative scientists closely aligned to Buddhist conceptions of the self. Meditation practice improved the brain's "routing strategies," collaborator Matthieu Ricard wrote in 2017, by "slow[ing] down the traffic on pathways of hatred and open[ing] wide the routes of compassion."[268]

This cultural translation attracted Google to meditative neuroscientists in the late 2000s, where SIYLI's curriculum began to formalize Buddhist practices like lovingkindness meditation into a coherent corporate program. Tan's courses first emerged from Google's tech startup culture, where organizational forms like flat hierarchies and collaborative production required emotional attunement between engineers. The courses used software engineering analogies to jell in this context, comparing the contemplative practice of emotional awareness to enhancing an image's resolution.

Following the 2007-09 financial crash, a crisis point for shareholder capitalism in the U.S., SIYLI expanded beyond Silicon Valley into other sectors like manufacturing, where workers dealt with omnipotent corporate restructuring like downsizings and layoffs. While mindfulness tried transforming workplace dynamics, it was often limited by precarious employment relations and at-will contracts.

---

[267] Lutz et al., "Long-Term Meditators Self-Induce High-Amplitude Gamma Synchrony During Mental Practice."
[268] Ricard and Singer, *Beyond the Self: Conversations Between Buddhism and Neuroscience*.

On the ground, SIYLI instructors did the work of adapting Tan's standard program to its local conditions. Interviews with instructors highlighted an "everyday politics" of workplace mindfulness where, in some settings, the practice reinforced corporate control, while in others, it offered the potential for more democratic and embodied forms of contemplation. In these environments, SIYLI instructors served as supportive tools, similar to yoga blocks, facilitating mindfulness for otherwise skeptical corporate clients. Just like yoga blocks help novices achieve certain poses with greater ease, instructors adjusted their methods to accommodate the varying leaves of readiness they perceived in their courses.

What Does Mindfulness Teach Us About Work in the U.S.?

The rise of mindfulness programs across U.S. workplaces gives us deeper insight into the deteriorating conditions of work in a financialized economy. Financial practices and technologies have structured more of contemporary life including employment relations. Financialization—the processes of converting social dimensions into financial modalities—redefined the corporation as a "nexus" of at-will employment contracts, distinguished by a relentless attunement to financial market signals, often at the expense of workers' job security.

Examining corporate mindfulness as part of the broader U.S. political economy of work calls attention to political and legal conditions that sustain these dynamics. U.S. labor law like at-will employment as well as corporate legal structures and policymakers' antiregulatory attitudes towards finance created a work environment where short-term financial market gains are prioritized over the long-term care of workers. As mindfulness programs grew, they reflected this profound political ambivalence—a reluctance to confront the legal and economic frameworks that entrenched finance as a dominant force while also forced to metabolize the

intolerable conditions many workers face. Mindfulness programs normalized these stress-inducing work arrangements, encouraging workers to invest in their emotional capacities.

The U.S. Wellness Industry

To understand the U.S. wellness industry, an examination of how corporate forms like the nexus firm are involved in its growth. This burgeoning industry includes an array of products and services marketed for holistic health including fitness, diet and nutrition, psychotherapy, self-care, as well as practices like mindfulness and meditation. Effectively critiquing these trends, however, requires moving beyond the notion of corporate wellness as a mere tool of psychological control. Instead, corporate wellness initiatives reveal how the wellness industry is embedded in a broader framework of political, legal, and institutional rules.

The corporate wellness industry has grown to a formidable size in recent years. The worth of this industry, a mixture of employers and third party wellness vendors like SIYLI, jumped from $6 billion to $56 billion from 2013 to 2022.[269] This era of "wellness capitalism," according to Nopper and Zelickson, pulls together state governments, employers, and third-party wellness vendors monitor workers' activities under the goals of managing and improving society's health.[270] This includes online apps provided by employers like telehealth, wellness portals, family management services, and other employee assistance programs. These providers exist in largely unregulated industries, collecting large amounts of data on workers with no privacy protections in place.[271]

[269] Nopper and Zelickson, *Wellness Capitalism: Employee Health, the Benefits Maze, and Worker Control*, 10.
[270] Nopper and Zelickson, *Wellness Capitalism: Employee Health, the Benefits Maze, and Worker Control*.
[271] Nopper and Zelickson, 3.

The economic power of these companies has increased significantly in the era of big tech and big data. The emergence of "anxiety tech,"[272] for instance, which includes technologies like mobile apps, wearable devices, and only platforms specifically designed to manage stress. By 2018, the digital mindfulness app Headspace, founded in 2010, "aggressively" pursued at least 250 corporate clients to provide workers their application.[273] Headspace valued at $3 billion in 2021 after merging with Ginger, a virtual mental healthcare center.[274] Tracing the trajectories of companies like Headspace reveal how markets for wellness were formed themselves.

In this context, mindfulness courses indicate a larger critique of diminishing social welfare programs in the U.S. including inadequate parental leave policies and limited paid time off compared to other OECD countries. Additionally, the U.S. relies on employer-sponsored health insurance plans rather than universal coverage through the state, which further shapes a corporation's power in shaping workers' life experiences across the country.

The Normative Stakes of Workplace Mindfulness

Mindfulness, while often framed as an individual practice, is deeply shaped by the economic, social, and cultural contexts it is situated within. Under the constraints of shareholder capitalism, such as the prioritization of shareholder value maximization over workers' wellbeing, its potential for transformative change remains limited unless it actively engages with a larger critique of U.S. economic inequality. As discussed in Chapter Three, the practice of mindfulness

[272] Hunter, "'Anxiety Tech' Companies Say Their Glowing Orbs and Audio-Playing Rocks Will Improve Your Mental Health."
[273] Peebles, "Meditation App Headspace on Track to Double Corporate Clients, Bring Mindfulness to Work."
[274] Forrester, "Ginger and Headspace Merge: Looks to Build Mental Resilience in All Employees By Giving Them More Choice."

can help workers reconnect with a sense of agency and critical awareness, yet in most corporate settings this focus remains narrow.

In rethinking the relationship between contemplative practice and the economy, J.K. Gibson-Graham's work on diverse economies offers a way forward. Their model suggests that alternatives to shareholder capitalism like worker cooperatives offer spaces where mindfulness may facilitate more democratic, equitable economic relationships. Worker cooperatives, which involve power and profit sharing with workers, remove the corporate hierarchies that limited corporate mindfulness so much in the shareholder corporation.

Future research could deepen this analysis by examining Buddhist-inspired contemplative practices within cooperatives and other alternative economic enterprises in the U.S. These cooperatives, as counterpractices to the dominant model of shareholder capitalism, provide field sites to research mindfulness fostering more democratic forms of agency and economic solidarity. This work would also help refine the arguments in critical social theory that mixtures of Buddhism and economic activity are a priori corrupting by providing a counterexample. Alternative economic institutions including New York City's cooperative Mandala Café, mindfulness's use among care workers like hospice workers as well as for unions. There have been emergent efforts to unionize and cooperatize yoga studies in places like New York City and Philadelphia, providing another case that blends economic justice with contemplative practice. Researching these environments through interviews and participant observation can offer insight into how contemplative practices operate within non-hierarchical spaces as well as what kind of economic subjectivities they produce. Drawing from Chari and Mariotti's framework of embodied, democratic mindfulness as discussed in Chapter Three, cooperatives and other

alternative economic institutions provide rich opportunities to explore mindfulness and the economy.

REFERENCES CITED

Acker, Joan. “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations.” *Gender and Society* 4, no. 2 (1990): 139–58.

Alphabet Workers Union. “Alphabet Workers Union Members Oppose Unnecessary Layoffs,” January 12, 2024. https://www.alphabetworkersunion.org/press/statement-on-jan-2024-layoffs.

Anderson, Elizabeth. *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

APA. “Stress in the Workplace.” American Psychological Association, 2011. https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/phwa-survey-summary.pdf.

Asgar, Wendy Biddlecombe. “Revisiting Corporate Meditation.” *Tricycle*, Spring 2019. https://tricycle.org/magazine/mirabai-bush/.

Bartleby. “What Makes a Good Office Perk?” *The Economist*, April 20, 2023. https://www.economist.com/business/2023/04/20/what-makes-a-good-office-perk.

Bates, Daniel. “Father of Investment Banker, 29, Fears Son Turned to Drink and Drugs to Cope with Stress.” *Daily Mail*, May 29, 2015. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3102513/Successful-investment-banker-29-leaps-death-luxury-New-York-apartment-returning-Bahamas-holiday.html.

Bennett, Jane. *Influx & Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

Berinato, Scott. “Mindfulness Is Demotivating.” *Harvard Business Review*, 2019. https://hbr.org/2019/01/mindfulness-is-demotivating.

Bivens, Josh, and Jori Kandra. “CEO Pay Slightly Declined in 2022.” Economic Policy Institute, September 21, 2023. https://www.epi.org/publication/ceo-pay-in-2022/#:~:text=CEO%20granted%20compensation%20rose%201%2C046.9,to%2D1%20ratio%20in%201965.

Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2005.

Borck, Cornelius. *Brainwaves: A Cultural History of Electroencephalography*. Translated by Ann Hentschel. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Brown, Candy Gunther. “Can ‘Secular’ Mindfulness Be Separated from Religion?” In *Mindfulness in Behavioral Health*, 75–94. Springer International Publishing, 2016.

Bruce, Marino, Kia Skrine Jeffers, Jan King Robinson, and Keith Norris. “Contemplative Practices: A Strategy to Improve Health and Reduce Disparities.” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 15, no. 10 (October 2018): 2253.

Buchanan, Nadine. Interview with Nadine Buchanan. Interview by Katie Temple. Zoom, March 2, 2022.

Burton, Katherine, and Anthony Effinger. “To Make A Killing on Wall Street, Start Meditating.” *Bloomberg*, 2014.

Bush, Mirabai. *Working With Mindfulness*. More than Sound, 2012.

Carr, Lionel. Interview with Lionel Carr. Interview by Katie Temple, February 19, 2022.

Carrette, Jeremy, and Richard King. *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Cederström, Carl, and André Spicer. *The Wellness Syndrome*. Malden, MA: Polity, 2015.

Chari, Anita. “The Political Potential of Mindful Embodiment.” *New Political Science* 38, no. 2 (2016): 226–40.

Clifford, Catherine. “Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff: Why We Have ‘Mindfulness Zones’ Where Employees Put Away Phones, Clear Their Minds.” *CNBC*, November 5, 2019. https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/05/salesforce-ceo-marc-benioff-why-we-have-mindfulness-zones.html.

Cohan, William. “More Details on Banker’s Tragic Death, But Questions Persist.” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/02/business/dealbook/more-details-on-bankers-tragic-death-but-questions-persist.html.

Coleman, James. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Cooban, Anna. “Amazon Is Installing Phonebooth-Sized Boxes for Exhausted Employees to Meditate.” *Business Insider*, May 28, 2021. https://www.businessinsider.com/amazon-is-installing-tiny-amazen-booths-help-employees-mental-health-2021-5.

Cortois, Liza. “Expressive Individualism in the New Spirit of Capitalism: Mindfulness and Outdoor Management Development.” In *Spirituality, Organization and Neoliberalism: Understanding Lived Experiences*, 46–66. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020.

Davidson, Richard, and Anne Harrington. *Visions of Compassion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Davies, William. *The Happiness Industry*. New York: Verso, 2015.

Davis, Gerald. “After the Corporation.” *Politics & Society* 41, no. 2 (2013): 283–308.

———. *Managed by the Markets: How Finance Re-Shaped America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Dayton, Gary. *Trade Mindfully*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015.

DeMarco, Tom, and Timothy Lister. *Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams*. New York: Dorset House Publishing Co., 1999.

Dhiman, Satinder, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Mindfulness at Work*. New York: Routledge, 2021.

Dill, Kathryn. “Survey: 42% of Employees Have Changed Jobs Due to Stress.” *Forbes*, April 18, 2014. https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathryndill/2014/04/18/survey-42-of-employees-have-changed-jobs-due-to-stress/.

Dobbin, Frank, and Alexandra Kalev. *Getting to Diversity: What Works and What Doesn’t*. Belknap Press, 2022.

Dorjee, Dusana. *Neuroscience and Psychology of Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Driver, Michaela. “From Empty Speech to Full Speech? Reconceptualizing Spirituality in Organizations Based on Psychoanalytically-Grounded Understanding of the Self.” *Human Relations* 58, no. 9 (2005): 1091–1110.

Drougge, Per. “Notes Toward A Coming Backlash: Mindfulness as an Opiate of the Middle Classes,” 167–79. Springer International Publishing, 2016.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Natural Causes: An Epidemic of Wellness, the Certainty of Dying, and Killing Ourselves to Live*. New York: Twenty, 2018.

Ensign, Rachel Louise. “Investing the Downward Dog Way? Advisor Suggests Deep Breaths.” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 9, 2013.

Forrester. “Ginger and Headspace Merge: Looks to Build Mental Resilience in All Employees By Giving Them More Choice.” *Forbes*, September 7, 2021. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forrester/2021/09/07/ginger-and-headspace-merge-looks-to-build-mental-resilience-in-all-employees-by-giving-them-more-choice/?sh=4368df6a146c.

Fujii, Lee Ann. *Interviewing in Social Science Research*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Gandel, Stephen. “Barclays to Require Its Junior Bankers to Take Saturdays Off.” *Fortune Magazine*, September 11, 2015.

Gelles, David. “Amid the Chattering of the Global Elite, a Silent Interlude.” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2015.

———. *Mindful Work: How Meditation Is Changing Business from the Inside Out*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

———. “The Mind Business.” *Financial Times*, August 24, 2012. https://www.ft.com/content/d9cb7940-ebea-11e1-985a-00144feab49a.

Giang, Vivian. “Inside Google’s Insanely Popular Emotional-Intelligence Course.” *Fast Company*, March 25, 2015. https://www.fastcompany.com/3044157/inside-googles-insanely-popular-emotional-intelligence-course.

Gibson-Graham, J.K. *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

———. *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Glazer, Emily, and Daniel Huang. “J.P. Morgan to Workaholics: Knock It Off.” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 2016. https://www.wsj.com/articles/j-p-morgan-chase-tells-investment-bankers-to-take-weekends-off-1453384738.

Glickman, Marshall. “The Lama in the Lab.” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Spring 2003. https://tricycle.org/magazine/lama-lab/.

Goleman, Daniel. *Daniel Goleman on Social Intelligence*. Talks at Google. Mountain View, CA, 2007.

———. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books, 1996.

———. *The Varieties of Meditative Experience*. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1977.

Goleman, Daniel, and Richard Davidson. *Altered Traits*. New York: Avery, 2017.

Goyal, Madhav, Sonal Singh, Erica Sibinga, Neda Gould, Anastasia Rowland-Seymour, Ritu Sharma, Zackary Berger, et al. “Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 174, no. 3 (2014): 357–68.

Grant, Adam. “Can We End the Meditation Madness?” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/10/opinion/can-we-end-the-meditation-madness.html.

Grant, Nico. “Google Cuts Hundreds of Jobs in Engineering and Other Divisions.” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/11/technology/google-layoffs.html.

Griffin, Anne. Interview with Anne Griffin. Interview by Katie Temple. Zoom, September 9, 2022.

Gusterson, Hugh. "Studying Up Revisited." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1 (1997): 114–19.

Gyatso, Tenzin. "The Monk in the Lab." *New York Times*, April 26, 2003. https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/26/opinion/the-monk-in-the-lab.html?searchResultPosition=1.

Hafenbrack, Andrew, and Kathleen Vohs. "Mindfulness Meditation Impairs Task Motivation but Not Performance." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 147 (2018): 1–15.

Harris, Dan. "Neuroscientist Richie Davidson Says Dalai Lama Gave Him 'a Total Wake-Up Call' That Changed His Research Forever." *10% Happier*, July 27, 2016. https://abcnews.go.com/Health/neuroscientist-richie-davidson-dalai-lama-gave-total-wake/story?id=40859233.

Harris, Malcolm. *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2023.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hickey, Wakoh Shannon. "Meditation as Medicine: A Critique." *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 2 (2010): 168–84.

Ho, Karen. "Anthropology of Finance." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., 9:171–76. Elsevier Ltd., 2015.

———. *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.

hooks, bell. "Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love." *Lion's Roar*, November 8, 2022. https://www.lionsroar.com/toward-a-worldwide-culture-of-love/.

Hunter, Tatum. "'Anxiety Tech' Companies Say Their Glowing Orbs and Audio-Playing Rocks Will Improve Your Mental Health." *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/01/26/anxiety-stress-tech-meditation/.

Isaac, Mike. "Focused Cuts and Fewer Layers: Tech Layoffs Enter a New Phase." *The New York Times*, January 30, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/30/technology/layoffs-tech-industry.html#:~:text=The%20past%20couple%20of%20years,to%20data%20compiled%20by%20Layoffs.

Isaacson, Walter. *Steve Jobs*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Islam, Gazi, Marie Holm, and Mira Karjalainen. "Sign of the Times: Workplace Mindfulness as an Empty Signifier." *Organization* 29, no. 1 (2017): 3–29.

Johnson, Dirk. “Dalai Lama Donates to Center in Wisconsin.” *New York Times*, September 26, 2010. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/27/us/27happy.html#:~:text=Davidson%20would%20one%20day%20find,research%20lab%20founded%20by%20Dr.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living*. Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1990.

Kamoche, Ken, and Ashly Pinnington. “Managing People ‘Spiritually’: A Bourdieusian Critique.” *Work, Employment, and Society* 26, no. 3 (2012): 497–513.

Kelly, Caitlin. “O.K., Google, Take a Deep Breath.” *The New York Times*, 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/29/technology/google-course-asks-employees-to-take-a-deep-breath.html.

Kelly, Jack. “JP Morgan Is Channeling Its Inner Google With an Eco-Friendly New Headquarters Offering Yoga and Meditation Spaces.” *Forbes*, April 14, 2022. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2022/04/14/jp-morgan-is-channeling-its-inner-google-with-an-eco-friendly-new-headquarters-offering-yoga-and-meditation-spaces/?sh=5d14f1372545.

Kennedy, Maev. “Bank Intern Moritz Erhardt Died From Epileptic Seizure, Inquest Told.” *The Guardian*, November 22, 2013. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/nov/22/moritz-erhardt-merrill-lynch-intern-dead-inquest.

Kim, Eugene. “Salesforce Put A Meditation Room on Every Floor of Its New Tower Because of Buddhist Monks.” *Business Insider*, March 7, 2016. https://www.businessinsider.com/salesforce-put-a-meditation-room-on-every-floor-of-its-new-tower-2016-3.

Klein, Jonathan. Interview with Jonathan Klein. Interview by Katie Temple. Zoom, September 8, 2022.

Konrad, Alex. “How Monks Convinced Marc Benioff to Install ‘Mindfulness Zones’ Throughout Salesforce’s New Office.” *Forbes*, March 7, 2016. https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexkonrad/2016/03/07/how-monks-convinced-benioff-to-put-mindfulness-zones-in-salesforce/?sh=66971ab11e24.

Krippner, Greta. *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Kruse, Kevin. “Facebook Unveils New Campus: Will Workers Be Sick, Stressed and Dissatisfied?” *Forbes*, August 25, 2012. https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/08/25/facebook-unveils-new-campus-will-workers-be-sick-stressed-and-dissatisfied/?sh=e32346b53957.

Kucinskas, Jaime. *The Mindful Elite: Mobilizing from the Inside Out*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Lama, HH the Dalai. *The Universe in a Single Atom*. Chatsworth, CA: Harmony, 2006.

Lazonick, William. "Profits Without Prosperity." *Harvard Business Review*, 2014.

Lehrer, Jonah. "Steve Jobs: 'Technology Alone Is Not Enough.'" *The New Yorker*, October 7, 2011. https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/steve-jobs-technology-alone-is-not-enough.

Leonhardt, David. "The Amazon Customers Don't See." *The New York Times*, June 15, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/15/briefing/amazon-warehouse-investigation.html.

Lesser, Marc. *Seven Practices of a Mindful Leader: Lessons from Google and a Zen Monastery Kitchen*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2019.

Leung, Mei-Kei, Chetwyn Chan, Jing Yin, Chack-Fan Lee, Kwok-Fai So, and Tatia Lee. "Increased Gray Matter Volume in the Right Angular and Posterior Parahippocampal Gyri in Loving-Kindness Meditators." *Social Cognitive & Affective Neuroscience* 8, no. 1 (n.d.): 34–39.

Levy, Steven. *In The Plex*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Lohr, Steve. "Hey, Who's He? With Gwyneth? The Google Guy." *The New York Times*, September 1, 2007. https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/01/technology/01google.html.

Lutz, Antoine, Julie Brefczynski-Lewis, Tom Johnstone, and Richard Davidson. "Regulation of the Neural Circuitry of Emotion by Compassion Meditation." *PLOSOne* 3, no. 3 (2008).

Lutz, Antoine, Lawrence Greischar, Nancy Rawlings, Matthieu Ricard, and Richard Davidson. "Long-Term Meditators Self-Induce High-Amplitude Gamma Synchrony During Mental Practice." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 101, no. 46 (2004): 16369–73.

Lynch, Sarah. "Want More Engaged Employees? Let Them Meditate on the Job with Deepak Chopra, This Startup Says." *Inc.*, October 17, 2023. https://www.inc.com/sarah-lynch-/want-more-engaged-employees-let-them-meditate-on-job-with-deepak-chopra-this-startup-says.html.

Margalit, Ruth. "The Death of Moritz Erhardt, and Keynes's Mistake." *The New Yorker*, August 22, 2013. https://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-death-of-moritz-erhardt-and-keyness-mistake.

Mariotti, Shannon. "Zen and the Art of Democracy: Contemplative Practice as Ordinary Political Theory." *Political Theory* 48, no. 4 (2020): 469–95.

McMahan, David. *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Miller, Jeff. *University of Wisconsin Madison News* (blog), June 2008. https://news.wisc.edu/newsphotos/davidson08.html.

Munnell, Alicia. "The Financial Crisis and Restoring Retirement Security." Testimony. U.S. House of Representatives: Committee on Education and Labor, February 24, 2009. https://m.icmarc.org/Documents/educomm/aliciamunnelltestimony.pdf.

National Institutes of Health. "Meditation and Mindfulness: Effectiveness and Safety." *National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health*, June 2022. https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-and-mindfulness-effectiveness-and-safety.

Neate, Rupert. "Goldman Sachs Restricts Intern Workday to 17 Hours in Wake of Burnout Death." *The Guardian*, June 17, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/jun/17/goldman-sachs-interns-work-hours.

Nopper, Tamara, and Eve Zelickson. *Wellness Capitalism: Employee Health, the Benefits Maze, and Worker Control*. Data & Society Research Institute, 2023.

North, Anna. "The Mindfulness Backlash." *The New York Times*, 2014.

NPR. "New York Stock Exchanges Announces Plans to Merge with an Electronic Trading Company." *National Public Radio*, April 21, 2005.

NYSE. "The History of NYSE." New York Stock Exchange, n.d. https://www.nyse.com/history-of-nyse#:~:text=In%202006%2C%20the%20New%20York,third%20largest%20U.S.%20options%20market.

O'Sullivan, Mary. *Contests for Corporate Control: Corporate Governance and Economic Performance in the US and Germany*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Peebles, Angelica. "Meditation App Headspace on Track to Double Corporate Clients, Bring Mindfulness to Work." *CNBC*, September 2, 2018. https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/02/companies-are-turning-to-headspace-to-help-their-workers-meditate.html.

Penner, Drew. "Salesforce Cancels Contract with Retreat Center." *Press Banner*, March 10, 2023. https://pressbanner.com/salesforce-cancels-contract-with-retreat-center/.

Peters, Ray. Interview with Ray Peters. Interview by Katie Temple. Zoom, January 31, 2022.

Pickert, Kate. "The Mindful Revolution." *Time*, January 23, 2014.

Piketty, Thomas. *Capital In the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.

PR Newswire. “Research and Markets: The Era of Algorithmic Trading Is Here.” *PR Newswire*, May 27, 2005.

Purser, Ronald. *McMindfulness*. Repeater, 2019.

Purser, Ronald, David Forbes, and Adam Burke. “Preface.” In *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Springer International Publishing, 2016.

Purser, Ronald, and David Loy. “Beyond McMindfulness.” *Huffington Post*, July 1, 2013. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/beyond-mcmindfulness_b_3519289.

Ricard, Matthieu, and Wolf Singer. *Beyond the Self: Conversations Between Buddhism and Neuroscience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017.

Richie Davidson on Meeting the Dalai Lama. Mind and Life Institute, 2015. https://www.mindandlife.org/media/richie-davidson-on-meeting-the-dalai-lama/.

Rocha, Tomas. “The Dark Knight of the Soul.” *The Atlantic*, 2014.

Rose, Nikolas, and Joelle Abi-Rached. *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Rowe, James. “Zen and the Art of Social Movement Maintenance.” *Waging Nonviolence*, March 21, 2015. https://wagingnonviolence.org/2015/03/mindfulness-and-the-art-of-social-movement-maintenance/.

Sandoval, Jeffrey. Interview with Jeffrey Sandoval. Interview by Katie Temple. Zoom, January 27, 2022.

Saxenian, AnnaLee. *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Schmidt, Eric, and Jonathan Rosenberg. *How Google Works*. London, UK: John Murray, 2014.

Schwartz, Tony. “When Employee Engagement Turns Into Employee Burnout.” *The New York Times*, March 14, 2015.

Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine, and Dvora Yanow. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Shambroom, Paul. “The Mind Business.” August 24, 2012.

SIY Global. “Announcing SIY Global,” April 14, 2022.

SIYLI. “Search Inside Yourself Program Guide.” Search Inside Yourself Global, 2022. https://www.siyglobal.com/search-inside-yourself.

———. “SIY Organizational Teacher Certification Applicant’s Guide.” Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute, 2021. https://siyli.org/wp-content/uploads/SIY_OrgaTeacherCertification_ProgramGuide2021.pdf.

Slaughter, Anne-Marie. “A Toxic Work World.” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/sunday/a-toxic-work-world.html.

Stross, Randall. *Planet Google*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008.

Swanson, Ana. “Your Job Is Literally Killing You.” *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2015.

Tan, Chade-Meng. *Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness (and World) Peace*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012.

Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald. “The Relational Generation of Workplace Inequalities.” *Social Currents* 1, no. 1 (2014): 51–73.

Van Biema, David. “Buddhism in America.” *Time Magazine*, October 13, 1997.

Van Dam, Nicholas, Marieke van Vugt, David Vago, and Laura Schmalzl. “Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13, no. 1 (2018): 36–61.

Walker, Tim. “Perks for Employees and How Google Changed the Way We Work (While Waiting in Line).” *The Independent*, September 21, 2013.

Walsh, Zack. “Mindfulness Under Neoliberal Governmentality: Critiquing the Operation of Biopower in Corporate Mindfulness and Constructing Queer Alternatives.” *Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion* 15, no. 2 (2018): 109–22.

Ward, Steve. *TraderMind: Get a Mindful Edge in the Markets*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014.

Wieczner, Jen. “Is There a Suicide Contagion on Wall Street?” *Fortune*, February 27, 2014. https://fortune.com/2014/02/27/is-there-a-suicide-contagion-on-wall-street/.

Wiegers, Karl. *Creating a Software Engineering Culture*. New York: Dorset House Publishing Co., 1996.

Williams, Nia. “FX Traders Seek Coaching in Battle for Dominance.” *Reuters*, 2012.

Wilson, Jeff. *Mindful America: The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

World Economic Forum. “The Future of Jobs Report.” World Economic Forum, 2018. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf.

Zeidan, Fadel, Katherine Martucci, Robert Kraft, Nakia Gordon, John McHaffie, and Robert Coghill. “Brain Mechanisms Supporting the Modulation of Pain by Mindfulness Meditation.” *Journal of Neuroscience* 31, no. 14 (2011): 5540–48.

Zizek, Slavoj. “From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism.” *Cabinet Magazine*, 2001. https://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/zizek.php.