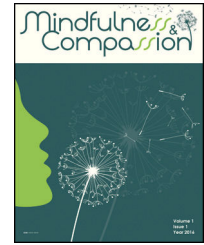




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SPECIAL ARTICLE

## Corporate use of mindfulness and authentic spiritual transmission: Competing or compatible ideals?



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**Abstract** There is consensus amongst both the scientific and Buddhist community that mindfulness – when correctly taught and practised – leads to a range of beneficial outcomes. However, there has been little evaluation of what happens when mindfulness is incorrectly taught, or is practised with a selfish rather than selfless intention. Nowhere is the importance of this issue more pertinent than the recent and growing assimilation of mindfulness for employees by large corporations. The current paper introduces the principle of ‘authentic spiritual transmission’ and examines how it can inform the integration of mindfulness into the corporate workplace. Three questions are explored: (i) what spiritual infrastructure is required to operationalize mindfulness that is effective in the corporate setting? (ii) to what extent can ‘inner change’ induced by mindfulness substitute the need for corporations to foster healthy ‘external’ working conditions? and (iii) is mindfulness corruptible or does it have a natural defence mechanism? The paper addresses these questions by synthesizing relevant Buddhist discourses, evaluating recent theoretical and empirical findings concerning the use of mindfulness in corporate settings, and examining how second-generation mindfulness-based interventions can inform this topical area of scholarly debate.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Conciencia plena;  
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auténtica;  
Rendimiento laboral

**Usos corporativos de la conciencia plena y la transmisión espiritual auténtica: ¿ideales contrapuestos o compatibles?**

**Resumen** Hay consenso entre los científicos y la comunidad budista sobre el hecho de que la conciencia plena —cuando se enseña y se practica correctamente— provoca una variedad de resultados beneficiosos. Sin embargo, ha habido poca evaluación de lo que ocurre cuando la conciencia plena no se enseña correctamente o se practica con una intención más egoísta

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que altruista. En ninguna parte la importancia de esta cuestión es más pertinente que en la asimilación reciente y creciente de la conciencia plena por parte de los empleados de grandes empresas. El presente artículo introduce el principio de «transmisión espiritual auténtica» y analiza cómo puede explicar la integración de la conciencia plena en el lugar de trabajo en una empresa. Se plantean 3 preguntas: a) ¿qué infraestructura espiritual es necesaria para llevar a la práctica la conciencia plena que es eficaz en el entorno empresarial?; b) ¿en qué medida un «cambio interno» provocado por la conciencia plena puede sustituir la necesidad de las empresas de promover condiciones laborales «externas» saludables? y c) ¿es posible corromper la conciencia plena o esta tiene un mecanismo de defensa natural? El artículo aborda estas preguntas mediante la síntesis de discursos budistas pertinentes, la evaluación de los últimos hallazgos teóricos y empíricos relativos a la utilización de la conciencia plena en los entornos empresariales y el análisis de cómo las intervenciones basadas en la conciencia plena de segunda generación pueden explicar este tema de debate académico.

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## Introduction

American corporations spend an average of \$13,000 per employee per year on direct and indirect healthcare costs (Klatt, Wise, & Fish, 2015). Approximately 20% of American employees take time off work due to a stress-related illness in a given twelve-month period, and 63% would welcome support and advice from their employer on how to improve their health and wellbeing (Crawford, 2014). In countries such as the United Kingdom, work-related stress results in a loss of 10 million working days each year (Health and Safety Executive, 2015). Moreover, since 2009, the number of sick days lost to stress, depression, and anxiety in the United Kingdom has increased by 24%, while the number lost to serious mental illness has doubled (Davies, 2014). Consequently, it is unsurprising that there is growing interest amongst large corporations into techniques such as mindfulness that are reported to directly improve employee wellbeing, and indirectly improve productivity and profitability (Dane, 2010).

Corporations such as *General Mills*, *Target*, *Apple*, *Google*, *Carlsberg*, *Sony Corporation*, *Ikea*, *Nike*, *Procter & Gamble*, *AOL*, *Goldman Sachs*, *Transport for London*, and *Monsanto* are reported to have implemented employee mindfulness programs, and according to one media report, over 25% of American companies have done likewise (Huffington, 2013). However, given that amongst traditional contemplative communities mindfulness is employed as a means of fostering spiritual growth (Purser, 2015), concerns have arisen regarding the use of mindfulness in the corporate setting. More specifically, some researchers, Buddhist teachers, and business leaders have asserted that introducing mindfulness into the corporate workplace could be harmful to (i) the Buddhist teachings (i.e., due to them being misappropriated and misapplied), (ii) society (i.e., due to employees using mindfulness to advance their career and/or wealth in ways that are ethically unwholesome), and (iii) employees (i.e., due to greater demands being placed upon them by corporations adopting the Buddhist rhetoric that stress is a 'mind-made' phenomenon that can be transmuted by practicing mindfulness) (Macaro & Baggini, 2015; Purser & Ng, 2015; Purser, 2015).

At the core of Buddhist thought is the notion that stress – and indeed all forms of suffering – are 'mind-made' constructs that can be overcome by eliminating erroneous views concerning the ultimate manner in which the 'self' and reality exist (Dalai Lama, 1995; Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016a). Although there are differing Buddhist perspectives, ultimately, all traditional schools of Buddhist practice subscribe to the view that by dedicating one's life to spiritual practice, it is possible to start cultivating a mind that is unconditionally happy (i.e., irrespective of external conditions) (Chah, 2011; Dalai Lama, 1995; Huang Po, 1982; Nhat Hanh, 1999). The term 'dedicating one's life' is key here because although Buddhism asserts that it is possible to permanently transmute suffering, it likewise asserts that this can only happen pursuant to the spiritual practitioner completely abandoning themselves to the *Buddhadharma* (in the sense used here, the Sanskrit term *Buddhadharma* means 'the truth' or 'true teachings') (Khyentse, 2006).

Some corporate mindfulness stakeholders appear to maintain that there are minimal risks associated with introducing mindfulness into the corporate setting (Huffington, 2013). The Trojan Horse metaphor is often employed in this respect in order to highlight the view that mindfulness will 'work from within' and gradually cause corporations to become more socially responsible and less profit-focused. There are also reports that some corporate mindfulness advocates have gone one step further by drawing direct comparisons between their work and the historical Buddha providing teachings to kings and wealthy merchants (Purser, 2015). However, as noted by Purser, such claims appear to be made with limited consideration of the context in which the Buddha offered his teachings to interested parties:

*While the Buddha taught the dharma to leaders and the merchant class, what he taught was not a mindfulness-based intervention so they could simply feel better about themselves, nor did he simply provide them a meditative technique for improving their concentration so that they could obtain even more wealth and riches, rather, the Buddha advocated a wiser form of ethical leadership that*

*counteracted the mental poisons of greed, ill will and delusion* (2015, p. 37).

Thus, when aspects of Buddhist practice are taken out of context and applied in settings that are primarily concerned with monetary – as opposed to spiritual – gain, claims that mindfulness can eliminate stress or induce an ‘enlightened workplace’ become contentious. Given these issues and concerns, the present paper introduces the principle of ‘authentic spiritual transmission’ and examines how it can inform the integration of mindfulness for employees into large corporations. More specifically, three questions are explored: (i) what spiritual infrastructure is required to operationalize mindfulness that is effective in the corporate setting? (ii) to what extent can ‘inner change’ induced by mindfulness substitute the need for corporations to foster healthy ‘external’ working conditions? and (iii) is mindfulness corruptible or does it have a natural defence mechanism? The present paper addresses these questions by synthesizing relevant Buddhist discourses, evaluating recent theoretical and empirical findings concerning the use of mindfulness in corporate settings, and examining how second-generation mindfulness-based interventions (SG-MBIs) can inform this topical area of scholarly debate.

## Authentic spiritual transmission

There are numerous perspectives on what is implied by the term ‘spiritual’, but for the purposes of this paper, ‘spiritual’ is understood to constitute ‘that which helps to transcend selfhood’. This delineation of spiritual is consistent with the Buddhist position that selfishness and craving for a ‘me’, ‘mine’, or ‘I’ is the cause of suffering, and that removing belief in selfhood is the cause of liberation (Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016b; Van Gordon, Shonin, Griffiths, & Singh, 2015a).

According to Shonin and Van Gordon (2015a), an authentic spiritual practitioner or teacher is an individual that has transcended the ego and cultivated a high level of spiritual awakening. Such an individual could be firmly on the path to enlightenment, or a fully enlightened Buddha (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015a). An authentic spiritual teacher emanates spiritual awareness and is not necessarily a Buddhist scholar (Nhat Hanh, 1999). Authentic spiritual transmission (AST) takes place when an authentic spiritual teacher (known as the ‘right teacher’) imparts spiritual insight and awakening onto a suitably disposed student (known as the ‘right student’) (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015a). There are various perspectives within Buddhism on what makes a student a suitable vessel for AST, but in general the student should be (i) willing to devote their life to spiritual practice, (ii) innately possessing spiritual acumen (possibly accumulated over successive lifetimes of spiritual practice), (iii) persevering and courageous, (iv) dissatisfied with cyclic existence (cyclic existence refers to the Buddhist notion that until they liberate themselves, sentient beings continue to migrate through a cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth; Dalai Lama, 1995), and (v) eager to foster qualities of humility, faith, compassion, patience, joy, and generosity (Tsong-Kha-pa, 2004).

In the Canki sutta, the Buddha advises that the principal mark of an authentic spiritual teacher is that their behavior

is not influenced by greed, hatred, or delusion (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2009). As suggested by the following words recorded in the Sandaka sutta (and attributed to the Buddha’s disciple Ananda), the Buddha placed limited emphasis on other factors, including whether the teacher is a recipient of a traditional spiritual teaching lineage:

*Again, Sandaka, here some teacher is a traditionalist, one who regards oral tradition as truth, he teaches a Dharma by oral tradition, by legends handed down, by the authority of the collections. But when a teacher is a traditionalist, one who regards oral tradition as truth, some is well transmitted and some badly transmitted, some is true and some is otherwise* (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2009, p. 624).

Consistent with these accounts of the Buddha’s teachings, Shonin and Van Gordon (2015a) argue that there are no ‘worldly qualifications’ that an individual can attain in order to be conferred the status of an authentic spiritual teacher:

*If a person has genuine spiritual realization, they are authorized to transmit the spiritual teachings. All titles, held-lineages, endorsements, acclamations, life accomplishments, life mistakes, and years spent in training are irrelevant... If a person is without genuine spiritual realization, they have no such authority. All titles, held-lineages, endorsements, acclamations, life accomplishments, life mistakes, and years spent in training are irrelevant... Ultimately, true authorization to transmit the spiritual teachings comes from awakening to the timeless truth of emptiness. It seems that some form of spiritual guide is required to effectuate this awakening* (p. 143).

The primary methods by which AST can be acquired, developed, and maintained are via: (i) oral instruction (Tsong-Kha-pa, 2004), (ii) the written word (Gampopa, 1998), (iii) mind-to-mind transmission from a teacher present in physical form (Nyoshul & Surya Das, 1995), and (iv) mind-to-mind transmission from a teacher not present in physical form (Urgyen, 2000). It should be understood that the ultimate purpose of AST (i.e., that occurs when the ‘right teacher’ encounters the ‘right student’) is to bring the student into contact with the ‘teacher within’ (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015a). Accessing and awakening the teacher within constitutes AST in its purest form and this notion has been alluded to by Nyoshul and Surya Das (1995) as follows:

*If you meet a teacher who represents the lineage and tradition of Dzogchen, this is also a partial idea; it is good fortune, but it is still a limited notion... Authentic sacred vision, the pure perception often mentioned in the tantric path, implies that we can and should see everything as perfectly pure and inherently good; that is, beyond good and bad, perfectly complete just as it is* (p. 115).

The most essential point appears to be that without the intervention of a spiritually realized teacher, and without the student being a receptive vessel, AST does not occur and the student remains unable to fully access or awaken the inner teacher (Urgyen, 1995). This principle (i.e., the importance of a spiritually realized teacher) applies to the

teaching and learning of all aspects of Buddhist practice, including mindfulness.

### What spiritual infrastructure is required to operationalize mindfulness that is effective in the corporate setting?

Various change management strategies have been implemented to maximize the chances of mindfulness being successfully integrated into the employee's workplace (Klatt et al., 2015). Such approaches typically seek to secure management and employee buy-in, deliver tailored interventions, and capture data (i.e., to feedback to senior management) on how such interventions improve various aspects of work-related wellbeing and/or work effectiveness (Klatt et al., 2015). For example, the multinational food company *General Mills* is reported to have delivered mindfulness training to over 400 employees, where over 80% reported taking time each day to optimize their personal productivity following mindfulness training compared to 23% pre-intervention (Gelles, 2012). The same company found that 80% of senior executives that participated in mindfulness training reported improvements in decision-making competency (Gelles, 2012).

These internal findings are consistent with reports in the academic literature where mindfulness has been shown to lead to significant improvements in employee mental health outcomes, including anxiety (Dobie, Tucker, Ferrari, & Rodgers, 2016), depression (Mealer et al., 2014), stress (Manocha, Black, Sarris, & Stough, 2011), burnout (Krasner et al., 2009), sleep quality (Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell, & Metz, 2015), and dispositional mindfulness (Malarkey, Jarjoura, & Klatt, 2013). Mindfulness has also been shown to improve employee physical health outcomes such as diet (Aikens et al., 2014), response to flu immunization (as measured via changes in antibody titers; Davidson et al., 2003), and salivary  $\alpha$ -amylase levels (Duchemin, Steinberg, Marks, Vanover, & Klatt, 2015). Furthermore, mindfulness in the workplace has been linked to job performance in various ways, including (i) client-centered empathic care in health-care professionals (e.g., Krasner et al., 2009), (ii) positive organizational behavior (Aikens et al., 2014), (iii) organizational innovativeness and performance (Ho, 2011), and (iv) work-related self-efficacy (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, & Karayolas, 2008).

Although these findings are promising, the fact of the matter is that what is being implemented by corporations (and researchers) is not necessarily mindfulness. According to all systems of Buddhist thought that recognize mindfulness as a key feature of meditative development, mindfulness is deemed to be a spiritual practice (Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014a). It is introduced as the seventh aspect of a fundamental teaching known as the Noble Eightfold Path (Bodhi, 1994). Whilst the Noble Eightfold Path (obviously) consists of eight different elements, these elements do not function as standalone entities. In other words, it is not the case that an individual begins with the first aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path – known as 'right view' – and only moves onto the second (known as 'right

intention') after concluding their training in 'right view'. Indeed, although the Noble Eightfold Path has eight different aspects, it is a single path and a single practice (Van Gordon et al., 2015a). This means that in the absence of 'right view', 'right intention', 'right speech', 'right action', 'right livelihood', 'right effort', and 'right concentration', there cannot be 'right mindfulness'.

The present authors argue that contemporary mindfulness (hereinafter referred to as "mindfulness"), as it is operationalized in mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), and Corporate-Based Mindfulness Training, does not always meet the traditional Buddhist criteria for authentic mindfulness (McWilliams, 2011; Purser, 2015; Rosch, 2007; Shonin et al., 2014a). The main reason for this is because contemporary "mindfulness" is invariably taught in the absence of each of the seven aforementioned Noble Eightfold Path elements, and it is generally not taught with the primary intention of fostering spiritual growth. A further reason why contemporary "mindfulness" techniques cannot necessarily be considered authentic from the Buddhist perspective, is the fact that most contemporary "mindfulness" instructors have not met Shonin and Van Gordon's (2015a) aforementioned criteria of being a realized spiritual teacher. Although the situation is gradually improving, the experience of some instructors of "mindfulness" is limited to attendance at just one eight-week course followed by one year of self-practice (Mental Health Foundation, 2010).

It would be inaccurate to assert that contemporary mindfulness-based interventions are ineffective, because (as indicated above) empirical data suggests otherwise. However, to date, all that such data demonstrate is that certain MBIs are effective for initiating change across pre-defined outcomes, and over relatively short periods of time (e.g., 3–24 months). Although this change is often reported as substantial, robustly conducted meta-analysis demonstrate that the effectiveness of MBIs is equivalent to what can be expected from using anti-depressants in a primary care population (i.e., small to moderate effect sizes; Goyal et al., 2014). In fact, with the exception of treating depression and anxiety in clinical populations, there is insufficient high quality evidence at present to support the wide-scale utilization of mindfulness for effecting lasting psychological and/or behavioral change – including in the workplace setting (Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2015).

The present authors argue that most "mindfulness" approaches teach an 'attention-based psychological technique' that has demonstrable real-world applications. However, this technique should not be confused with authentic Buddhist mindfulness. For the reasons outlined above, mindfulness only becomes authentic (i.e., in the Buddhist sense) when it becomes spiritual, and it only becomes spiritual when taught by an authentic spiritual teacher. Therefore, in essence, if an organization wishes to successfully introduce its employees to authentic mindfulness, the only indispensable infrastructure required is that of an authentic spiritual teacher. All other considerations (e.g., type of mindfulness intervention, programme length, protected time for employees to practice mindfulness, space

designation, amount of instructor–participant contact time, and range of meditation techniques employed) are of lesser importance.

### To what extent can ‘inner change’ induced by mindfulness substitute the need for organizations to foster healthy ‘external’ working conditions?

Santideva, an 8th Century Indian Buddhist saint and philosopher, asserted that rather than cover the entire outdoors with leather, it is more practical to adorn the feet with a leather sole (Santideva, 1997). As outlined above, central to Buddhist thought is the notion that any form of suffering can be transformed by spiritual training, and that this ultimately liberates the mind (Dalai Lama, 1995). The present authors believe that the position of Santideva and other Buddhist adepts (including the Buddha) is robust, and that it is possible to foster meditative awareness to such an extent, that egoistic clinging (and therefore suffering) is abandoned. Under such circumstances, there is no longer a reification of ‘self’ through which suffering can manifest (Huang Po, 1982). This is not to say that an enlightened being does not experience (for example) pain when they trap their finger in a door, but they experience such pain ‘as it is’ (Urgyen, 2000) – without attachment and without relating to it as something that belongs to a ‘me’, ‘mine’, or ‘I’ (for a detailed explanation of the Buddhist concepts of attachment, emptiness, and non-self, see Shonin et al., 2014a).

Based on empirical findings, it appears that after only 8–12 weeks of training, employees that participate in MBIs can increase resilience to psychological distress caused by suboptimal working conditions (Klatt et al., 2015). However, the notion of mindfulness equipping employees with the necessary psychological and spiritual resources to transcend the self – and thus become impervious to toxic work conditions – is unrealistic. The primary reasons for this are that (i) as noted above, the “mindfulness” that is typically taught by organizations is not necessarily authentic or sufficiently potent according to the Buddhist conceptualization, and (ii) even where mindfulness is correctly taught and practiced, it generally takes many years (if not decades) of diligent day-to-day practice to attain high levels of spiritual insight (i.e., whereby mental quietude is profound, unconditional, and self-sustaining) (Shonin et al., 2014a).

In recent years, a new generation of MBI, that are (unsurprisingly) termed second-generation MBIs (SG-MBIs), have been formulated and empirically investigated. Compared to first-generation mindfulness-based interventions (FG-MBIs) such as MBSR and MBCT, SG-MBIs – such as Meditation Awareness Training (MAT) – integrate a greater range of meditation techniques and operationalize mindfulness in a manner deemed to be more congruent with the traditional Buddhist model (Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2015). FG-MBIs generally subscribe to Kabat-Zinn’s (1994) definition that mindfulness involves “*paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally*” (1994, p. 4). Conversely, according to the SG-MBI delineation, mindfulness is deemed to be “*the process of engaging a full, direct, and active awareness of*

*experienced phenomena that is (i) spiritual in aspect, and (ii) maintained from one moment to the next*” (Van Gordon et al., 2015, p. 592).

The term ‘direct awareness’ in the SG-MBI formulation contradicts the use of the term ‘non-judgemental’ in the FG-MBI definition. According to Van Gordon et al. (2015), rather than teaching participants to be ‘non-judgemental’, SG-MBIs encourage them to be (amongst other things) (i) ethically discriminative (i.e., responsible world citizens that are aware of both the short-term and long-term consequences of their actions), and (ii) spiritually empowered to relate to mindfulness as a ‘way of life’, rather than a therapeutic technique that is employed under certain conditions but not others.

Studies of MAT (from randomized controlled trials and clinical case studies) have shown that 8–10 weeks of training can help effectuate statistically and/or clinically significant improvements in employee levels of (i) job performance (as rated by employee’s line managers), (ii) work-related stress, (iii) job satisfaction, (iv) attitudes toward work, and (v) workaholism (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015b; Shonin, Van Gordon, Dunn, Singh, & Griffiths, 2014; Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014b; Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016c). Qualitative studies have likewise indicated that MAT can improve participant’s ability to transfer the locus of control for stress from external conditions to internal metacognitive and attentional resources (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2015b; Shonin, Van Gordon, & Griffiths, 2014c; Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2016d). Studies of other SG-MBIs – such as Mindfulness-Based Positive Behavior Support – have shown that SG-MBIs can improve caregiver levels of stress, turnover, and work-related injury, as well as reduce their use of physical restraints (Singh, Lancioni, Karazsia, & Myers, 2016; Singh et al., 2009, 2015).

Findings from SG-MBI qualitative studies are often accompanied by participants reporting increases in spiritual awareness that are arguably more profound than comparative qualitative studies of FG-MBIs (Van Gordon et al., 2016d). Outcomes from SG-MBI research are promising and – at least from the Buddhist perspective – their greater focus on authentic spiritual transmission could mean that they equip participants with greater psycho-spiritual coping resources relative to FG-MBIs. However, to date, no head-to-head studies have been conducted that allow reliable inferences to be drawn as to the relative effectiveness of FG-MBIs and SG-MBIs for different population groups. Furthermore, the manner in which SG-MBIs are being integrated into research and applied settings appears to be more in-keeping with providing prospective mindfulness practitioners with a greater choice of MBI rather than seeking to compete with FG-MBIs.

Thus, notwithstanding the fact that SG-MBIs are intended to be more spiritual in nature, as the situation currently stands it appears (i.e., based on available empirical findings) that mindfulness – whether delivered according to the FG-MBI or SG-MBI model – can be used by corporations to make improvements to work-related wellbeing and/or work effectiveness among employees. However, corporations should be realistic about what outcomes can be induced by both FG-MBIs and SG-MBIs and should consider them as just one element of the overall workplace infrastructure that can help to optimize productive working conditions.

Mindful working and mindful managing are arguably key aspects of a healthy work environment, but over-reliance on mindfulness could directly or indirectly exert pressures on employees to endure work stresses that might otherwise be eliminated by (for example) making changes to human resource management systems (e.g., flexible work schemes, innovative appraisal and reward systems, etc.). The view of the present authors is that in the majority of instances, corporations that have chosen to make mindfulness available to employees are well intended (i.e., they are seeking a win-win situation), and in so far as mindfulness training has encouraged a rhetoric of 'stress is in the mind', it should not be discounted that this may have occurred due to poor teaching and/or project implementation on the part of third-party mindfulness consultants (or a small number of so-called mindfulness experts in cases where corporations have instructed their own employees to deliver the training).

### Is mindfulness corruptible or does it have a natural defence mechanism?

Where an employee is taught mindfulness correctly, they are also being directly or indirectly instructed in practices intended to cultivate ethical awareness (i.e., 'right speech', 'right action', 'right livelihood'), a compassionate and spiritual outlook (i.e., 'right intention', 'right effort'), and wisdom (i.e., 'right view') (Nhat Hanh, 1999). Consequently, correct and authentically taught mindfulness means that employees will also be learning how to become wiser and more responsible world citizens (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014). Under such conditions, there is a 'win' for the employee, employer, Buddhism, and society more generally.

As noted earlier, where mindfulness is taught outside of a system of ethical and spiritual values, it is not 'true' mindfulness that is being taught, but rather an 'attention-based psychological technique'. Since what is being propagated in such situations is not authentic mindfulness, there is arguably limited value in being concerned with the consequences of employees or corporations misappropriating the mindfulness teachings. In other words, it is difficult to justify raising a grievance that a corporation is misusing mindfulness, if in fact what is being implemented is not mindfulness (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014).

Exposure to "mindfulness" could foster an interest in more profound forms of spirituality (Lomas, Cartwright, Edginton, & Ridge, 2014), but it could also quash spiritual inquisitiveness while it is still at an embryonic stage (Farias & Wikholm, 2015). Indeed, it is the present authors view that a significant proportion of individuals enticed by "mindfulness" to explore spiritual practice have the 'wrong intention' and are motivated, or partially motivated, by desire to (for example) accrue wealth, follow a fashion, discover friends or relationship partners, or advance their career. However, despite this unfortunate scenario, Shonin and Van Gordon (2014) have asserted that it is precisely this 'wrong intention' that triggers a natural defence mechanism of the spiritual teachings:

*If a person comes into contact with the Dharma who is not ready to receive the teachings, or who intends to use them for selfish or negative purposes, their wrong intention will prevent the teachings from taking root within*

*their being. In fact, all that they will receive will be a theoretical and superficial account of the teachings – and even this won't be properly understood (p. 1).*

Furthermore, as implied by the following words of the Buddha (who refers to himself below as the Tathāgata), where an individual has a 'wrong intention', it is generally the case that an authentic spiritual teacher will refuse to teach them:

*Some misguided men here formulate a question, come to the Tathāgata, and ask it. In that case, Sunakkhatta, though the Tathagata has thought: 'I should teach them the Dhamma,' he changes his mind (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2009, pp. 861–862).*

Specific Buddhist systems of thought divide history into phases that correspond to the 'health' of the spiritual teachings during a given period of time (Van Gordon, Shonin, Griffiths, & Singh, 2015b). For example, 'the age of true law' (Sanskrit: *saddharma*, Japanese: *shōbō*) corresponds to the period when the historical Buddha lived and taught some 2500-years-ago, and when the spiritual teachings were deemed to be flourishing (Endo, 1999). This was followed by the 'age of semblance dharma' (Sanskrit: *pratirupadharma*, Japanese: *zōbō*), a period where authentic spiritual teachings were deemed difficult to happen upon. The current period of time (i.e., approximately the last 500–1000 years) is known as the 'age of degeneration of the dharma' (Sanskrit: *pashchimadhama*, Japanese: *mappō*) and corresponds to a period of widespread demise in spiritual teachings.

However, although, according to the Buddhist view we are currently in a period of spiritual degeneration, the present authors would argue that ultimately, the *Buddhadharma* – and indeed any true spiritual teaching – such as authentic mindfulness – is indestructible. Santideva (1997) asserted that authentic spiritual teachings are expressions of an ultimate truth of reality. Although individuals may foster deluded views regarding how to attain this ultimate truth (i.e., enlightenment), the ultimate truth itself does not degenerate. Likewise, because authentic spiritual teachings are direct expressions of a pervasive and enduring ultimate truth of existence, they too remain incorruptible (Norbu & Clemente, 1999).

Thus, whether due to authentic spiritual teachers refusing to teach it, or due to it not revealing itself to individuals with impure intention, 'spiritual truth' – of which authentic mindfulness is an aspect – remains protected from corruption (Norbu & Clemente, 1999). The minds of human beings may move through phases of being less receptive to authentic mindfulness (and other spiritual) teachings, but the essence of mindfulness does not wax nor wane. Therefore, it is the present authors view that corporations can (inadvertently) misguide employees by teaching "mindfulness", but it is both employee and employer that are subjected to a corrupted version of the teachings rather than mindfulness being corrupted per se.

### Discussion

The Buddhist teachings, that include teachings on mindfulness, are asserted to be universal in their application (Dalai

Lama, 2000). It is inconsistent with the ethos of Buddhism, and that of spiritual practice more generally, to make spiritual teachings available to some people, but deny them to others (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014). Therefore, there are strong grounds for arguing that individuals working for large corporations should be permitted the opportunity to make an informed decision as to whether a particular form of spiritual practice is right for them. This can only happen if they have the opportunity to try it first. Consequently, the present authors support the integration of authentic mindfulness into the corporate workplace.

However, there is clearly a need for greater awareness amongst corporations as to what (i) constitutes authentic mindfulness practice, (ii) outcomes can be realistically expected from training employees in mindfulness techniques (i.e., steady improvements in work-related wellbeing and/or work effectiveness rather than the sudden emergence of an 'enlightened workplace'), (iii) methodological factors limit the findings from mindfulness research (i.e., in order to counteract some of the scientific and media hype that organizations may have encountered regarding mindfulness efficacy), and (iv) health and commercial risks can arise due to a lack of authenticity (i.e., spiritual aptitude) on the part of the mindfulness teacher.

This latter point is arguably of crucial importance because very few studies have specifically sought to assess whether mindfulness can incur adverse effects, and where such studies have been conducted their outcomes have given rise for concern. For example, one recent study that appeared to employ what the present authors would deem to constitute "mindfulness" (i.e., rather than authentic mindfulness) demonstrated that a mindful breathing exercise led to increased false memory susceptibility (Wilson, Mickes, Stolarz-Fantino, Evrard, & Fantino, 2015). There also exist reports of mindfulness fostering 'depersonalization' (Booth, 2014) and negative self-perceptions (Lomas, Cartwright, Edginton, & Ridge, 2015).

Although there are also few (if any) studies investigating whether mindfulness practiced according to the traditional Buddhist model can lead to negative consequences, the traditional model of mindfulness has been 'tried and tested' for over 2500 years. Consequently, and while acknowledging that minor modifications, such as language secularization, are likely to be necessary when using mindfulness in corporate (and other applied) settings, any major deviation from the traditional approach should be undertaken with caution.

In terms of the current state of affairs, it is probably accurate to conclude that authentic spiritual transmission and corporate mindfulness constitute competing rather than compatible ideals. Nevertheless, the present authors believe that there is scope for introducing authentic (and secular) mindfulness into the corporate workplace in a manner that serves the spiritual, health, and financial interests of both employers and employees. However, the effective implementation of such an initiative would require fundamental changes in the way corporations view both spiritual and commercial advancement, as well as the close collaboration of spiritual leaders – that possess at least a moderate degree of genuine meditative realization – with spiritually receptive business leaders. In the meantime, corporations may wish to carefully investigate the 'spiritual authenticity' of their chosen mindfulness provider (whether

an employee or external consultant) to ensure that they (i) are not permitting individuals that do not understand the delicate intricacies of AST to teach mindfulness to their workforce, and (ii) are not paying for an occupational intervention that, when the hype surrounding "mindfulness" eventually subsides, will leave them spiritually and financially short-changed.

## Authorship

We confirm that each of the abovenamed authors is responsible for the contents of the article, and had authority over manuscript preparation as well as the decision to submit the manuscript for publication.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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