Mindful Educational Leadership

Contemplative, Cognitive, and Organizational Systems and Practices

Sharon D. Kruse

ROUTLEDGE

Mindful Educational Leadership

Mindful Educational Leadership unpacks the literature of mindfulness as it applies to K12 school leadership. Crossing disciplinary and theoretical boundaries, scholar and mindfulness coach Sharon Kruse explores mindfulness in three complementary research and philosophical traditions—contemplative, cognitive, and organizational—and applies it to school leadership. This book explores how these perspectives complement and inform each other and the ways in which understanding each can inform decision-making, school/community engagement and responsiveness, and advancing equity in school organizations. Full of authentic examples, stories, and models of mindful leadership from real educators, this volume helps readers become more mindful and effective in their practice. An exciting resource for aspiring educational leaders, each chapter also includes supporting resources for study, practice, and reflection on key concepts.

Sharon D. Kruse is Academic Director and Professor of Educational Leadership at Washington State University, Vancouver, and Chair of Educational Leadership and Sport Management for the Washington State University multi-campus system, USA.

"In *Mindful Educational Leadership: Contemplative, Cognitive, and Organizational Systems and Practices*, author Sharon Kruse puts forward a novel framework for leadership practice, one grounded in a unique synthesis of mindfulness research and theory. The latter gives the impression of a scholarly exercise; while the book rests on scholarly shoulders, it also offers approachable illustrations and abundant examples from current practice that promise to connect with its intended audience of novice and veteran school leaders. The book is timely: Mindfulness, as Kruse points out in her preface, has become part of the 'modern zeitgeist.' But Kruse adds much-needed clarity and depth to the concept with her tripartite framework of contemplative, cognitive and organizational mindfulness. At a time when leadership is synonymous with perpetual distraction, this book promises to help aspiring and current leaders center on what matters most, individual and organizational awareness."

—**David Eddy Spicer**, *University of Virginia*

"With over three decades of experience, Sharon Kruse provides invaluable advice on how to deliberately lead schools with curiosity. Through crafting narratives of the lived experiences of school leaders, Kruse weaves in theory, research, and practical advice for school leaders in a way that is relevant, actionable, and doable. This text is a must-have for leaders who want to rethink and reframe their leadership practices (current or future) with more authenticity and intentionality."

—**Jayson W. Richardson**, *University of Denver*

"Sharon Kruse's new book *Mindful Educational Leadership: Contemplative, Cognitive, and Organizational Systems and Practices* explores not only what effective mindful leaders do but how they think, how they reflect on their own choices and practices, and the intentional ways that they engage with and learn from others to innovate equitable, inclusive organizational approaches and systems. Based on interviews with 20 educational leaders who reflect, in part, the rich racial and ethnic diversity of our population, Dr. Kruse has crafted a resource to support educational leaders to more deeply learn about themselves and their organizations in order to mindfully and intentionally co-create inclusive equity-driven, learning environments. This is a must-read resource for educational leaders and those who develop, coach, or support educational leaders."

—**Ann O'Doherty**, *University of Washington*

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

What makes a great leader? For centuries, it was assumed that leadership skill was intrinsic and great leaders possessed some special combination of intelligence, toughness, perseverance, and courage, allowing them, and only them, to be right for the job. Thankfully, our thinking has evolved, and scholars of leadership studies have learned that great leadership is contingent and situational, task and relationship-focused, transactional and transformative, and equity-facing and inclusive. We have learned leadership can be taught, and that great leadership requires both a skillset and a mindset. We have learned that making ethical and equitable choices is as important as having and communicating a vision or balancing the budget.

Moreover, we have learned that a leader may be most successful when they get out of the way, create spaces for learning, and then strengthen, amplify, and encourage those ideas. In sum, we have learned intentionality matters. Recent research (Duckek, 2020; Levy & Levy, 2019; Sutcliffe et al, 2016) draws a clear distinction between good leaders who intuitively "get it right" and those that intentionally seek out the perspectives of others, think wholistically, focus on individual and organizational efficacy, learning, and are self-aware. Leaders who act *mindfully*.

No doubt, interest in mindfulness has intensified in the past two decades (Brown et al., 2007; Good et al., 2016; Weick & Putman, 2006). Once associated with monks, hippies, and nonconformists, mindfulness's popularity has blossomed. Mindfulness exercises and activities can now be found seemingly everywhere from yoga studios to corporate boardrooms and the military. It has become an almost unquestioned part of the modern zeitgeist.

Research has linked acting mindfully to individual well-being (Levy & Levy, 2019; Weare, 2019) and organizational productivity (Duckek, 2020, Sutcliffe et al., 2016). Moreover, scholars in business (Hales & Chakravorty, 2016; Sanyal & Rigg, 2021), psychology (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016), medicine (Kok & Singer, 2017; Tang et al., 2020), and education (Bellamy et al., 2005; Hoy, 2003) have convincingly demonstrated that the practice of mindfulness has far-reaching benefits.

Crossing disciplinary and theoretical boundaries, the literature has surfaced three complementary traditions of mindfulness. Starting with a focus on the self, *contemplative* mindfulness stresses that knowing ourselves well is the foundation for intentional action. *Cognitive* mindfulness extends one's attention to that of others, emphasizing how learning about others' experiences and worldviews can lead to personal and leadership insight and wisdom. Finally, *organizational* mindfulness turns attention to teams, units, and departments, directing awareness to how institutions and organizations benefit from purposeful leadership action. Drawing on these three traditions, *Mindful*

Educational Leadership: Contemplative, Cognitive, and Organizational Systems and Practices, explores the application of mindfulness theory and practice in K12 leadership.

ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1 of this book sets the stage for how mindfulness, in all its forms, can serve school leaders and help make their work better, easier, and more effective. The chapter broadly introduces each mindfulness tradition and begins to explain how they are complementary and mutually supportive of high-quality school leadership practice. Central to the chapter are theoretical and practical examples of mindful and mindless practice. Additionally, philosophy and foci, integral to conceptions of Eastern and Western mindfulness, are introduced.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on contemplative mindfulness. Mindfulness, as a contemplative practice, focuses introspective attention and awareness on one's body, feelings, and thoughts. Far and away, it is the most well-known form of mindfulness and receives the lion's share of attention in popular culture. Chapters 2 and 3 explore the philosophical and psychological roots of the contemplative traditions, demonstrating their relevance for school leaders. Chapter 2 explores the benefits of contemplative mindfulness, the research behind evidence for those benefits, and links the practice of contemplative mindfulness to the practice of authentic leadership. Chapter 3 addresses how focus, concentration, and attention contribute to awareness, and individual and organizational resilience.

However, mindfulness is not only contemplative. Langer (1992; 2014), introduced the construct of cognitive mindfulness as a leadership skillset with roots in psychology and sociology. As introduced in Chapters 4 and 5, cognitive mindfulness concerns itself with the active processing of information, the creation and refinement of categories and distinctions, and developing an awareness of the validity of multiple perspectives. Chapter 4 addresses these ideas, unpacking the conceptual and practical applications of Langer's theoretical constructs. Chapter 5 demonstrates how cognitive mindfulness is enhanced by systems thinking and routines, accountability, individual and collective efficacy, unlearning, and a sense of belonging throughout a school and district.

In contrast to contemplative and cognitive mindfulness which focus on the individual, organizational mindfulness refers to an organization's collective disposition toward learning and supports its ongoing quest for effective and reliable performance (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Chapters 6 and 7 address how organizational mindfulness can assist school leaders in preparation for conflict, crisis, and the improvement of normal operations. Chapter 6 unpacks the current research about highly reliable organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015) and fail-safe schools (Bellamy et al., 2005), applying those ideas to mindful organizing. Chapter 7 expands those theories and applies them to constructs of organizational learning and organizational change. In conclusion, Chapter 8 argues that dialogic communication

(Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014) and sensemaking (Weick, 2001) weave together the practices of contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness, creating a strong foundation for leadership practice. The chapter challenges school leaders to be more curious, reflective, and aware of their own experiences and how the experiences and perspectives of others can contribute to leadership learning. Finally, *Mindful Educational Leadership* concludes by suggesting that, by engaging in intentional practice, school leaders can deepen their individual and organizational knowledge and strengthen communal bonds.

METHODOLOGY

Informed by over three decades of research in schools, this book draws on a data set of reflective interviews with 20 current school leaders. Interviews

▶ TABLE P.1

Participant pseudonyms

Name	M/F	Race	School
Julia Barbeau*	F	W	Red Ryvers High School
Elliott Barcia*	M	W	Kings Canyon High School
Anders Christo	M	B	Gateway High School
Michela Flores	F	L	Bear Lake District Office
Rosa Fortin	F	B	Salmon River Middle School
Maryam Khot	F	A	Harrison Peaks Elementary
Simon Kimberson	M	W	Powell Middle School
Lillie Kurran	F	W	Sunshine Grove Elementary
Jade Lee	F	A	Frasiers Creek Middle School
Eva Morin	F	B	Thelon Middle School
Angel Morraw	M	L	North Green Elementary
Whea Nguyen	F	A	Deep Bend District Office
Henri Olesson	M	W	Slatton District Office
Zoe Poverly	F	W	Piver Ford Elementary
Declan Rhee	M	W	Wadins Middle School
Naomi Schapiro*	F	W	Spring Mountains Elementary School
Marc Smythe	M	W	Voyagers High School
Laine Tremblay	M	W	Great Basin High School
Sophie Urbaine	F	W	Great Plains Middle School
Leah Willson	F	W	Hilltop Crest Elementary

Note: *Meditators.

◤ **TABLE P.2**

Participant demographics

	District Office	High School	Middle School	Elementary School	Total
Male	1	4	2	1	8
Female	2	1	4	5	12
Race	1-White	4-White	3-White	4-White	12-White
	0-Black	1-Black	2-Black	0-Black	3-Black
	1-Asian	0-Asian	1-Asian	1-Asian	3-Asian
	1-Latinx	0-Latinx	0-Latinx	1-Latinx	2-Latinx
Active Meditator	0	2	0	1	3
No/Little Meditation Experience	3	3	6	5	17
Range Leadership Years	10–19	2–7	3–11	4–12	2–19
Average Leadership Years	14	4.2	7.2	7.5	8.2

included elementary, middle, and high school principals (N=17) and district office personnel (e.g., superintendents and curriculum directors, N=3).

Like school leadership across the nation, those interviewed skew White in their ethnic origin (N=12), while there were three Black, three Asian, and two Latinx school leaders. Chosen because they had been locally, regionally, or nationally recognized, participants include three self-identified active meditators and 17 who do not meditate regularly and represent four regions in the US (i.e., Northwest, Midwest, Northeast, Southwest). Data collection began just prior to the early months of the pandemic (i.e., January 2020) and has been kept current through follow-up interviews.

This was a purposeful sample and the narratives presented in this book were chosen purposefully. Several participants had been part of other studies I have conducted, others I knew from teaching educational leadership courses, and still others were referrals. In some instances, a participant's comments drove the framing of the narrative. In others, the reverse was true, and I sought out quotes supportive of a particular theoretical point or idea. Additionally, I made ample use of qualifying follow-up interviews, seeking clarity and depth extending participants' thinking, stories, and assertions. At times, the narratives presented are composites of several versions of the same story. Narratives and quotes have been edited for clarity, grammar, and ease of reading. For example, in most cases, extraneous words (e.g., you know, umm, like) and repeated words and phrases (e.g., I've tried, I've really tried) have been omitted, in all cases, the intent of participants' words has been retained.

BOOK FEATURES AND AUDIENCE

Designed to support novice and veteran school leaders, *Mindful Educational Leadership* offers several reader-focused features. Each chapter opens with key vocabulary and closes with a contemplative meditation and related leadership activity. Additional resources (e.g., books, articles, websites) are offered at the conclusion of each chapter. Instructors will find the volume attractive because it weaves theory with concrete and applied examples of mindful leadership in educational settings. The targeted audience for this volume is masters-level degree and principalship or superintendent certification or licensure candidates. However, other educational practitioners (e.g., teacher leaders, instructional support faculty and staff) will also find it engaging and useful. Additionally, this volume could serve as either a primary or secondary source for workshop and book-study groups at the school and district leadership levels. The resources included in the text will support individual or team learning by providing opportunities for reflection on current practices as well as alternatives for future efforts.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Mindful Educational Leadership was written from an awareness that Western conceptions of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Siegel, 2018) and Eastern philosophies of the construct (Goldstein, 2003; Harvey, 2009) differ. Additionally, and because Eastern traditions draw from Buddhism, it is important to note that Buddhism is not monolithic. Rather, Buddhism is a complex and rich philosophy of living informed by multiple interpretations and schools of practice and understanding. Moreover, as Bodhi (2011) asserts, popular uses of the term can be co-optive and appropriative of mindfulness. No doubt this is problematic.

However, and aware of the dangers of appropriation, when included, Eastern philosophies are credited to the appropriate Buddhist tradition. Nonetheless, it is equally important to state that this volume is rooted in the long-standing Buddhist teaching that developing an acceptance of the nature and condition of living in the world, as it presents itself, matters, if we are to live (and lead) authenticity. In turn, the volume is written with the conviction that the practice of mindfulness offers benefits, that when cultivated, can enrich one's leadership practice.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

These resources can be downloaded, printed, used to copy/paste text, and/or manipulated to suit your individualized use. You can access the downloads by visiting this book's product page on our website: www.routledge.com/978103 2254890 (then follow the links indicating related resources, which you can then download directly to your computer).

- Activity 1: Analyzing Your School Through Mindfulness Lenses
- Contemplative, Cognitive, and Organizational Mindfulness Key Definitions and Themes
- Activity 2: An Authenticity Scale
- Continuum of Authenticity and Inauthenticity
- Activity 3: Contemplative Mindfulness Self-Assessment
- Focus, Concentration, and Attention Definitions
- Activity 4: Walking Your School
- Dimensions of Cognitive Mindfulness
- Activity 5: Cognitive Mindfulness Self-Assessment
- Elements of Cognitive Mindfulness as Evidenced in Systems Thinking and Routines
- Activity 6: What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- HRO Principles, Organizational Features, and Applications to Practice
- Activity 7: Organizational Mindfulness Self-Assessment
- Organizational Conditions that Support Mindful Organizational Learning
- Activity 8: Values Reflection
- Weaving Contemplative, Cognitive, and Organizational Mindfulness with Leadership Systems & Practices

Mindfulness and Leadership

> **KEY VOCABULARY**
>
> *Cognition*—Mental activities including thoughts, experiences, and sensations that result in the acquisition of knowledge whether or not sensemaking, clarity, or resolution is achieved.
>
> *Contemplation*—Deep, often reflective, activity focused on paying attention to the present moment, an immediate experience or feeling, in non-analytic and non-judgmental ways.
>
> *Organization*—A body of people brought together for a purpose. Most often, but not always, organizational members share common goals, values, and norms of behavior.
>
> *Practice*—Using ideas and skills in professional or applied activities.

This book is rooted in the premise that leadership is a *practice*. School leaders practice leadership every time they work to establish a compelling vision of what the school might be. They practice leadership by providing encouragement and recognition; by obtaining resources to ensure the efficient and effective operation of school services; and when they implement policy and procedure, monitor efforts, and handle disturbances. Leadership is practiced in small moments such as when superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals listen to the concerns of teachers, staff, and students. It is exercised over time as part of long-term planning for school improvement, student well-being, and community involvement. Sometimes school leaders get it right. Other times they fall short. However, leadership does not occur in a vacuum. Nor does it spring forth without effort, knowledge, and practice. Leadership requires work, and investing in the work of leadership is an essential part of strong leadership practice.

Moreover, effective leadership practice requires that people understand themselves, the people they work with, the communities they serve, and the organizations they lead. This is hardly a bold statement. Educational leadership curricula, standards, and public policies have been organized around these ideas for decades. Yet, each of those tasks—understanding ourselves, those around us, and the structures and systems that comprise our schools—can be

daunting, and requires continuous, ongoing, reflective attention and practice. A person can spend a lifetime figuring out who they are. Equally difficult, if not even more so, is the challenge of knowing and understanding the perspectives of teachers, staff, students, and families that make up a school community.

Yet, as leaders the world over have demonstrated, it is possible to learn how to be a leader that knows and honors themself *and* contributes to the common good. Leaders who can act smartly, compassionately, and with grace in times of pressure and stress. Leaders who are willing to admit when they do not know something and reach out to others to find solid solutions to vexing problems and concerns. Leaders who expand their leadership circles, bringing new perspectives and worldviews into the school organization. This volume is informed by those kinds of leaders. More importantly, it is informed by leaders who act in these ways *because* of their mindful leadership choices and who they involve in those efforts.

Inasmuch as this book is informed by strong, effective leadership practice it is also informed by theory. It is purposefully practical and theoretical by design. Rooted in practice, this book offers examples of mindful leadership experiences from acting principals, curriculum directors, and superintendents. Theoretically, it draws from three complementary traditions of mindfulness—contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness. Each offers powerful leadership tools. Together, acting in concert, these three traditions offer school leaders the opportunity to know themselves better through contemplation, understand their world better through cognitive engagement, and better appreciate their organizations through focused attention on possibilities, challenges, and potential threats.

Furthermore, it is important to stress that *intentionally* incorporating mindful systems and practices matters if leaders are to successfully address the challenges of school leadership. Certainly, examples abound of school leaders who use many of the systems and practices described in this volume. Yet, what separates mindful leaders from good leaders, who may intuitively incorporate some of the systems and practices of mindfulness, is their intentionality. Anders Christo's approach to leadership offers one example of how attention to mindful systems and practices can create real changes in a school's culture over time.

In 2016, Anders Christo came to the principalship at Gateway High School after a decade of experience. In his prior school, Christo was known for being a thoughtful and deliberate leader who was vocal and supportive of the initiatives he believed would benefit students academically and personally. Like many educators, Christo had introduced several equity initiatives. He had been instrumental in the development of curriculum committees comprised of students, faculty, and community members tasked with creating more representative reading lists and exemplars of success. Alongside the curriculum work, Christo developed a practice of monthly community equity meetings. A hallmark of these evenings was a shared meal, a featured speaker, and most importantly, an open mic where parents and students could, without fear of retribution, share stories of their experiences at Gateway High School. Christo explained how he came to structure these evenings:

> It was important to me, really important, that parent and student voice was honored. I knew that even though my teachers meant well and were really trying, the curriculum work wasn't enough. Gateway still wasn't a place where all our students felt welcome. So, I needed to find a way to hear those voices. To hear about their experiences. And I knew that wasn't gonna happen at school. We started small. Our first meeting, it was at this parent's home, we invited four, maybe six, other families, so there were maybe like eighteen of us in the backyard. I brought pizzas and made it clear I was there to listen. All I did was say something like, "What's Gateway like for you?" Then I just let them talk. Three hours later I knew two things. One, we were failing our students and families who didn't fit the mold. Two, we could do something about it.

Christo stresses that he was intentional about how he scaled up his vision for the community meetings. He continued:

> Doing something about it meant I needed to have a lot more of these meetings. But that also I needed to build into them some way for others to hear these voices and to accept them as real and true stories. Last thing Gateway needed was to turn this into a them and us thing. Last thing I needed was for people to think I'd taken advantage, didn't follow up… So, I held another one. This time I was clear, we were forming a community equity committee. Made clear that we were gathering to discuss how Gateway could be more welcoming, that not welcoming all our students was a real threat to our school community. I made it clear that this was an extension of our values, my values, and that Gateway had to face up to this issue. I was also clear that this work didn't mean that I thought what we were doing was wrong or bad, that we just had more work to do.

Christo explained:

> I worked to build a coalition of the willing. These meetings were at night on purpose. I welcomed anyone who wanted to come but there were rules. This is about making Gateway a more equitable place because we were learning together about where we were failing. What wasn't okay was walking in there to justify the status quo. To get in the door you had to agree to be part of the change and that meant listening and sharing. That was our starting point…

What set Anders Christo's leadership apart from that of other well-meaning equity-focused leaders was the mindful way he went about the work. Christo intentionally sought out the viewpoints and experiences of others; he deliberately surfaced and named the threat he believed the school was facing, and he created an opportunity for individual and organizational learning. In short, he intentionally drew on the traditions of contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness as he set out to create conditions designed to foster a stronger school culture. Before we return to Anders Christo's story, it is important that

we unpack some of this book's key ideas, including understanding mindfulness as a tradition of systems and practices, as well as defining what mindfulness is (and what it is not).

MINDFULNESS AS A TRADITION

Others have written about frames of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2021), arenas of leadership (Murphy et al., 2009), and leadership as praxis (Furman, 2012). Each of those classifications provides its own lens into how leadership might be viewed. Yet, I have purposefully chosen to adopt the term tradition as my lens for describing these three leadership approaches. I do so because each of these traditions is informed by decades of theorizing, empirical testing, and research, and each rests on a strong philosophical foundation. Underscoring these traditions are systems and practices that, when intentionally employed, create the conditions that lead to organizational success.

Furthermore, traditions endure, they have *history*. These three ways of approaching leadership—focusing on oneself, members of the community, and the organization itself—have endured. Each has a deep history in the leadership literature and whether implicitly or explicitly, offers powerful systems and practices proven to foster leadership success. Equally important, for traditions to endure, *learning* must occur. Throughout our lives, we learn in formal and informal ways, each providing different, yet important knowledge and skills. In turn, our understandings of who we are, what we believe, and how we confront our lives are socially constructed and contextually bound. Just like most families have some way to celebrate significant occasions, be they birthdays, religious holidays, weddings, or graduations, not all families celebrate in the same way. Like leadership, the tradition of celebration may be universal, but its practice is more intimate and local.

Similarly, we come to our *beliefs and knowledge* about leadership in formal and informal ways. We pair formal educational coursework, readings, and mentoring with informal networking and social interaction in the hopes of developing a deep toolkit of knowledge and skills. Likewise, as a field of study, educational leadership has a strong tradition of looking to the fields of psychology, sociology, and business for direction and explanation. Our tradition has been to synthesize and blend, taking that which resonates and offers robust explanatory power and then making it our own. This book builds on these traditions by focusing on how school leaders can intentionally synthesize and blend mindful structures and practices and in turn, increase our knowledge about ourselves, those around us, and our organizations.

MINDFULNESS DEFINED

Mindfulness is popular. In fact, it is so popular that people assume they know what mindfulness is and what it means. When asked to define or describe mindfulness, the school leaders interviewed for this book suggested:

- Mindfulness is remembering to breathe. Taking a moment every so often.
- Mindfulness is thinking before I act, trying to create some space between the crisis and my response.
- Mindfulness helps me step back when things are hard. It's about using my gut and building perspective.

Certainly, all these descriptions touch on an aspect of mindfulness. They highlight attention to the body (i.e., breathing), the mind (i.e., thinking), and the connection between the two (i.e., "using my gut and building perspective"), but alone, each overlooks key aspects of the construct, substituting simplicity for complexity, and common understanding for nuance and depth. This is not surprising. Bodhi (2011) asserts that as mindfulness has become popularized it has become "so vague and elastic that it serves almost as a cipher into which one can read virtually anything we want" (p. 22).

While it may be helpful to use the term mindfulness as a shorthand for any number of ideas, doing so lacks the precision a thoughtful analysis can provide. As students of leadership, precision matters because it helps us to become more intentional concerning our practice and better at employing our knowledge and skills when a need for them arises. Furthermore, and importantly, the practice of mindful leadership is not the same as reflection, purpose, paying attention, or thoughtfulness. Unquestionably, mindful leaders may employ any (or all) of those practices in their quest to lead schools well. However, it is important to note that the structures and practices described in this volume are not simply "things good leaders do." As Christo shares:

> For me, it's all about making good choices. I'm very intentional in creating structures that connect with people. When I came to Gateway, I started this project where I highlight a teacher or student each week in a short video. I look for opportunities to amplify the good things that are happening in the building and tell those stories. I do shout outs that recognize staff, anyone can nominate someone for a shout out. Then I go to their classroom, meet with them for a few minutes. I take a lot of coffee cards with me. I give each of them a card, take a selfie [with them], and then get their story, in their words, and I email it out to the entire staff…it goes on our web page. I think I have to be intentional about what I'm doing, building community, really thoughtful about how I connect with people.

Leaders, like Anders Christo, intentionally employ mindful structures and practices in purposeful ways. In turn, they lead differently than those who do not. Understanding how leaders can build intentionality begins by briefly exploring each of the three traditions of mindfulness.

Contemplative Mindfulness

Contemplative mindfulness reminds us to be *aware*. That is it. Straightforward and simple. More formal definitions suggest that contemplative mindfulness is the practice of centering one's attention for the purpose of one's prolonging

TABLE 1.1

Contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness key definitions and themes

	Contemplative Mindfulness	Cognitive Mindfulness	Organizational Mindfulness
Broad Definition	An orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, characterized by curiosity, openness, & acceptance	The act of noticing new things resulting in deep & novel understandings of what we see & experience	An organizational disposition focused on learning directed toward effective & reliable performance
Purpose	To increase awareness of mental & emotional patterns, decrease reactivity, stress, & anxiety through seeing the world & ourselves clearly	To experience the novel, ease risk-taking, increase the ability to embrace & participate in change, & enhance learning	To avoid the institutional, organizational, or individual consequences of crisis & failure
Fundamental Points of Inquiry	How do I know myself better? How do I better understand my relationship to the world around me?	Do others see what I see? How is this situation like those I have experienced in the past & how does it differ?	What am I missing? Where is/are my attention(s) best directed?
Key Themes	The development of non-analytical conscious attention, that does not dwell on thoughts, ruminations, &/or beliefs or expectations	The development of individual systems of attention that encourage differentiation, openness to new information, & perspective-taking	The development of organizational systems & structures to detect problems, improve regular operations, & foster resilience in the face of problems
Experiential Qualities	Attention Curiosity Embodiment Empathy Compassion	Awareness Keenness Examination Wonder	Attentional staying power Deliberate application of effort Intentional presence

Source: Goldstein, 2016; Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2003, 2011; Langer, 2014, 2016; Vogus & Rerup, 2017; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015.

awareness of the here and now (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2003, 2011; King & Badham, 2020). Other definitions suggest that contemplative mindfulness occurs when one pays attention, non-analytically and without judgement, to what is happening in the moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2007a; Goldstein, 2016). In each definition, awareness is a central feature. So is the focus on oneself and how we react to experiences as they arise.

As a result of being increasingly aware, it is suggested that practitioners of contemplative mindfulness develop the capacity to *focus* on the moment, in the moment, and to have their experience of the moment untouched or unaffected by fear, bias, rumination about the past, or projections about the future (Goldstein, 2016; Salzberg, 2010). In this way, it differs from reflective inquiry, in that contemplative mindfulness does not focus on problem solving or uncovering the root causes of why something happened the way it did or why we feel the way we do. Instead, contemplative mindfulness focuses on how we are feeling, what thoughts are arising, and how we identify and label those feelings and thoughts. Research (Brown et al., 2007b; Levy & Levy, 2019) suggests that contemplative mindfulness helps us to learn concentration and how to focus our minds. Doing so has been proven to change people's perceptions about the world around them and their relationship to that which confronts and troubles them. Furthermore, because mindfulness is focused on the present, ruminating on how the future may or may not unfold is disrupted and people are better able to focus on productive responses when confronted by challenge and difficulty (Bodhi, 2011).

As De La Rosa (2018) writes, "contemplative mindfulness teaches us that the monkey is the messenger." In suggesting that the monkey is the messenger, De La Rosa references the Buddhist concept of monkey mind. We have all experienced monkey mind, it is that experience of not letting go of thinking of something or someone, sometimes long after the situation has occurred. Contemplative mindfulness offers us a remedy for monkey mind by structuring an opportunity for us to sit with ourselves so that we can learn how we think, where our triggers are, and what we can do to offer ourselves some space when we are triggered.

While this applies to us more generally as a life lesson, it also applies as a leadership lesson. What we worry about, where our attentions are directed, and to whom we listen (and to whom we do not) all tell us something about how we lead and what we value in our leadership. By focusing on our awareness of the present moment, contemplative mindfulness helps us to see what is really going on and what we are inventing, fearing, or imagining.

Inasmuch as contemplative mindfulness can be a powerful tool for school leaders, it is not a silver bullet, a solution to all that ails us and our schools. It cannot replace a strong knowledge and skill set. Nor can it substitute for a durable network of resources, a supportive community, or a clear mission and vision. Furthermore, the practice of contemplative mindfulness will not help you to become someone who is always calm, right, or in control. Rather, it is

a practice that allows us to make space for how things are exactly as they are. Nervous? That's okay. Excited? That's okay. Worried? Yep, okay too.

Furthermore, contemplative mindfulness is not a life–or leadership-hack. It is not something one employs when things get hard, or when we are stuck and looking for guidance. Instead, contemplative mindfulness is a practice of learning to be *aware*. As with any practice, one must do it regularly to be any good at it in the long run. The good news is that research (Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016; Lomas et al., 2017; Weare, 2019) suggests that regular practice of contemplative mindfulness can help us learn how we habitually respond. This stands in sharp contrast to living on automatic pilot and responding without a real awareness of what is happening around us.

Living on automatic pilot suggests that we respond in habitual, unknowing ways. Stuck in traffic? We become anxious and nervous about being late for whatever event we are driving to. Heading into a difficult meeting with an upset parent? In our heads we are already forming a retort to a statement that has not yet been uttered. Considering asking for help with a difficult project? We may begin to contemplate all the ways others will let us down and how the work will remain uncompleted. The practice of contemplative mindfulness suggests that by understanding our habits and realizing when we shift into automatic pilot, we can disengage from our habitual patterns of reactivity and instead choose how we respond. Contemplative mindfulness asks that we fully engage with what happens in any given moment and let it be.

Cognitive Mindfulness

Inasmuch as contemplative mindfulness provides leaders a way to better understand themselves in relation to the world around them, cognitive mindfulness creates the conditions under which leaders may *see the world through the eyes of others*. Langer (2014) defines cognitive mindfulness as directing attention toward an object, event, or circumstance with the objective of enhancing learning and contextual understanding in relation to it. As practicing school leaders suggest, they engage in cognitive mindfulness when they "look outside myself" and "really attend to why I think something is as it is." Langer (2014) suggests that cognitive mindfulness includes three key leadership activities— active differentiation, openness to new information, and perspective-taking.

Active Differentiation. Active differentiation requires that individuals examine previously held assumptions and beliefs that limit our ability to see the world in new ways (Rerup, 2005). Engaging in cognitive mindfulness necessitates that school leaders purposely *resist categorizing* events, decisions, and/or people in habitual or reflexive ways (e.g., good/bad, resistant/supportive, difficult/easy) and prematurely embracing a narrative that may, in the end, prove limiting. Instead, active differentiation encourages leaders to purposefully seek and accept new understandings and categorizations, so that they may respond with greater clarity and purpose (Day & Gregory, 2017).

Openness to New Information. Openness to new information as a cognitive approach to leadership action is consistent with Weick's (1995) assertion that all sense making is retrospective (i.e., we can only completely understand

something once we look back and reflect on it). Remaining open to new information encourages leaders to be mindful of information and data that can inform *meaning making* and *sense making*. In this way, mindful engagement allows leaders to attend to individual and organizational signals as they evolve. Maintaining openness is particularly useful in crisis situations but is equally important when situations are slow to change but are, in fact, shifting over time (Duckek, 2020; Weick, 2001).

Perspective-taking. Perspective-taking suggests that actively and systematically seeking out others' experiences and understandings of the world is a significant leadership task and skill. Brown et al. (2007b) assert that "we do not simply live in the world as we view it, construct it, and interpret it" (p. 213), suggesting that seeking to *understand how others see their world(s)* has the potential to increase our ability to see and comprehend our world in new and more complete ways. As Weick & Roberts (1993) posit, our ability to generate creative and robust solutions is enhanced when we increase our depth of experience and access to others' world views and narratives.

Organizational Mindfulness

While contemplative and cognitive mindfulness is focused on individuals, organizational mindfulness focuses on how organizations take in and use information. In this tradition of mindfulness, leadership is focused on identifying potential threats to organizational performance, and leadership effort is oriented toward *eliminating* or *minimizing negative impact*. In turn, organizational mindfulness directs a leader's attention toward organizational practices designed to increase highly reliable leadership performance (Andersson et al., 2019; Lomas et al., 2017; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Furthermore, mindful leaders seek robust and complex interpretations of organizational threat, embracing a heightened sensitivity to the link between organizational processes and outcomes.

Organizational mindfulness is a concept initially introduced by Weick and Roberts (1993) as a tool for leading organizations in which the consequences and costs of failure are extremely high (e.g., loss of life, significant property or assets, or organizational reputation). First explored in organizations that operate in typically hazardous environments (e.g., firefighting), the construct has recently been applied broadly to include K12 school leadership (Gilbert, 2019; Hoy, 2003; Kruse & Johnson, 2017), healthcare and business environments (Hales & Chakravorty, 2016; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015), and higher education (Ray, Baker, & Plowman, 2011). In each case, the presence of organizational mindfulness is posited to result in the creation of a highly reliable organization (HRO). HROs are organizations that exhibit high learning capacity through the practice of sustained, focused attention, with the intent of avoiding crisis and failure and better managing unexpected events when they do arise (Vogus & Rerup, 2017). Moreover, HRO thinking suggests that leaders are simply unable to know everything, all the time, about the organizations they lead. As Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) suggest, HROs are marked by five key leadership principles—preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise.

Preoccupation with Failure. Preoccupation with failure suggests that when leaders focus continuous awareness toward small anomalies within larger systems and structures, they are better able to identify symptoms of larger, potentially more troubling concerns. Preoccupation with failure surfaces the notion that, in any given situation, our understanding of and knowledge about the situation is unavoidably incomplete. As a result, leaders who look toward "what might go wrong" are better able to respond early and avoid more serious organizational outcomes. However, HRO thinking suggests that merely being preoccupied with failure is not sufficient to avoid crisis or difficulty.

Reluctance to Simplify. Leaders must also be reluctant to simplify issues and concerns as they arise. When concerns and problems are too quickly (and easily) categorized as one thing, or when leaders take things for granted and overlook other explanations for what is happening, they run the risk of missing bigger issues. Reluctance to simplify invites leaders to not accept an easy explanation. Rather, reluctance to simplify encourages leaders to press for a complex, detailed, and nuanced read. Therefore, creating the circumstances for more expert resolution.

Sensitivity to Operations. Likewise, remaining sensitive to operations suggests that leaders should be mindful of what is occurring regardless of intentions, designs, and plans (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). It asks that leaders focus attention on the here and now rather than what was anticipated, expected, or preferred. By attending to the current context, leaders are better able to observe when things begin to head off course. Yet, no matter how well-planned any activity or task may be, things can still go wrong. Leaders make mistakes and events take unforeseen turns. If leaders are able to develop resilience, they are better able to bounce back after mistakes.

Resilience. Developing resilience helps leaders to weather the storm of crisis. Simply put, developing resilience suggests that leaders are better served by adopting a mindset of flexibility and responsiveness rather than one of defensiveness or protection when difficulty strikes. Moreover, a stance of resilience helps leaders to both respond to issues as they arise and learn from them when they do.

Deference to Expertise. By employing deference to expertise, we honor the knowledge, skills, and experiences of others. Deference to expertise reminds leaders that their own knowledge is limited and that attending to feedback and input from across the organization is important. It suggests that by understanding that we need others if we are to lead well, our insights can be deepened and our leadership strengthened, rather than weakened, in times of stress and difficulty.

MINDLESSNESS, AUTOMATICITY, AND DELIBERATE PRACTICE

As the research (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016; Sanyal & Rigg, 2021) suggests, being present and acting mindfully offers multiple personal

and professional benefits. When school leaders are present, they can take advantage of new opportunities as they arise and forestall crises before they occur. Interestingly, most school leaders will tell you that they believe they are present. They believe that they are attending to the day-to-day workings of their school and that they are focused on important goals and outcomes. Yet, perhaps often, school leaders are not as present as they might be.

They act mindlessly, not attending closely to the daily interactions of and in their school. To be clear, *mindlessness* is not the same as incompetence, ineffectiveness, or ignorance. Rather, mindlessness is defined as an unthinking reliance on habits, routines, and outdated mental models (Langer, 1992, 2014; Rerup, 2005). Simply put, when school leaders rely on "the ways we've always done things," rather than paying attention to the world as it presents itself today, they are acting mindlessly. In turn, they risk missing important cues that can inform their current leadership practice. More dangerously, when leaders unquestioningly forge on, assuming they understand an event, issue, or concern, they risk perpetuating old biases and prejudices. So, how, and why does this happen?

Mindlessness has been hypothesized to occur when leaders over-rely on routines and repetitive patterns of behavior (Langer, 1992; Vu et al., 2018). Clearly, routines are important for the smooth functioning of schools and other organizations. As individuals, we want to be assured that when we visit the doctor, they are following up-to-date routine protocols for diagnosing and treating illness. As a society, we want to be confident that those we trust with our health and safety respect professional codes of practice and behavior when we need them. School leaders need to ensure that instruction is occurring in appropriate ways, that parents are informed of student progress and learning, and school safety is maintained. In other words, routine has its place. Routine can serve as a source of accountability and safeguard against poor performance and chaotic action.

Similarly, organizational routines can be built into the DNA of schools to foster learning and change. For example, continuous improvement planning, program evaluation, or professional development designed to expand the knowledge and skill set of teachers and staff are all routine school activities. When done well, each can serve to help members of the school community grow and change, to challenge old practices, and to encourage new ways of acting and being. Therefore, it is *how* an organizational routine is employed, rather than the presence of a routine that indicates if a leader is acting mindfully or mindlessly.

However, when routines are unthinkingly and mindlessly followed, the potential to fully process information and reach robust, lasting, and impactful decisions is decreased (Langer, 1992, 2014; Rerup, 2005). Moreover, excessive routinization—mindlessly following the steps of a procedure without paying attention to what is actually happening—may cause leaders to miss opportunities to critically examine important information, consider alternative viewpoints, and act innovatively. Additionally, when leaders act mindlessly, they risk being seen as uncaring, uninvolved, and inauthentic when they appear

to be "following a script" rather than responding in ways that are responsive to the current environment (Hoy, 2003).

Similarly, mindlessness can occur when school leaders accept ideas, policies, and practices without questioning whether they are a good fit for their school and community. How we "do school" looks quite similar from place to place, district to district. Even in highly restructured schools and districts, a good deal of replication concerning curriculum, pedagogy, and other school structures exists. To the extent that we are aware that best practices exist, we rarely consider what modifying them to fit our own contexts might look like. Rather, the concern is often for fidelity and consistency.

Known as organizational *isomorphism*, the fact that schools have similar features, structures, and forms across the nation and globe is not surprising. Certainly, while some isomorphism is a result of state and national policy that dictates the organization of school (e.g., school calendar, student placement in grades), some is not (e.g., sequencing and structuring of the school day, how instruction and curriculum are enacted). Yet, these structures of schooling persist because school leaders fail to deeply question how school might be different in their state, region, or district. This is not to argue that acting mindfully requires that school leaders take on a wholesale restructuring of public schooling. Rather, it is to say that when we lock ourselves into a single understanding of how something "should be" we chance acting mindlessly. Again, the concern is not with *what* is adopted but with *how* those adoptions are used, and with how contextually appropriate results are measured and achieved.

TABLE 1.2

Characteristics of mindfulness and mindlessness

Practicing Mindfulness Includes:	Mindlessness is Evidenced By:
Intentional routines	Excessive routinization & repetitive patterns of behavior
Regular & ongoing review of organizational structures, policies, & procedures	"Following a script" &/or commitment to rigid structures, policies, & procedures
Purposeful replication of organizational structures with clear purposes & functions	Senseless organizational isomorphism
Openness to new information, worldviews, & perspectives	Reticence to explore new information, worldviews, or perspectives
Attentiveness to organizational signals & indications of unexpected change	Insensitivity to organizational signals & data
Interest in & acceptance of complex explanations in the face of complex problems	Oversimplification & generalization despite increasing organizational complexity

Source: Hoy, 2003; Langer, 1992, 2016; Rerup, 2005; Vu et al., 2018.

Paradoxically, there are times when acting mindlessly has its benefits. As Di Nucci (2013) suggests, it is not always beneficial to be completely present and aware. *Automaticity*, the ability to do things without thinking about them, is necessary for daily life. Our ability to function would be greatly impeded if we needed to relearn to walk, speak, dress ourselves, or read every day. Similarly, elite athletes practice their craft so that they can act without thinking (or overthinking) their swing, shot, or step. Airline pilots are required, yearly, to simulate emergency landings and other in-flight safety procedures so that, if necessary, they can respond quickly and proficiently. Professional musicians rehearse scales throughout their careers so that they remain nimble and dexterous. Research (Ericsson & Pool, 2017; Langer, 2016) suggests that repetitive practice builds fluidity. It allows us to act mindlessly when the situation requires it. Said another way, in cases where flow, quick response, or instinctive action is required, thinking is overrated.

Although repetition is important to practice, mere repetition rarely produces sought-after results. While a critical mass of practice is needed for expertise to be developed (Ericsson & Pool, 2017), what matters more is the quality of practice. As Di Nucci (2013) suggests, quality practice is *deliberate practice*. Deliberate practice is often slow and involves working through small or very specific pieces of an activity. For example, musicians will often work on just the opening note of a solo to make sure that it "speaks" exactly the way they want it to rather than practicing the entire opening phrase of a piece. Only once they have mastered that note do they move on to mastering the remainder of the phrase.

Deliberate practice requires a continual focus on improvement. Whether one's practice is reviewed in real-time, by audio or video recording, or through personal reflection, growth and improvement must be the focus of deliberate practice for efforts to produce intended results. Doing so requires engagement, concentration, and openness to feedback (Ericsson & Pool, 2017). In turn, deliberate practice builds automaticity. Athletes become more consistent, pilots more confident, and musicians better able to improvise. In other words, reaching mindlessness requires mindfulness.

Therefore, it is particularly important for school leaders to develop a stance of *curiosity* concerning their leadership practice. Curiosity, as opposed to complacency, is a hallmark of mindful leadership. When school leaders approach their work from a place of curiosity, questioning *why* they are doing *what* they are doing, they are less likely to act mindlessly.

Unquestionably, reducing uncertainty, so that people feel safe and secure within the school, is a major function of school leadership. Automaticity and routine can reduce uncertainty. However, schools are not static places and things are always changing. Becoming curious suggests that questioning—both the status quo and new ideas—offers leaders the opportunity to learn new things and explore new ways to solve problems. Therefore, being curious requires that we stay in the present moment, noticing what and how things are. In turn, the potential for mindlessness is reduced and the capacity for more skillful leadership is enhanced.

EASTERN AND WESTERN CONCEPTIONS OF MINDFULNESS

There is no denying that interest in mindfulness has grown in recent years. Popular prior to the pandemic, Google trend searches for the term mindfulness grew steadily as Covid swept the globe. Indeed, this growing popularity is understandable because mindfulness has been suggested to help quell anxiety and to offer both spiritual support and practical benefit (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Lomas et al., 2017; Weare, 2019). Yet, mindfulness' popularity is not without concern. Inasmuch as popular understandings of the term suggest that mindfulness arose solely from Buddhist and Hindu traditions, elements of mindfulness can be found in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian religion and philosophy. Each of these spiritual traditions includes some form of reflective practice (e.g., prayer, meditation, daily devotions, structured worship) and focuses on how contemplation can sustain human beings in times of distress and support our quest for happiness. At the heart of each of these traditions, lies a belief system focused toward providing insight and reducing suffering. However, my critique is not that we misunderstand the roots of mindfulness practices. Rather it is that popular applications of the term can be reductionist and appropriative.

Bodhi (2011) and De La Rosa (2018) reinforce this idea, suggesting that as the term has become popularized, Western understandings have simultaneously simplified the complexity of Buddhist thought and philosophy and as Purser (2019) suggests, have co-opted the notion to support a consumerist agenda. Specifically, these authors caution against reducing mindfulness to a skill set that can be employed in any number of circumstances to enhance one's performance or status. They suggest that even the use of the term mindfulness is burdened by misuse and misappropriation. Therefore, and because of mindfulness's popularity, it is important to address the significant differences between Eastern philosophies (Goldstein, 1993; Harvey, 2009) and Western conceptions of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2003; Siegel, 2018). Indeed, to ignore these differences risks even further appropriation of this concept.

First, we must acknowledge that even though reflective practice is a hallmark of many spiritual traditions, the construct of mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist philosophy. In turn, we must also acknowledge that Buddhism is a complex and rich philosophy of living. Like other spiritual and philosophic traditions, Buddhism, in our current world, is informed by multiple interpretations and schools of practice and understanding. However, scholars (Goldstein, 2016; Harvey, 2009) suggest that there are two main traditions of Buddhist thought—Theravada and Mahayana. Practitioners of Theravada Buddhism are more commonly found in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Laos, and practitioners of Mahayana Buddhism are generally located in Tibet, China, Japan, and Vietnam. Zen Buddhism originates from the Mahayana tradition. While it is beyond the purpose of this text to explore the differences between each, the commonalities that underscore Buddhist philosophy are important to note.

Common to both Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism is a focus on the four noble truths, the basic teachings of Buddhism. These include the notion that suffering is part of life, that the cause of suffering is craving and ignorance, that the end of suffering is available to us, and that the path toward freedom from suffering can be found by awakening and living ethically. The four noble truths suggest that while pain, stress, and grief are inevitable we can accept each by developing mindful awareness. Furthermore, and key to Buddhist philosophy, is the importance of right living. Outlined in the noble eight-fold path, right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration are practices believed to foster right living. Following the eight-fold path asks that Buddhist practitioners consider how they live in the world and the consequence of those actions. Meant to be developed simultaneously, the practice of the eight-fold path aims to promote three essential constructs of Buddhist discipline: ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom (Harvey, 2009; Weiss, 2020).

Second, and important for our inquiry here, as the noble eight-fold path suggests, mindfulness is but one strand of a complex Buddhist whole. As Rosch (2007) notes, when authors suggest that:

Awareness or presence [are] attributes of a mindful consciousness, they are not, in the Buddhist view, talking about how the world will look in the consciousness of an ordinary troubled person paying attention to his breath or her thinking but to the way in which the world arises in the enlightened mind.

(p. 259)

As such, Buddhist philosophy suggests that mindfulness is a quality to be cultivated rather than a practice to be applied, followed, or accomplished.

This distinction matters because Western conceptions of mindfulness focus on the therapeutic aspects of the discipline. Popularized by John Kabat-Zinn (1990), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MSBR) introduced Westerners to meditation as a therapeutic tool. Certainly, and as we will unpack in chapters 2 and 3, mindfulness practice has been suggested to help alleviate any number of medical conditions in adults, including depression, high blood pressure, and anxiety (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003, Shapiro et al., 2006). Similarly, mindfulness has been employed in school settings to assist children and youth in coping with childhood adversity (Mendelson et al., 2010), stress (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012), and disruptive behaviors (Felver, et al., 2013). Mindfulness has also been suggested to support overall student well-being (Huppert & Johnson, 2010). Undeniably, and although research findings vary as to the efficacy of these programs, the current trend is to incorporate contemplative mindfulness practices in schools as a tool for increasing student resilience.

That these programs have experienced success is not at issue here. The issue lies with the conflation of these two world views and the subsequent reduction of mindfulness to a practice focused on the release of daily stress

rather than one that centers on how a person desires to live their life. As Bodhi (2011) and De La Rosa (2018) caution, reducing mindfulness to its therapeutic benefits devalues the beliefs, values, and philosophical foundations on which mindfulness practice has traditionally rested. Yet, as Bodhi suggests, these concerns are not reason to abandon mindfulness as a tool for modern Western living. In fact, he suggests:

> If clinicians find that mindfulness helps patients accept pain and illness that is wonderful… If peace activists find the meditation on loving-kindness helps them be more peaceful in their advocacy of peace, again, that is splendid… If a businessman [sic] finds his Zen practice makes him more considerate of his clients, again this should merit our approval… At the same time, I also believe it is the responsibility of [Buddhist practitioners] to remind such experimenters that they have entered a sanctuary deemed sacred by Buddhists. Thus, respectful towards their sources, they should pursue their investigations with humility and gratitude.
>
> *(p. 36)*

This volume seeks to do just that. In these pages, I intend to honor the roots of mindfulness thinking and practice acknowledging that I can only write from my own Western lens and positionality.

I come to this effort fully acknowledging that my education, including even that of mindfulness, is unavoidably and unapologetically Western. My schooling has been completed entirely within the United States. My work, including the data on which this volume rests, has been focused on schools and school leaders in the United States. My personal mindfulness practice has been influenced by teachers who are all from the US and UK. Regretfully, I only speak English. I do not read or speak Pali or Sanskrit, so I have never read contemplative texts that have not been translated. I am a meditator and certified meditation teacher and coach but not a Buddhist and honestly, my decades-long meditation practice is completely imperfect. Some days I find it easy to meditate and others it takes all of my effort to practice. While I count myself lucky to have lived on both coasts and in the Midwest, I cannot pretend to understand how all US school leaders experience their world(s) nor can I speak beyond what my own knowledge and interpretations offer. Yet, with "humility and gratitude" I submit that we all have much to learn from the current philosophical and theoretical research concerning mindfulness and that mindfulness, in all its forms, offers benefits, that when cultivated, can enrich ones' leadership practice.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Focusing on the Breath

Mindful Educational Leadership is written from the perspective that school leaders can become mindful leaders without becoming meditators. However,

and, as research supports (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Weare, 2019), taking even a moment out of a busy day to calm and focus the mind helps people become better at what they do and how they do it. Thought of this way, meditation is a technique that helps to create conditions supportive of practicing mindful leadership. Offered here is the simplest way to take a moment, recenter, and be ready to head back into stressful situations. In fact, this meditation relies on nothing more than an awareness of ones' breath. Attending to the breath is considered a foundational skill in meditation and mindfulness. Practically, focusing on the breath makes sense: it is always with us and can be accessed from anywhere. Additionally, our breath is something we tend to take for granted, yet it can teach us a lot about how we are experiencing any moment.

Certainly, there are benefits to finding a quiet space to do this meditation but even that is not necessary. All that matters is that you stop what you are doing in that moment and attend to your breathing. Closing your eyes may help, but even that is not necessary. Try this:

- Fully let go of the breath that is currently in your lungs.
- Take a deep breath in, pay attention to how that breath enters your body.
  - Is it cool?
  - Warm?
  - Where do you feel the breath? In the nose? The chest? The belly?
- Let that breath out.
  - Is it warmer on the exhale?
  - Can you feel the way your lungs contract, even slightly as the breath leaves the body?
  - What else do you notice?
- Take another breath, again pay attention to how the breath feels.
  - Is it different on this inhale?
  - Can you locate it as it moves from the nose into the lungs?
  - Can you only think about the breath as you inhale and exhale?

Try to maintain a focus on your breath for a full minute. Set your phone timer (or try one of the apps recommended here) so that the issue of time does not distract. Settle in and simply breathe. Keep returning to the sensations of the breath. As thoughts arise, and they will, just let them go. You can be interested in the fact that your mind is working. It happens. In fact, it is impossible for you to not think. Just return to the breath when your mind wanders. The purpose of this exercise is not to stop the mind from thinking but to pay attention to what is actually happening as you breathe.

Trying to make something happen or change is counterproductive. The breath is simply a focus; it holds no great truths nor is it really all that special. Rather, focusing on the breath is about finding one stable point on which your mind may rest. Therefore, as much as possible, try to hold a light focus.

Fighting for the mind's attention is a game that you will inevitably lose. Simply note when and how the mind wanders and come back to the breath. The power of this meditation lies in your ability to learn to return, without judgement, to your starting point. Also, be aware that meditation is not a game to win at or that building your ability to hold awareness for longer and longer periods of time is somehow better. Indeed, on any given day holding steady attention will be easier or harder, dependent on what else is going on in your life. Inasmuch as timers help to set a period for meditation, know that it is perfectly fine to finish your meditative session when you feel done. Some days we are simply too agitated to sit for more than a few minutes. When this happens, it is a good time to end your meditation. You can always return to your practice the next day and start again.

Before you return to your day, note how you are feeling. Are your shoulders more relaxed? Is your heart rate slowed? Are you feeling less reactive? Less stressed? More focused? There is no correct answer. The benefit arises from the act of noticing. Maybe not the first time, or every time, but over time, this simple mediative practice can offer support.

Variations. If attending to your breath makes you anxious or if you want to mix this practice up, feel free to use the sounds around you as your focus. Many of the apps suggested here have white noise functions that can be useful as focal points. Rather than exploring the sound, the objective is to choose it as a focal point and stay with it for the full meditation. Still another variation of a breath-focused meditation is to focus on an object. Chose something simple. A spot on the wall, a pen, your mouse pad, anything works. The idea is not to think about this object but to allow your mind to rest on it, using it as a point of respite from distractions and concerns.

Additionally, counting breath can be helpful to focus. There are two equally useful ways to count. One is counting the length of inhalation and exhalation. Try breathing in for a slow count of four and then out for the same length of time. Slightly lengthening the exhalation has been found useful for reducing stress and lowering blood pressure. The second form of counting breath is to count each breath while repeating silently, one inhalation, one exhalation, two inhalation, two exhalation, and so on. When distraction occurs, and it will, start back at one. The goal here is not to see how far you can count but to notice the distraction and let it go.

Activity

ACTIVITY 1

ANALYZING YOUR SCHOOL THROUGH MINDFULNESS LENSES (BODHI, 2011; LANGER, 2014; WEICK & SUTCLIFFE, 2015)

This activity is designed to be completed after you have had a chance to reflect on the ways mindfulness is expressed in leadership practice. Understanding that no leader can be perfectly mindful, and no school will respond to all challenges in the same way, consider each item, ranking it as honestly as you can.

In my school we…	Always	Sometimes	Never
Think before we act.			
Review our policies, practices, and procedures to assure that they are working as we need them to.			
Are able to be flexible and responsive to situations as they arise.			
Are curious about why things happen the ways they do.			
Have clear policies and practices for reviewing and changing systems and structures when they no longer serve.			
Are focused on improvement, no matter how hard the issue might be.			
Seek information and ideas to encourage perspective-taking before we make changes and/or decisions.			
Are conscious about our words and actions, especially when working together.			
Foster resilience in everyone.			
Focus on what matters.			

Upon completing the activity, choose one or more of these questions for consideration:

- Where are there opportunities for celebration and growth?
- How would others in your school rank these items? Why?
- What more do you need to know about your school to lead in mindful ways?

Additional Resources

Should you wish to do a deeper dive into reading about these traditions of mindfulness, good places to start include:

- Harris, D. (2014). *10% Happier: How I tamed the voice in my head, reduced stress without losing my edge, and found self-help that actually works, a true story*. New York: NY: Harper Collins.
- Langer, E. J. (2014). *Mindfulness. 25th anniversary edition*. Boston, MA: Perseus Books Group.
- Puddicombe, A. (2016). *Meditation and mindfulness: How mindfulness can change your life in ten minutes a day*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Salzberg, S. (2010). *Real happiness: A 28-day program*. New York, NY: Workman Publishing.

There are quite a few good websites designed to support contemplative practice. Among the most well known are:

- Tara Brach www.tarabrach.com. Tara Brach's website offers numerous free meditations and links to resources, articles, and retreat opportunities. She is an internationally recognized therapist and meditation teacher.
- Sharon Salzberg www.sharonsalzberg.com. Salzberg is recognized for several best-selling books on meditation. These include *Loving-kindness: The revolutionary art of happiness* (1995), *Real happiness* (2010), and *Real change* (2021). Her website offers links to full-length podcasts and meditations derived from her work.
- Ten Percent Happier www.tenpercent.com. The ten percent happier website is a companion to Dan Harris' popular book *10% Happier*. Harris is the co-anchor of the weekend edition of *Good Morning America* and a proponent of meditation as a way to calm fidgety minds and promote personal happiness. The website offers a variety of meditations, podcasts, and lectures from leading figures in the mindfulness community.
- Tricycle https://tricycle.org runs a subscription-based online magazine and offers online asynchronous courses designed to enhance meditation practice. Articles vary in length and focus and with a subscription you can receive a daily email with a link to a daily lesson. The online courses allow you to self-pace your learning, offer unlimited access to the lectures and lessons (even after you have completed the course), and include discussion forums should you wish to engage with others who are also enrolled in the class.

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CONTEMPLATIVE MINDFULNESS

Presence and Intentionality

Why bother? For many, the idea of contemplative mindfulness may seem frivolous, unnecessary, and unlinked to the foundational tenets of leadership. Indeed, research on contemplative mindfulness stands in sharp contrast to more traditional research in leadership studies, focusing less on *what* it takes to be an effective leader (Kotter, 1996; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Yukl, 2012) and more on *how* one might approach their work (Felver et al., 2013; Good et al., 2016).

Traditionally, the "what" of leadership has focused on the knowledge (e.g., principles of instructional leadership, budgeting, educational law), skills (e.g., visioning and goal setting, building culture and climate), and dispositions (e.g., trust, transparency, equity) required for school leaders to be successful and effective. Certainly, researchers (cf., Murphy & Louis, 2018; Smylie et al., 2020; Tschannen Moran, 2014) have attempted to uncover what makes successful leaders successful. However, there still exists a considerable gap between suggesting what good or effective leadership looks like and being able to replicate it in practice. This is especially true if someone does not already have a predisposition to acting in evidence-based ways or has had leadership training or experiences that have emphasized other kinds of action.

In sum, it is far easier to suggest that leaders build trust or act transparently than it is to teach someone how to do those things.

Contemplative mindfulness offers us a way to close this gap. Because contemplative mindfulness focuses on developing self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-regulation, it offers us tools for living our lives and facing and resolving difficult situations. By focusing on how leaders approach their work, the people they work with, and the situations they face, contemplative mindfulness suggests that no matter what we do, understanding *who we are while we are doing it* matters.

Moreover, the research is clear, practicing contemplative mindfulness produces salutary effects (Brown, et al., 2007a; Siegel, 2018). These include stress and anxiety reduction (Hoge et al., 2013; Lomas et al., 2017), decreased blood pressure (Koike & Cardoso, 2014), emotional health (Goyal, M., 2014; Pathath, 2017), enhanced self-awareness and attention span (Dahl, 2015; Sood & Jones, 2013), increased creativity (Capurso et al., 2014), and the ability to lead with insight, compassion, and authenticity (Brown, et al., 2007b; Lomas et al., 2017). In fact, there is growing evidence that, when applied in workplace settings, contemplative mindfulness is associated with increased well-being, more skillful leadership, and organizational effectiveness (Good et al., 2016; Felver et al., 2013; Janssen et al., 2018). These outcomes have been found to foster a leader's clarity about their perceptions of the world and their relationship to challenge and difficulty, and decrease worries about future events or issues (Good et al., 2016; Mendelson et al., 2010). Furthermore, research (Colzato et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2006) suggests that the ability to do what is right *and to do it for the right reason* is enhanced by the practice of contemplative mindfulness.

BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Contemplative mindfulness can take many forms. While much of the research has been focused on seated meditation (Fredrickson et al., 2017; Hoge, et al., 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), other forms of practice have been found to be effective in reaching these same goals. Kok and Singer (2017) suggest that interpersonal forms of contemplation (e.g., focused interactive dialogue) can have a significant positive impact on a sense of well-being. Still others (Badfar et al., 2018; Tong et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2017) suggest that physical activities such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong, when practiced from a contemplative (as opposed to competitive) stance, can produce similar results. While studies like that of Kok and Singer (2017) present results informed by data from self-reported survey instruments, studies of brain imagery (Hasenkamp & Barsalou, 2012; Zsadanyi et al., 2021) suggest that even short episodes of meditation, or meditative activities like yoga, can result in changes in neural activity, as evidenced in functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans. Furthermore, with continued contemplative practice, it has been found that these neural changes persist, and over time, practitioners report an increased and consistent sense

of well-being (Dodich et al., 2018). This work suggests that by cultivating self-awareness and introspection, people have the potential to change the neural circuits of the brain thus changing their responses to challenge, difficulty, and stress (Fredrickson et al., 2017; Holzel et al., 2011; Sood & Jones, 2013).

Without getting too far into the brain science, it is worth noting that there is a long tradition of medical studies that employ fMRI scanning to map brain function and activity. Primarily used to measure the effects of trauma to the brain, stroke, or the presence of tumors, fMRI studies have proven useful in understanding which regions of the brain function during different tasks. Because an fMRI measures the activity of the brain by measuring the blood flow to areas of increased activity, researchers can track which regions light up when different regions of the brain are stimulated. When illness or disease is present, neural activity, as measured by the fMRI, is decreased. When the brain is active, either because we are doing simple activities like walking or more complex activities like thinking or speaking, brain activity is increased. Increased brain activity is generally associated with increased cognitive health including learning, emotional regulation, and enhanced problem-solving (Tang et al., 2019; Vago & Zeidan, 2016; Wheeler et al., 2017).

Because the fMRI is capable of measuring, with good accuracy, which regions of the brain are active when doing one type of activity as opposed to another, researchers interested in mindfulness became interested in what effects, if any, meditation would have on brain activity. Recent studies (Bauer, et al., 2020; Holzel et al., 2011; Wheeler et al., 2017; Vago & Zeidan, 2016; Zsadanyi et al., 2021) have suggested that regular mindfulness practice leads to increased brain activity and density of gray matter in the brain. Gray matter, a central component of the central nervous system, is involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation and self-control, perspective-taking, and decision-making.

Decreases in gray matter have been linked to poorer language processing, access and use of memory, and performance on cognitively challenging tasks. Aging has long been associated with decreased gray matter however, more recently, research has suggested that gray matter decreases when people experience chronic pain (Kang et al., 2019), long-term depression (Ancelin et al., 2019), and stress (Moreno et al., 2017). Conversely, the increase of gray matter has been posited to increase our ability to regulate our emotions in the face of stress and difficulty, enhance our ability to problem-solve, and improve our ability to face the unprecedented demands of contemporary life (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

To be clear, none of this research suggests that contemplative mindfulness alone can address long-standing physical or mental illness. Nor can it replace medication, therapy, regular exercise, or a robust network of support as necessary tools for confronting stress, disease, or burnout. However, research in modern psychology (Dahl et al., 2015; Goyal et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2019), neuroscience (Bauer et al., 2020; Holzel et al., 2011), and medicine (Koike & Cardoso, 2014; Pathath, 2017) have all found that the practice of contemplative

mindfulness provides a valuable resource for facing the demands of life and leadership.

CONTEMPLATIVE MINDFULNESS IN PRACTICE

That ancient Buddhist wisdom, modern psychology, and medicine have converged around the idea that contemplative mindfulness offers practitioners significant benefits is not surprising. In fact, this convergence makes good sense because the central question asked in each case is simple and enduring—how can we live our lives with less suffering and pain? Obviously, each of these reflective and research traditions defines suffering and pain slightly differently. The philosopher looks to lift the pain of the human experience, modern psychology the pain of depression, anxiety, and stress, and the medical professional wishes to alleviate physical suffering. Yet, in each case, the focus remains the same—how can we live our lives with more ease and peace, no matter the source of the suffering? So, what is contemplative mindfulness and how does it manifest in leadership practice? As Feldman & Kuyken (2019) suggest, contemplative mindfulness can be described as a state, a process, and a faculty.

Mindfulness as a State

As a state, mindfulness calls us to be present. Mindfulness as a state of being present requires that we remain open and aware, our curiosity directed toward being *with* whatever is happening and present in the experience. Being present, being *with it*, asks that we step away from the stories we spin, our projections of what might happen, and the fantasies we have about who we are or what might be. Angel Morraw of North Green Elementary School describes an experience familiar to us all:

> As soon as an angry parent walks into my office, I'm getting wound up. Honestly, sometimes it happens when I'm not even sure the parent is angry, I just think they might be… I can feel it, my heart races, I get cold, I'm jumpy. I'm in my head playing out the way this is gonna go. Rehearsing what I think they'll say and what I'll say back.

Morraw went on to suggest:

> When I feel it, I can see that I'm not all that present. And then I stop. Well, I try to stop. If I can stop in time, I'm better off, it makes a bit of space there. You know, like I can step back from it and see what's really going on.

As De La Rosa (2018) notes, we tend to live our lives, "without much distance between us and our experience" (p. 85). Known as cognitive fusion (Herzberg et al., 2012), this tendency to automatically attach a thought to an experience has consequences for how we experience our lives. Cognitive fusion can be helpful as it allows us to attach positive feelings to things we enjoy. However, cognitive fusion can elicit negative feelings just as easily, summoning

habitual responses that allow us to become lost in old memories or current fears, distanced from what is happening in the present moment. As a result of being *in it* as opposed to being *with it*, we live in our projections and fantasies instead of the present moment. Mindfulness as a state of being present offers us the opportunity to create, as Morraw suggests, a bit of space so that we act more intentionally and purposefully.

Mindfulness as a Process

Mindfulness, as a process, prompts us to be *intentionally aware* of how our lives unfold from moment to moment. It motivates us to let go of our fixed ideas about ourselves, those around us, and more generally, the world as we believe it to be. Described as cultivating our capacity for "not-knowing," mindfulness, as a process, suggests that as we gain skill at approaching the world around us from a stance of curiosity, we become better able to explore what is happening around us including our own thoughts, judgements, feelings, and sensations (Salzberg, 2021). This allows us to better observe what arises and to do so without distress.

Research regarding anxiety (Badfar et al., 2018; Hoge et al., 2013) addresses this point directly, suggesting that anxiety can, in part, be alleviated by becoming aware of what is happening when we feel anxious, acknowledging it, and, with care, directing our thoughts back to the present moment. This research acknowledges that anxiety feels very real and that when people are anxious, they experience measurable physiological reactions. Heart rate and blood pressure increase as do other sensations of distress. In fact, this happens to all of us. When we feel threatened, our flight or fight reactions kick in and we are on full alert, poised to respond as if our life depends on it. Our brains become convinced that we are dealing with something far more threatening than what is confronting us. In the moment, our concerns feel very real, and our bodies respond accordingly, as if our lives are on the line.

However, the causes of our anxiety are rarely life-threatening. Instead, generally, our anxiety is a result of projection and rumination about what may happen at some future time. Yet, as Pathath (2017) suggests, if we can step back from those worries and concerns and become more aware of what is happening around us, we can calm and recenter ourselves. We can learn that even though the feelings of anxiety are real, the message the body is receiving is not true. We may feel threatened but, in fact, we are not in danger. Over time, as we watch how our life unfolds, we can learn how we instinctively respond, strengthen our attentive muscle, and change our response patterns in the future.

Mindfulness as a Faculty

Mindfulness as a faculty suggests that we can, through practice, strengthen our attentive muscle and learn how to respond with *increased intention* no matter what confronts us. As Feldman and Kuyken (2019) suggest, the faculty of mindfulness can be described as having four primary functions, cultivating simple knowing, protective awareness, investigative awareness, and reframing

perceptions. As we nurture and apply these faculties, we become better at recognizing our instinctive responses and patterns.

Simple knowing. Cultivating simple knowing suggests that we can learn to be with the moment attending to, without developing a running narrative about, what is happening. It means we are curious, but not judgmental, about what is happening when it is happening. Yet, cultivating simple knowing takes effort. As De La Rosa (2018) writes, the brain is always working. We cannot stop our thoughts and reactions, nor can we shut down the brain's effort to categorize and classify our experiences. Everything we experience causes us to, in some way, react. Cultivating simple knowing, prompts us to look at those reactions and attend to the message we attach to our experiences.

Protective awareness. If simple knowing is about meeting each experience with curiosity, protective awareness is about choosing how we respond. Protective awareness necessitates discernment. However, mindful discernment is less about categorizing our experiences as good or bad, right or wrong, and more about our attitude toward them. It is about purposefully creating some distance between you and what occurs. As De La Rosa (2018, p. 19) writes:

> Ordinarily we live in a mode, in which, if something good happens, we're happy; if something bad happens, we're upset; if someone is kind to us, we feel worthy; if someone disregards us, we feel unworthy; if someone disrespects us, we get angry; and so on… This might make perfect sense according to conventional logic but living this way is exactly like having a remote control with buttons on it for happiness, upset, worthiness, unworthiness, and anger, and handing that remote control to the world.

Mindfulness as protective awareness functions to help us return to the place where a thought is just a thought, a feeling just a feeling. To be sure, protective awareness is not the same as avoidance or pushing away unwelcome thoughts and feelings (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Wellings, 2016). Rather, it is about taking responsibility for our responses, feelings, and thoughts and learning that we do not need to be controlled by them. It sets the stage for us to investigate what is really going on.

Investigative awareness. Investigative awareness implies that we can understand and gain insights into how our minds work. It helps us begin to identify what causes us distress; it reminds us that in past circumstances our distress has dissolved and that there are ways we can actively work to mitigate distress when it arises. Obviously, investigative awareness does not immediately cause all our troubles to magically disappear. It does, however, help us to foster the conditions that support discernment about the stories we tell ourselves about what is happening around us.

Reframing perception. Finally, reframing perception suggests that as we work toward simple knowing, protective and investigative awareness, we can challenge and change our old ways of response and action. It helps us realize we have choices about how we act in response to the things that confront us.

In turn, we are more likely to respond to difficulty and stress in skillful, intentional ways.

Skillful Action

Acting skillfully is a central tenet of Buddhist philosophy (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Goldstein, 2016) and modern psychology (Lomas et al., 2017; Pathath, 2017). Skillful action, sometimes referred to as wise or right action, is action that leads to our happiness and reduces our stress and distress. This is not to suggest that skillful action is about skipping doing the hard work of our lives. Nor is it the passive acceptance of the suffering. Rather, skillful action recognizes that there is a difference between coping and healing.

Coping suggests that we have found ways to effectively deal with something that is stressful, difficult, or challenging. However, coping can be adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive coping helps us build individual resiliency and sustains us through tough times. Examples of adaptive coping include asking others for assistance, engaging in problem-solving, working to maintain emotional composure, or seeking out emotionally satisfying relationships. Maladaptive coping is less productive. Examples of maladaptive coping include attempting to escape from the problems of our lives in any number of unhealthy or isolating ways.

In moderation, coping is not bad. No question, coping helps us deal with life's daily and ongoing dramas and traumas. It helps us build resilience and resilience helps us to bounce back after we have been stressed or dealt a difficult blow. As Masten (2014) suggests, resilience can be thought of as positively adapting to adversity. However, as Masten (2014) and Ungar (2021) note, no matter how resilient one might be, long-term adversity takes its toll. Asking anyone to be ruggedly resilient in the face of stress after stress, difficulty after difficulty is unsustainable. In this way, coping fails us because coping rarely helps us resolve the things that are causing us stress and distress in any lasting ways. Healing is different because it includes resolving (or at least working toward resolving) unhelpful patterns of behavior and thought.

Healing requires skillful action. It emphasizes our ability to make good choices and to, as much as possible, avoid bad ones. Importantly, skillful action suggests that a good choice is one that increases our happiness, and the happiness of others, and is guided by our ability to act with compassion and wisdom. In short, both healing and skillful action require that we focus our attentions on those things that reduce suffering—our own and that of those around us.

However, acting skillfully requires skill. It is easy to act unskillfully. Unskillful actions are generally considered to be motivated by desire, a need to be "right," or by anger. Jade Lee, principal of Frasiers Creek Middle School reflects:

> I like being right. I especially like being right when a kid does something
> dumb, makes me angry… One thing, I've learned when I want to be right,

I'm working kind of stupid. I'm missing the opportunity to help that kid learn how to be different, act differently… [and] to create a relationship with that kid. In fact, when I'm pushing to be right, I've learned I'm usually doing something that really undermines that kid's trust in me.

The feelings and thoughts Lee describes are universal. Being right feels good. However, as Lee points out, it is not always skillful.

Lee's words also introduce another important aspect of skillful action, the understanding that we are all interconnected, and nothing occurs that is not influenced by something else. If we play out Lee's example, we can see how this is the case. Imagine that the incident begins with a student arriving at her office door. Perhaps the student's arrival interrupts her from a task she finds important. Perhaps she was counting on a moment to herself. Perhaps this student is back, once again, and Lee knows them well. No matter, their arrival causes her to react, to want to make her point, and be right. In turn, even though being right may feel good in the moment, over time, that choice potentially undermines her relationship with this student as well as any trust she may have developed with them. As her day unfolds her good feelings dissolve and other issues arise. Perhaps, at the end of the day, she regrets her actions. Maybe she forgets the incident entirely. However, as Lee notes, no matter what happens next, she missed an opportunity to help this student learn what is needed for them to be successful. She failed to act skillfully. Recognizing the difference between skillful and unskillful action takes skill. It sounds simple but it is not easy.

Simple but Not Easy

Skillful action is hard because it takes effort, energy, and awareness. Skillful action requires that we flex our muscles of self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-regulation. Inasmuch as a good choice is a choice that promotes well-being and reduces harm, it is often difficult to see our way to making good choices if we are not able to move beyond our own distress and distractions. This is hard to do because, as Sood and Jones (2013) assert, we simultaneously live in two parallel worlds—the perceptual and the conceptual. The *perceptual world* consists of our experiences of the external world. If the day is warm or cool, that is a perception. The taste of salty, sweet, or bitter food, all perceptions. Our experience of a noise as loud or quiet, perception once again.

However, our perceptions are just experiences. It is only when we begin to assess our experiences that our conceptual brain kicks in. It is our conceptual brain that interprets the world, including our emotional and intellectual reactions. When we judge a warm day to be pleasant, our food delicious, or a bird's chirp as happy, we are adding our own interpretation to what we have perceived. Our *conceptual brain* is rendering a ruling and layering an internal story over what we have experienced. Moreover, our perceptual and conceptual worlds work in tandem and influence each other. Our thoughts, moods, and emotions change our perceptions of what is happening around us, and our environment changes our thoughts.

We have all been there. We wake up feeling ready to face the day, energized by an event we are looking forward to and someone we have plans to see. We imagine how things will happen, how great it will all feel, how wonderful it will be to reconnect. Sometimes, our lives play out exactly as we imagined them. More often, things do not turn out as we expect them to. Traffic might be heavier than we expected, lines longer, the food and conversation just not quite right. In reality, it may have been a perfectly fine day. However, we are disappointed because our experience did not measure up to the fantasy we created in our mind.

The issue is not that we have expectations. It is impossible for our brains not to think, plan, and be engaged with the world around us. The issue is that we allow our expectations to be the goalposts by which we judge our experiences. And when they do not measure up, we respond with disappointment, frustration, and dissatisfaction. Both Buddhist philosophy and modern psychology would suggest we have created our own suffering (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Goldstein, 2016; Sood & Jones, 2013). Skillful action suggests we can choose to do things differently, to be different, and experience the world differently. Naomi Schapiro's story points us toward better understanding how these ideas look in practice.

Naomi Schapiro is a well-respected and well-liked principal. Nearing her thirtieth year in education and her fifteenth as a building principal, she is known across the district for the positive culture and climate she has built at Spring Mountains Elementary School. She explains:

> My belief is that school needs to be a fun, joyous place. When I think about it, when someone asks, 'What's your vision of an effective school?' I have a clear visual in my mind. I think of a triangle. At the top is high achievement. A school needs to be focused on high achievement not just academically, but also social emotionally, and behaviorally. That's the business of school. Over here, on this other corner, this is about connection. I believe firmly that many of the people we work with—students, families, teachers—they feel like strangers in a strange land. All the research we know about healthy communities is people need to feel welcomed and connected. For me, that means I greet all the kids at the buses, I supervise the cafeteria, I stop by classrooms, I handwrite notes to teachers, parents, kids. I want them to know that I am reaching out to them. Building that connection. And then this part of the triangle, the left bottom part that's the joy. I believe every child needs to know joy each day and to look forward to some joyous event for tomorrow. If you just have high achievement and you don't have connection or joy, it's going to fall apart.

Asked to further explain, Schapiro continued:

> I think one of the most important parts for me in terms of developing my own leadership style, how I got to that triangle, is to really think intrapersonally, like, 'Who am I as a person?' For me, the idea that staying present in the moment and taking a breath, not catastrophizing, just staying in that moment, staying in my body has been very beneficial, very helpful… I started meditating about ten years ago. It's not always easy, there are times

I don't want to do it. But mostly I do it. Twenty minutes every morning… What I've learned through years of deep reflection, therapy, and meditation is that it comes down to genuineness… Asking, 'Okay, who am I at my core?'. Not disowning who I am. Not pretending to be somebody I am not. That doesn't mean I don't work my ass off at being a good leader. That means it's my responsibility to really know who I am so I can show up and connect with them. I needed to learn me… to be a good leader.

Schapiro's story aligns with what research tells us about the power of contemplative mindfulness in developing deep understandings about who we are as people. It also aligns with what research tells us about authentic leadership. As Kernis (2003) suggests, authentic leadership is "acting in accord with one's values, preferences, and needs rather than acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments" (p. 14). To do so requires, as Schapiro suggests, knowing oneself and acting in ways that are both true and honest, including embracing our mistakes and missteps. We now turn to exploring how contemplative mindfulness can help us to lead more authentically, in all circumstances, but most importantly when faced with challenge and difficulty (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Klenke, 2007).

AUTHENTICITY AND CONTEMPLATIVE MINDFULNESS

Generally, authenticity means that something is or feels real. An experience is considered authentic when it feels unscripted, unique, or genuine. A painting is considered authentic when important qualities of the piece (e.g., artist's signature, historical documentation, scientific analysis of canvas and paint) support the determination that the painting is genuine. Literature is thought to be culturally authentic to the extent to which the writing reflects the worldview of the represented people or cultural group and the details of language, beliefs, values, and depictions of life are accurately presented. Our experiences with people are no different. We judge people to be authentic when our interactions with them feel genuine and we experience them as being true to themselves.

Yet, and it is important to note, authenticity is not an either/or condition. One is never wholly authentic or inauthentic. Moreover, acting in an authentic fashion does not mean that leaders must be an open book, fully transparent to all members of an organization, and in all circumstances. Circumstances matter and feelings of trust, understanding, and confidence are variable. Consequently, it is more accurate to suggest that one's ability to act authentically is contextual in nature and, like most human behaviors, likely to occur on a continuum. However, even if we cannot be completely authentic in all situations, research is clear—the more we are able to act authentically, the more successful we will be at handling whatever comes our way (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Acting authentically requires developing several key traits and qualities. These include self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-regulation.

TABLE 2.1

Continuum of authenticity and inauthenticity

	Authenticity	Inauthenticity
	People who act authentically have/are…	*People who act inauthentically have/ are…*
Self-Awareness	Realistic perceptions of self	Self-deceptive
	Accepting of self	Rejecting of significant aspects of oneself
	Conscious of connections between mind & body	Unaware of the experience of the body in the world
Self-Understanding	Cognizant of values & beliefs, acting consistently across contexts, circumstances, & conditions	Plasticity regarding values & beliefs, inconsistent behaviors in like situations & contexts
	Thoughtful & reflective & understand how motivations guide actions	Judgmental & impulsive & do not understand what motivates any decision or action
	Able to communicate ideas & logic leading to decision-making with clarity & transparency	Uncertain about what ideas & logic inform decision-making
	Aware of the connections between self & others, sensitive to relationships	Unaware of the connective & relational aspects of one's life & leadership
Self-Regulation	Values that align with intentions & actions	Stated values that do not align with intentions &/ or actions
	Able to learn from errors, mistakes, & difficulties, & are willing to own up to mistakes when they happen	Unable to see errors, mistakes, & difficulties as learning opportunities, & are unable to own mistakes when they occur
	Able to set internal standards & assess discrepancies between standards & outcomes	Unable to see discrepancies between behaviors & actions or act in consistent ways

Source: Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Klenke, 2007.

Self-awareness

Important to the construct of authenticity in people is the notion that one "knows themself" deeply and honestly. However, self-awareness is more than identifying as a coffee person, a nice guy, a parent, a principal, or a runner. In fact, seeing oneself as separate from the roles we inhabit is a key tenet of self-awareness (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). As self-awareness increases, people are better able to discern that *who* they are differs from *what* they do. Contemplative mindfulness helps build self-awareness. Inasmuch as mindfulness focuses people on paying attention to their reactions, and their thoughts about those reactions, it also helps people build self-awareness as a result of their experiences. In turn, a key quality of authenticity, sense of self, is strengthened.

Moreover, contemplative mindfulness teaches that self-awareness includes more than our cognitive experiences and conclusions about the world around us. In fact, empirical measures of mindfulness (Bergomi et al., 2013; Stedham & Skaar, 2019) that purport to measure self-awareness often include items that include both cognitive engagement (e.g., When working on a task I often find myself fully immersed in it) and experiences of the world around us (e.g., When I am outside, I am aware of how the sun feels on my face and the sounds around me). Consistent with research that suggests that the benefits of mindfulness can be achieved through purposeful movement, mindful self-awareness is embodied (Khoury et al., 2017).

Embodied mindful self-awareness suggests that our brain collects and processes input from the rest of the body. Therefore, from this perspective, the body functions as an essential component of the mind and, in turn, is involved with cognition. The body and the mind work in tandem, providing important signals and cues concerning who we are and what our experience of the world means to us. Intuitively, this makes sense. We have all experienced the sensation of our breath becoming shallow, our shoulders tightening, or our gut twisting when we are faced with difficulty. That our body offers key

▶ TABLE 2.2

Contributions of experiential and conceptual awareness to self-awareness and self-understanding

Experiential Awareness	Conceptual Awareness
Part of the experience	Separate from the experience
Observed, exploratory, first-hand	Evaluative, judgmental, moderated by cognition
Sense-based & concrete	Abstract, theoretical, removed
Present moment focused	Delayed by cognitive processes, future focused
Reality determined by direct experience	Reality determined by cognitive activity, thoughts, & labels

Source: Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Khoury et al., 2017; Varela et al., 2017.

information about how we are experiencing something is not surprising or new. However, thinking about self-awareness as inclusive of the body may be.

To push this idea even further, researchers of embodied mindfulness (Khoury et al., 2017; Varela et al., 2017) suggest that mindful self-awareness is not only a product of the cognitive brain. Rather, our bodily experiences inform our cognitive inferences and conclusions. Said another way, mindful self-awareness depends on the brain but does not exclusively occur within the brain. Certainly, people need the neural networks of the brain to make sense of the world around them, to help them label and understand that which is occurring. However, mindfulness consists of the totality of experience, not just those experiences for which we have labels. Moreover, having experiences and thoughts is not the goal of self-awareness, being aware of how you experience and live in the world is.

Self-understanding

Just as self-awareness is foundational to authenticity so is self-understanding. Inasmuch as self-awareness is about being experientially and cognitively in tune with what you are thinking and feeling, self-understanding prompts us to recognize how our thoughts and feelings influence our behaviors and actions (Gardner et al., 2011; Shapiro et al., 2006). In keeping with this distinction, research concerning authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Klenke, 2007), suggests that self-understanding consists of several key qualities, each of which points to the utility of self-understanding for our leadership practice. These include identifying key values and beliefs, developing a thoughtful and reflective understanding of the motivations that guide choices and actions, and communicating, with clarity and transparency, the ideas and logic behind decisions and actions.

Furthermore, the development of these key qualities underscores that self-understanding is a relational construct. We exist in relation to the conditions around us, our interactions with others, and our preferences, commitments, and interests. Moreover, self-understanding is informed by our connections to the world around us and with one another. Contemplative mindfulness would suggest that, in fact, there is no separation between us and others and that relational connections exist whether or not you are cognizant of them (Salzberg, 2021; Siegel, 2018). However, and consistent with the foundational ideas of contemplative mindfulness, connection is a complex notion (De La Rosa, 2018; Feldman & Kuyken, 2019). From a contemplative mindfulness lens, connection refers to how all kinds of information flow between us and others. Therefore, connection is fostered or diminished by not only the information we share through our words but also by emotive and affective messages as well.

Therefore, self-understanding is dependent on not only how we understand ourselves but also how others understand us. Self-understanding promotes our ability to act in accordance with our espoused values and beliefs and to express ourselves in ways that feel true and trustworthy to others (Klenke, 2007). Consequently, as self-understanding is developed, people are better able to

respond in ways that are consistent with their espoused values and beliefs and leverage those values and beliefs in ways that are consistent across contexts, circumstances, and conditions (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Self-regulation

Whereas self-awareness is about being experientially and cognitively in tune, and self-understanding recognizes the connections between our actions and our relationships with others, self-regulation is about practicing discernment and restraint. The research literature (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Klenke, 2007; Luthans & Avolio, 2003) is clear, acting authentically is more than simply "showing up as me" and letting the chips fall where they may. Rather, authenticity, in life and leadership, requires that we make choices concerning how we will act in any given circumstance and situation. Making those choices requires self-regulation.

Research (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Klenke, 2007), suggests that self-regulation includes the ability to set internal standards, learn from our errors and own up to our mistakes, and align values with intentions and actions. In this way, self-regulation builds on self-awareness and self-understanding, acknowledging the role of judgement in decisions and actions. Furthermore, self-regulation, as a fundamental quality of authenticity, surfaces the importance of internal regulatory processes as central to decision-making and judgement. Self-regulation suggests that one lives up to and lives by a set of internal standards and values as opposed to relying on external consequences as a regulatory mechanism for our actions. Self-regulation requires that we own our choices.

Likewise, self-regulation is well-aligned with key tenets of mindfulness that focus on developing, in ongoing ways, deeper and more nuanced understandings of who we are (De La Rosa, 2018; Langer, 2016). It allows for our "selves" to grow in dynamic ways and to make mistakes and errors. Yet, self-regulation also suggests that intention matters. It suggests that if others are to experience our leadership choices and actions as well-meaning and authentic, it is necessary to act in ways that are consistent with our stated goals and objectives.

Finally, self-regulation extends self-understanding by acknowledging that our actions have consequences for ourselves and others. As Klenke (2007) and Brown and Ryan (2003) suggest, when leaders act in authentic ways organizational trust, member engagement, and alignment between goal setting and outcome attainment is increased. Additionally, research (Good et al., 2016; Lomas et al., 2017) suggests that in addition to positive organizational outcomes, the individuals who work for and with authentic leaders accrue considerable benefits as well.

Certainly, organizational members benefit when trust is present and valued outcomes are achieved (Leroy et al., 2015). Yet, in studies of follower experience (Hu et al., 2018; Sparrowe, 2005), findings suggest that leaders who demonstrate self-regulation create workplaces marked by empathy and compassion. These studies suggest that not only are these workplaces more

productive and creative, but they are also better places to work. It is posited that because self-regulation considers the experiences of others in relation to the choices and decisions leaders make, it fosters leaders' empathy (i.e., the ability to understand and share others' feelings, experiences, and perspectives) as well as their compassion (i.e., concern for others' stress and distress as well as the desire to help) (Cuff et al., 2016).

IN CONCLUSION

A key premise of contemplative mindfulness is that our physical and mental health and well-being are supported by our awareness of the world around us. Yet, the world that we experience is dependent upon how we approach it. If we approach with dread and anxiety, reality appears one way. If we approach with curiosity, it appears quite differently. Similarly, our worldview is framed by our experiences and what our cognitive mind makes of them.

Furthermore, contemplative mindfulness research (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Khoury et al., 2017) suggests that as we gain familiarity with our experiential world and how we cognitively engage with that world, our capacity to understand is enhanced. As we become better able to learn from our experiential and conceptual worlds, we become better able to deploy our attentions toward what matters for our lives and leadership. As a result, and perhaps more importantly, our reserves of understanding, acceptance, and discernment flourish. In turn, we are better able to live and to lead authentically.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Loving-kindness

Closely linked to the notion that we are all connected to each other, and at the heart of Buddhist mindfulness, is a focus on developing compassion for oneself and others through meditation. In the west, the best-known version of compassionate meditation is metta bhavana (sometimes simply referred to as metta) or the loving-kindness meditation. The term, metta bhavana, comes from the Pali language and has its origins in the Thervada school of Buddhism of northern India. Pali is the language in which the teachings of the Thervada school of Buddhism were written and passed down. While practitioners of the Thervada school of Buddhism ritually chant in Pali, it is not a currently spoken language nor is it clear where the language may have originated or when it may have died out as a widely spoken dialect.

Yet, because the practice of Thervada Buddhism has persisted, the term, metta bhavana, has endured. Metta, in Pali, is translated as (non-romantic) love, friendliness, attachment, or kindness. Bhavana means development, fostering, or cultivation. Therefore, the practice of metta bhavana is focused on developing a loving or kind stance toward oneself and others. When practicing metta bhavana, loving-kindness meditation, the objective is to sit in a place

of inclusive awareness and to embrace acceptance for who we are without conditions. Yet, loving-kindness meditation is not solely focused on the self. Practitioners of loving-kindness meditation also focus on others we feel close to, neutral others, difficult others, and ultimately all living things. In turn, the practice is suggested to aid in developing acceptance of others' struggles and difficulties. Metta bhavana is caring and compassionate meditation that, while offering practitioners great benefits, embraces all.

There are numerous ways to practice loving-kindness meditation. In fact, almost every meditation teacher puts their own spin on how they go about leading a loving-kindness meditation. Classically, the practice unfolds in this manner:

- After finding a comfortable position, chose to either close your eyes or softly focus your gaze on a point fairly close to where you are sitting. Some practitioners find it useful to gently gaze at a candle, house plant, or picture of a place where, in some prior time, they felt happy or at peace.
- Breathe in and out for several rounds, attending to the length of your breath, the cadence of your inhalation and exhalation, and take a few minutes to intentionally ground yourself in the moment. It may be helpful to focus on experiencing how your body is supported by your seat, cushion, mat, or the floor. Being aware of how you are showing up helps to center attention on the meditation to come.
- Once you feel ready, begin by silently repeating these classic phrases:
  - May I be safe.
  - May I be happy.
  - May I be healthy.
  - May I be at peace.
- It may be helpful to breathe in with each phrase, pausing on the exhalation to briefly feel how each phrase resonates within you. If it does not, no matter, just move to the next phrase with your next breath.
- After completing the first-round phrases, you may choose to sit for a bit longer noticing how you feel, what thoughts arise, or any other sensations that may be present.
- For the next round in the meditation, picture in your mind's eye someone who has been kind to you, you feel warmth and connection toward, or someone who you love. With each inhalation silently repeat the same phrases substituting "you" for "I:"
  - May you be safe.
  - May you be happy.
  - May you be healthy.
  - May you be at peace.
- On your exhalation, note what arises. As with the first round, you may choose to take a moment to gently check in with yourself. If your tendency is toward impatience, you might wish to experience this moment absent of any expectation of anything occurring.

- The third round of metta bhavana encourages you to picture someone who you feel neutrally toward, someone who generally does not evoke feelings of warmth or distress. You might choose a grocery store employee or a neighbor you do not know well. If you cannot find someone who you feel truly neutral toward, choose a good friend or a trusted acquaintance. Once again, repeat the phrases of loving-kindness with this new person in mind, pausing as necessary to experience what may arise.
- The fourth round is where the practice of loving-kindness gets interesting. If it feels feasible, recall someone with whom you are experiencing tension or difficulty. Starting with someone who really drives you crazy, with whom you are deeply at odds, or have had long-standing conflict is not the best first choice. Instead, try to identify someone to whom you really can offer loving-kindness and compassion. Once again, repeat the phrases of loving-kindness, pausing, and noticing what arises in your mind and body.
- The fifth round asks that you bring to mind a small group of people, perhaps even including people you do not know well, but consider without distinction, without exclusion, a broader group. For school leaders, this group might include the students in your school, the collective faculty and staff, or the families of the community your school serves. Classically, this round continues with the words "may you" however substituting the words "may we" serves to reinforce the notion that loving-kindness meditation is about connection. With this larger group in mind, silently repeat the final round of breath-focused phrases:
  - May we be safe.
  - May we be happy.
  - May we be healthy.
  - May we be at peace.
- Close the meditation with a few rounds of non-directed breathing, attending to how you are currently feeling and what thoughts arise.

In the practice of loving-kindness, the objective is to direct your thinking and understanding to the notion that all of us, no matter our relationship to each other, are likely looking for the same things in our lives—a sense of safety, happiness, health, and peace. Loving-kindness focuses on noticing connection rather than difference. Sending loving-kindness does not mean that you forget or condone past harm, it simply means that you recognize shared, deeply human, wants, and needs. It suggests that we can see poor behavior and unskillful action as something we are all capable of and that, even in the face of conflict, we can still feel connections to other human beings. To practice loving-kindness meditation is to cultivate our reserves of compassion be they for ourselves or for others.

Variations. Listed above are the classic metta bhavana phrases. However, there is no reason why you cannot alter where you place your meditative attentions. There are two common ways to do this. The first simply changes out the point of intention. Rather than reciting "may I be safe" you might

repeat "may I be kind" or "may I be clear." The second changes out the verb. Here, rather than the focus on "being" you might "know" or "live with" your intention. Some favorites of mine are:

- May I know this moment.
- May I know appreciation.
- May I know compassion.
- May I know kindness.
- May I live with connection.
- May I live with awareness.
- May I live with gratitude.
- May I live with joy and ease.

If you choose to change out the phrases, remember to stay with the structure of starting with yourself and moving out to others. If reciting the phrases feels odd to you or does not resonate, it is possible to focus on feelings of safety, happiness, wellness, or gratitude. You can meditate on how each of these kindnesses feels or on an experience where you felt each deeply.

Finally, a caution, this practice takes time. Practicing metta bhavana will not immediately result in an ability to accept and see the best in everyone. Nor will it immediately result in warm and kind feelings for yourself and others. However, it is a practice that creeps up on you. Feelings will come and go. Some days the practice will feel entirely natural, others it will be a struggle. Yet, one day, when confronted by either a personal difficulty or a particularly challenging student, you may just find yourself thinking about ways to address those difficulties from a more caring and kinder place.

Activity

ACTIVITY 2

AN AUTHENTICITY SCALE (AVOLIO & GARDNER, 2005; GARDNER ET AL., 2011; KLENKE, 2007)

Authentic people typically know themselves well. The following scale asks that you consider which of these statements most accurately describes you.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	I…	Agree	Strongly Agree
		Know what I enjoy and what I am good at.		
		Understand why I believe the things I do about myself.		
		Usually align my actions with my beliefs and values.		
		Feel good about the things I have accomplished.		
		Can usually identify what I am feeling.		
		Can accept negative consequences if I have acted in accordance with my beliefs and values.		
		Spend time doing the things I enjoy.		
		Understand why I believe the things I do about others.		
		Stop to consider what I am thinking and feeling before I act.		
		Can objectively consider my strengths and weakness, knowing no one is perfect.		
		Generally show up as my true self, regardless of the situation.		
		Know what is important to me.		

After reflecting on your responses, consider these questions:

● Do your answers indicate any places of strength or areas for growth?
● Is there one attribute of authenticity you could commit to practicing?
● What would your practice include?

Additional Resources

There are several very good books and resources focused on contemplative mindfulness, some favorites include:

- De La Rosa, R. (2018). *The monkey is the messenger: Meditation and what your busy mind is trying to tell you*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications. In this book, De La Rosa challenges the myth that meditation is about clearing our minds. Instead, he contends that it is impossible for our brains to stop working, therefore learning how to work with our thoughts as they arise, offers promise for personal and professional growth and happiness. De La Rosa's thinking offers tangible advice for those of us who think we cannot meditate because our minds are too busy, our lives are too stressful, or our difficulties too great.
- Hanh, T.H. (2001). *You are here: Discovering the magic of the present moment*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications. *You are here* is a classic volume that offers straightforward, understandable directions for developing a mindfulness practice. Focused on addressing the pain and stress of life, Hanh suggests simple practices that can be included in one's daily life to impressive result.
- Tejaniya, S.U. (2019). *Relax & be aware: Mindfulness meditations for clarity, confidence, and wisdom*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications. In this slim volume, Tejaniya offers both instructional and meditative lessons. Each short chapter includes introductory material that centers on how meditation can increase individual happiness and wisdom and includes a full month of meditations that can be read and reflected upon. Meditations begin with a clear statement of meditative purpose followed by directions for the meditation and end with a simple phrase that can be the focus of a meditative session.

Chapter 1 offered several popular websites for finding contemplative meditations and those will not be repeated here. However, in addition to those excellent resources, there are several good apps that are supported by iPhone and Android. Many of these contain meditation timers as well as pre-recorded and live meditation sessions and classes. Most contain free content and the option to access additional content for a small fee. A cautionary note, if you do use your phone as a timer just be sure to change your settings to airplane mode or do not disturb so that you will not be distracted by incoming calls, texts, and emails.

- Buddhify https://buddhify.com
- Calm www.calm.com
- Headspace www.headspace.com
- Insight Timer https://insighttimer.com
- Plum Village https://plumvillage.app
- Simple Habit www.simplehabit.com

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Focus and Concentration

KEY VOCABULARY

Attention—Sustaining focus while ignoring distractions.

Awareness—The state of perceiving and being cognizant of emotions, thoughts, and experiences.

Distraction—Thoughts and feelings that take attention away from something else.

Equanimity—Even-mindedness, the practice of approaching emotions, thoughts, and experiences with non-attachment and non-resistance.

Resilience—Effective adaptation in response to significant challenge, stress, and disruption.

Most of us have had the experience of driving to work and, once there, not remembering the details of our trip. We enter rooms only to forget what we were looking for or cannot find our car keys once we have put them down. Often, we rationalize these lapses. The trip to work is repetitive and boring, the dog is distracting, the car keys have a mind of their own. Of course, all those things may be true. However, more likely, we were simply not paying attention to what we were doing. We were unaware. As annoying as searching, yet again, for the car keys is, more important is the fact that when we are unaware we miss a good deal of what happens around us. Contemplative mindfulness reminds us that there are good reasons to become more personally and professionally aware.

Awareness can be developed in many complementary ways. Some people develop awareness through mentoring and coaching (Schechter, 2020; Gates, 2015), others through therapy (Siegel, 2018), and still others through mindfulness work (Brown et al., 2007a; Brown & Ryan, 2003). To be clear, research

has not determined that any of these approaches is better (or worse) than the other. However, no matter the origin, research suggests that leaders can benefit from paying attention to their mind "at work." As Eva Morin, Thelon Middle School Principal shares:

> I learned that knowing what I obsess about matters. [My leadership coach] taught me I had to get out of my head. But really, I had to be better at reading myself and knowing what I was doing and why I was doing it.

Her thoughts are echoed by Laine Trembly Principal of Great Basin High school:

> Therapy, lots of therapy, got me here. Even before Covid I knew I couldn't keep up this pace. It was too much; I was carrying too much… In therapy, I learned I was taking on too much, worried about things I really couldn't [control]. Now I can see when that's happening and when I should step back or step in.

And as Elliot Barcia, a regular meditator, and Principal of Kings Canyon High School, offers:

> When I take a minute to breathe, I center. It all stops for that minute and I'm better able to start again. I just see me in that minute and it just feels like I'm back in my body. Like I'm not spinning out there being bounced around by whatever.

As these principals suggest, paying attention and becoming aware of what is happening around them helps them feel like they are better leaders. Whether they were focused on making a hard decision or working with others, by attending to their experience they believe they were better able to respond in effective ways. Yet, as research (Christoff, 2012; Langer, 2016; Siegel, 2018) suggests, many of us struggle with attention and awareness.

ATTENTION AND AWARENESS

Attention and awareness are described as key attributes of mindfulness. Often used synonymously, understanding their differences is helpful to understand how mindfulness is developed and sustained. Paying attention means sticking with an undertaking regardless of disruptions and diversions. As the research literature (Maier & Tsuchiya, 2021; Nani et al., 2019) suggests, *attention* is the act of focusing, for a sustained period, while ignoring distracting stimuli. Implied in the first description and included in the second, the role of *focus* is important to developing attention. Focus, as a key component of attention is the act of remaining engaged with a task usually through to its completion. Analogously, *concentration* is defined as a measure of focus inclusive of the ability to remain attentive. In the hard sciences, concentration refers to how much of an element is present in a solution. Higher concentrations of, for

TABLE 3.1

Focus, concentration, and attention

	Focus	Concentration	Attention
Definition (central to mindfulness)	Center of interest, activity, or engagement; effort or energy employed as part of the act of attention	A learned skill in which one develops the ability to sustain attention to a task, assignment, or undertaking	Sustained focus, inclusive of the ability to ignore distraction & disruption
Example of Use	Their focus was on the game	The one thousand-piece puzzle took concentration to complete	Our decision was so complex it took the attention of the entire team
Other Definitions	Clarity of sight	Amount of an element within a solution	Taking care of something or someone; a distraction
Example	Reading glasses helped them focus on the text	The solution was more concentrated than dilute	They required medical attention after their fall. They were the center of attention

Source: Maier & Tsuchiya, 2021; Nani et al., 2019; Seigel, 2018.

example, salt in water, means that the water will taste saltier than if there was a lower concentration of salt in the same amount of water. In the social sciences, concentration generally refers to one's ability to focus on something usually with interest and engagement. For example, when a student is focusing on an assignment or project, we say they are concentrating. When that same student can remain focused, even in the face of distraction, we suggest that are paying attention. Furthermore, research (Felver et al., 2013; King & Badham, 2020; Steel, 2007), suggests concentration is a learned skill and with practice can be improved.

Therefore, focus, attention, concentration, and awareness are intertwined, with each influencing and informing the other. However, the ability to focus is a necessary but not sufficient condition of *awareness*. Awareness, from a contemplative mindfulness perspective, suggests that we are attentive and focused not only on the task at hand but also on our experience with, and of, the things in which we are engaged (Merikle, 1984; Morley, 2018). Moreover, awareness is an introspective process because it integrates focus, concentration, and attention with conscious and emotive interpretations of experiences, events, or phenomena.

Attention, Mind-wandering, and Procrastination

We have all experienced times when no matter how much we plan to focus we are unable to do so. We find ourselves lost in thoughts unrelated to the task or activity in which we intended to be engaged. We daydream, fantasize, ruminate, and stare into space unable to concentrate, unaware of what is happening around us. This absence of attention has been characterized as *mind-wandering* (Sood & Jones, 2013; Vago & Zeidan, 2016). The good news is we are not alone when we mind-wander. As Christoff (2012) reports, over 90% of Americans report that they experience some form of mind-wandering every day. For most of us, while distracting, these thoughts are benign, perhaps even pleasant. Yet, mind-wandering, especially when it results in rumination, can increase procrastination (Schutte & del Pozo de Bolger, 2020), anxiety (Vago & Zeidan, 2016), and depression (Sood & Jones, 2013). Furthermore, a wandering mind is less able to learn and more likely to struggle when tasks require concentration.

Clearly, there are times when the mind needs a break, when walking away from a vexing problem allows us to come back fresh and better able to problem-solve and move forward. However, the ability to sustain our attention and focus long enough to complete our work matters if we are to be successful school leaders. While some people are predisposed to be able to concentrate, for others it is more trying. Increasing our ability to focus and pay attention offers the potential for all of us to be happier, more productive, and better able to connect with others (Siegel, 2018; Vago & Zeidan, 2016).

Contemplative mindfulness has been posited to be a remedy for mind-wandering (Schutte & del Pozo de Bolger, 2020; Sood & Jones, 2013). Inasmuch as contemplative mindfulness has been demonstrated to increase the ability to focus (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019), this application of mindfulness

practice makes good sense. However, and importantly, scholars of contemplative mindfulness extend the definition of attention beyond mere focus, including non-judgement and non-engagement. As Kabat-Zinn (2003) suggests, mindful attention is focused on paying attention to thoughts, feelings, and other stimuli as they arise, without judgment or engagement. The addition of non-judgement and non-engagement is an important feature of mindful attention as it enhances our ability to clearly see what comes up for us and helps us create the conditions that help us to avoid habitual and unproductive behaviors.

Procrastination offers an excellent example of the importance of non-judgement and non-engagement. Like mind-wandering, we all procrastinate (Steel, 2007). It may be because we dislike washing the dishes, weeding the garden, or simply find reading, playing the guitar, or watching a movie more pleasurable than an alternative. Yet, habitual procrastinators often find themselves both procrastinating and stressed because of their procrastination. It is a cycle we all know well. We avoid doing a task and then feel bad that we did not get it done. We assign judgement to our lack of productivity and poor performance further deepening our guilt and stress and yes, procrastination. For some of us, we can shrug our bad feelings off, for others they perpetuate feelings of depression and anxiety (Hoge et al., 2013).

Yet, procrastination is changeable (Schutte and del Pozo de Bolger, 2020). In a quantitative study of 170 university students, 85 were provided with contemplative mindfulness training and 85 were not. Those who completed the training reported decreased procrastination in the weeks following training. Furthermore, students in the mindfulness training cohort reported being able to experience mistakes and difficulties with less judgement. Schutte and del Pozo de Bolger's (2020) work supports findings by Kabat-Zinn (2003), Brown, et al., (2007b), and Morley (2018), suggesting that practicing mindfulness sets the stage for discernment, learning, and clarity rather than self-recrimination and distress.

However, as Puddicombe (2011) suggests, developing clarity and discernment is a gradual process. It takes time to become aware of the patterns that govern our lives. Furthermore, simply knowing that we respond in a particular way is not enough to change what we do. While *clarity* helps us to observe our habits, *discernment* helps us identify and intentionally change our unproductive habits and patterns. It is as if we are driving down a familiar road and there is a pothole ahead of us. If we are paying attention to the road, we are more likely to see the hole before we drive into it. If we see it in time, we can change lanes, swerve to avoid it, or slow down enough so that any impact is softened. If we are distracted and do not see the pothole in time, we run the risk of damaging our vehicle or worse. Learning our patterns of mind is similar. We are less likely to see our habitual mental potholes the more distracted and disengaged we are or the faster we are metaphorically moving.

Thus, developing mindful attention does not change who we are or reprogram our propensities and inclinations. Rather, it allows us to see, from an increasingly greater distance, the things that get in our way and prevent us from acting as we would like. Mindfulness teaches us to be more aware of our

patterns of thought and reaction. Taking a moment to reflect on what a mentor taught us, what a therapist has suggested, or simply to breathe, stops us in our tracks. In turn, and through increased awareness, discernment is fostered, and we are better able to respond as the situation requires.

It is not that we will never fall prey to old habits. Nor will we ever completely stop mind-wandering or procrastinating. Rather, as we become clearer and better able to notice the patterns of our minds, our minds wander less and when they do wander, we become better at bringing them back to the task at hand and better at doing so without self-recrimination (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Schutte & del Pozo de Bolger, 2020). By observing when we are focused or unfocused, distracted or undistracted, and aware or unaware we can develop clarity about what distracts us, how we are distracted, and how we habitually respond to those distractions. Furthermore, by paying attention to the quality of our attention we can create the conditions that support our personal and professional growth.

Developing Awareness

As we saw with the words focus, concentration, and attention, the words aware and unaware can be used in several contexts and with many different meanings (Schipper, 2014). In some situations, the word aware is conflated with the word knowing as in a statement like, "I am aware of that idea." In other cases, aware means being alert as in the statement, "Be aware of the dog." Similarly, the famous London underground reminder, "Mind the gap" implies that one should be aware of the space between the train car and the platform. Our common use of the word aware, suggests that both *knowledge of* and *attention to* the world around us are central attributes of awareness. Conversely, the word unaware suggests an absence of knowledge or attention to some generally understood or acknowledged circumstance. The term "blissfully unaware" suggests not knowing about something unpleasant, as in, "He was blissfully unaware of the corruption in the organization." Similarly, one might suggest that they were unaware of some danger and innocent of any wrongdoing because they lacked any knowledge of its happening or its potential to happen.

Awareness, from the perspective of contemplative mindfulness, encompasses these aspects of knowing and moves beyond the conscious to include awareness of our emotions and thoughts about our experiences. Siegel (2018) suggests that mindful awareness is fostered by the development of four key behaviors, including attention to one's subjective experience, information processing, self-organization, and consciousness.

Subjective experience. Much like mindful attention, attention to *subjective experience* suggests that we stop and attend to how we are experiencing any given event. Subjective experience requires that we be aware that others around us may not share those same emotions or aspirations, and that others do not experience the same needs (Goldstein, 2016). Being aware that our experiences are unavoidably subjective helps us to be mindful of the fact that our worldviews are not necessarily shared nor are they universal. However, as

we can see in the following example, awareness of our subjective experience can enhance our own clarity and connect us to others.

Dr. Henri Olesson has served as the associate superintendent of teaching and learning in the Slatton School District for five years. Olesson's entire career has been with Slatton schools. Prior to working in the district office, he was a middle school principal, a high school assistant principal, and a high school English teacher. He credits his longevity with the district to a deeply held commitment and connection to the Slatton community. He shares:

> I live in this community, have for a very long time, they know me, and I know them. We may not always see things the same way…but it helps. I'm heavily focused on relationships. I tell people "You don't need to earn my respect. I'm going to give you respect from the get-go." They might need to earn maintaining it, but I just start there. I start with trust and respect… I try to get to know people. And to get to know them not just for their work but for the people they are. I take a lot of mental notes, I try to engage people about stuff that isn't so work centric. I will also try to, if there's things people don't want to talk about, I try to respect that as well. And I think it shows. Also, I can't not show it.

He continues:

> This funny thing happened to me about a decade ago, I got a brain injury playing [soccer], and ever since then, as far as I can tell, I can't control my emotions well. So that comes out all the time, it's a bit of a running joke because I always cry at any sort of public-speaking opportunity where I'm talking about something that matters to me… It makes me uncomfortable every time, but I've had to learn to embrace it. People see it. They know I'm really invested in this school district. But also, it's like a clue to me as well, I can't not know that I'm feeling something. It helps me see when something matters, and I can work with that awareness. I find that the crying thing also keeps me grounded in the present…it causes us all to stop and just feel what's going on. It can be kind of transforming. Like you know, it's not this external thing we're talking about but it's something that matters. It's not like I plan it. That's just how it goes. I think that's why it's almost a strength for me, people find it kind of endearing, but it also just bonds us, you know?

Unquestionably, Olesson's natural response increases his ability to be aware of his subjective experience. However, for those of us who are less predisposed to experiencing events in real time, attention to our *information processing* can assist in developing awareness.

Information Processing. Seigel (2018) suggests that becoming curious about how we make meaning from what we experience helps us to see what we naturally attend to and what we miss. Attending to how we experientially process information, inclusive of our embodied experiences, allows us to see, and compensate for our (unavoidable) areas of weakness. As we see in the leadership example of Maryam Khot, when attention to how one takes in

information is developed, our ability to process it is enhanced (Good et al., 2016) and our ability to respond with focus and compassion in the face of challenge is strengthened (Das, 2007).

Principal of Harrison Peaks Elementary, Maryam Khot describes how she employs awareness in her leadership:

> One thing I learned early in my administrative work was that it was important that when I got new information, I paid attention to how it impacted me. Like if a new policy was going to be implemented…how did I immediately respond? When I felt gut-punched by something it was a real clue that I had to work on what was happening and you know, why it impacted me that way. Usually, it's because I feel like my leadership, like I'm being questioned or that I'm being asked to do something that I really don't have the power to really do… But I pay attention because if I feel that way, it's gonna impact my next steps. Maybe I needed to go back [to the district office] and try to negotiate it a bit… Like maybe more time to do it, or if we maybe could do it a bit differently.

Khot clarifies:

> I learned that I could get comfortable with what was going to happen, I could get beyond my initial pow reaction and I could then lean into it… I learned that once I had processed it all, I could do a better job of standing up for my teachers if I had to or helping them get to a place of acceptance or at least help them to make sense of it all. So now, it's 100% [intentional] that I step back and process all this. Even if I don't have an immediate [strong] reaction myself, I take the time to pay attention to even that. Like even if I'm "yeah that makes sense" I check in and think "why?" [it] helps me to be more intentional when I bring stuff back to the building.

Self-organization. Awareness of subjectivity and information processing work in concert with a strong sense of one's self-organization. Being aware of how we mentally organize our experiences, and what stories we create about them, helps us to understand what is happening around us. *Self-organization* fosters clarity. It directs us toward thinking about how we process information and how we link information to experiences, emotions, and thoughts (Goldstein, 2016; Seigel, 2018). In turn, as we see in the example of Julia Barbeau, understanding how we organize what we encounter, take on, and avoid, has the potential to strengthen our leadership skills.

Julia Barbeau describes her meditation practice as "deliberate." She explains, "I'm very intentional about my practice, every morning, 15 minutes, first thing after I get up. It grounds me and positions my day. It's very important that I sit every morning." Principal of Red Ryvers High School, Barbeau speaks to the ways she thinks about awareness:

> Of course, you're asking about awareness. What's that line all meditation folks say about your awareness of your awareness about awareness? For

me, awareness is about connection. I've thought deeply about that… As a meditator I try to be aware about what I'm aware of. It's a core part of my practice. I sit with what comes up. I pay attention to it… Yeah, I judge it. I know all about that non-judgmental stance but really, I find myself saying to me, "We're here again? Damn, girl." Seriously? But…. when I can be aware of what's going on for me, I can connect to it. For me, for my leadership, that connection that knowing what's coming up for me, [knowing] it's there, I'm deliberate about paying attention to it, that's key. It's important data about how I'm entering the situation and what I'm bringing to it… Knowing that, I'm ready to face what's there.

Consciousness. Weaving the tools of subjective experience, information processing, and self-organization together creates the conditions for attention to *consciousness*. In other words, a school leader can be aware of both the felt expression of any given moment as well as the meaning they are creating within that moment. As Seigel (2018) contends and as the prior narratives demonstrate, building a robust and durable, rather than episodic, state of awareness requires attention to the ways we consciously engage in our lives and work. Awareness of one's consciousness incorporates "both the knowns and the knowing" (Seigel, 2018, p. 41) resulting in a fuller understanding of events as they unfold. As Zoe Poverly's experience demonstrates, acting consciously and intentionally helps leaders respond with greater awareness when it matters. Zoe Poverly of Piver Ford Elementary speaks to using conscious experience to inform leadership practice:

> I had this person transferred to one of my most high-functioning teams. She was transferred because no one wanted her on their team for several reasons. First, she was the former union president who had a lot of power, control… Frankly, I didn't want her on my team either, but I knew I didn't have an option, and I knew it was a strong team. She wreaked havoc on the team for a little while when she first came. It was challenging for me to see…she started doing things really under the radar to try and do things to, I would say, break down my leadership and get the team to turn against me and turn against each other.

Poverly explains how she responded:

> I had a one-on-one conversation with her, and I just consciously laid it out. I said to [her], "I think you're a great part of this team… However, despite my best intention, my best effort, and using all of the tools in my toolkit to build a relationship with you, I still feel that our relationship is guarded, that you don't trust me, and frankly, you don't even like working with me." I said, "I want to check that out with you. Before I make an assumption, I want to check it out with you. And if that is the case, let's talk about it. If that's not the case, let's talk about it. But let's not just…continu[e] on the road we're [on]." I said, "Because that's not going to work for me, and ultimately that's not going to work for you either." She ended up telling me that it was not

about me at all, that she has a hard time trusting. That when she has a hard time trusting, she looks for opportunities to gain upper ground… She shared some other pieces with me that weren't as relevant, but still were meaningful and helped me to understand her more. Then we were able to have a conversation about, "Okay, so what could I be doing differently? What do you think needs to happen differently with your team?" It completely changed the trajectory of our relationship. I think people just dealt with her and tried to ignore as much as possible or do something more dismissive or the disciplinary route instead of having a direct conversation… I came at it from a strength space with her and what I think was, I want our relationship to work. I was calling her out without making it disciplinary. I made it more about our relationship working so we could both thrive.

As Greenburg and Mitra (2015) caution, attention and awareness are *preconditions* to mindfulness rather than equivalents. Inasmuch as building one's awareness is largely an individual task it is important that leaders take to heart understandings concerning subjective experiences. Regularly asking questions like "Whose reality is this?" and "How might this be experienced differently?" help leaders be aware that their experience of the world is not universal.

Power, privilege, and position differ across an organization, and even those within the same school experience the reality of day-to-day life in accordance with and in response to their own positionality. When leaders become overly attached to their own single-minded perspectives, they risk misreading and mislabeling important organizational cues and much-needed alternative explanations of organizational events. Furthermore, while important, awareness alone is not enough if school principals and district office administrators are to lead mindfully. Meeting our stresses and successes with equanimity matters if we are to persist.

EQUANIMITY

Juneau et al. (2020) assert that increased equanimity is an outcome of practicing contemplative mindfulness. Equanimity, in the Western world, is defined as balance, evenness, or calmness, remaining centered when surrounded by chaos and instability. Equanimity, from a Buddhist philosophy perspective, requires the acceptance of everything that confronts us, understanding that no matter how intense the joy or sorrow of the moment, it is transitory (Analayo, 2021; Desbordes et al., 2015). Additionally, from the Buddhist perspective, the act of acceptance is thought to promote one's ability to stand in the middle (Shoham et al., 2018) neither reaching for joy nor evading sorrow.

Inasmuch as psychological and medical research (Good et al., 2016; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Weber, 2021) suggests that the practice of mindfulness can promote greater equanimity and acceptance of life's challenges, it is a misunderstanding to suggest that practicing mindfulness will free us from challenge and despair. Instead, it is the cycle of craving and desire, and aversion and worry, that contemplative mindfulness can help us recognize and release (Goldstein, 2016). As

Analayo (2021) asserts, the cultivation of mindfulness facilitates one's ability to be aware of their emotions, thoughts, and sensations as well as develop an increased tolerance for them and equanimity about them. As Julia Barbeau, from Red Ryvers High School shares:

> I work to respond rather than react when I'm running between stuff. This job, you get rewarded for quick, like doing immediately, but I think I'm better when I step back and take a minute to figure out what I'm doing. My response is better then. More in sync with…[who] I want to be as a leader.

The distinction between being reactive and being responsive matters if one is to understand how the practice of mindfulness results in increased equanimity. *Reactivity* is generally considered an automatic and deeply ingrained behavioral reaction to internal or external environmental stimuli. When we scratch itches, jump at loud noises, or shift position because we are uncomfortable, those are all reactions. Similarly, when we become defensive when provoked, self-critical when critiqued, or worried when faced with new and challenging circumstances, those too, are all reactions. It is not that reaction is a bad thing. Certainly, when we touch something hot it is better to quickly react than it is to get burned. Yet, the key is to understand that when there is no gap between the stimulus and the reaction there is no space for making a different choice (Desbordes et al., 2015; Feldman & Kuyken, 2019).

Being *responsive* suggests a more attentive way of behaving, one in which we work to create some space between the things that confront us and our reactions to them. Significantly, responding suggests that in the pause between stimuli and response, we can observe our emotions, thoughts, and experiences as they unfold. Doing so increases our opportunity to learn from those experiences. It also increases our opportunities to make choices about what we do next. If we resist the urge to scratch an itch, even for a few seconds, we can observe the ways the itchy sensation changes, becoming stronger or weaker, and learn that even as intense as it seems it will, ultimately, resolve itself. If we resist the urge to snap back at someone who has crossed us, we can observe the thoughts and emotions that arise in relation to that experience. Ultimately, through our mindful attention, we begin to understand that all emotions, thoughts, and sensations are transitory. Learning this helps us to decide which ones are worth a response and which are not. Barbeau continues:

> I've also learned that not everything, everyone, needs a response. I mean, I don't ignore people, I see them, I listen, but I don't always have to do something… It's so easy to tell them the answer, how I think it should go, I think though, if I let others figure it out themselves it's better. They learn how to do it [without me] and I'm less busy, less stressed.

Understanding equanimity helps us to see that practicing mindfulness is not about removing strong emotions or reactions from our lives. However, it is about learning to live with and learning from what we habitually desire and what we avoid. By attending to our habits and patterns we can learn that they

are not solely a result of our desires and aversions, rather, they stem from how we relate to desires and aversions as they arise. In other words, once our habits and patterns become recognizable, we can reframe our perceptions and views, and be less bound by the constant pushes and pulls of our lives. The same is true for living in the hamster wheel of constant reaction to stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy or failure. Developing equanimity helps us to learn that a thought is just a thought, an emotion is just an emotion, and a sensation is just a sensation (Analayo, 2021; Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Weber, 2021). Developing equanimity helps us to be less reactive and more responsive to that which confronts us. Equanimity helps us to detach from our triggers and develop a bit of space between the world and our response to it.

Yet, equanimity is not indifference. Indifference suggests a lack of care and concern for ourselves and others. Importantly, acting indifferently is contrary to the central tenets of contemplative mindfulness, such as compassion, loving-kindness, and empathy. Cultivating equanimity, as opposed to indifference, suggests that as we develop moment-to-moment awareness we are better able to release, rather than dwell, on distracting thoughts and emotions (Analayo, 2021; Weber, 2021). In turn, we create the conditions for skillfully addressing disruptions or problems as they arise, and once resolved, are better able to bring our attention back to the core purposes of and for our work. Thus, developing equanimity orients us back to why our work and the people we work with matter. It helps us to develop resilience in the face of adversity and challenge.

INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE, RISK, AND MINDFULNESS

Resilience has been described as the outcome of learning from adversity (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013; Musil et al., 2021; Masten, 2014). Stainton et al., (2018) describe resilience as a multimodal dynamic process in which people draw upon individual and communal assets and resources in an effort to produce favorable outcomes in challenging circumstances. Ungar (2019) concurs, writing that resilience is the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being and their capacity to negotiate for those resources. Resilience can be explained as one's ability to garner relevant and useful resources in times of stress and distress.

Moreover, resilience is developed in response to adversity. In this way, resilience is closely tied to *risk*. Yet, risk is variable and contextual. Too much risk, and one's capacity to navigate the situation is undermined. We can quickly become overwhelmed and overly vulnerable. Too little risk, as when situations are easily negotiated, and individuals can find themselves under-resourced when real difficulty presents. Furthermore, risk is both individually and socially constructed. In practical terms, this means that resilience is the result of what we each bring to any given circumstance and how our organizations and communities can support us in times of need. Therefore, resilience and risk function in tandem, with resilience developed in response to context and opportunity.

TABLE 3.2

Individual and social/societal resources and variable contexts of resilience & risk

	Variable Contexts of Resilience & Risk	
Individual Resources	*Highly Resourced for Resilience/Low Risk for Vulnerability*	*Less Well-resourced for Resilience/High Risk for Vulnerability*
Self-efficacy	Sound, sturdy, &/or deep-seated sense of one's efficacy & value to the broader community	Fragile, precarious, &/or tenuous sense of one's efficacy & value to the broader community
Healthy Identity	Identity marked by a clear, realistic, & authentic self-appraisal of strengths & weakness allowing for ongoing personal & professional development	Identity marked by an inaccurate self-appraisal that unhealthily over-emphasizes weakness &/or under-identifies strengths
Supportive, Connected Relationships	Relationships are plentiful, meaningful, & marked by trust & respect	Relationships are scarce, inadequate, or insufficient to meet current needs
Sense of Meaning/ Place in the World	Acknowledgement of clearly identified personal values & goals paired with a belief of obtainability &/or personal power for performance & accomplishment	An uncertain &/or unrealistic evaluation of options, goals, & values; diminished sense of personal power & capacity for goal attainment
Introspection & Self-regulation	A robust ability to identify & manage emotions & behaviors in the face of adversity is present	The ability to identify & manage emotions & behaviors in the face of adversity is lacking
Social/Societal Resources	*Highly Resourced for Resilience/ Low Risk for Vulnerability*	*Less Well-resourced for Resilience/High Risk for Vulnerability*
Economic, Environmental, & Social/Societal Conditions & Contexts	Resources are stable & predictable across time & place	Resources are erratic, volatile, irregular &/or variable across time & place
Sense of Belonging & Connection	Relevant & meaningful relationships that sustain one's sense of worthiness & value are present in the community	Relationships to others that foster a sense of importance or significance within the community are lacking or deficient
Predictability of & Support for Well-being	Support for communal well-being is steady, reliable, & consistent across the community	Support for communal well-being is inconsistent, unreliable, &/or unpredictable

(*Continued*)

> ◤ **TABLE 3.2 CONTINUED**
>
> **Variable Contexts of Resilience & Risk**
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | *Community Orientation to Social Justice & Equity* | Community values that are responsive to equity, inclusion, fairness, & justice are clearly present & are consistently demonstrated in policy & practice | Community values that are responsive to equity, inclusion, fairness, & justice are absent or inconsistently applied |
> | *Provision of Responsive & Reliable Community Resources* | Community resources are dependable, consistent, & aligned with/relevant to individual need | Community resources are undependable & may not be well matched to need |
>
> Source: Masten, 2014; Musil et al., 2021; Stainton et al., 2018; Ungar, 2021.

Inasmuch as contemplative mindfulness is a significant predictor of individual resilience (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013) it follows that the qualities associated with mindfulness are also associated with resilience. These include self-efficacy (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2019), help-seeking (Musil et al., 2021), self-regulation (Nota et al., 2004), introspection (Zemel et al., 2016), and creative problem-solving (Levey & Levey, 2019). Yet, resilience cannot be reduced to a quality that one possesses or does not. It is not stable across time and circumstance nor is it enduring. Certainly, it is easier to be resilient at work when things at home are relatively secure and unchanging. Similarly, finding the inner will to face personal challenges is made easier when things on the work front are stable and predictable. All things considered, when we are at our most vulnerable, our ability to be resilient is compromised as well.

Furthermore, resilience goes beyond one's ability to weather difficulty with composure and steadfastness. Certainly, some of us are more rugged than others. We are simply better at coping. Yet, even the most resilient of us are resilient because we were successful in resolving other earlier (and likely smaller) problems. We learned our way into resilience. The resilience research (Masten, 2014; Stainton et al., 2018) is unambiguous, early success breeds later success because we learn patterns of behavior that we bring forward to new situations. For example, we may have learned early on that by reaching out to others when we feel overwhelmed we feel less alone and our ability to respond is enhanced. Likewise, if we learned that when we are inundated by multiple deadlines that creating a structure and routine for completing the work helps, we may be better able to complete what is required of us. Zoe Poverly of Piver Ford Elementary illustrates this point well:

> Someone I once heard said being resilient was the difference between snapping and snapping back. I like that, I try to snap back as much as I can. I like to think I'm tough… But then again, I have a lot of support. I've learned

who I can call when I need help, I've also learned that I work best when I get a full night's sleep, I eat lunch, really stop at least for fifteen minutes and eat, and when I schedule times to just walk around the building. I like going out during recess, I like seeing the kids, all that helps me stay grounded so when it gets hard, I have that. Like, I have to make sure I do it so there's gas in my tank for when I need it.

Clearly, individual ruggedness and prior learning contribute to developing resilience (Keye & Pidgeon, 2013). However, individual ruggedness and learning are not sufficient to inoculate us against future difficulty. Simply because we have been able to cope in the past is no guarantee that we will be able to do so in the future. As Poverly states, individuals do better when they are supported. Likely, for many of us, our prior success was a product of our response *and* our ability to access supportive systems and structures.

Research (Masten, 2014; Musil et al., 2021; Ungar, 2019) backs up this insight, suggesting that resilience is the product of both individual ruggedness and community or social resources. In other words, resilience is not something we are able to build on our own. Rather our ability to be resilient is dependent on the presence of *multiple protective factors* including supportive, connected relationships, a sense of belonging and place within one's larger community, physical, financial, and emotional well-being, and predictability of and support for one's basic needs (e.g., shelter, food, clothing, transportation, education). Furthermore, our ability to creatively respond to stress and distress is enhanced when more of these protective factors are present in our lives. Similarly, when we are resource-poor and risk is high, we are less resilient and more likely to struggle in times of challenge. As such, encouraging resilience requires a clear understanding of the contexts within which we are working and the resources that people bring to bear in any circumstance.

It is also important to note that resilience differs from grit. Certainly, grit and resilience have much in common. They both describe conditions in which individuals, in the face of adversity, are able to overcome challenges and succeed at something that matters to them. When someone has grit, we are generally suggesting that they can persevere, committing to reaching a long-term goal despite intermittent setbacks, complications, and disappointments (Stoffel & Cain, 2018). Definitions of grit often pair perseverance with passion, suggesting a link between determination, drive, and desire (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). Yet, much of the writing on grit underestimates the impact of power, privilege, and social vulnerability on one's ability to access resources that enhance resilience.

As Matin et al. (2018) contend, by conflating grit and resilience, we over-emphasize the power of individual traits and resources and underappreciate the importance of social and societal resources. This research suggests that by overemphasizing grit we place unrealistic expectations on already stressed and marginalized individuals; pressuring them to exhibit resilience in the face of issues and problems that are not theirs alone to solve. Moreover, as Ungar (2021) contends, when resilience is viewed through the lens of grit, often

well-meaning interventions fail because they are not responsive to the needs of the individuals they intend to serve.

This occurs for several reasons. First, often the resources provided are not *well matched* to the challenge an individual or community is facing. For example, in response to school violence, principals often plead for increased counseling services and other forms of student and faculty support. What they frequently get are teddy bears. Certainly, it is understandable that well-meaning community members are looking to provide items of comfort to those in need. However cuddly, a teddy bear is an inadequate substitute for therapy and mental health treatment. Similarly, episodic professional learning provides weaker support for classroom practice than sustained efforts and after-school enrichment programs cannot take the place of embedded well-designed, challenging student learning.

Second, for resources to be *effective* they need to be provided in sustained and predictable ways. They should be durable. This means appropriate resources should be provided for the long haul, as needed, until recovery becomes enduring. Often, resources are exhausted or removed far too soon for resilience to be assured. Likewise, when schools focus on intervention rather than thinking broadly about the ways schools support some students and marginalize others, they miss opportunities to build cultures focused on diminishing risk and nurturing resilience. Finally, for lasting success, resources must be *robust*. For resilience to flourish, individuals need to both feel a strong sense of self-worth and value and have the tools to move forward in the face of future adversity.

Since school leaders are key to helping develop resilience in students, faculty, and staff, this thinking highlights the value of *compassion* and *empathy* as important characteristics of mindful leadership (Sanyal & Rigg, 2021; Stedham, & Skaar, 2019). When we lead from a stance of compassion and empathy, we are better able to support the most vulnerable among us while honoring our own vulnerability as well. This observation highlights the importance of mindful awareness as a leadership skill (King & Badham, 2020; Levey & Levey, 2019). In the case of fostering our own resilience and supporting its development in others, mindful awareness, as opposed to positive thinking, offers us the skillset to see things as they are.

No doubt, positive thinking matters in the development of resilience. Hope and optimism are important to weathering hardship and suffering. Yet, hope is not enough. Likewise, the provision of uncoordinated and inconsistent resources offers scant support in times of need.

True resilience is built when we can meet challenges with equanimity (i.e., accepting things for what they are), strength (i.e., meaningful and relevant knowledge and skills), and appropriate supports (e.g., access to necessary resources) (King & Badham, 2020; Masten, 2014; Sanyal & Rigg, 2021).

IN CONCLUSION

Developing contemplative mindfulness helps us to understand that while we cannot control much of what confronts us in life, we can choose how we

respond. As trite as this sounds it is not trivial. Importantly, and as research (Good et al., 2016; Schipper, 2014; Stedham & Skaar, 2019) suggests, mindfulness is an essential life and leadership skill for learning how to step back, disengage, assess, and respond with discernment to all that life presents. As with all skills, mindfulness can be learned. Attention to one's breathing, where our minds go when they wander, and how we react when pressured and stressed all have the potential to teach us who we are. Importantly, contemplative mindfulness teaches us to observe, rather than try to control, our thoughts and emotions. As we learn our mental and emotional habits and patterns we can intentionally choose to look beyond our initial evaluations and see the world in more subtle and nuanced ways, thus increasing our ability to intentionally respond to and resolve problems (Capurso et al., 2014; Good et al., 2016; Stedham & Skaar, 2019). As a result of intentional, mindful action our ability to lead with flexibility, creativity, resourcefulness, and resilience is intensified.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Accepting What Is

Hopefully, by now, you have tried the breathing and loving-kindness meditations offered in chapters 1 and 2. If not, no worries. If you have, great. Neither is a prerequisite to the ideas discussed or the practice offered here. In fact, these ideas may make it easier for you to try both of those practices.

First, a reminder, meditation does not make you a different person nor does it make you a better person. Meditation simply trains your mind to be aware of how you are thinking and feeling in any moment. Because meditation promotes mindfulness, it promotes awareness. In turn, awareness provides us the opportunity to be present in our own lives, observing how we all think, feel, react, and respond. What we do with that information is up to us.

A common myth about meditation is that it makes us a calmer person that is somehow more at peace no matter what is happening around us. The truth of the matter is that we set ourselves up if we go looking for some particular outcome as a result of meditative practice. Contemplative mindfulness is about being present with no expectation. In practice, this means meditation cannot be something we employ to feel better. Nor is it productive if we are determined to feel some particular way or we are focused on pushing away uncomfortable thoughts and feelings.

In fact, when mindfulness meditation is used as an escape, as a distraction from the challenges we face, we are shortchanging ourselves. When we approach meditation as another thing we need to control, when we use the practice to be better, rather than to be present, we undermine our ability to become more self-aware. Simply put, meditation is not about creating anything, it is about being present to and aware of what is. In many ways, understanding this lets us off the hook a bit. If we head into the practice of meditation with the attitude that whatever happens, happens, we cannot fail. When we realize

that we can become comfortable with whatever comes up, whatever emotion or thought arises, we also realize that each has less control over us. In turn, we become better able to respond to life as it unfolds with more awareness and skill.

The following meditation challenges you to apply these ideas by centering your practice on non-attachment and acceptance.

- Begin by finding a comfortable seated posture. Your posture is important because it sets the intention for your meditation practice. It does not matter if you are in a chair or on a cushion or if you sit or kneel. What does matter is that you are able to breathe easily and deeply and hold an upright posture for the duration of this meditation.
- Set a timer for five or ten minutes. If you are a more regular meditator, feel free to go longer. It might be worth using an app that lets you set interval bells. Interval bells give you a sense of where you are in time and space and can be useful especially if you like to know how long you have been sitting and how much longer you have planned to sit.
- Once you are seated take several deep breaths, attending to how you feel. Settle.
- Once you feel settled remind yourself that you are here to sit with whatever arises.
- When something comes up, and it will, lightly hold the thought or feeling and respond to it with one of the following the phrases:
  - That's interesting.
  - That's okay.
  - That's a thought.
  - That's a feeling.
  - I have thoughts.
  - I have feelings.
- Repeat. That is it. The point is to practice accepting what comes up and letting it go.

Variations. None of the phrases listed above are particularly magical. In fact, they are chosen for their blandness to suggest that no matter what is there, the practice is to simply hold it in your awareness. If you find them too bland, feel free to substitute any of these equally non-judgmental, but somewhat more amusing, choices: "okeydokey," "righto," "sure," "certainly," or "yep." The point is to simply foster your awareness of what arises and do nothing about it.

Activity

ACTIVITY 3

CONTEMPLATIVE MINDFULNESS SELF-ASSESSMENT (BROWN ET AL., 2007B; GOOD ET AL., 2016; SIEGAL, 2018)

Because mindfulness is not a static state, this scale is designed to allow you to reflect on mindfulness as an area of comfort or stretch. Some days it is easy to stay focused, seek out new ideas, or look for help from a variety of sources. On other days it is harder. The idea here is for you to be able to consider how mindfully you are approaching any one event or, more broadly, your outlook for the coming month or year. The scale asks that you consider each item from the lens of how comfortable you feel with it, or how much of a stretch it might be.

	Comfort	Stretch
When I work on a project, I am rarely distracted.		
I find it easy to stay focused.		
Most of the time I feel like I am aware of what is happening around me.		
When I am questioned or challenged, I can pause and not immediately react.		
Most of the time, I know how I am feeling.		
I notice things that others seem to miss.		
I rarely avoid thinking about difficult issues or situations.		
I feel like I show up no matter the situation.		
I feel connected to my experiences.		
I rarely worry about what will happen in the future.		
I can be comfortable doing nothing.		
I can delay gratification.		
When I am stressed, I recognize it and can take a break and step away from my thoughts.		
I am comfortable in my own skin.		

After reflecting on your responses, does an area of growth stand out?

● What could you do to become more contemplatively mindful?

Additional Resources

Expanding on the resources offered in chapters 1 and 2, here are three more challenging, but well-worth-the-effort, resources that explore the benefits of mindfulness and offer support for building individual and organizational resilience.

- Masten, A. S. (2014). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press. *Ordinary magic* synthesizes current research and practical knowledge about resilience in children and adolescents. Masten includes chapters on disadvantage and economic crisis, trauma and extreme adversity, and resilience in families, schools, and communities. Masten concludes with an action-focused resilience framework designed to support teachers and other professionals who work with struggling children. *Ordinary magic* is a refreshing take on developing resilience in children and adolescents because both protective and responsive factors are described, and the book provides teachers and other education professionals with tangible ways to make a difference in the lives of children experiencing distress.
- Siegel, D. J. (2018). *Aware: The science and practice of presence*. New York, NY: Tarcher Perigee. *Aware* begins with the basic premise that mindlessness is pervasive and more problematic than we know and suggests that developing focused attention, open awareness, and kind intention has the potential to help us live less mindlessly. Seigel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at UCLA, synthesizes clinical and medical science to describe how, by developing awareness and a practice of presence, our sense of connection to our own lives and the lives of others can be increased. *Aware* offers clear examples of the benefits of mindfulness in developing individual resilience and compassion and as a response to the stresses of modern life.
- Ungar, M. (Ed.). (2021). *Multisystemic resilience: Adaptation and transformation in contexts of change*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. *Multisystemic resilience* brings together the writing and research of resilience scholars from across the globe. Read separately, each chapter offers insights into how resilience can be built after personal (e.g., public health challenges), community (e.g., challenges related to disaster and post-disaster reconstruction), and political trauma (e.g., challenges that result from terrorism, war, and displacement). Read together, the 39 chapters offer a robust foundation for thinking about resilience in biological, social, psychological, and ecological contexts. Of particular interest to educators, are chapters written by Cefai (whole school approaches to resilience), Theron (student resilience), and Crane (organizational resilience).

Building awareness, equanimity, and resilience takes support. Offered here are several useful resources:

- The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, https://deve lopingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/, offers print resources and short videos that summarize the findings of the center's recent publications and presentations. The center's work focuses on how reducing the effects of childhood adversity is important for individuals and society. Materials on the website are available for free and provide useful direction for schools seeking to develop supportive adult-child relationships, scaffold learning that builds self-efficacy and self-control, strengthen adaptive skills, and employ community cultural resources that support building hope and stability.
- The Resilience Research Center housed at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada, https://resilienceresearch.org, is a globally recognized center of resiliency research. Rooted in a definition of resilience that emphasizes a systemic, social justice perspective, the center's work provides insights concerning how resilience can be nurtured by schools, social service agencies, and communities. The center's website offers links to current research and publications, many of which are available for free. Of interest is the 2018 monograph titled *What works: A manual for designing programs that build resilience*. Here, the center summarizes decades of research regarding children, youth, and families in challenging contexts, focusing on elements of effective processes and programs. The center also offers support for schools through its *R2 Resilience Program* which focuses on building school cultures that support the development of protective factors and foster resilience in K12 students.
- *Harry Potter and the Ordinary Magic of Resilience* www.youtube.com/ watch?v=oN1dD0K0NoM Developed and presented by Sara Langworthy this seven-minute video uses the popular children's book series *Harry Potter* to explain how protective factors contribute to building resiliency. In clear, easy-to-understand language, Langworthy communicates the research behind resiliency science and how resiliency can be recognized and fostered. If you are looking for a quick, accessible way to understand (or share) the foundational ideas that underscore resiliency science, this video is a wonderful resource. Langworthy is also the author of the 2017 independent publisher gold medal award-winning *Bridging the relationship: Connecting with children facing adversity* (Redleaf Press, 2015), a text that addresses how parents and teachers can develop supportive relationships with children managing difficulty.

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COGNITIVE MINDFULNESS

Awareness and Responsiveness

KEY VOCABULARY

Context—The circumstances that frame an event, statement, position, or belief and contribute to how it is understood and/or interpreted.

Narrative—A story, account, explanation, or description of an event or connected events as told from the perspective of the person who is speaking or writing.

Perspective—One's point of view, influenced by one's background, experience, knowledgebase, and positionality within the context of an event, statement, position, or belief.

Wisdom—The ability to pair knowledge, insight, and virtue.

In February 2015, after a single Facebook post, a picture of a dress went viral. In just one week over 10,000 people tweeted a picture of #thedress. Was it black and blue? Was it white and gold? Celebrities weighed in. Taylor Swift and Mindy Kaling thought it was blue and black. Katy Perry and Kim Kardashian saw white and gold. The quality of the photo was debated. Was it overexposed? Did it have poor color balance? Was the difference a result of how someone's brain distinguishes color? As the controversy raged on, people became more adamant about how they saw the dress. Clearly, their perspective was the right one. How could others be so wrong?

Perspective works this way. Not only do we (literally) see things differently, but our experiences shape what we see and how we see it. Our perspectives are informed by our experiences, values, and beliefs. When the controversy is over something simple, and who is right and who is wrong does not really matter, people can usually tolerate an opposing viewpoint or position. When the stakes are higher, it is harder. This is especially true when issues of power, influence, and authority are present. Our ability to accept the perceptions of others, to be open to new ideas and information, and be willing to suspend judgement and

resist categorizing differences as right or wrong matter, if school leaders are to lead mindfully.

The practice of *cognitive mindfulness* encourages school leaders to broaden their perspectives, see their schools with fresh eyes, and use what they learn as tools for their leadership practice. By centering learning as a primary feature of leadership, theories of cognitive mindfulness emphasize that leadership is less about knowing and more about discovery and understanding (Brown et al., 2007a, 2007b; Dunoon & Langer, 2011; Langer; 1992, 2014; Lee, 2019). The practice of cognitive mindfulness encourages school leaders to become curious about the organizations they lead and the world in which they live.

In this tradition, mindful activity is focused on *actively noticing* when and how our environment changes and resisting the tendency to view things as static and inflexible (Dunoon & Langer, 2011; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Lee, 2019). Importantly, cognitive mindfulness emphasizes that for any situation there are always multiple explanations and perspectives, and that issues and ideas are experienced and understood differently by different stakeholders. Leading, within the tradition of cognitive mindfulness, assumes that no matter how smart we are, how well educated, or what position we hold, our understandings are unavoidably, only partial. Therefore, cognitive mindfulness is a dynamic quality, one in which leaders remain open to new signals in and from the environment including, and perhaps privileging, those that are at odds with our prior experiences and understandings.

Without a doubt, the foundational researcher and theorist of cognitive mindfulness is Ellen Langer. Beginning in the 1970s, Langer's primary focus concerned inattentive, mindless behavior. Langer's research provided explanations for why habitual, unthinking behavior undermines performance and relationships, why people rely on social scripts and stereotypical narratives in communication, and why people resist new information in favor of prior experience when making choices and decisions (Langer, 1975, 1989). Positing that mindlessness produces poor performance, error, and miscommunication, Langer went on to identify behaviors with the potential to counter these negative and costly consequences. Langer suggested that inattentive and mindless behavior could be positively redirected through intentional and mindful cognition (Langer, 1992; Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Langer's work suggests that by employing active noticing, leaders can stem mindlessness and promote cognitive mindfulness.

School leaders engage in cognitive mindfulness when they "look outside myself" and "really attend to why I think something is what it is." Moreover, they suggest that attending to cognitive mindfulness allows them to "better understand the full issue before I make a decision." As Michela Flores, superintendent of Bear Lake School District comments:

> If I've learned anything during Covid, it's that I don't know. None of the old scripts work… It's not like anything else I've faced before. I listen, I read, but that's not enough. If I don't ask, really look for what my teachers, staff, and community are thinking, I'll be way off base. I know I won't please everyone.

TABLE 4.1

Dimensions of cognitive mindfulness

	Active Differentiation	Openness to New Information	Perspective-taking
Definition	Resistance to categorizing events, decisions, &/or people in habitual or reflexive ways	Commitment to learning from novel events, cues, signals, or interpretations	Purposefully searching for diverse interpretations of events, cues, signals, or interpretations
Purpose	Develop cognitive reappraisal skills fostering greater focus, clarity, & purpose	Advance individual & organizational learning	Cultivate the ability to see & comprehend the world in new & more complete ways
Focus of Attention	Expanding explanations of individual & organizational behavior	Active development of one's knowledge & skill set to include new ideas, perspectives, & understandings	Expanding & enhancing understanding by identifying & acknowledging alternative perspectives
Facilitators of …	Active Differentiation	Openness to New Information	Perspective-taking
	Awareness & questioning of routine sorting & classing of people, situations, & circumstances	Sensitivity to change; Acceptance of the world as dynamic & ever-changing	Awareness of context; Genuine connection
Barriers to …	Active Differentiation	Openness to New Information	Perspective-taking
	Passive categorization Premature cognitive commitment Conformation bias	Absorptive capacity Cognitive distance Cognitive dissonance	Investment in one right worldview, solution, or framing Acting from a single assessment or viewpoint
Experiential Feeling Tone	Awareness Keenness Sensitivity	Wonder Curiosity Compassion	Examination Consideration Empathy

Source: Brown et al., 2007a, 2007b; Dahl et al., 2015; Langer, 1992, 2014; Rerup, 2005; Tan, 2021.

> Hell, I can barely make half the folks happy with any decision…but I've learned if I don't look outside of myself, I'll get it even more wrong.

Flores succinctly describes what Langer (2014, 2016) and Brown et al. (2007a) identify as cognitive mindfulness, including *active differentiation* (e.g., "none of the old scripts work"), *openness to new information* (e.g., listening, reading), and *perspective-taking* (e.g., seeking out other's ideas) as key features of leadership practice.

ACTIVE DIFFERENTIATION

We have all gotten good at the shorthand of passive categorization. We instinctively like some things and dislike others. We are automatically comfortable in some situations and less so in others. We save time by labeling something or someone as good or bad, resistant or supportive, difficult or easy. Because *passive categorization* feels natural and efficient, we assume that the categories we have established are correct and universal. Confident in our analysis, we quickly move forward and make choices about how we will respond or the decisions we need to make. Only rarely, and often in hindsight, do we stop and consider if our categories are, in fact, accurate and correct. Therefore, we find ourselves "frequently in error but rarely in doubt" (Dunoon & Langer, 2011, p. 3).

Furthermore, passive categorization stunts our ability to learn from novel situations or events. When we approach a situation expecting it to be like another, we naturally look for confirmatory cues. If prior to our first trip to the United Kingdom, someone tells us that London is just like New York; we are cued to look for ways that statement is true. And of course, in part, it will be true. Unquestionably, all large cities have similarities. London and New York have distinct neighborhoods, mass transit, museums, and large public parks. The same might be said for Boston or Paris. However, if we only attend to the ways London is like New York (or Boston or Paris) we chance missing the ways London is fantastically different from other large cities. We risk missing the very things that make London, London, if we are set on finding the ways it is just like New York. Moreover, we risk missing the experiences we sought when we planned the trip in the first place.

As heartbreaking as those missed opportunities might be, they pale in comparison to the ways in which passive categorization undermines our relationships and decision-making. When we prematurely decide that a parent is "trouble," a teacher "difficult," or a situation "unmanageable," we truncate our ability to respond in creative and potentially more effective ways. We lose the opportunity to build trust, foster connection, and ultimately learn new ways of leading and being in our schools.

Passive categorization creates the conditions in which premature cognitive commitment and confirmation bias fester (Khoury, 2018). *Premature cognitive commitment* occurs when we accept our passive judgments as true. We become cognitively committed to a stance, decision, or judgement before we have had

the time to process our experiences from another perspective. Furthermore, as Carson and Langer (2006) suggest, once an individual decides that something is true, the individual is less likely to question that decision or to reconsider it when presented with conflicting or nonconforming information. Premature cognitive commitment causes individuals to become mindlessly trapped by their own perspective and extinguishes the potential for reconsideration and reinterpretation. Once committed, we are more likely to seek verification of our position, reinforcing the potential for *confirmation bias*. In short, once we decide we are right (i.e., prematurely cognitively commit) we then look for ways to prove it (i.e., demonstrate confirmation bias). As a result, our ability to respond creatively and adaptively problem-solve is reduced.

Active differentiation stands in sharp contrast to passive categorization. The practice of *active differentiation* encourages leaders to purposefully seek and accept new understandings and categorizations, so that they may respond with greater clarity and purpose (Rerup, 2005; Sutcliffe et al., 2016). When leaders engage in active differentiation, they purposely resist categorizing events, decisions, and/or people in habitual or reflexive ways and prematurely embracing a narrative that may prove limiting. Active differentiation affords school leaders the opportunity to *cognitively reappraise* their responses to situations as they arise. As Dahl et al. (2015) suggest, cognitive reappraisal allows us to change how we think about a situation so that our response to that situation is altered in ways that are better informed by and aligned with the current environment. Thus, cognitive reappraisal allows us to confront premature cognitive commitments and avoid conformation bias.

Ultimately, when school leaders take the time to mindfully self-assess how they instinctively categorize events, decisions, and other individuals, they increase their ability to see the world in more mindful ways. Simon Kimberson's story illustrates these ideas. Principal of Powell Middle School, Simon Kimberson admits to struggling with what it means to be a school leader. As he suggests here, his struggle is less about his ability to lead and more about how leadership is categorized and reified in schools. His words offer a compelling narrative regarding how resistance to categorizing how we view teachers, families, and students, enhances our ability to know others and to increase our own learning. Kimberson observes:

> I think I'm really different in the way I see myself as constantly being critical of a lot of the hierarchical structures that exist within organizations. I feel like that as a leader, I don't see myself fitting into a hierarchy where I have the power to judge others… I do see myself as someone that will involve as many voices and perspectives as needed in discussions and decision-making and reform. My idea of stakeholders I think is a little different than a lot of people I meet in the ed leadership world, I think there's expertise in and importance in the perspectives of people that aren't necessarily heard…
> I think humility is really important to me as a leader. I can't stress how important it is to me as a person just to know that I don't know everything, that my experience is really limited, and that the reality is that there are

others with more expertise out there. That other people know so much more about certain things than I do. So how can I judge that?

Kimberson adds:

> I think humility comes from being able to listen to other people and what they have to say. Trying to understand their perspective and what's going on with them. I don't want to limit what I can learn from that person or about that thing… As a person that's generally interested in equity and social justice, I really feel that each one of us has such a different view of the world based on how we've grown up, how we've been raised, our background, the experiences we've had, the different ideologies that influenced us… I deeply believe in the goodness of people. It just really intrigues me to understand people, and to understand their perspective… Judging, putting people into boxes, that doesn't help.

As Kimberson suggests, active differentiation is both a characteristic of cognitively mindful leadership and an outcome of mindful leadership practice. Moreover, as he implies, practicing active differentiation can be as simple as asking the following questions:

- How am I categorizing this situation, person, or experience?
- On what information, data, or knowledge am I making this assessment?
- What information, data, or knowledge might I be missing?
- What might another framing be?
- Where might I direct my awareness so that I get a more complete picture?

OPENNESS TO NEW INFORMATION

Scholars and practitioners of educational leadership are well acquainted with the phrase "openness to improvement." Long suggested to be a hallmark of school reform (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Lewis, 2015; Louis et al., 1997) and school change (Earl & Lee, 2000; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Hopkins, 1995) openness to improvement suggests that for change to occur, the school community, (i.e., school leaders, teachers, families, and community members) must be open to change. While openness to improvement has been found to be a precursor to innovation and change (Jia et al., 2018; Kruse, 2020; Love et al., 2014), *openness to new information* is a more robust concept, and includes attention to information that may not directly or immediately lead to change. A stance of openness to new information concentrates leadership attention on learning from and about the school environment and organization.

Adopting a stance of openness to new information challenges leaders to look beyond their habitual, single-minded lenses when analyzing situations, making decisions, and interacting with others. Its purpose is to create the conditions under which *learning* can occur. Armed with new information and understandings, school leaders are better able to consider alternative actions,

ideas, and perspectives regarding a specific situation. A stance of openness can also surface how policies and practices are received, accepted, or resisted within the school or district.

However, learning is dependent on *experience* (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). Experiences can reinforce our prior understandings and perceptions, or they can challenge what we believe to be true, real, and right. When we rely on previously established ideas, thoughts, and perceptions to interpret new situations we risk acting mindlessly because we can miss important cues that make these events different and, therefore, immune to older responses and actions (Kudesia, 2019; Langer, 2016). Therefore, cognitive mindfulness is less about (impulsively) deciding to do things differently and more about becoming open to new information so that it can purposefully inform our thinking, responses, and decision processes.

Moreover, openness to new information is both a trait and a state. As a *trait*, openness is an attribute, something that makes up who we are. It is stable and enduring. When thought of as a trait, we can imagine leaders who naturally monitor information as it presents itself and adjust their responses accordingly. Leaders who are adept at "reading the room" demonstrate the trait of openness to new information. They are at once able to assess the group dynamic, the emotional tone, and infer what fleeting smiles or raised eyebrows mean, and use those cues to inform how they present themselves and their ideas.

As a *state*, openness is more temporary, provisional, and contextually conditional, because it is catalyzed by new situations and events. Context matters, and leadership action is predicated on a leader's ability to interpret a situation and compare it to others, using those comparisons as data to adjust their mode of engagement to the current situation. In this instance, leaders employ new information as a form of meaning-making and sensemaking when they are confronted with challenges and change (Weick & Roberts, 1993; Weick, 1995). For example, in the early days of the COVID-19 response leaders needed to attend to how Covid differed from other kinds of school closure events (e.g., snowstorms, flooding, power outages) both employing responses that were useful in the past (e.g., maintaining direct communication) and creatively developing responses (e.g., deployment of hotspots, instructional materials, and school lunches to students and their families; scaling up online instruction) unique to an extended school closure caused by a global pandemic.

Importantly, openness to new information, as a leadership skill, operates as both a trait and a state, where leaders are well-served to employ a stance of personal openness to new ideas as well as a sensitivity to contextual cues that signal change, risk, or opportunity. Remaining open to new information, as it presents itself in real time, fosters a leader's ability to flexibly respond to even subtle cues as they arise in day-to-day and exceptional situations and events.

Furthermore, for openness to new information to result in more mindful leadership behaviors, attention must be directed equally toward developing openness breadth and depth (Jia et al., 2018; Love et al., 2014). *Openness breadth* suggests that broadly searching for new ideas, perceptions, and

▌**TABLE 4.2**		
Trait/State distinctions		
	Trait	State
General Definition	Quality, characteristic, attribute, or feature of an individual	Condition or characteristic of an individual that is attributable to a context or perspective
Way of Being	Stable &/or enduring	Temporary, provisional, or transitory
Stability/Variability	Generalizable & stable across situations & time	Variable or fluctuating across time; dependent on the situation/context
Orientation	Internally oriented & generated	Externally/environmentally oriented, triggered, or produced
Outcome/ Circumstance	Prediction of present behavior or response from past actions	Identification of behaviors, actions, &/or responses that may be situational in nature

Source: Brown et al., 2007b; Clark et al., 2019; Cuff et al., 2016; Lee, 2019; Tan, 2021.

resources increases individual and organizational knowledge. *Openness depth* suggests the need to draw deeply from a variety of informational sources and channels. By focusing on both breadth and depth leaders are better able to sort out what information has import, under what circumstances it matters, and to whom it matters most. In turn, sensitivity to change is increased as is the potential for creative and resourceful response. Yet, as school leaders know, often the issue is not a lack of information. School leaders often find themselves besieged by information from multiple directions. Figuring out which information to attend to because it is of the greatest importance, is often a leader's real dilemma. Thinking about three interrelated and important aspects of cognitive awareness—absorptive capacity, cognitive distance, and cognitive dissonance—is of use in considering how openness to new information can inform, rather than overwhelm.

Absorptive Capacity

Absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Nooteboom et al., 2007) refers to the extent to which we can be fully immersed in a learning experience. The construct includes two equally important aspects of the learning moment. First, is the ability to become absorbed or wholly captivated by a new experience or idea. Characterized by deep cognitive curiosity, *absorption* is evidenced by deep involvement, temporal dissociation, and an energized focus toward learning. Simply put, it is the ability to be completely wrapped up by and in the moment. Yet, as Sophie Urbaine at Great Plains Middle School shares, staying absorbed is difficult when places and situations become overly familiar and commonplace:

I used to, you know, when I was first a principal, find all this really interesting. I really liked coming to school every day and seeing what was going on. Then, it just started to feel like, "yep, that again." When Covid started, I'm really embarrassed to say it, but dealing with all that forced me to look at my school again. I got more interested…like the adrenaline kicked in and things were fascinating again, I was completely there.

Important in thinking about mindful leadership is that simply being swept up in the moment is insufficient for absorptive capacity to result in individual or organizational learning, progress, or growth. Absorption must be balanced with attention to how much *capacity* is individually and organizationally available to assimilate and apply new learning in ways that foster innovation and change (Love et al., 2014). Individual and organizational capacity matters if learning is to occur and be of use. Paradoxically, as Kudesia (2019) asserts, individual and organizational capacity is enhanced when openness to new and novel information is a regular practice of leaders. The paradox here is, of course, that on a day-to-day basis working to scan the environment for new and novel information takes attention and time. Of course, time is a scarce leadership commodity. Yet, investing in environmental scanning can save time and energy in the long term. Just as expertise cannot be developed on the fly, developing a deep understanding of one's school or district requires ongoing attention to what happening within the organization. Therefore, absorptive capacity building is a bit like strength training, where maximum benefits are developed over time. However, absorptive capacity is influenced by more than the availability of a leader's time, it is also influenced by cognitive distance and cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive Distance

Cognitive distance suggests that our ability to learn is conditional on our prior life experience and is directly affected by how far or how close new information is to our personal and professional values, beliefs, and goals (Nooteboom et al., 2007). The relationship is not linear, nor is our ability to learn new information wholly determined by its proximity to older ideas, understandings, and constructs. In fact, familiarity may well inhibit learning due to passive categorization or inattentiveness to difference (Khoury, 2018). Inasmuch as familiarity may inhibit learning so does extreme distance. When ideas and information are completely foreign and our absorptive capacity is stretched, learning may be constrained. As such, learning from new information is, in part, a balance of cognitive closeness and distance where optimal learning occurs in instances when new information is different enough to be recognized but not so different that it is overwhelming or challenging.

Cognitive Dissonance

Another form of cognitive challenge is *cognitive dissonance* (Cooper, 2007; 2019). Cognitive dissonance occurs when people are confronted by two or more ideas that are psychologically inconsistent. Moreover, cognitive

dissonance results in discomfort or distress. For example, you may see yourself as an honest person yet, you find yourself telling a small lie because it is easier than having a hard conversation. Afterwards, you feel bad that you did not handle the situation as honestly as you might have. That resultant discomfort is cognitive dissonance. Moving forward, you might pledge to do better the next time to feel better about yourself in the short term.

If you can keep your promise to yourself and remain truthful, your sense of self can be restored, and your self-esteem repaired. If not, you may experience some lingering discomfort because of your inconsistent behavior. Persistent liars aside, most people prefer to live with a sense of consistency, aligning what they believe about themselves and how they act. Additionally, and because consistency is a more comfortable state, people generally work to resolve feelings of inconsistency rapidly. In fact, research (Cooper, 2007) has found that the greater the magnitude of dissonance and discomfort the greater the urgency to resolve internal tensions. On balance, when cognitive dissonance is more intensely experienced, we have a greater motivation to change. Yet, we do not always resolve discomfort by changing our thinking and actions. At times, we find ways to rationalize or excuse our behavior.

For example, when a superior asks us to behave in ways counter to our sense of self, we are more likely to absolve ourselves of responsibility (Cooper, 2019). After all, we reason, it cannot be considered our fault if we were put in the position of acting inconsistently by another. By shifting the blame to the supervisor, we are better able to resolve our own internal tensions. Similarly, when we find ourselves faced with a truth we do not want to accept, we are more likely to refuse to believe it as true and more likely to suggest that the messenger is wrong or to blame (Cooper, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, and important to our thinking about cognitive mindfulness and openness to new information, any new information has the potential to produce cognitive dissonance. Moreover, as Mattes (2018) suggests, some cognitive dissonance is unavoidable when we are seeking to understand new information. It is simply not possible for information, either about ourselves or about our organizations, to fully align with our sense of self and how we would like the world to be. That we all experience cognitive dissonance is not at issue. How we respond when we experience it, is.

Cognitive mindfulness research (Carson & Langer, 2006; Langer, 2014) suggests that rather than instinctively resisting and seeking to resolve the tensions created by cognitive dissonance, noticing those feelings and thoughts is of equal importance. Therefore, as Langer (2016) concludes, openness to new information can lead to new understandings *and* also test our values and beliefs. As Whea Nguyen's narrative suggests, awareness of those differences, paired with a critical evaluation of subsequent choices has the potential to provide leaders the opportunity to embrace, rather than reject, discomforting information.

Dr. Whea Nguyen has held the position of deputy superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the Deep Bend School District since 2017. After 14 years of teaching, she was promoted to principal at Deep Bend's

Intermediate school where she served as principal for ten years. During that time, Nguyen earned an EdD and her superintendent license from a well-respected university program located close to Deep Bend. She credits that program for helping her learn how to be intentional about leadership choices and actions. She remarks:

> I learned, when I'm looking at something new or something that will change our schools in some way, that I needed to just soak in the information I can get from other folks. It's about reaching for understanding. I know I can't assume I know where other people are coming from. Typically, what I will do is spend time unpacking an issue from a variety of different contexts. I learned, okay, say first start with a teacher because they're in a different space than me. So, what might a teacher think? What are the commonalities between them and me? It's like as I listen to them, I'm highlighting and coding and figuring, okay, where are the similarities and the differences between those stories and how they take place? Then it's almost like I'm unpacking the teacher as well. Why do they believe what they believe? Is it typical of other teachers? Are they unique? I try to really hear them. I sit with all that and try to understand what there is to be learned. I work at not coming to a conclusion too soon. Then I do that with a parent as well. Okay so let's unpack the parent. Where are they coming from? Are they a new parent? Do they come from a different context? Maybe they've been here for five years and they're on the PTA and they have some political affiliation to that space. What does that mean for my understanding? Then I try to really go broad, I'm also thinking, what is the general nature of where we're at right now, politically, socially in our world? All these things play out in my head as the person is talking and I am just, okay, what is there to be learned here? Usually, I need to talk to five or six people before I begin to develop any conclusions. Sometimes more, sometimes a lot more, especially if I'm getting really different thinking. I try to get a rounded picture of the issue, so that I can really understand what's going on. Only when I've done that do I start to make plans. It's really important for me to know what I'm walking into where the landmines might be and where it won't be so bad.

As Nguyen suggests, the practice of openness to information can foster more mindful leadership action. Moreover, as she implies, practicing openness to information can be motivated by asking the following questions:

- What do others/might others think is important in this context or situation?
- What does that information have to teach me?
- How does that information fit with other things I know about this issue or situation?
- What is new and how can I better understand it?

PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

Active differentiation and openness to information are closely linked to *perspective-taking*. Perspective-taking, as a key feature of cognitive mindfulness, is the process of actively noticing how others experience their world, including the school organization, the issues it faces, and their connections to and within the school community. Ku et al. (2015) define perspective-taking as "the active cognitive process of imagining the world from another's vantage point or imagining oneself in another's shoes to understand their visual viewpoint, thoughts, motivations, intentions, and/or emotions" (p. 95). Brown et al. (2007b) simplify Ku's thinking suggesting perceptive-taking is recognizing that, "we do not simply live in the world as we view it, construct it, and interpret it" (p. 213).

Perspective-taking contributes to a leader's knowledge and skill set in two ways. The first is *organizational*. As Weick & Roberts (1993) posit, our ability to generate creative and robust solutions is enhanced when we increase our depth of experience and access to the world views and narratives of others. From this vantage point, perspective-taking focuses on improving organizational performance by employing the information gained from others to enhance leadership learning and decision-making. Because perspective-taking involves actively contemplating another's viewpoint, it encourages leaders to step outside their habitual ways of knowing to develop more cognitively complex explanations for organizational dilemmas. As school leaders know, and research supports (Brown et al., 2007b; Langer, 2014), organizational dilemmas are experienced and understood differently by different stakeholders. As Anders Christo of Gateway High School describes:

> When we started building our equity agenda, there were folks, they weren't having it. The school was working for their kids. It made sense to them. They belonged and they [didn't think they] should have to change. One parent, he said it, but I know it wasn't just him thinking it, he said, "Those kids should learn our history." And then there's the tradition line, I heard it a lot, that's the one that goes, "That book's a classic, everyone should read it." Who cares if it's racist? Who cares if that kid doesn't feel safe as long as my kid does? But I knew, we could do better, and it was going to take doing things different…that it wasn't gonna be easy, I wanna say, the easy way…that's what got us here.

Any issue can be viewed from numerous viewpoints and positions. This is particularly true of contentious issues. Furthermore, if organizational members, especially those who view themselves as organizational outsiders, experience school leaders as having a fixed stance, they will be more reticent to communicate in honest and open ways (Dunoon & Langer, 2011; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Tan, 2021). However, if contentious issues are to be surfaced and resolved, the deep sharing of perspectives, ideas, and experiences is essential if insight and understanding is to result. Therefore, perspective-taking

requires that we step back from our own framings of issues and explore others' experiences and explanations alongside our own.

Additionally, perspective-taking honors the importance of context as an important feature of problem-solving and decision-making. Context matters, and yet, leaders often fail to consider contextual shifts and changes. Furthermore, leaders tend to uncritically apply leadership skills learned in one situation to another, without regard for contextual differences. As Dunoon and Langer (2011) suggest, this may occur because we are preoccupied with achieving our own objectives or because we may believe that prior commitments constrain our choices and decisions. This was particularly true when many schools across the nation went fully online during the Covid epidemic. For example, as Naomi Shapiro of Spring Mountains Elementary School explained:

> Our teachers, they're like trying their best to learn new ways of teaching and reaching kids. And the state you know, wouldn't cancel the tests. So, the district felt like they had to press for teaching content and holding kids accountable for learning… All they knew was how we'd always done it. State, the district, they couldn't see what was happening, they were too tied up in needing that data. They couldn't see how hard it was for us. Our teachers, they just felt no one had their backs.

Of course, and certainly at the beginning of the pandemic, it was hard for anyone to imagine how long schools would be closed or how difficult online schooling would be. Adding to the complexity of the testing issue was the legitimate fear of many school superintendents that they would lose state and federal funding if they did not comply with the administrative code. Yet, the failure to take on the perspective of hard-working school principals and teachers concerning state tests, and the many other challenges online education created, ultimately undermined confidence in subsequent decisions.

Undeniably, the coronavirus pandemic created an unprecedented crisis. Yet, ideally, leaders frame responses with attention to multiple audiences, working to convey the right message, at the right time, and to the right audience. Perspective-taking is critical to doing that well. In practice, perspective-taking can be promoted by consideration of questions like:

- What might I be missing?
- Who haven't I heard from?
- What's another way to think about this?

By posing questions designed to frame organizational issues from other perspectives, leaders can take on a more divergent and context-dependent approach to organizational problem-solving. As a result, they are better able to move beyond convergent thinking and routine decision-making to thought processes that expand, rather than condense our ideas. In turn, deeper, and more nuanced, understandings of present organizational realities and potential futures can be generated.

However, the benefits of perspective-taking are not limited to organizational leadership and goal attainment. A second benefit of perspective-taking includes focusing on understanding others' perspectives so that we are *better able to understand them as people*. Foundational to understanding the importance of perspective-taking is accepting the notion that we live in a world where everyone views, constructs, and interprets things according to their own values, beliefs, and interests. Truly, no two people perceive the same situation in the same way. Yet, we often fail to consider how others might be experiencing the "same" situation we are.

Moreover, from a cognitive mindfulness perspective, understanding how others' view, construct, and interpret their world has the potential to increase our ability to see and comprehend our world in new and more complete ways. However, seeking others' perspectives provides greater benefits than increasing leaders' understanding. Seeking others' perspectives facilitates the ability to create, maintain, and strengthen social bonds (Carson & Langer, 2006; Ku et al., 2015). As research (Lee, 2019) suggests, perspective-taking paves the way for us to connect to others. Thus, and as a result of perspective-taking's role in developing interpersonal connections, perspective-taking has been linked to increased empathy and compassion (Batson, 2009; Clark et al., 2019; Cuff et al., 2016; Hojat, 2009).

This is not to infer that perspective-taking will always lead to increased empathy. Nor are the two synonymous. In fact, Ku et al. (2015) distinguish between the two suggesting that perspective-taking is a cognitive process and empathy an affective response. Others (Clark et al., 2019; Cuff et al., 2016), suggest that perspective-taking can result in cognitive empathy (i.e., the ability to understand another's viewpoint and feelings), although that outcome is not necessarily guaranteed. Nor does cognitive empathy assure affective empathy (i.e., feeling a related feeling). For example, as Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2004) found, adults labeled with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism may demonstrate cognitive empathy deficits but average levels of affective empathy. Interestingly, Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright (2004) found significant differences related to sex, with females demonstrating higher levels of both cognitive and affective empathy, suggesting that the development of empathy may be linked to socialization or other experiential factors. As Cuff et al. (2016) note, psychopathic individuals demonstrate the opposite pattern. Furthermore, Shamay-Tsoory (2011) provides evidence that cognitive and affective empathy work neurologically independently activating different structures of the brain under experimental conditions. Definitional differences aside, it is understood that cognitive and affective empathy are strongly correlated (Clark et al., 2019) and are influenced by the act of perspective-taking (Hojat, 2009).

Importantly, perspective-taking and empathy differ from other commonly used terms to describe our responses to others. These include sympathy and compassion. Whereas empathy is described as feeling *as* another, sympathy is described as feeling *for* another (Clark et al., 2019; Cuff et al., 2016). The

TABLE 4.3

Perspective-taking, empathy, sympathy, and compassion defined

Perspective-taking	Process of putting yourself in the shoes of another with the intent of learning how they experience the world
Empathy (inclusive definition)	The capacity to understand & share the feelings of others; "Feeling *as* another"
Cognitive Empathy	Understanding the feelings & perspective of another
Affective Empathy	Feeling or experiencing a similar feeling as another
Sympathy	Feeling concern for another's misfortune, adversity, or hardship while maintaining your own perspective; "Feeling *for* another"
Compassion	An emotional response to empathy commonly expressed as the desire or motivation to *do* something in response to another's feeling or circumstance

Source: (Batson, 2009; Clark et al., 2019; Cuff et al., 2016; Hojat, 2009.

difference between the two lies in perspective. As we have seen, empathy requires that we understand and feel as the other. Sympathy suggests that while we may feel some concern for another, we maintain our own perspective. For example, one might feel concern (i.e., sympathy) for someone facing adversity, yet still judge them for their current circumstance, failing to account for societal context, bias, or other influencing external conditions.

Finally, perspective-taking and empathy differ from compassion in that compassion, which may arise from empathy, requires that we are motivated to *do* something in response to another's feelings or circumstances. Additionally, compassion can take the form of being willing to suffer with another, to bear witness to their pain, and to provide solace in times of need. No matter the form compassion takes, it is substantially different from empathy even though both have the potential to help us understand the positions and experiences of others.

In conclusion, cognitive mindfulness privileges active differentiation, openness to new information, and perspective-taking as avenues for learning and leadership (Langer, 2014, 2016; Rerup, 2005, Tan, 2021). As an orientation toward *learning*, cognitive mindfulness offers school leaders the tools to better understand and experience the world as others do, therefore increasing access to useful and important information. As an orientation toward *leadership*, cognitive mindfulness helps leaders to broaden their appreciation of possibilities for approaching issues and concerns and be better able to respond to the challenges they face. Moreover, practicing cognitive mindfulness increases individual and organizational connection and empathy and intensifies leadership insight and wisdom.

INSIGHT, WISDOM, AND COGNITIVE MINDFULNESS

Leading mindfully is not an accidental or occasional orientation. Rather, cognitive mindfulness, as a leadership practice, is a deliberate and purposeful choice, one that centers *leadership as learning* and acknowledges that for all of us, our understandings and perceptions are unavoidably partial. As Julia Barbeau, of Red Ryvers High School explains:

> When I step back…stop to look around…really ask how my teachers are experiencing this, students, their families…and then ask them, not assume I know, I'm better. I make better choices; I pay better attention to what's happening [in the school and community]. It's like this flash of knowing and then I get what's really going on. I see it wholly differently and it just makes sense. But you know, if I don't ask, that wouldn't happen.

Barbeau describes what Ash et al. (2012) describe as sudden learning or *insight*. Often thought of as an "aha!" or a "lightbulb moment," insight combines elements of inspiration, comprehension, and re-orientation in the pursuit of understanding and problem-solving. Yet, as research (Cushen & Wiley, 2012) shows, insight does not occur absent prior understanding or knowledge. Instead, insight is the result of learning. Insight occurs in the moment when we bring new perspectives and interpretations to the vexing, often enduring, problems we face. Insight is built upon the intentional practice of seeking alternative narratives about the world around us and taking seriously what that information has to offer. In turn, the incorporation of novel understandings fuels insight, awareness, and perceptiveness.

Furthermore, insight is fueled by *curiosity*, a key feature of cognitive mindfulness. As in perspective-taking, insight requires that leaders ask the question, "What am I missing?" in the hunt for answers. Curiosity originates in two ways (Litman & Silva, 2006; Ryakhovskaya et al., 2022). The first is based on deprivation. Deprivation-based curiosity is careful, specific, and reactive, it occurs when we are seeking a clear answer to a question or problem. For example, one might be curious about who first recorded "Respect" (Ottis Redding in 1965, Aretha Franklin's version appeared in 1967) or who won the first Super Bowl (Green Bay Packers in 1967 over the Kansas City Chiefs). Each question has a stopping point and is easily answered by a simple Google search. Once the answer is discovered, one's curiosity is satisfied.

The second kind of curiosity, interest-based curiosity, is driven by the wish to discover more about a topic, experience, or situation. Interest-based curiosity is akin to openness to new information because interest-based curiosity has no stopping point. Interest-base curiosity results from questions like, "what if," "why does," and "how might I…." In each, a single answer is likely to be insufficient nor would it fully address all potential avenues of response. While both deprivation–and interest-based curiosity may result in learning, interest-based curiosity is more likely to result in insight due to its generative nature.

A close relative of insight is *wisdom*. Both are predicated on intellectual humility (i.e., an awareness of the partial nature of our own knowledge), the recognition of uncertainty and change, and attentiveness to others' perspectives and world views (Deroche, 2021; Grossman, 2017; Zhang et al., 2022). Both insight and wisdom emphasize the generation of new understandings, meaning-making, and reflectivity. Inasmuch as insight is motivated by curiosity, wisdom is motivated by the development of virtue, good-heartedness, and the common good as outcomes for intellectual activity. Certainly, wisdom requires intelligence and knowledge, but intelligence and knowledge alone are not evidence of wisdom. Wisdom requires that someone uses their intelligence and knowledge for the betterment of others.

These distinctions are important because the attributes of cognitive mindfulness can result in both favorable and unfavorable outcomes. The concern here is one of ethics and integrity. Insofar as cognitive mindfulness encourages leaders to seek the perspectives, narratives, and experiences of others in the pursuit of deeper understandings, mindful leadership requires that doing so comes from a place of honesty and respect. Curiosity without honesty and respect is worthless. Worse yet, it is exploitative. Because listening to people shows that they matter, seeking others' perspectives without a real commitment to learning from them is manipulative and unethical. When we ask others to share of themselves, it is our responsibility to interact in ways that recognize their full humanity, regardless of what has been shared.

Practicing cognitive mindfulness requires wisdom. It requires that we listen for the meaning behind the story, lean into others' ways of knowing and being, and reject the certainty of our own worldviews in favor of deeper more nuanced explanations and narratives. Cognitive mindfulness prompts us to ask the questions "How do others see the world?" "What makes these perspectives understandable?" and "How can I/What can I learn from looking at this situation/problem/circumstance differently?" rather than "Who is right?"

CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITATION, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Sympathetic, Appreciative, Altruistic Joy

Considering that cognitive mindfulness prompts us to look outside of ourselves it makes good sense to focus here on a meditation that focuses on others. Mudita bhavana is that practice. The word mudita comes from the Pali and generally is translated as sympathetic, appreciative, or altruistic joy. A close meditative cousin of metta bhavana, loving-kindness meditation, mudita bhavana asks that we consider what it is like to feel happiness for another's happiness. Mudita bhavana is considered one of the four immeasurables (brahma-vihara) or the four divine states in Buddhism. In addition to mudita, the brahma-vihara include metta (loving-kindness), karuna (compassion), and upekkha (equanimity) (Goldstein, 2016; Tejaniya, 2016).

Of course, the opposite of appreciative joy is jealousy, envy, resentfulness, and covetousness. Yet, the philosophy that underscores the practice of mudita bhavana suggests that jealousy, envy, resentfulness, and covetousness occur when we compare ourselves to others. Take, for example, the experience of a good friend who has just purchased a fancy new car. Prior to this purchase, you were probably just fine, perhaps even proud of driving your paid-off, perfectly good vehicle. However, and because of comparing these two vehicles, suddenly you are resentful and miserable. Not only has your appreciation of what you already have diminished but feeling jealous or resentful gets you no closer to ownership of a new car yourself.

Buddhist philosophy suggests that getting caught up this way is counter-productive because it unnecessarily increases our own suffering. The philosophy and practice of mudita suggests that if you can notice joy, wherever it arises, you are better able to experience more joy yourself. In short, if you can find your way to celebrating your friend's excitement, you too can experience (even if vicariously) the feeling of joy. Whereas, wallowing in jealousy or envy simply increases your own suffering.

This practice is subtle. It is also hard. No question, it is difficult to feel happy for someone who has received something we wanted. Yet, noticing when we feel difficulty arise and then purposefully redirecting our attention to the joy of others has the potential to lessen the initial sting. The following meditation offers a way to begin to celebrate the joy of others and to help us see where and how we compare ourselves to others.

- As always, begin by finding a comfortable posture. Take a few breaths and place yourself in the space. Is the air around you warm or cool? Are there sounds that soothe or distract? What is your sense of the light in the room, does it shift as if there are clouds above, or is it consistently bright or dim?
- Take the time to notice rather than judge these physical sensations. Practicing mudita helps to surface how comparison is a form of judgement and once we begin to judge things around us our ability to understand them becomes compromised. Therefore, changing our minds becomes harder because we quite naturally screen out information that does not support the conclusion we have already reached.
- To begin this practice, try to feel what you are feeling and experiencing in this moment. As with all meditative practices, mudita is not about trying to manufacture or force any specific feeling. Importantly, mudita is not about judging ourselves for our inability to feel happiness in the face of real sorrow or disappointment. It is simply about noticing how we feel and then noticing how others' might feel from their vantage point.
- Many practitioners of mudita find the easiest way to start is to focus on their pet, a well-loved child, or a friend. Starting from a place where it is easy to feel appreciative joy is a straightforward way into this practice.
- The meditation begins by bringing a well-loved person or pet to mind. Try to bring your thoughts to one image or memory that clearly demonstrates

their deeply felt joy. It might make sense for you to focus on the image of your cat stretching in the sun, your dog happily rolling in freshly cut grass, or a child eating ice cream on a hot day. Reflect for a moment on their happiness in that moment and more broadly in their life. Holding this image in your mind's eye repeat one of the classic phrases associated with mudita. These include:
- May you always be happy.
- May your happiness grow.
- May you find success.
- May you know delight.
- I rejoice in your happiness.
- I appreciate the joy that is in your life.
- I am happy for your happiness.

- If those do not feel genuine to you it is fine to create your own phrase or phrases that feel more authentic. As with metta, the power of meditation is not in the phrase itself but in the effort to remain focused on the meditative intention and the feelings it produces. As feelings and thoughts arise note them. If you get distracted and begin to spin a story in your mind about the image you have chosen, set it aside and return to attending to your feelings. As feelings arise, include them in your meditation.
- If feelings do not arise, simply sit with what does. Often, meditation does not appear to be producing a result. In fact, practicing mudita is a great way to practice acceptance of whatever happens. When we step back from grasping for something our energy shifts and changes. In turn, we become better able to realize that if we just wait out feelings of fear, anger, envy, resentfulness, or greed, they dissipate. The meditative process is not about escaping what arises. Instead, it is about focusing on learning to be with whatever arises in our minds and lives.
- Focusing on a well-loved person or pet may be all that is needed in any given session. However, if you are interested in moving more deeply into this practice, as with metta, mudita unfolds through a sequence of focal points. These include starting with oneself, then including friends or loved ones, a neutral person, a difficult person, and ultimately all beings. In each case, try to appreciate their joy.

Variations. As the sequence unfolds, many people find it difficult to appreciate the joy of others whom they feel negatively toward. If this is a struggle, staying with easier focal points makes good sense. You might also try phrases that center your attention on how all of us are trying to do our best in this world, or how each of us embodies great potential. You might choose one of the phrases below.

- Appreciating my effort.
- Appreciating this effort.
- Appreciating your effort.

- Being grateful for my potential.
- Being grateful for this potential.
- Being grateful for your potential.

Finally, end your practice with a few minutes of being with your breath or a few minutes of reconnection to the space around you.

Activity

ACTIVITY 4

WALKING YOUR SCHOOL (BRYK & SCHNEIDER, 2002; KRUSE, 2020; KRUSE & LOUIS, 2009)

Spend a morning, an afternoon, or a full day on a walkabout of your school. The idea of the exercise is to consider how the school is experienced by others. Try not to see the place as you usually do or with an eye for what needs to be accomplished, fixed, or changed. Just observe. As you work to see the school with new eyes, direct your observations to:

- What happens as teachers arrive.
  - What do they see?
  - Where are the first places they go?
  - Who are the first people they interact with?
    - How might you characterize those interactions?
- What happens as students arrive.
  - What do they see?
    - What messages do hallways, bulletin boards, showcases and classroom doors send?
  - Once they enter the school, where do most students go?
  - Are they greeted? If so, by who?
    - What are those greetings like?
- What the hallways are like.
  - Who is in the hallways and how are they moving?
    - What are they paying attention to?
  - Are there small dramas that occur?
    - If so, who pays attention and what does that attention look like?
- What classrooms and other student spaces are like.
  - Are classrooms welcoming?
  - Are there student workspaces in addition to desks?
  - Are there places for students to be with friends, small groups, or alone?
- The feeling tone of the school during lunch, recess, and passing time.
  - Who is in the hallways?
    - What are they paying attention to?
  - What might they be concerned about?
    - What makes their concern evident?
  - Are there spaces where students and teachers can have a private moment or share some time with friends or colleagues?
- How the school is the same or different in the morning, mid-day, and end of day.
  - Who leaves early? Quickly?
  - Who lingers? What are they doing?
  - What do they look like? Happy? Burdened? Focused?

Once you've completed your walkabout, reflect on what you learned.

- What interested you?
- Where was your attention drawn?
- What surprised you?
- What are you more curious about?
- What will you do with your new understandings?
- Would doing this again offer different information?
- Who could you share your observations with and what would they think of them?

Additional Resources

Offered here are several readings and a website to support further learning.

- Langer, E.J. (2016). *The power of mindful learning*. (2nd ed.) Boston, MA: Perseus Books Group. No doubt, Ellen Langer's work is foundational to the theory and practice of cognitive mindfulness. In *The power of mindful learning*, Langer turns attention to mindlessness and its impacts on student learning. The volume begins with the assertion that schools, "unintentionally teach us to be mindless…[by teaching] us to evaluate each other and ourselves, and they teach us to seek or accept information as if it were absolute and independent of human creation" (p. xv). Langer backs this claim up by focusing on ways schools error and promote mindlessness. She contends that overlearning skills through rote, contextless practice, overemphasizing attention at the expense of creative distraction, inappropriately asking students to delay understanding the relevance of what they are asked to learn, and mistaking students' ability to provide us the "right answer" all contribute to mindlessness. Thankfully, Langer offers more than a critique of schools. Suggesting that each of these foci might be replaced by more mindful practices, Langer concludes by suggesting that schools might focus on the value of doubt, enhance novelty, turn work into play, and focus on learning as re-imagining the world, as antidotes to mindlessness.
- Tejaniya, S.U. (2016). *When awareness becomes natural*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Press. Informed by his own meditative journey and highlighting the importance of perseverance and practice to the development of wisdom, Tejaniya suggests that developing an awareness of the mind is critical if we are to understand the world around us. Likening this work to a marathon rather than a sprint he suggests that developing cognitive mindfulness is a life practice that is particularly effective for independent thought, problem-solving, and juggling the responsibilities and commitments of everyday life. The short 175-page volume focuses on how we can all recognize wisdom, investigate our minds, and commit to the development of wise action and thought by developing our ability to recognize and notice what arises and what passes away throughout our days, weeks, and lives. In conclusion, Tejaniya offers both the invitation to and a roadmap for bringing practice into our daily life and using our learning and wisdom to become better leaders, partners, and people.
- Mindful.org (www.mindful.org) is a website that offers short articles, classes, and other materials that support developing the skills of focus, calm, and compassion. The site is notable because its focus is practical rather than philosophical. Mindful.org helps readers develop a skillset to support a healthy mind and a healthy life. Much of its material is free however there is a subscription link that provides access to trained and vetted mindfulness teachers and coaches.

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Systems and Practices

KEY VOCABULARY

Accountability—The implicit or explicit expectation that one is answerable for the outcomes of their decisions, behaviors, or actions.

Belonging—A sense of acceptance, affinity, or inclusion in a place, organization, or group.

Efficacy—The belief that an individual or a collective of individuals can achieve an intended result.

Responsibility—An externally imposed or internally felt obligation to perform an assignment, task, function, or comply with a rule.

Unlearning—The purposeful identification and removal of practices that no longer serve the school organization in favor of adopting more appropriate systems and practices.

When a school is running smoothly and problems are few, self-reliant leadership may be robust enough to address day-to-day functions. However, when problems are many, principals need access to multiple and varied resources if difficulties are to be resolved (Duckek, 2020; Hoy, 2003; Murphy & Louis, 2018). Cognitive mindfulness offers an approach to helping school leaders build a durable, resource-rich support structure and organizational culture. Additionally, cognitive mindfulness offers leaders a framework of supportive structures and practices that are predictable and responsive to members of the school organization. Declan Rhee describes how this works at Wadins Middle School:

Of course, it's intentional. We can't all be all over the place. The work needs to be coordinated. We all need to be reading, looking at data, asking questions. That way, we have our own take on things, but we're coordinated. We're doing this for a reason. It's not just about right and wrong, my way or theirs. But and it's a big but… We have to be doing something. We can't just get caught in a loop where all we do is talk and nothing happens…my old school… we could talk, we could talk so much nothing ever happened, we never let go of anything.

When asked how he avoids getting trapped in the same loop, Rhee replied:

So, my way, from the start, we're all clear about what we're doing, why we're doing it, and how we want to do it. We follow our plan, everyone knows the plan, and they know where we're going. It helps, people can count on that being my way. They know if I'm asking what they think it's because I really want to know. I'm not just BSing them, it's real… it may not go exactly like they want it but there is an opportunity for [significant] input before something happens. But it's gonna happen, we're not gonna just talk.

Rhee's comments evidence the attributes of cognitive mindfulness in multiple ways. Active differentiation is demonstrated by his acknowledging that, "it's not just about right and wrong, my way or theirs." Openness to new information is present in his suggestion of "reading, looking at data, [and] asking questions." Perspective-taking is evidenced in his description of "asking what they think…because I really want to know" and his focus on developing "input before something happens." Additionally, Rhee's suggestions that "people can count on that being my way," "we have to be doing something," and "it's gonna happen," are further evidence of his intentionality and focus on individual and organizational relationships, growth, and change. As Rhee indicates, his school functions well because, as a school community, they have built a set of coordinated systems and practices that work for them. These include employing systems thinking, felt accountability, efficacy, unlearning, and belonging in purposeful and coordinated ways.

SYSTEMS THINKING AND ROUTINES

Schools are complex places. Over the course of the school day, school leaders are called upon to coordinate a variety of events (e.g., supporting teachers and students; class, bus, and lunch schedules; responding to district office directives and community concerns), people (e.g., faculty, staff, students, families, caregivers), and processes (e.g., handling student discipline, performing evaluation and supervision responsibilities). While these tasks may appear to have little connection, research (Bryk et al., 2015; Murphy, 2016), has shown that when leaders tackle organizational complexity by finding the interconnections between the issues and events that confront them, they are more effective. Furthermore, they are more likely to encourage others to engage in and support shared work (Louis & Lee, 2016; Ryu et al., 2020).

TABLE 5.1

Elements of cognitive mindfulness as evidenced in systems thinking and routines (Langer, 2014; Nilsson & Kazwmi, 2016; Shaked & Schechter, 2020), internally motivated accountability (Hoy et al., 2006; Murphy & Louis, 2018), efficacy (Good et al., 2016; Hoy, 2003), unlearning (Vidal, 2015; Visser, 2017), and belonging (Lomas et al., 2017; May 2011)

	Active Differentiation	Openness to New Information	Perspective-taking
Leaders Who Employ Systems Thinking and Routines…	Distinguish between simple & complex issues, local & general problems, & complete & partial knowledge, as points of learning & productive routine	Highlight awareness of incomplete, ambiguous, & partial knowledge as places for leadership effort	Surface differing viewpoints & experiences within the school organization & system
Leaders Who Demonstrate Felt Accountability…	Balance measures of external performance with those of internal trust-building & organizational commitment	Attend to organizational information including broadly defined values & goals	Focus on accountability to self & others as informed by the needs & worldviews of school community members
Leaders Who Advance Individual and Collective Efficacy…	Champion beliefs that foster rather than detract from success	Establish intentional learning experiences	Work to understand the viewpoints of school community members
Leaders Who Spotlight Unlearning…	Focus on the intentional breaking of outdated practice to support improvement efforts	Pursue new routines, practices, & processes that better support current school goals & values	Promote examination of perceptual lenses, explanations, issue framing, & response
Leaders Who Nurture Belonging…	Accept that connectedness & belonging are multidimensional constructs	Develop systems & practices that build high-quality connections & are responsive to individual need	Acknowledge that experiences of belonging differ & multiple perceptions of belonging are always present

However, coordination and interconnectedness must be intentional work. For example, if student hallway behavior is viewed as a communal responsibility it is more likely that fewer students will be caught running in the halls than if it is not. Similarly, if teachers regularly review and discuss formative assessment data in professional learning communities (PLCs), with the intent of using their analysis to alter instruction for students, it is more likely that students who are struggling will receive timely intervention. Hallway behavior and PLC foci may seem like discrete events however, if intentionally coordinated, each contributes to the development of school *routines* that purposefully focus on conditions that enhance student learning and well-being. Consequently, by intentionally attending to the school holistically, school leaders are better able to be responsive to the varied needs, perceptions, identities, beliefs, and values of those who work and learn within the school (Shaked & Schechter, 2017, 2020).

Holistic Leadership

Systems thinking suggests that leaders are better served when they view leadership in holistic ways. As Shaked and Schechter (2020) suggest, systems thinking is about, "seeing the whole beyond the parts and seeing the parts in the context of the whole" (p. 109). By identifying how the parts (e.g., schedules, policy, practices) of the school system are interrelated to holistic school goals and values (e.g., providing for the intellectual, physical, and social growth of all students in equitable and inclusive ways) systems thinkers are better able to optimize facilitative interactions.

It is in this context that the importance of organizational routines becomes salient. As Langer (2014) stresses, if organizations are to function optimally, the mindful management of organizational structures and routines matters. While excessive routinization, absent cognitive attention, has the potential to result in mindlessness, routines can be designed to foster stability, coordination, and shared expertise and reduce complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Becker, 2004; Feldman & Pentland, 2003).

To the extent that routines are executed without much variation, they create organizational stability. In turn, organizational stability contributes to predictability, which aids in the coordination and development of shared expertise. School safety drills offer a clear example of a stable and predictable organizational routine. In the event of a real emergency, lives are likely to be saved by the practice of safety routines. A less obvious, but equally salient example of how well-designed and executed routines support mindful leadership practice, is walkthroughs.

Popularized by Marzano et al. (2005), walkthroughs can be an effective leadership routine. As Ing (2013) has found, when walkthroughs are focused on supporting improved classroom instruction, teachers report that their principals are more effective. This occurs for several reasons. First, walkthroughs increase principal knowledge about the instructional practices used in the school. This knowledge can be used to tailor future professional learning opportunities, identify teachers who are doing exceptionally well or struggling, and build rapport with students. Second, walkthroughs offer principals the opportunity

to demonstrate their commitment to school improvement and classroom reform efforts. The act of being visible in regular and consistent ways aids leaders in developing creditability, a sense of supportiveness, and trust. Finally, walkthroughs offer school leaders the opportunity to structure and normalize teaching as public practice. By de-privatizing teaching practice, leaders can set the stage for conversations about instruction, curriculum, and assessment among faculty. However, walkthroughs themselves do not guarantee positive organizational results. Done poorly (i.e., without real commitment and/or used as an evaluative, rather than a supportive tool), walkthroughs will not result in school improvement, nor will they contribute to a leader's efficacy.

What makes walkthroughs an effective leadership routine are the ways in which school leaders develop and employ the actions that comprise the walkthrough. Successful organizational routines are marked by consistent and regular patterns of action (Annosi et al., 2020; Pentland et al., 2012). When leadership action is *recognizable* and *repetitive*, routines can serve to mindfully support organizational goals. A routine is recognizable when the steps follow each other in regularly identifiable ways. A routine is repetitive when its patterns of action are consistent from one performance to the next. This is not to say that routines are without flexibility. Rather, as in the cases of safety drills and walkthroughs, an organizational routine should be intentionally performed in similar enough ways so that organizational members can identify them and respond in appropriate and consistent ways.

Uncertainty

Importantly, routines serve to minimize uncertainty and increase resiliency (Schoemaker, 2019; Vidal, 2015). Inasmuch as schools are complex places, and change a constant presence, uncertainty is unavoidable. Furthermore, uncertainty is increased when knowledge is incomplete or ambiguous. As a result, and when knowledge is partial, having structures and routines designed to focus a leader's attention on immediate and peripheral organizational signals offers benefits. When leaders are inattentive, the potential to miss important signals within the system increases.

Clearly, signals can be disjointed and appear meaningless in isolation. It is often hard to see the threads that connect a hallway dispute, a disappointing test result, and a missed goal, to a punch thrown after school in the parking lot. Additionally, our ability to be fully attentive is limited and hindsight offers clarity that real-time events often cannot. However, when cognitively mindful attention is directed toward routines that foster organizational awareness, school leaders can respond with more agility and coordination (Holbeche, 2019).

Issue Identification

Similarly, when school leaders approach the school as a system, they are better able to identify issues and differentiate how they might respond. Knowing if an issue is simple or complex, local to a school or more generally present in

schools, or if knowledge about the issue is complete or partial, helps leaders to differentiate their responses. If a problem can be stated in a single sentence (e.g., it takes too long for students to get through the lunch line) likely, it is a *simple problem*. Undoubtedly, solving the issue might be complicated. Simple problems can, and often do, take grit and intellect to solve. When problems are simple, organizational members are more likely to be able to define the problem and implement corrective practices. Conversely, *complex problems* are less easily defined and potentially have multiple possible solutions. By actively differentiating between simple and complex problems and by taking the time to consider how the problem might be framed from a variety of perspectives, leaders can be better prepared to address the issue from a systems perspective (Langer, 2014; Duckek, 2020).

Likewise, determining whether the issue is *general* or *local* can inform school leaders about what kinds of information are needed to address the issue or concern. Commonly, general issues are complex issues (e.g., increasing equity, decreasing disparate discipline outcomes). Yet, because of their ubiquity, there may be more information available concerning how issues might be addressed. Therefore, when school leaders are faced with general issues, they may find themselves better supported in finding ways to tease out how the system might be improved. Likewise, when a sense that "we're all in this together" is present, communal problem-solving and information sharing is more productive.

This is not to suggest that local issues are simple issues. However, solving a local issue (e.g., a shortage of qualified teachers, overcrowding at a school site) may be hindered by a paucity of applicable information or resources. Programs, policies, or practices that worked elsewhere may not generalize to a specific local context. Therefore, local issues may be harder to address because of their distinct features. Moreover, when an issue feels like a one-off, school leaders may find themselves feeling quite alone.

Therefore, from a systems perspective, problem-solving and decision-making require that school leaders be aware of the kind of issues they are facing and the adequacy of the information and resources they have at hand. In turn, knowing when to ask for help, seek additional insights, information, or data creates the conditions in which leaders can act more mindfully and with greater organizational intention and purpose. Consequently, systems thinking contributes to cognitively mindful leadership by directing school leaders toward robust framings of the school organization and guides attentions toward interconnected and durable solutions.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Practiced with intention, cognitive mindfulness can help leaders target their personal sense of accountability in important and consequential ways. Undeniably, beginning with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and followed by the *Improving America's Schools Act* (1994), the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002), *Race to the Top* (2009), and the *Every Student Succeeds*

Act (2015), attending to external demands for accountability has become a cornerstone of principals' work in the United States. Clearly, the intention of these efforts to improve the educational outcomes for students, including those who have been historically marginalized, is admirable. However, no matter how admirable the goals, and because of legislative efforts, significant attention has been directed toward accountability for student learning outcomes as measured by state testing in the United States.

Similar legislation, as described by Mattei (2012) and Perry and McWilliam (2007), has impacted schooling and school leadership in the United Kingdom (e.g., Education Reform Act, 1988, 2005), France (e.g., *etablisssement public local d'enseigment*, 1985), Germany (e.g., *Selbstandige Schule*, 2008), and Italy (e.g., *Norme concernenti il governo delle istituzioni scolastiche*, 2002). Like in the US, across the UK and European Union, accountability to regional and national government rule-bound systems has increased. Therefore, accountability in educational leadership across the globe (and to be fair, leadership in any number of public and private sectors) has become synonymous with externally established expectations for individual and organizational actions and outcomes (Larson, 2010; Mattei, 2012; Melo et al., 2020).

External Accountability

In many ways, this is unsurprising. Traditionally, accountability has been externally imposed and tied to *rewards and sanctions* (Wang et al., 2019). Expectations and obligations are set by those with authority (e.g., managers, funders, government agencies, elders) and subordinates are expected to produce results and be "held to account" for their actions. Fundamentally, external accountability acts as a form of acculturalization and social control (Brees & Parker Ellen III, 2022; Perry & McWilliam, 2007).

Accountability as *acculturalization* establishes and reinforces norms of acceptable behavior. Accountability as acculturalization can be subtle. A new teacher may quickly realize that jeans are not acceptable teaching attire by observing what others wear and start to dress more like their colleagues. Conversely, explicit messages of "how we behave around here" can be quite blatant. Student handbooks that list acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and classroom, playground, bus, and lunchroom rules are ubiquitous features of schools.

Accountability as *social control* suggests that, once accepted, the norms of acceptable behavior serve to regulate and constrain activity through the promise of reward and threat of punishment. Here too, evidence of accountability as social control is implicit and explicit. The jeans-wearing teacher might be pulled aside and quietly informed of the unofficial staff dress code. Whereas consequences for student misbehavior are generally shared with students on the first day of classes.

However, as traditionally conceived, external accountability does not necessarily guarantee that leaders (or, for that matter, any organizational member) take personal responsibility for their actions (Wang et al., 2019;

Wood & Winston, 2005). While some do, others fail to take ownership of poor decisions and individual or organizational performance. Similarly, they may apologize for mistakes but stop short of corrective action. This is especially true in environments where the ability to truly sanction or penalize poor performance is absent.

Felt Accountability

Moreover, externally facing forms of accountability have been suggested to ignore the social and emotional aspects of leadership in favor of prescriptive hard measures of performance (Daly, 2009; Larson, 2010). Likewise, external accountability measures can conflate performing well with genuine motivations to lead with intelligence, compassion, and care. Standing in sharp contrast to externally facing accountability is the concept of internally motivated or felt accountability (Brees & Parker Ellen III, 2021; Hall et al., 2017). Felt accountability refers to an individual's perception of the degree to which they feel *personally accountable* for their own leadership actions and resultant organizational outcomes. Felt accountability has also been described as internally assumed accountability (Wang et al., 2019) or enacted accountability (Brees & Parker Ellen III, 2022).

Building on one's sense of responsibility or obligation to others, felt accountability is based on one's *perception* of accountability rather than on externally imposed measures or outcomes. Felt accountability is personal. However, it is often expressed in public ways. It may be evidenced by one's sense of responsibility to the common good through acts of kindness, generosity, or charity or it can be context specific. For example, a principal who is an active recycler (i.e., demonstrating felt accountability for the environment) may also feel accountable to the teachers and students in their building but not those in another school (i.e., demonstrating contextually bound felt accountability).

As Knapp and Feldman (2012) have posited, in schools, felt accountability is evidenced when principals and teachers hold *themselves* accountable for their own contributions to student learning and well-being and for the collective performance of the whole school. Similarly, as research (Hoy et al., 2006; Wood & Winston, 2005) suggests, members of the school community feel a greater sense of support for and investment in the school when leaders demonstrate their sense of responsibility toward the larger school community in clear observable ways (e.g., securing needed resources, actively working to resolve conflicts and concerns). Moreover, for school leaders, felt accountability overlaps with ethical leadership since the execution of ethical leadership relies on care, attention to the best interests of others, and a sense of moral obligation to do what is right. Like ethical leadership, felt accountability rests on common principles and values, including integrity, fairness, trust, and honesty.

Felt accountability requires school leaders to identify what matters to them and act accordingly, holding themselves personally and publicly accountable for those actions. These ideas are summed up well by Declan Rhee:

For me, it's about the people…yeah, I care about our state ranking, I got to. And we work hard to give kids the best education we can. We do PD, we [stress] good teaching and learning. But really, in the end, it's my teachers, the kids, their families that matter. I care about them. I hope they trust me… It's my job to make school a good place for them…that's what I care about.

As Rhee suggests, felt accountability, shifts the focus of leadership attention. By stressing to *whom* a leader feels an obligation, felt accountability directs leadership action toward the broad school community, as opposed to solely stressing *what* outcomes are to be achieved. When woven with strong systems and routines, felt accountability makes actionable school leaders' commitments to student learning and well-being. Leah Willson's story illustrates how routines and accountability can be mindfully woven together.

Leah Willson, a former kindergarten and first-grade teacher, came to the principalship after 20 years in the classroom. Now in her fourth year as principal at Hilltop Crest Elementary School, Willson stresses how mindful leadership includes accountability to oneself and others. She explains:

I'm a very reflective person. I will think of a conversation I had with someone and there are times when I will follow-up and say, "I didn't handle that as I would have liked." Or "that didn't go like I thought it would. Can we have a redo?" Or I send an apology message like, "I did not communicate that well. I was not my best self that day and I'm sorry."… Usually, I'm pretty good at anticipating but sometimes, I get caught off guard and it's like "really?" Then I have to go back and do it over…

Pressed for detail, Willson clarifies,

How do I do that? I think first I hold myself accountable to my teachers, the students, their families. If I get it wrong, I admit it, I apologize and I make amends. Always those three A's. They matter to me… But after that, or maybe so I don't get to that, I have these routines, I walk the building, I talk to people, I'm professional and kind no matter what… I can deliver a very difficult message while being kind. If I couldn't, I wouldn't want this job. I would rather surprise someone with kindness. I think that actually goes farther in terms of creating change, or making a situation turn, or supporting a relationship. I think, really deep listening and then responding with kindness, but also directness, goes a long way.

As Willson describes, felt accountability is most powerful when it results in the creation of mindful and responsive leadership practice.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Just as the intentional use of systems thinking, the development of productive routines, and felt accountability can enhance cognitive mindfulness, so can the

purposeful development of individual and collective efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines individual efficacy as, "beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Yet, efficacy is task specific. Unlike other conceptions of self, such as self-concept or self-esteem, individual efficacy rarely generalizes among and between situations (Goddard et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2001). A person may feel high levels of efficacy for familiar tasks and activities. On the other hand, that same person may experience low levels of efficacy for unfamiliar or untried pursuits. An accomplished skier has reason to feel a strong sense of efficacy even when skiing in a new location. Yet, they may possess low efficacy in new situations. Consequently, As Klassnen (2010) and Kulophas et al. (2018) have found, one's sense of efficacy influences the choice of activity, investment of effort, and persistence.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy extends the construct of individual efficacy to a larger group. As Bandura (1997) suggests, "collective efficacy represents a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 477). Therefore, collective efficacy is *communal* and results from the group's prior experiences of successful performance. Collective efficacy asks the question, "What can *we* do, together, to achieve *our* goals?" Much like individual efficacy, collective efficacy is built on success. However, collective efficacy does not develop without leadership effort.

As Murphy and Louis (2018) suggest, absent supportive organizational conditions collective efficacy is unlikely to emerge. In schools, several organizational factors have been linked to the development of collective efficacy. These include positive school climate and culture, support for and development of effective instruction, and teacher engagement and empowerment (Goddard, et al., 2004; Klassen, 2010; Kulophas et al., 2018). In studies outside of schools, shared optimism and motivation to succeed have been identified as significant factors in the development of collective efficacy (Watson et al., 2001). Thus, leaders seeking to establish collective efficacy must focus on creating school environments in which organizational members understand the importance of acting collectively as opposed to settings that privilege individual reward. Research (Hesbol, 2019; Kulophas et al., 2018; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Qadach et al., 2020) suggests promoting collective action fosters collective efficacy, professionally positive and satisfying personal relationships, personal and collective growth and development, and connects decision-making and organizational vision to shared values.

Collective Work

If collective action is to result in positive outcomes, an organizational culture directed toward improvement and success must be developed. Key to the development of creating an improvement–and success-oriented culture is intentional

leadership action focused on helping faculty and staff to see themselves, *in concert* with their colleagues, as vital to the school's success (Goddard et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2001). Moreover, participation in meaningful collective work not only builds efficacy but also serves as a powerful antidote to teacher turnover, stress, burnout, and disillusionment (Klassen, 2010; Kulophas et al., 2018). As Marc Smythe, principal at Voyagers High School suggests, building collective efficacy can be a powerful leadership emphasis.

Voyagers High School was built in 2010 to accommodate increasing district enrollment. As the founding principal of Voyagers, Marc Smythe took the job understanding that "this wasn't an opportunity that comes up very often" and that "building a school from the ground up [was] a real chance to create the conditions that build impact." As he shared:

> I was really excited. When I interviewed, I think I used the words "collective impact" over a hundred times. I took this job because I wanted to build a team that from the start knew they needed to work together, that wanted to work together. If [the district] didn't want that, I wasn't their guy. I mean, I know working in schools, it's hard. I also know, because we had a real school community at [my former school], when people care about each other it makes a difference… When I interviewed folks to come work here, I asked them what helping students succeed meant to them, what impact they hoped to make on kids [and] how they planned to build community. I was very, very aware that because we were hiring in new teams, we had a real opportunity to get the right folks in place at the start.

Asked to describe who the "right people" were, Smythe answered:

> I wanted people who felt like they were ready, that they were confident in their own ability to teach, to work with students, to work with each other. We wanted team players, teachers who had confidence but also had humility. We were clear, [Voyagers'] didn't need rock-stars, we're about working as a whole, focusing on the whole…and that what was going to make you successful at this school had more to do with how you worked with others than it had to do with being individually great. I mean, great teachers are important, definitely, but building a collective, you know people who were pulling together, that was the goal.

Thus, as Smythe suggests, collective efficacy rarely emerges by happenstance. Rather, it is the product of intentional mindful planning and follow-through.

UNLEARNING

An important aspect of building productive systems and routines, internally assumed accountability, and efficacy is the development of intentional unlearning (Cegarra-Navarro & Wensley, 2019; Klammer & Gueldenberg, 2019). Unlearning is not forgetting. Unlearning focuses on the purposeful

elimination of policy, practice, and procedures that no longer serve organizational needs, whereas forgetting is unintentional. Intentional unlearning creates the conditions under which cognitive capacity for new learning can be developed (Cegarra-Navarro & Wensley, 2019). Conversely, forgetting is passive and occurs when new knowledge or skills deteriorate over time or are inadvertently abandoned.

Intentional Effort

When school leaders ask questions like "What do we need to let go of for X to happen?" "What beliefs do we need to challenge if X is to happen?" or "What prompts X to act (or happen) in Y ways?" unlearning is fostered. However, unlearning does not simply occur. Unlearning requires that school leaders intentionally direct efforts toward unpacking the choices, challenges, and thoughts inspired by questions like these. Furthermore, it is not enough to discard older, less productive, ways of working. For unlearning to be efficacious, older knowledge and skills must be replaced by new, clearly understood, and accepted systems and practices. As Akgun et al. (2007) and Visser (2017) suggest, unlearning follows a pattern where organizational members become aware of a mismatch between current practice and intended performance, the interruption and relinquishing of outdated or unproductive procedures and routines, and a period of relearning and application of new ideas and practices. Elliot Barcia of Kings Canyon High School describes his school's processes of unlearning:

> It's all so overwhelming. It feels like, we just add stuff and never take anything away. At least we don't explicitly talk about getting rid of stuff. I mean yeah, if we get new [materials], we take the old stuff away. But we don't really talk about what we're not doing any more. Letting go is a big part of change. We don't do that well…[we] replace, we add on, we sort of expect folks to reexamine what they think but we don't formalize that. We're not clear, I've never heard someone explicitly say, because we're doing this, we're not doing that anymore. So, I try to. I try to point out, ask teachers, how does this change what you think and do… Doing new is hard and I have teachers, they loved doing that old thing, that lesson on the family tree or whatever. So, part of my job, I think, is to hold a space for growth too.

As Barcia notes, unlearning is a key feature of cognitively mindful leadership. Indeed, ignoring a problem does not mean the problem has gone away. Nor does ignoring reticence to change result in improved practice. Ultimately, if school leaders are to support improvement efforts, mindful attention must be paid to unlearning.

BELONGING

Undeniably, leadership includes an affective component. No matter the leadership action, organizational members will react. Sometimes reactions are

strongly and universally positive. Sometimes leadership decisions result in pleasing some and distressing others. Sometimes no one is happy because the decision required choosing between equally bad choices. Often, leaders instinctively consider and prepare for those reactions. However, when preparation is haphazard, the result can be alienation, distrust, and cynicism. One antidote to potentially negative outcomes is the mindful development of connection and belonging in the school (Bowles & Scull, 2019; Michaleson, 2021).

Educational Spaces and Belonging

Belonging has been suggested to be an essential factor in K12 student success (Bowles & Scull, 2019; Gray et al., 2018; Libbey, 2004). Students who report a sense of belonging are more likely to fare well academically (Gray et al., 2018), exhibit increased motivation to do well in school (Bowles & Scull, 2019), and are less likely to be absent (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Gowling, 2019). Moreover, belonging is posited to be important across one's lifespan. Studies of college students (Pedler et al., 2021; Raaper, 2021) suggest students who report a strong sense of belonging have higher motivation, more academic self-confidence, and higher levels of academic engagement and achievement. As a result, belonging to higher education is thought to increase student persistence and retention. Studies of adults (Buijs et al., 2021; Michalski et al., 2020) suggest that belonging contributes to decreased social isolation and better mental and physical health. Consequently, physicians and social workers who work with adult populations attend not only to the symptoms a patient reports but also to their larger systems of belonging, support, and social engagement.

Yet, as our understanding of the importance of belonging grows, what belonging means has become increasingly ill-defined. In part this is because belonging, as a theoretical construct, has been considered a key variable in studies of attachment theory (Watson, 2019), school culture and climate (Brittian & Gray, 2014; Gray et al., 2018), diversity and equity (Banks & Banks, 2010; Berryman & Eley, 2019), student engagement (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Bowles & Scull, 2019), and social inclusion and exclusion (Crisp, 2010; Scorgie & Forlin, 2019). While these studies have all concluded that belonging plays an important role in people's lives, what contributes to a person's sense of belonging is less well understood.

As Libbey (2004) suggests, in K12 schools, belonging is enhanced by teacher supportiveness and caring, the presence of good friends, engagement in academics, fair and consistent discipline, feeling safe at school, and participation in extra-curricular activities. Gray et al. (2018) extend Libbey's thinking, observing that the promotion of cultural competence offers a path to creating belonging in schools. Therefore, in K12 schools, creating a sense of belonging among students includes interpersonal and instructional processes. Relatedly, if students are to feel a sense of belonging, a precursor must be developing a sense of connection and belonging among teachers and staff (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Good et al., 2016). However, as Bowles & Scull (2019) and Gray et al. (2018) point out, numerous structural and cultural factors affect how the school environment is experienced and understood. Therefore,

creating a school environment that fosters belonging is a complex and multi-dimensional task.

Additionally, belonging is not a static state. Nor is belonging a singular experience. We simultaneously belong to many dissimilar groups (e.g., including those based on age, race, sexuality, occupation, hobbies) and commonly move in and out of states of belonging. Furthermore, when change occurs, belonging must be reinvented and reestablished (Crisp, 2010). This is particularly salient for school leaders because it underscores that developing a culture of belonging is an ongoing and active process. Thus, belonging is not given nor is it something that can be achieved and forgotten.

Finally, as May (2011) notes, a lack of belonging can ignite change. Historically, social and political change has been motivated by feelings of non-belonging. However, the expectation that marginalized people and groups must experience long-term and damaging experiences before change occurs is profoundly inequitable. This is especially true in schools where ongoing marginalization and feelings of non-belonging are more likely to result in disengagement with learning and school rather than meaningful reform.

Connectedness

Belonging is closely linked to connectedness. Often, these terms are used interchangeably however, as May (2011) and Crisp (2010) note, one can be connected to a place or institution yet still not feel like they belong. For example, church members may feel connected to churches of the same denomination and not feel a sense of belonging to churches they do not regularly attend. Similarly, students might feel connected to a particular teacher or student group but their sense of belonging to the larger school community might be lacking. Furthermore, in schools where implicit or explicit racism, bullying, or social ostracism are commonly present, belonging is hard to achieve even if students feel connected to one another.

Interactions and Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are central to establishing a strong sense of belonging. For students, interpersonal relationships include those with teachers, school staff, and peers (Bowles & Scull, 2019; Gray et al., 2018). For adults, interpersonal relationships extend beyond the school including relationships that encompass the larger school community (e.g., parents, district leadership, central office staff). As research (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Good et al., 2016) has proposed, connective ties are created and sustained when leaders attend to building respectful engagement, trust, and a focus on the well-being of all members within the school.

Importantly, high-quality relationships are not created by positive, but shallow statements and mottos. Professional and personal respect, trust, and a focus on well-being cannot be built via motivational posters or periodic displays of support. Because relationship building is an intensely personal matter, it is difficult to provide a recipe or checklist of leadership actions guaranteed to

create high-quality relationships. Therefore, leaders must also attend to creating a sense of belonging that extends to the ways the school, as an institution, functions and is experienced. Inasmuch as experience is unavoidably personal and therefore impossible to predict, it is important to note that school leaders can only create conditions with the potential to foster belonging and connection. However, working on several fronts offers more opportunities for success than more limited actions. These include building opportunities for influence, meeting members' needs, and mindfully attending to belonging as a core value.

Influence. Influence suggests that organizational members, be they teachers, students, staff, or families, experience a sense of belonging more strongly when they believe that they have some authority over the policies and practices within the school (Gray et al., 2018; Good et al., 2016; Rodela & Bertrand, 2023). Linked to respectful engagement (Dutton & Ragins, 2017), creating opportunities for influence require that school leaders, teachers, and other school personnel intentionally work at being open to new ideas and taking them into consideration when planning future initiatives and programs. Activities might include the appointment of students, families, teachers, and others to decision-making bodies, regular opportunities for those same groups to set the agenda for formal and informal meetings, and/or significant investments in the development of a school culture focused on inclusion and equity (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Bowles & Scull, 2019; Libbey, 2004). No matter the activity, the goal must be to create conditions where organizational members can be heard and feel seen (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

Members' needs. As the resiliency research (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2021) suggests, a sense of belonging is fostered when resources are provided that meet self-identified needs and when people have a sense of control in and of their daily lives. In practice, this means mindful attention should be paid to matching resources to members' challenges and strengths. In the case of students, this means thinking beyond traditional programs and practices to include student and family input concerning choices of interventions, services, and assistance. It also means a careful review of who is referred for disciplinary actions and who is placed in gifted and talented programs (Gray et al., 2018). In the case of adults, this means offering diverse and responsive opportunities for professional learning, engagement in meaningful work, and significant collaboration with like-minded colleagues (Dutton & Ragins, 2017; Kruse, 2020). The idea here is not to create a school environment where anything goes. Rather, it is to create school environments where multiple connections can be fostered and the opportunities for those connections are transparent and relational.

Mindful attention. Absent mindful attention, we risk perpetuating outdated, alienating, and exclusionary practice. Furthermore, we risk compromising our values and goals as well as our commitments to children, adolescents, and their families. Rosa Fortin's experiences exemplify cognitive mindfulness in practice.

Rosa Fortin has been Salmon River Middle School's principal for five years. A Black woman, Fortin was hired at Salmon River to lead a predominately

white faculty and staff. She suggests that her own experiences with race and equity uniquely position her for the work she is doing now. She explains:

> Just after I came to SR, I had this multiracial family come in and tell me that their sixth-grade daughter was accused of stealing. You know one of those, something's missing from my backpack things. They thought she'd been singled out. There was a part of me, you know, that wanted to say no, no, that never would have happened here. She wasn't singled out. Not in my school. But I knew, in my heart, yes, that's exactly what could have happened. So instead, I said, "Wow, thank you for coming to talk to me. This is a really important subject and experience for me to be aware of. I promise to further investigate." And the parents were happy, they said they "just wanted me to know." Some people they would have dropped it there. [The parents] felt like I listened to them. I could have dropped it. But I didn't, I actually said, "Can you tell me if this is the first time you felt race was a factor in how your daughter was treated in this school?" It was uncomfortable. I wasn't enjoying it. I'm not going to lie. It wasn't something that made me happy to hear, nor would I ever want a student in my school, under my care, to feel singled out because of her race. I mean it was a horrific situation… I just wanted them to know I cared. I shared some of the [anti-racism] work I had started, and I said, we have a long way to go. I acknowledged that. But I also wanted them to know they belonged here. That their daughter belonged here and that we needed to do better for them and her… I promised to follow-up to talk to the teachers involved. In the end, well you know, there are times we never fully resolve the situation. I still don't know what really happened, but the family knows I'm listening, that I care…

IN CONCLUSION

Becoming a cognitively mindful leader is a demanding task. Yet, as research suggests (Langer, 2014; Rerup, 2005) practicing cognitive mindfulness creates opportunities for principals to build school environments that are informed by robust systems of information and that include the worldviews, experiences, and perspectives of organizational members. In turn, and because of these intentional and purposeful leadership actions, trust and commitment are fostered, and belonging is developed. Because cognitive mindfulness prompts leaders to be curious, think carefully, speak clearly, and act in good faith, the schools they lead are better places to work and learn.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Compassion

Practicing cognitive mindfulness in a sustained way asks that school leaders look not only at the things that are going well but also those that are not. In fact, practicing cognitive mindfulness suggests that considerable leadership

effort should be directed toward things that are hard, painful, and persistent. The first noble truth of Buddhism is that life is hard. Or in Pali, life is *dukkha*. Dukkha is often translated as suffering; however, suffering is an inadequate word to capture the essence of what dukkha includes. The Buddha taught that there are three states of dukkha. Dukkha-dukkha, or ordinary suffering, includes the kinds of hard or unpleasant things we encounter in everyday life including physical, emotional, and mental pain. Hurt feelings, a sprained ankle, and fear of failure are all examples of dukkha-dukkha or the suffering of suffering. A second form of dukkha, viparinama-dukkha includes the kind of pain we feel when things change. The Buddha taught that all things are impermanent, they change, and when we cling to the past, we subject ourselves to the pain caused by resisting change. Good or bad it is all temporary. This does not mean that we should not enjoy happiness or success. It simply means that change is inevitable and that resisting change is a cause of suffering. A third form of dukkha is samkhara-dukkha or suffering caused by the satisfactoriness of conditionality. In other words, pain that arises when things are not how we believe or want them to be. Another way to think of samkhara-dukkha is that it is the pain of imperfection. When our happiness is contingent on things being as they should, we are setting ourselves up to experience samkhara-dukkha, the suffering of comparison.

Karuna bhavana is a meditative practice that focuses our attention on the realities of dukkha, that life is hard, stressful, and painful. Importantly, karuna bhavana acknowledges that there is no avoiding pain, suffering, unpleasantness, and imperfection. Karuna bhavana focuses attention on extending compassion to ourselves and others. Karuna bhavana expressly focuses on our ability to be present to suffering. Karuna bhavana is traditionally practiced for others with the understanding that, as human beings, we are never separate and therefore, our suffering is connected and connects us.

However, compassion is often misunderstood. Compassion is not pity, righteous anger, or guilt. It is not feeling sorry for someone else's plight or getting lost in feelings of outrage and fury. Understandably, it does not take a lot of effort to feel overcome by all the things that happen in the world that are out of our control. It is natural to feel angered by injustice and to feel sorrow and grief when confronted by devastating loss. However, making the pain of others about us is not compassion. Neither is compassion about feeling bad for our good fortune in the face of another's loss or adversity.

Acting with compassion requires that we acknowledge that pain and suffering are part of life. Absolutely everywhere, people are suffering. Moreover, acknowledging that suffering is universal is a first step toward developing compassion. The meditative practice of karuna bhavana helps us to step back from our own pain and the pain of others. Practicing karuna bhavana helps us to become less reactive to suffering, and to be *with* and not *in* the patterns of our conditioned responses to pain. To be clear, stepping back from the pain of others does not mean we do not care about them. Rather stepping back, as a response to suffering, provides us the space to recognize what we can and cannot do in the face of pain. In this way, karuna bhavana helps us to

move our feelings off centerstage and make space for others. Karuna bhavana expands our ability to see that no matter what, suffering is part of life and that our skillful response to pain is all that is required.

The following meditation offers a way to acknowledge pain, our own and that of others, and to come to that pain from a place of compassion. As with other meditations, the effort here is not to make yourself feel compassion. The goal is to shift your attention toward compassion. The practice of karuna bhavana is not about making yourself feel better nor does it have any magical power to heal others. It is not about wishing things to be better or using your meditation to absolve yourself from other kinds of involvement that may alleviate suffering in more tangible ways (e.g., sitting with someone in need, providing monetary support for a worthy cause, providing a meal when someone is ill). It is (not so) simply about uncovering the healing powers of compassion within all of us.

- Start by finding a comfortable posture. Breathe for a few rounds. Sense where your body is in space and how you are approaching this round of sitting.
- As you move into this practice, it may be useful to begin with a few rounds of metta bhavana, loving-kindness meditation. Starting from a place of kindness helps develop compassion.
- Unlike metta bhavana, karuna bhavana uses only one or two phrases. Choosing more than two phrases has the potential to overwhelm. Classically, the phrases are:
  - May I/you be free from suffering.
  - May I/you find peace.
- The point is to keep your attentions directed toward compassion and to be clear about what suffering you are hoping is lightened or eased.
- While it is not necessary to begin with yourself, you may. Overlooking our own needs can exacerbate our own suffering. Therefore, offering compassion to yourself might be a kind, first step.
- Next, focus on a friend in distress. This practice is best attempted by focusing on a real person. As tempting as it might be to start with an intention to alleviate suffering across the globe, you will be more successful at developing real feelings of compassion with a focus on someone with whom you already feel a connection.
- Repeat your chosen phrases for several rounds keeping your focus on your friend. If you find it too challenging to stay with someone you feel a connection to, you might want to shift your focus to a more neutral person.
- Try to stick with your felt experience. Thoughts (and especially judgements) can hook you right back into a state of suffering. Try to be open, receiving, and allowing and let be what is. If you jump immediately to thoughts you might ask yourself, "What am I telling myself, that is making me feel (or think) X?" and then return to the practice.
- End by offering yourself compassion once again. We all deserve compassion.

    Variations. If the suggested phrases do not resonate, it may be useful to try more specific and direct sentences such as:

- May I/you be free from oppression.
- May I/you be free from anger.
- May I/you be free from pain.
- May I/you be free from sadness and sorrow.

Compassion mediation is about learning to cultivate the skills that allow us to be present in all of our life. Most of us tend to look for some kind of epiphany so that we can find a way to conjure up the kinds of moments we prefer. Meditating on compassion, no matter the phrase you choose, helps us to realize that awareness may be subtle, but it is always possible.

Activity

ACTIVITY 5

COGNITIVE MINDFULNESS SELF-ASSESSMENT (GOOD ET AL., 2016; HOY ET AL., 2006; PIRSON & LANGER, 2014)

As with the contemplative self-assessment, this scale is designed to allow you to consider how cognitively mindful you believe yourself to be.

	Comfort	Stretch
I am open to new ideas.		
I regularly seek out others to hear their ideas.		
I can get lost in a project, assignment, or undertaking.		
I enjoy intellectual challenge.		
I enjoy learning new things.		
Others look to me for creative solutions to problems or concerns.		
After I decide something, when presented new, relevant information, I am able to change my mind.		
I can "read a room" and know how to act or what to say.		
I am not easily overwhelmed by new ideas or situations.		
I often take time to reflect before I make a decision.		
I rarely jump to conclusions.		
When I am stuck, I look to others for insights.		
I am an engaged and patient listener.		
I make original contributions to problem-solving discussions.		

After reflecting on your responses, choose one or more of these questions for consideration:

● Are you as cognitively mindful as you would like to be?
● If you were to choose one area to focus your efforts, what would it be and why?

Additional Resources

Resources help build cognitive mindfulness. The following organizations offer school leaders support for learning, professional development, and grant funding.

- *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* www.carnegiefoundation.org: Established by an Act of Congress in 1905, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching seeks to increase educational attainment, catalyze post-secondary education, explore the future of teaching, and leverage improvement science in an effort to foster educational equity. The website is home to a variety of publications, video resources, and free tools for principals and superintendents to explore.
- *The Kresge Foundation* www.kresge.org: Located in Detroit, the Kresge Foundation works to address the pressing concerns of America's cities. Focusing on issues like the environment, health, and education the foundation provides community grants and reports from previous grantees with the intent to improve, through increased coordination and flexibility of resource funding, the lives of residents. All website materials are free.
- *The NEA Foundation* www.neafoundation.org: The NEA Foundation is a national nonprofit founded by educators and devoted to promoting public education. Educators will find numerous grant opportunities, digital lesson plans, and programs designed to provide resources to schools and districts.
- *The Wallace Foundation* www.wallacefoundation.org: Established by DeWitt and Lila Wallace, founders of the *Reader's Digest*, The Wallace Foundation seeks to foster equity for children, adolescents and in the arts. In particular, The Wallace Foundation focuses on school leadership, summer and expanded learning, social and emotional learning, and after-school programming. The website includes an online Knowledge Center, a repository of free guides and reports, videos, and infographics.
- *The W. K. Kellogg Foundation* www.wkkf.org: Working across the globe, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation supports families, children, and communities by providing resources to assure that all children have a promising future. Through grants and other forms of support, the foundation sponsors efforts designed to help children thrive, support working families, and foster equitable communities. The website includes a resource directory (see the issue lab tab) for reports and other grant produced materials.

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ORGANIZATIONAL MINDFULNESS

Reliability and Dependability

In March 2020 everyone's life changed. Faced with clear evidence that the coronavirus had become an unprecedented global crisis, and with little warning, school leaders sent teachers and students home, abandoned face-to-face instruction, and shifted to online learning. Practically overnight, principals and teachers became a lifeline for students and families. The issues were daunting and numerous. Principals and teachers were tasked with delivering instruction, and caring for students and their families, while, in many cases, monitoring their own children's online educational progress. As the pandemic wore on the issues and problems educators faced became more uncertain and ambiguous. Addressing food insecurity, lack of reliable internet service, and the physical and mental health of students became daily concerns for many school leaders. Nonetheless, educators persisted and waited for the day "things would return to normal."

However, in many schools, even as students have returned to school and regular classroom instruction has resumed, the toll of the pandemic still resonates. Across the nation, teachers and students are grieving the loss of a parent or loved one. Reports (Barron Rodriguez et al., 2020; Carver-Thomas et al., 2021) suggest that a significant number of students have fallen behind academically and others have lingering social and emotional difficulties.

Additionally, persistent school leadership concerns have not abated. School safety remains an enduring concern as do challenges to curriculum and school policies. It would be deeply comforting to describe the current educational environment as "uncharacteristic" and filled with "temporary" difficulties. Yet, as comforting as this narrative may be, it is more likely that the intensifying change, instability, and unpredictability of our times will persist. Sadly, it is unlikely that things will get easier for school leaders any time soon.

Without a doubt, practicing contemplative and cognitive mindfulness offers benefits to school leaders facing challenging times. Contemplative mindfulness helps school leaders understand themselves better. Cognitive mindfulness provides school leaders with the tools to better understand how others experience the world. Each is important. Yet, even practiced in tandem, important organizational signals and cues can be missed. *Organizational mindfulness* targets those signals and cues. Organizational mindfulness offers leaders a framework for detecting, correcting, and preventing errors and problems before they become crises (Bellamy et al., 2005; Cantu et al., 2021; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Weick & Roberts, 1993; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

MISTAKES AND ERRORS

The truth of the matter is, as Murphy's Law suggests, if something can go wrong, it will. Murphy's Law acknowledges that all human beings make mistakes. Organizational mindfulness concedes that mistakes are unavoidable and embraces that truth. As Angel Morraw suggests:

> I completely get, 100%, that I'm human and so is everyone who works with me. We're not going to get this right all the time. We have to know how to own our missteps and recover. If I model that… I think it's easier to do hard things.

However, individual and organizational mistakes and errors can produce unintended, undesirable, and, at times, dire consequences for school leaders.

Researchers (Lawson, 2021; Leveson, 2009) draw a distinction between an error and a mistake. While both can be corrected, mistakes are considered easier to rectify. Mistakes happen because, as Angel Morrow points out, we are all fallible. Mental and physical strain cause people to make mistakes as do misunderstandings and attentional lapses. Often a correction and change in the behavior of a single person (or a small group) is all that is needed to correct a mistake. Errors result when people intentionally or unintentionally deviate from established rules and procedures. Errors are more serious than mistakes and, if they are to be resolved, often require learning, time, and resources.

Moreover, mistakes and errors can occur at both the individual and organizational level. No doubt, personal mistakes are embarrassing and distressing. Forgetting someone's name just after you have been introduced is awkward. Missing a deadline or forgetting to attend an important meeting can be humbling. Submitting an inaccurate report to the district office or providing incorrect information to faculty, staff, and parents is humiliating. While the personal

costs of mistakes may be high, typically, their impact is limited. More troubling are mistakes and errors that happen at the organizational level.

Organizational mistakes and errors can have significant and lasting effects. When the actions of multiple people diverge from organizationally identified procedures, policies, or practices, the result can be devastating. Organizational mistakes and errors can lead to major disruption, distraction from important goals and values, and significant loss of trust and reputation. Furthermore, unraveling an organizational-level error often requires an in-depth analysis of root causes and identifying how organizational members, units, and teams are affected (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Additionally, in most organizations, individual and organizational factors are interwoven, and most organizational errors are the result of both (Duckek, 2020; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006).

What is a leader to do? Essentially, leaders have two choices, they can react (i.e., address the error or mistake after it occurs) or they can be proactive and focus on avoiding missteps before they occur. Realistically, leaders need to do both. Because it is simply not possible to plan for every contingency, *reaction strategies* are important leadership tools. Reaction strategies inform future practice and include incident response and debriefing strategies (Shapiro et al., 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015) and the creation of new, and hopefully better, ways to address enduring issues (Cantu et al., 2020; Yukofsky, 2022). *Proactive strategies* include building redundancy into the system or routine (Langer, 2014; Andersson et al., 2019), ongoing professional learning and reflection opportunities (Lorton et al., 2013; Spillane et al., 2019), and targeted, regular assessment and evaluation of existing policies and practices (Sutcliffe et al., 2016; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). These examples are not intended to be exhaustive. Nor can the adoption of any one alone error-proof a school. However, when leaders focus on detecting, correcting, and preventing errors and problems before they arise, they are working to assure organizational reliability by engaging in organizational mindfulness.

BUILDING HIGHLY RELIABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational mindfulness is a concept initially introduced and developed by Weick and Roberts (1993) as a tool for leading organizations where the consequences and costs of failure are extremely high (e.g., loss of life, significant property or assets, or organizational reputation). First explored in organizations that operate in typically hazardous environments (e.g., firefighting, aircraft flight decks, nuclear power plants), the construct has been applied broadly in studies of K12 schools (Bellamy, 2005; Gilbert, 2019; Hoy, 2003; Kruse & Johnson, 2017), healthcare and business environments (Hales & Chakravorty, 2016; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015), and higher education (Ray, Baker & Plowman, 2011). No matter the context, acting in organizationally mindful ways has been proven to provide leadership benefits in schools, businesses, and other workplaces.

Vogus and Stucliffe (2012) define organizational mindfulness as, "the extent to which an organization captures discriminatory detail about emerging threats

and creates a capability to swiftly act in response to these details" (p. 723). However, capturing "discriminatory detail" and focusing on "emerging threats" does not happen by chance. Nor does swift action. Instead, each is the result of attention to what the organization needs to accomplish *and* what it should never allow to happen. Research (Rerup, 2009; Vogus & Rerup, 2017; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012) suggests that *highly reliable organizations* purposefully organize to balance success (i.e., achieving goals) and failure (i.e., disastrous mistakes and errors). Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) posit that highly reliable organizations (HROs) are marked by five key leadership principles for reliable organizing. These include preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise.

Preoccupation with Failure

Preoccupation with failure institutionalizes caution and wariness (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). Preoccupation with failure promotes the practice of intentional, ongoing inquiry into the effectiveness of organizational practices (Gilbert, 2019; Lawson, 2021). By treating any lapse in organizational practice or procedure as a symptom of potential organizational error, preoccupation with failure directs leaders to identify small anomalies within larger organizational systems in hopes of resolving issues before they become more troubling concerns. Leaders who are preoccupied with failure appreciate that in any situation, understanding of and knowledge about the situation is unavoidably incomplete. Therefore, anticipating potential mistakes and errors prepares leaders to respond early and avoid more serious organizational outcomes. As Julia Barbeau explains,

> It's sort of a joke, I always ask "What could possibly go wrong?" People laugh but then I really make them think it through. I am serious. If we can figure out what might happen, we can avoid at least that mistake.

In addition to asking, "What could possibly go wrong?" leaders who are preoccupied with failure can also ask questions such as:

- What procedures, policies, or practices must be in place for things to go right?
- How are mistakes and errors handled when they do occur?
- Do faculty and staff feel secure when they raise concerns or worries? Are they listened to?
- What can be done to create a school culture that supports the identification of potential problems so that serious mistakes and errors can be avoided?

Reluctance to Simplify

Reluctance to simplify recognizes that organizations are complex places and that leaders rely on multiple forms of data, information, and knowledge as

TABLE 6.1

HRO principles, organizational features, and applications to practice

HRO Principles	Organizational Features	Applications to Practice
	Leaders who apply HRO principles…	
Preoccupation with Failure	Institutionalize caution & wariness	Work to detect small, emerging issues
	Adopt inquiry as a leadership stance	Anticipate & specify significant mistakes to avoid
	Attend to evolving cues of failure	Assume that knowledge is always incomplete
Reluctance to Simplify	Rely on multiple forms of data, information, & knowledge	Engage in intensive problem finding & definition
	Critically analyze events & issues	Appreciate & explore organizational complexities
	Demonstrate a willingness to revise explanations in the face of new data & information	Institutionalize continuous improvement planning
Sensitivity to Operations	Look to actual rather than intended practice for cues	Create multiple avenues for members to speak up
	Attend to how policies, practice, & procedures interact & interrelate	Maintain powerful social ties
	Develop a depth of knowledge concerning organizational processes & activities	Reward the public examination of practice
Commitment to Resilience	Do not allow unintended events & outcomes to derail attention away from central goals & values	Use continuous monitoring to develop a mindset & spirit of contextual & situational learning
	Act in the face of uncertainty	Focus on strategic action
Deference to Expertise	Accept that all knowledge is bounded & limited	Ask for help & additional data & information in problem-solving & decision-making situations
	Seek & value the input & experience of others	Include a variety of perspectives & voices in regular & ongoing ways

Source: Bellamy et al., 2005; Cantu et al., 2021; Eby et al., 2020; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Weick & Roberts, 1993; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015.

part of the problem-finding and defining process. When leaders are reluctant to simplify, they avoid the trap of prematurely categorizing issues and concerns and overlooking complex explanations of incidents and concerns. Critical analysis and a willingness to revise initial explanations in the face of new data and information are key indicators of reluctance to simplify in action. Thus, reluctance to simplify prompts leaders to not accept the easy explanation and to press for a comprehensive and nuanced read, one that seeks detail and allows for situations to be skillfully resolved. Simon Kimberly of Powell Middle School explains it this way:

> We like to name our problems quickly. Then we're off and running to solve what we think is going on. More than once I've gone to a lot of trouble only to find I've missed what was really happening. I've learned to slow myself down and take more time to [critically] think about what's really happening before I jump into it.

Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) suggest attention to questions like the following, can aid school leaders in becoming reluctant to simplify.

- What happens when someone poses difficult questions? Are they listened to?
- When data and information are being analyzed or discussed are a variety of explanations encouraged before decisions are reached?
- When someone offers an alternative explanation for a schoolwide issue or concern is it accepted or are they dismissed? Are there ideas given respect?
- Are policies, practices, and procedures regularly reviewed when other changes have occurred within the school? If they seem unaligned, what is the response?

Sensitivity to Operations

Sensitivity to operations suggests that regardless of "intentions, designs, and plans" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015, pg. 79) leaders must pay attention to what actually is happening within an organization. Sensitivity to operations builds on a preoccupation with failure (i.e., detecting problems) and reluctance to simplify (i.e., examining the logic and processes behind leadership activity) because it encourages leaders to focus on organizational work in real time. Additionally, sensitivity to operations encourages situational awareness and attention to how policies, practices, and procedures interact and interrelate (Weick & Roberts, 1993). It requires leaders to attend to the system, looking at both the forest and the trees. As Henri Olesson suggests, engaging in sensitivity to operations is everyone's work.

> Being in the district office it's easy to become numb to what's happening in classrooms. We adopt new [curriculum and instructional practices] and then hope they're working... I've found taking the time to check back in, to see how new stuff is being used really helps us to know if we're getting the

results, we wanted…the only way to do this is to talk with a lot of folks and to be out there in the schools and community. If they don't know me and I don't know them, I really have no way to know what's going on. If I don't know what's going on, I can't anticipate what we might need next.

Questions for leaders interested in growing their sensitivity to operations ask questions like:

- Are school and district goals clearly stated and are teachers, staff, and students' caregivers aware of what needs to be accomplished for them to be met?
- Do school and district leaders pay attention to day-to-day events, situations, and practices?
- Is feedback provided sensitively and in ways that promote learning and changed behavior?
- Are changes in the school or district's community, region, or state noted and discussed? Are plans developed to respond to issues with the potential to impact schools?

Commitment to Resilience

A commitment to resilience requires two complementary foci. First, leaders must orient organizational attention to core missions and values on a regular basis. In schools and other organizations, it is not uncommon for mission and vision work, strategic and curriculum planning efforts, and other big-picture activities to be forgotten as soon as the work is completed. Leaders with a commitment to resilience use their mission, vision, and values as tools for problem-solving, budget planning, and other important organizational decisions. Moreover, they point to school and district vision and values when they explain why they made the choices they did and how the vision and its underlying values are reflected in their choices. Resilience is built as a result of coherent and aligned actions and behaviors.

Second, leaders must be willing to strategically act in the face of uncertainty to assure that the organization endures and thrives despite its challenges. Tightly linked to the HRO hallmark of sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience adopts a mindset of contextual and situational learning focused on strategic action. It suggests that in the face of challenge, leaders take the time to examine what has happened and explore what learning is needed to resolve it and prevent it from occurring again. Resiliency cannot ensure that mistakes and errors will not occur. However, a commitment to resilience means that when they do, the school is not derailed by them. Maryam Khot describes how she intentionally focuses her attention to support organizational resilience:

No matter what, our job is to educate kids… I can't lose sight of that. For me, that means we need to over and over again remind folks that no matter what else is going on, our job is to teach. Of course, we need to help kids grow in all sorts of ways but you're not doing a kid any favors if you spend

all your time doing other stuff… [Student learning], it's our core mission. We gotta use everything we have to be sure that happens. It's too easy to get sidetracked, trying to do a bunch of other things, when we're here to educate. If we don't do that, there's no reason for us being here.

As Khot suggests, when an organization can withstand disruption and disturbance, and remain focused on its core purposes, it is resilient. Questions that foster a commitment to resilience include:

- How tightly are organizational values tied to decisions? In times of need, do school leaders call on those values to guide decisions and other leadership actions?
- When things go wrong, can people learn from their mistakes and apply that learning in new situations?
- As new policies, practices, and procedures are introduced, are they tied in purposeful and public ways to existing efforts, values, and goals? Do people understand why they are doing what they are doing and how it supports other values and goals?

Deference to Expertise

Deference to expertise suggests that the people closest to any situation know more about it than those further away. It also acknowledges that information and knowledge is unevenly distributed among organizational members and experience with a resource or tool rests with those who use it regularly. Because organizational members closest to the issue are likely to be the ones that understand it best, deference to expertise stresses the inclusion of a variety of members of the school community in the school's decision-making processes. Closely tied to the practice of including multiple perspectives, HRO theory suggests that increasing autonomy for decision-making can be beneficial. When autonomy for decision-making in real time is increased, people closest to an issue may be better able to respond to emergent and troubling signals. Furthermore, school leaders who regularly seek out a variety of perspectives and then defer to those with greater experience are better able to identify issues and concerns before they become insurmountable.

As Eva Morin notes,

Good teachers, they're the ones that know what's really working… I meet with folks to see what they think we're doing right and where we need to look for improvements. They see [how students are performing] before I can. I trust them to make good instructional choices when kids start to struggle.

School leaders wishing to improve their practice of deference to experience should consider these questions:

- Is respect evenly distributed across the school? Or are some members of the school community more respected than others? How might a lack of respect hinder the achievement of goals and other important outcomes?

- Who is involved in problem-solving and decision-making efforts when challenges arise? Do these teams include people who will ultimately have to implement the results of the decision? When are their voices heard?

Limitations of Current Organizational Mindfulness and HRO Theory

Research has proven that when leaders act in organizationally mindful ways, they are better able to respond when difficulty strikes or when errors occur (Gilbert, 2019; Sutcliffe et al., 2016; Vogus & Rerup, 2017; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006, 2015). Yet, as the popularity of HROs' thinking grew several *misconceptions and misunderstandings* about HROs' application and efficacy have surfaced (Leveson et al., 2009; Rerup, 2009). First, there has been a temptation, on the part of researchers and practitioners alike, to suggest whether organizations are mindful or not (Vogus, 2011). This assumption suggests that organizational mindfulness was an all-or-nothing construct and that the application of HRO tenets would be uniformly advantageous regardless of organizational type and purpose. Research (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2021; Bellamy, 2011) suggests that this is not necessarily the case and leaders should exercise caution not to over-generalize these ideas.

Indeed, as Vogus (2011) and Levinthal and Rerup (2006) have written, even high-functioning organizations evidence differences in the adoption and use of the principles. Cantu et al. (2020, 2021), in findings from a meta-analysis of studies of organizational mindfulness, suggest that healthcare organizations appear to favor preoccupation with failure and reluctance to simplify. Similarly, non-healthcare agencies are likely to privilege preoccupation with failure yet, the remaining tenets appear to be equally distributed. Interestingly, Cantu et al. (2020, 2021) found that a commitment to resilience was least likely to be an organizational focus no matter the organization.

Second, researchers have argued that, as presented, HRO theory presumes the presence of abundant and equally concentrated organizational resources (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). Therefore, there has been some privileging of *quantity* of attention over *quality* of attention. However, in most organizations, attentional resources are scarce and costly. Undeniably, when leaders reach data or information overload it is difficult to know what is most important and where attention should be directed. Therefore, as Rerup (2009) and Duckek (2020) suggest, attending more closely to fewer HRO tenets might be advantageous when organizational resources are scarce.

Yet, as Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) counter, the issue may not be attentional scarcity, but rather attentional overload resulting from undisciplined and dispersed attentional foci (e.g., too many diverse goals; lack of agreement on organizational values). Therefore, according to Weick and Sutcliffe (2006), leaders would be well served to hone *attentional focus and coordination* by clarifying organizational goals and values rather than compromising potential arenas of risk. Following this logic, organizational resources can be most effectively used when values and goals are coordinated, and data collection and analysis activities refined. However, while this may be possible in smaller more tightly linked organizations, high levels of focus and coordination may be impossible in larger, more diverse, and loosely linked settings.

Similarly, HRO theory implies that leaders within highly reliable organizations could identify and agree on which issues to invest attention. However, there is no guarantee that units share the same interests and priorities or that organizations have the autonomy to prioritize selected goals over others. This is especially true in schools and school districts where compliance with numerous state and federal guidelines is mandatory. Therefore, it is possible that individual units and departments may display considerable mindfulness to their own interests and priorities yet, fail to coordinate efforts due to conflicting (and sometimes incompatible) priorities.

Third, as written, the principles are silent concerning the level of *communication*, presence or absence of *hierarchical boundaries*, *trust*, and *transparency* required for the tenets to be operationalized. As Leveson et al. (2009) have suggested, coordination of HRO activity is strongly related to the level of managerial control present within and across the organization. Inasmuch as individual organizational behavior is directly influenced by management activities, it is equally, but indirectly, affected by the policies, practices, and other aspects of an organization's culture. Therefore, it is equally likely that HRO activities will be supported or hindered by organizational characteristics far beyond those influenced by leadership activity.

This is not to suggest that HRO theorizing is unavoidably flawed and that pursuing organizational mindfulness is folly. Rather, it is to caution against the oversimplification of these ideas as well as to further emphasize that organizational complexity serves as a mitigating factor in developing organizational mindfulness. Additionally, it is important to note that the tenets are not discrete and there exists great potential for overlap and interpretation among and between each one. For example, in schools, it is equally likely that reluctance to simplify and sensitivity to operations function in parallel and are mutually informing.

Finally, and crucially, as HRO thinking has evolved, so has our depth of understanding about the ways in which organizational mindfulness can enhance productivity and performance across a wide range of contexts and concerns. As with all aspects of mindful leadership, ultimately one's practice is less about the strict implementation of any one theory or aspect of mindful practice and more about how individuals and organizations choose to use these ideas to inform their work.

FAIL-SAFE SCHOOLS

Current research (Gilbert, 2019; Hoy, 2003; Kruse & Johnson, 2017), has suggested that HRO theory can be successfully applied to understanding problem-solving and decision-making in K12 schools. Importantly, as Stringfield & Datnow (2002) have shown, HRO strategies can support improvements in student learning outcomes for students identified as at-risk. Therefore, research has demonstrated that HRO strategies offer a strong framework for understanding what schools seek to achieve (e.g., consistent student achievement) and what they should avoid (e.g., failure of one or more student groups to meet standards).

More generally, the press that all students master challenging content standards and demonstrate adequate yearly progress, underscores the burden on schools to produce reliable student learning results.

However, and as Bellamy (2011), Bellamy et al. (2005), and Lorton et al. (2013) observe, schools are significantly different than the kinds of high-risk organizations that typically inform HRO theorizing. Schools differ in two important ways—coupling and autonomy. First, nuclear power plants and aircraft carrier flight decks are examples of *tightly coupled* and centralized organizations. In a highly coupled organization subunits must be responsive to each other because their work, when executed properly, is standardized and predictable. Drawing on the work of Weick (1976, 1982), Spain and Woulfin (2019) contend that schools are more *loosely coupled* and operate in more decentralized ways than most organizations focused on attaining reliability. While it is understandable that tight coupling and standardizing of procedures is advantageous in organizations dedicated to quality control, Spain and Woulfin (2019) caution that over-centralization and tight control of work may constrain teachers in ways antithetical to making high-quality instructional decisions. Second, while HRO theory suggests that increasing *autonomy* of decision-making offers more typically HRO-focused organizations the ability to respond in real time, schools already offer a good deal of autonomy at the building and classroom level (Bellamy et al., 2005). Therefore, providing additional autonomy, especially in poor-performing schools, is unlikely to be an effective strategy.

Cognizant of these differences Bellamy (2011), Bellamy et al. (2005), and Lorton et al. (2013) suggest that thinking of HRO strategy as a metaphor, rather than a model of practice holds great promise for schools. HRO strategy as a metaphor suggests that school leaders reconceptualize the five HRO hallmarks as three more general educational foci. These include improving normal operations, detecting potential student learning problems, and recovering from emerging problems. As Bellamy et al. (2005) states: "although these practices are not unfamiliar in schools, neither are they commonplace" (p. 391).

Improving Normal Operations

Improving normal operations reminds school leaders that attention to the day-to-day work of the school is important if progress toward goals is to be achieved. Improving normal operations begins with thinking about recruitment and hiring practices and extends to classroom instructional practice supported by targeted high-quality professional learning. Attention to normal operations also includes leadership attention to how school climate and culture supports high-quality learning. Lillie Kurran, principal at Sunshine Grove Elementary, explains how she focuses on improving normal operations.

A recent winner of a state-wide award for excellence, Sunshine Grove has been identified as a high-performing school for several years. Kurran is clear that those results are the product of "hard work" and "thoughtful practice" designed to "meet all kids where they are and with what they need every day." She stresses that the school's achievements are the result of collaboration,

extensive communication, and a deep-seated belief that everyone is responsible for each student's success. She states:

> It's important to me that how we do things around here includes talking about our work. For us, that means a lot of discussion about instruction and curriculum, who gets what lessons, followed up by how it worked. Did the kiddo get the concept, can they use it like they're supposed to? We're all responsible for [high-quality instructional] practice.

She clarifies:

> How did we do that? A lot of back and forth. Sometimes, that is what I've called, an accordion process, we'll have a conversation and identify some needs, or some new practice. I say, "Take that back out. Have discussions [about this] with your PLC, other teachers… [I] ask, Are we going in the right direction?" Then I bring that feedback back, that's the stuff we discuss next… We set a direction, we say, "This is the goal." Finding [instructional] resources, that's a collective effort…a lot of teachers collaborate… they bring their own thinking their own ideas to the table… Bottom line, we're all responsible for learning in this school. That's what we value. We can't have some classrooms that are really good and others not so much.

As Kurran's words demonstrate, improving normal practice requires multiple strategies (i.e., collaboration, communication, shared values) as well as attention to teaching strategies that meet student need. These foci are not prescriptive. Rather, they demonstrate that regular attention to the technical core of teacher work serves to improve how the school coordinates work among teachers, approaches instruction, puts these approaches to work, and learns from those experiences (Lorton et al., 2013).

Detecting Potential Student Learning Problems

Detecting potential student learning problems implies that schools must locate and use strategies that reliably identify students who are struggling and in need of support. Importantly, as Bellamy et al. (2005) assert, considerable attention must be paid to the early detection of student learning problems and the identification of curricular and instructional responses designed to address them. Considering that schools must match their choices of instructional approaches to the needs of their student population, solutions for addressing student learning problems must be intentionally coordinated. Research has identified several promising strategies including instructional leadership directed toward student learning (Bush, 2015; Robinson, 2010), schoolwide practices of data collection and analysis (Ehren & Swanborn, 2012; Schildkamp et al., 2017), and attention to meaningful organizational reform and change (Ishimaru, 2013; Murphy & Bleiberg, 2019). Furthermore, the provision of ample time for teacher collaboration (Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Vangrieken et al., 2015) and opportunities for teacher feedback and professional growth

(Darling-Hammond, 2013; Donaldson & Woulfin, 2018) have been found to be impactful.

Not only do these recommendations make good sense, but they have also been long understood. Schools have a history of resource adoption designed to support student learning. However, schools also have a history of failing to fully implement and establish an organized plan for their use. Taking a resilience-focused approach suggests that leadership efforts are directed toward understanding how new ideas and resources are used, fit into existing school practices and culture, and are institutionalized in the support of student learning. However, resources alone cannot mitigate student learning problems. To be sure, resources are needed for early detection and instructional support. Nevertheless, absent resiliency-focused leadership efforts, new resources may do little to address on-ongoing student learning concerns.

Laine Tremblay, principal at Great Basin High School, speaks to how he builds an environment designed to support resiliency. Tremblay asserts that a focus on the learning of adults within the school matters, if Great Basin is to "serve all the kids who go here." He shares:

> I've been told this, "Don't make people uncomfortable." Generally, I'm not the type of person who enjoys making people squirm. But part of learning is discomfort. We're talking about a growth mindset with our kids. On the other hand, adults…we have very fixed mindsets… I think people are scared that if they're in a state of discomfort they'll stay there. They don't necessarily know that, hey, I'm going to regain my balance. Humans are resilient. Our brains have the capacity to learn and grow. I see all this work toward school reform as being a really positive thing… I think that growth is really empowering, and really beautiful, and very fulfilling. I think that helping people through that, whatever discomfort they're feeling, and reminding them it's part of the learning process [matters]. That what you're feeling is helpful.

When asked to say more, Tremblay expands upon these ideas adding:

> As much as I can, I'm trying to, instead of forcing things and forcing people to change their ways because I think it's right, I ask questions. It's sometimes enough to irk people. Asking questions, I feel it's really important. A lot of my conversations with people are just a series of questions, just trying to understand what they're thinking. Then we can unravel it together… How can we reimagine this to be better? [I also work to] build respect. Being respected as a professional is important to me… Being valued for my expertise and being involved in spaces where collaboration and decision-making are happening. I try to build that for everyone here as well. [We] can't change if we're not learning. If we're not learning…we can't help kids.

Tremblay's discussion is interesting because, unlike approaches that focus primarily on instructional and curricular resources, he works to encourage

inquiry and dialogue directed toward bettering practice. Focusing on strategies that deepen understandings and develop robust and dependable approaches to ongoing practice and growth, Tremblay models how the implementation of new tools requires leadership effort and intentional action beyond that of traditional in-service and practice.

Recovering from Emerging Problems

Finally, Bellamy et al. (2005) suggest, that building recovery systems into the structure and systems of the school assure that when older practices fail to be useful any longer, the school can shift and adopt more productive routines. Here too, school leaders are encouraged to work closely with teachers and other staff to create collaborative systems that support collective responsibility (Friesen & Brown, 2020; Hargreaves, 2019), intensive interventions (McMaster et al., 2020; Stevens et al., 2018), and the use of responsive instructional approaches (Richardson et al., 2021; Sterrett & Richardson, 2020). As Lorton et al. (2013) indicate, resilience depends on collaboration (i.e., shared information about emerging problems) and is developed with a focus on the ways present practice creates implications for future work. Whea Nguyen deputy superintendent of Deep Bend Schools explains:

> We're coming out of the Covid years. That's good. But I also know that we're in this for the long haul. We can't just say we're back to normal, whatever that means. We have to plan our thinking and support structure around what these years mean for the next decade... I mean, sure, we need to worry about our kids right now, but we also need to think about what the longer impacts might be. How we're going to plan for what's happening in the second grade so that middle school goes well. The only way to do that is to work together... So absolutely, what we teach this year has to account for what was missed these last two years. Definitely. But we also need to think about what's that gonna mean for the next decade, because...we're going to be feeling this for a long time.

Evidenced in Nguyen's, Kurran's, and Tremblay's discussion is attention to developing recovery approaches as part of regular routines in their schools. When Kurran speaks to developing and supporting multiple strategies for improvement and Tremblay to professional learning, they are both suggesting that as leaders, they spotlight the development of organizational conditions that support resiliency. For schools to recover when difficulty strikes, as Nguyen suggests, structural and cultural support systems must be in place to ensure success.

Additionally, Nguyen alludes to the centrality of collaborative work supportive of long-term student learning goals. Important here is that collegial recovery work is focused on exploring new instructional options and developing a culture focused on student learning. These strategies are not unfamiliar to school leaders. Nor can any one of them assure success. What matters is the mindful and intentional use of meaningful strategies for student

success and attention to how, when, and with what instructional and curricular tools students best learn. In this way, resilience becomes baked into the structures and systems of schooling.

MINDFUL ORGANIZING

Organizational mindfulness is predicated on cognitive and contemplative facility (Langer, 2014; Langer & Moldoveanu 2000). Absent perspective-taking, active differentiation, and openness to new information, organizational mindfulness cannot be achieved. It is hard to imagine how anyone could be sensitive to indicators of organizational distress without being open to new information. Similarly, deference to expertise requires that leaders be able to understand the perspective of those closest to the work. Moreover, absent authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2011) and skillful action (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019; Goldstein, 2016) it is difficult to imagine that a leader could be organizationally mindful.

Yet, even as deference to expertise advocates for increasing autonomy in decision-making processes, many of the other tenets favor focused and directive leadership. Inasmuch as HRO tenets stress the development and implementation of reliable organizational operations, it assumes that leadership has adequate organizational power to assure that procedures are executed across the organization as they are designed. Obviously, if risk is to be reduced, fidelity to organizationally reliable processes and procedures and strict adherence to organizational activities is necessary for organizational success. No doubt, in high-risk environments stability rather than individual creativity or innovation, is an important organizational goal.

However, given its directive orientation, as Vogus (2011) asserts, HRO theory fails to fully account for the aims, goals, and workplace satisfaction of organizational members. Furthermore, as Vogus and Sutcliffe (2012) propose, when reliability is privileged, the significance of other equally important outcomes (e.g., equity, well-being) may be ignored. Therefore, wise organizational leaders balance a focus on reliability with one that is mindful of the importance of individuals in the workplace (Cantu et al., 2021). They work to create *mindfully organized* schools, businesses, and other kinds of workplaces.

Like contemplative and cognitive mindfulness, mindful organizing proposes that absent the coordination of interpersonal and systemic processes and practices organizations are unlikely to realize success. Mindful organizing recognizes the roles emotion (e.g., reaction and response to stimuli) and social processes (e.g., communication, influence, power) play in organizational success. For example, mindful organizing acknowledges that employees are less likely to participate in processes and procedures they do not fully understand or for which they cannot identify a need. Nor are essential employees (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals) likely to identify nascent signals of organizational distress if they are disengaged from the core purposes of the organization. Moreover, mindful organizing acknowledges the subjectivity of organizational members'

▮ **TABLE 6.2**

Organizational mindfulness and mindful organizing as complimentary constructs

	Organizational Mindfulness	Mindful Organizing
Mindfulness as a/an	Organizational attribute	Social process
Leadership Orientation	Focused & directive	Balanced, collaborative, & integrated
Contextual Foci	System functions & activities Reliable processes & performances	Individual & differentiated behaviors
Outcome Measures	Narrow & fixed	Broad & inclusive
Role of Routine	Development of strict adherence to organizational processes & procedures	Policies, practices, & procedures to be drawn upon in response to organizational events & issues
Role of Organizational Culture	Organizational variable where reliability & resilience efforts are evidenced	Metaphor for the context(s) of organizational work including reliability & resilience

Source: Cantu et al., 2020; Cantu et al., 2021; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012.

experiences and accepts that organizations, even those seeking reliability, are quite dynamic. Stated more forcefully, Vogus (2011) argues, successful organizational mindfulness is *dependent* on mindful organizing.

Offsetting the management control conception of organizations, mindful organizing stresses the role of differing perspectives and context-specific responses as necessary for long-term organizational success. Mindful organizing acknowledges that organizations are social places and surfaces the importance of organizational climate and culture in organizational success. As Schein and Schein (2017) note, climate and culture are often indicators of engagement with and investment in organizational goals and values. Therefore, as Cantu et al. (2020) suggest, the intentional development of a strong organizational culture is a foundational hallmark of a highly reliable organization.

Yet, organizational culture is complex and rarely monolithic (Alvesson, 2013). In fact, as Connolly and Kruse (2019) assert, most organizations lack cultural cohesion and are characterized by the coexistence of numerous subcultures. For example, in schools, teacher, student, and parent cultures differ as do the cultures of elementary, middle, and high schools. Furthermore, the members of each subculture experience the school differently and their preferences, values, and expectations can be quite diffuse.

▎**TABLE 6.3**

Complexities of organizational culture

Culture is…

Something an Organization "Has"	Something an Organization "Is"
Viewed from the perspective of leadership or from the managerial perspective	Viewed through an interpretivist lens or ethnographic tradition
An organizational variable that can be shaped by a leader or leaders	A metaphor for viewing how the organization functions
Unfixed & able to be transformed	Based in examination & understanding, less able to be altered or easily changed
Managed by leaders & focused on performance outcomes	Context-specific, internal, & less able to be influenced by leadership
An extension of management control	Informed by differing perspectives & more fragmented between & among subcultures

Source: Alvesson, 2013; Connolly & Kruse, 2019; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Schein & Schein, 2017.

Moreover, the principles that underscore HRO leadership suggest that culture can be thought of as something an organization *has* rather than something it *is*. The distinction here is one of control. In the former case, culture is thought to be an organizational variable that leaders can shape and manipulate. The latter describes culture as more interpretative, context-specific, and less able to be influenced by leadership actions, no matter how virtuous they may be. While each conception has its strengths and weaknesses, and is not entirely dichotomous, understanding these distinctions matters if school leaders are to balance organizational mindfulness with that of mindful organizing. Furthermore, if school leaders are to be viewed as consistent and trustworthy (both necessary leadership traits for reliability) they must understand that their approach to fostering school culture should be as well.

No one theory, no matter how robust, can account for every aspect of organizational life. Such is the case with both organizational mindfulness and mindful organizing. However, currently, there is a growing acknowledgement that focusing on organizational *reliability* and *individual well-being* is central to organizational success. As a result, while mistakes and errors cannot be avoided, school leaders can be better prepared to address them when they happen.

IN CONCLUSION

Organizational mindfulness, whether it is defined by the constructs of high reliability organizations, fail-safe schools, or mindful organizing, reminds

leaders that all organizations experience success and failure. Organizational mindfulness asks leaders to pay attention, at the organizational level, to how work at the unit level (e.g., departments, teams, grade levels) contributes to realizing organizational goals. In other words, organizational mindfulness prompts school leaders to look for signals in today's work and plan for what tomorrow might bring. It prompts wholistic thinking and the awareness that day-to-day experiences are worth thoughtful consideration, even as plans for the future are developed.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Equanimity, Walking Amidst the Uneven

Being able to weather the ups and downs of organizational life matters, if school leaders are to thrive. Certainly, practicing organizational mindfulness, in tandem with cognitive mindfulness, creates conditions under which school leaders are more likely to succeed. However, even the most expert school leaders will experience hardship, misfortune, and bad luck. What matters is how one responds when things are going well and when they are not (Desbordes et al., 2015). When school leaders are able to respond to the inevitable ups and downs of leadership in emotionally balanced ways, they are demonstrating *equanimity*.

The fourth immeasurable or divine state of Buddhism is that of upekkha or equanimity. Practically, focusing on equanimity reminds us that this too shall pass, no matter how intense things may feel right now. Think of the last time you felt anger or joy, excitement, or trepidation, calm or tense. How long did it last? Minutes? Hours? Days? Weeks? No matter how intensely the emotion was felt or how long it lasted, emotions change, they dissipate, and their intensity fades. Certainly, some emotions linger longer than others but, inevitably, they all fade. Practicing upekkha is about learning to keep a level head no matter what confronts us.

As Bodhi (2010) suggests, upekkha is about "walking amidst the uneven" or "seeing with patience and understanding" (p. 1). As described in Buddhist teachings, equanimity serves as protection from the eight worldly winds (Goldstein, 2016). Translated from the Pali, the eight worldly winds include praise and blame (sometimes translated as fame and disrepute), success and failure, gain and loss, and joy and sorrow (sometimes translated as pleasure and pain). Presented as pairs, the eight worldly winds are converses of each other and cannot exist absent of the other. Moreover, from the Buddhist perspective, becoming attached to praise, success, gain, and joy, positions us for suffering when our fortunes change. Conversely, long-standing attachment or sustained identification with blame, failure, pain, and disrepute sets us up for discouragement and hopelessness. Neither state is a productive place to live.

Developing equanimity is thought to increase our sense of well-being by helping us to see that we can be independent of the eight worldly winds and more prepared to remain steady and composed in the face of change, impermanence, and transitions. Upekkha meditation focuses on helping the mind stay focused and calm. The following meditation unfolds through several iterations, in each the focus is directed on noticing and developing balance. Traditionally, upekkha meditation heads directly into addressing difficult emotions. However, and especially for beginners, doing so may be more challenging than useful. Therefore, unlike the other meditations offered in this book, this meditation offers several starting and stopping points.

- As always, start by finding a comfortable posture. Begin by focusing on a time when you felt balanced, happy, or at ease. If nothing comes to mind, try to imagine a place that evokes feelings of calm and peace. It is perfectly fine to sit with that image for as long as you like. For some people, simply shifting their attention to a pleasant experience is enough to restore a sense of equanimity. If that is the case for you, ending the mediation session may be appropriate.
- Should you wish to go further into the meditation, take a few breaths and sink into the present moment. Invite yourself to soften and connect with whatever is happening right now. Notice what you are feeling. You might label the emotion (e.g., I feel anger, I feel confusion, I feel joy.) Whatever the emotion, notice how it feels. In response to whatever feeling appears, you may quietly repeat one of the following phrases:
  ○ I am here.
  ○ I can be with things as they are.
- After sitting with the present, it may be useful to return to the memory of a calm and peaceful place. The idea is not to push yourself into more than you are able to handle in one sitting. Developing equanimity takes time. Allowing yourself the time to notice and experience the impermanence of strong emotion is the first step. Ending the mediation session here may be appropriate.
- After practicing with happier emotions and identifying your current emotional state, you may wish to imagine or recall something that has made equanimity difficult. Something you are caught up in, overwhelmed by, or stressed about. It is important here to resist using this meditation to rehearse an old argument, plan a rebuttal, or try to solve a problem. Upekkha is not focused on the past, it is focused on developing equanimity in the present.
- Notice what happens in your body. Are there places of tightness, tension, or contraction? If so, try to breathe into those places, noticing what you are experiencing in the moment. The point of this meditation is to sit with what you are feeling. You can always acknowledge thoughts and return back to the breath as needed.

- End your session when you feel ready. You may choose to return to a happier place once more or to pay attention to your breath. A few rounds of loving-kindness may be grounding. No matter how you end your session, and especially if you are still feeling agitated, recognize that cultivating equanimity is difficult work. It takes practice and with every new challenge must be relearned.

Variations. If phrases help you to focus, here are some additional possibilities. A few are fancier than others, a few are more directive, and several are designed to remind you that in any experience there is really only this impermanent moment. No matter which phrase you choose, try to stick with it for the full session. The repetition matters, as repeating a single phrase is calming in and of itself.

- May I walk evenly amidst the uneven.
- May I be at peace with myself and others.
- I can be with things as they were.
- Things are as they are.
- This too shall pass.

Activity

ACTIVITY 6

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG? (BELLAMY ET AL., 2005; DUCKEK, 2020; WEICK & SUTCLIFFE, 2015)

This activity is designed for you (or your leadership team) to spend some time organizing for reliable results. The idea here is not to catastrophize, dramatize, or create unnecessary worry. Nor is it designed to become a gripe session. It is designed so that you can develop a critical practice of examining organizational issues, concerns, and errors. The idea is to institutionalize a practice of critical examination *before* issues become crises. Be aware that no protocol will fit every school perfectly and feel free to alter this exercise so that it works in your context. Additionally, be sure to schedule adequate time for discussion and reflection. Done well, this activity cannot be completed quickly.

- Issue Identification
    - Begin by identifying a realistic or impending issue with the potential to result in organizational difficulty. If you have not had an organizational culture that has a practice of critical examination, start with something you and your team are comfortable discussing. Some examples that might work include responding to a destructive event (e.g., flood, fire, tornado) or a misleading post about the school or district on social media. If you already have a culture of critical inquiry, feel free to dive right into a more challenging issue.
    - Clearly state the issue.
        - An important part of this process is perspective-taking. It is worth investing time to consider how each member of the team understands the issue. Identify key differences in and of perception. Clarify what those differences are and why they matter.
- Perspective-taking
    - Reframe the issue from the perspectives of others who are not in the room. Remember that organizational subgroups are not monolithic and it is important to consider within group differences as well.
        - How would parents frame the issue?
        - Students?
        - Staff?
        - Teachers?
        - Community members?
    - Identify why subgroups may hold the perspectives they do. It is important here to resist simplifying the issue or dismissing its impact on others.
    - In the case of a real incident, following-up to verify your assumptions and to identify gaps is important.

- Identify Missing Information
  - Missing information can be contextual or factual. Consider the flowing questions designed to surface additional information:
    - Who are the key players in the situation? Secondary actors?
    - What is the political, cultural, or economic environment for this issue or decision?
    - How have similar issues been resolved in the past? Were those resolutions adequate? Where were they lacking?
    - What limitations exist to resolving this issue?
    - How might resistance, disagreement, and challenge be addressed?
    - What would an effective response look like?
  - Develop a plan to obtain missing information.
    - Identify who, what, when, and how missing information can be obtained.
    - Set deadlines for attainment and a plan for review.
    - Plan for a follow-up discussion or meeting.
- Develop Intentional Response and Evaluate Readiness for Purposeful Action
  - Synthesize the information you have collected.
    - What story does it tell about the issue?
    - Is there a perspective that is privileged? If so, why?
    - What are the political, cultural, or economic barriers to a comprehensive solution?
    - What might facilitate a solution?
    - Who might need to be brought on board? What is necessary to gain support for this issue to be resolved?
    - Might there be adverse reactions? Unintended consequences?
    - If so, who will address them when they arise?
  - Would you define the issue differently now that you have considered other perspectives and have more information?
    - If so, clarify how your (or your team's) understanding of the issue has been deepened or clarified.
  - Create a plan for response.
    - Consider timelines, courses of action, responsibilities, and roles.
    - What resources are needed?
    - Who needs to be informed of these activities?
  - Check that you are solving the problem you set out to solve.
    - Are the solutions aligned with the issues?
    - Is there clarity regarding what is to happen and why it needs to?
- Evaluate Effectiveness
  - How will effectiveness be measured?
  - What follow-up will need to happen and when will it happen?

- Who are your audiences for communication? What are the best avenues to reach internal and external members?
- How will you tell the story of resolving this issue in the future?
    - What lessons were learned?
    - How will that organizational knowledge be stored so that it can be accessed in the future?

It is worthwhile to spend some time reflecting on what is happening as you and your team go through this process.

- What are you learning about yourself and others?
- What are you learning about your school?
- Are there ways you could change practices so that your school becomes fail-safe?

Additional Resources

Much of the writing about organizational mindfulness has come from fields other than education. Offered here are three books that draw lessons from health care organizations, corporate and government leaders, and organizational psychology. Each offers a unique perspective regarding how organizational mindfulness can enhance anyone's leadership knowledge and skills.

- Smith, C. (2021). *Mindfulness without the bells and beads: Unlocking exceptional performance leadership, and well-being for working professionals*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Winner of the 2021 American Book Fest best book in management and leadership, *Mindfulness without the bells and beads* builds on the mindfulness principles of focus and open awareness and offers a down-to-earth approach to employing organizational mindfulness into leadership practice. Smith, a former US army veteran, shares lessons culled from experience and research that support leaders' understandings of organizational resilience, communication, motivation, and problem-solving.
- Rowland, D. (2017). *Still moving: How to lead mindful change*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. Focused on leading in environments of ongoing, disruptive change, and based on Rowland's research in companies like Shell Oil and GlaxoSmithKline, *Still moving* focuses on how organizational mindfulness is essential to meaningful change. Rowland stresses that "being precedes doing" (p. 7) and that systemic change only begins after organizational leaders move beyond the habitual and consider how their orientations to leadership and management both foster and impede organizational growth, development, and transformation.
- Weick, K.E., & Sutcliffe, K.M. (2015). *Managing the unexpected: Sustained performance in a complex world*. 3rd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. In *Managing the unexpected* Weick and Sutcliffe distill decades of research about high reliability organizations (HROs) into one accessible volume. *Managing the unexpected* introduces cases from emergency rooms, aircraft carriers, firefighting units, and other organizations and uses them to provide clear descriptions of how organizing for reliability can help leaders manage even the most difficult obstacles. Each of the five HRO principles is covered in a full chapter and case examples provide clear images of how each principle supports organizational effectiveness and how its absence forecasts potential difficulties.

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Learning and Change

KEY VOCABULARY

Change—The process of becoming different.

Learning—Acquiring new information, skills, or abilities.

Learning and change are inescapably linked. Google the phrase "quotes about change and learning" and your screen will fill with inspirational images, posters, and essays. Among the top results are these passages:

> Change demands new learning (Kanter, 1983).
> Change comes from listening, learning, caring, and conversation (Ifill, n.d.).
> Change is the end result of all true learning (Buscaglia, n.d.).
> Change is another word for growth, another synonym for learning (Handy, n.d.).
> Change is inevitable. Growth is optional (Maxwell, n.d.).

Similarly, researchers have associated learning with change, suggesting that for an organization to change it must continually learn (Argyris, 1993; Argyris & Schon, 1978; Weick, 2001). Friedlander (1983) states it elegantly: "Learning is the process that underlies and gives birth to change. Change is the child of learning" (p. 194). Framing learning and change in ecological terms, Dixon (1999) writes:

> A formula borrowed from ecology states that in order for an organism to survive, its rate of learning must be equal or greater than the rate of change in its environment… Considering organizations as organisms, it is apparent

that organizations are going to have to increase their rate of learning to survive in these times of unprecedented change. (p. 2)

Moreover, the assumption that learning is required for change is a cornerstone of the change management and change leadership (Cameron & Green, 2004, 2009, 2012; Damas & Beinecke, 2018), organizational learning (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Basten & Haamann, 2018), and professional development (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015; Knapp, 2003) literatures.

Yet, knowing what efforts will produce the best results or which process will get you there, most efficiently, is difficult to ascertain. All too often school leaders are clear about what goals they wish to achieve (e.g., improve attendance, increase the graduation rate) and far less sure about how to achieve them. And no wonder, choices abound. It can be incredibly overwhelming to know which program, policy, or practice to choose and which to avoid. Furthermore, what works in one school may not in another. Without a doubt, choosing wisely is an art and a craft. Admittedly, there is some luck involved as well. However, choosing wisely does not happen by accident either. Wise choices are the result of school leaders who attend to the signs and signals generated within their school and use that information to guide their work. Wise choices are the *result* of intentional, mindful decisions.

Organizational mindfulness stimulates learning and change. By focusing attention on present activity and looking for signals of potential failure, organizational mindfulness focuses on opportunities for organizational improvement, learning, and growth. Importantly, it shifts leadership attention from the identification of blame (i.e., uncovering who made the mistake) to discovering how errors and mistakes can be avoided (i.e., How could X be better?). By design, organizational mindfulness is simultaneously experiential and retrospective (Argote & Miron-Spector, 2011; Weick, 2001).

It is *experiential* because it honors information about potential problems or concerns as they emerge. In schools, this reinforces the importance of formative assessment of student learning and ongoing evaluation of improvement efforts. It suggests that data from the day-to-day observations of classroom teachers is every bit as useful as data generated by summative assessments. Organizational mindfulness embraces experiential knowledge because it offers immediate and targeted information about the effect of classroom activity.

Organizational mindfulness is *retrospective* because meaning-making is inherently backward-looking (i.e., learning occurs after we process information and experiences). In schools, this suggests that providing time for teachers to reflect on their pedagogy matters if classroom practice is to be successful. Likewise, it suggests that developing opportunities for targeted, regular, and extensive feedback cycles gives school leaders a chance to deeply examine school operations. Practiced well, organizational mindfulness presents school leaders with opportunities to learn, in real time, where efforts are succeeding and how they are struggling.

However, for all its contributions, organizational mindfulness, as described by HRO and fail-safe theorizing, is fairly silent concerning how leaders foster

resilient, learning-focused, workplace environments (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Even though theory indicates that organizational mindfulness will result in organizational learning and change, it lacks specificity regarding the knowledge and skill set required to create mindful organizations. Drawing from research in business (Sparr, 2018; Weick, 2015), schools (Cohen et al., 2017; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Ryu et al., 2022), and other organizations (Dumas & Beinecke, 2018; Duckek, 2020), this chapter explores leadership practices that generate and support learning and change.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Organizational learning (OL) describes how organizations use information to motivate meaningful change (Argyris & Schon, 1978, 1996; Huber, 1991; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). Engaging in organizational learning has been suggested to increase creativity and curiosity (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Autunes & Pinherio, 2020) and collective responsibility for organizational goals and results (Higgins et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2022; Schechter & Qadach, 2012). It has also been linked to the development of agile and nimble problem-solving and decision-making (Argyris & Schon, 1996, Crossan et al., 1999), responsiveness to challenge (Macpherson et al., 2021; Provera et al., 2010), and personal engagement, commitment, dignity, and happiness (Berson et al., 2006; Johnson & Kruse, 2019). Moreover, these outcomes work in tandem and are mutually reinforcing.

Senge (1990) suggested that focusing on organizational learning would stimulate productive organizational effort. Contrasting traditional organizations with that of *learning organizations*, Senge posited that by privileging active learning (over more passive forms of information and knowledge gathering) organizational foci, goals, and values could be transformed. While the terms organizational learning and learning organization are used somewhat interchangeably, becoming a learning organization is an aspirational goal. Learning organizations are generally described in relation to institutional structures and forms (e.g., teams, professional learning communities, networks, alliances). The theory assumes that by creating structures supportive of and focused on learning, enhanced information and knowledge use follows.

Comparably, *organizational learning* stresses the importance of inquiry, problem-solving, and knowledge use. Of the two, organizational learning has been more robustly researched (Argote & Miron-Spector, 2011; Basten & Haamann, 2018). Therefore, more is known about how organizational learning can be incorporated into mindful leadership action. Moreover, an organizational learning approach to school leadership amplifies the local, situated, and contextual qualities of learning. It suggests that solutions be aligned to needs and new learning be presented within the context of existing practice.

Organizational learning is most effective when it focuses on procedural and substantive learning (Berson et al., 2006; Macpherson et al., 2021; Neumerski & Cohen, 2019). Procedure addresses process. *Procedural learning*

emphasizes rationality. It assumes that there are a series of rational actions that help school leaders achieve goals. Procedural learning asks questions like, "What steps do we need to take to remedy this problem?" Without a doubt, procedural learning has its place. However, procedural learning can fall short. This is especially true in the face of complexity and ambiguity.

Conversely, *substantive learning* is explicitly directed toward learning that is central to the goals and values of the school. Substantive learning requires critical thinking. It requires that members of the school community are able to analyze current circumstances in relation to present needs and values and make determinations that honor both. Substantive learning is motivated by questions such as, "What more do we need to know to understand this issue?"

Processes, Capacity, and Culture's Role in Organizational Learning

Research about organizational learning directly focuses on how organizational processes, capacity, and culture enhance or detract from organizational improvement and change. *Processes* of organizational learning highlight how organizations acquire, distribute, interpret, and retain information (Huber, 1991). Moreover, understanding organizational learning as a process in which information is captured and internalized, stresses the collective nature of organizational learning. OL as a process emphasizes that organizational learning is greater than the collectivity of individual learning (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Basten & Haamann, 2018; Weick, 2002).

However, not all organizations have an equal *capacity* to learn. Building capacity is contingent upon an organization's ability to absorb new ideas and reflect upon shared experiences and apply them to improvement and change efforts (Higgins et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2022; Schechter & Qadach, 2012). Thinking of organizational learning as a capacity surfaces the importance of information and knowledge use, in the presence of shared experience, to activate robust and durable learning. Thus, the capacity of any organization to function as a learning organization is dependent upon the organization's ability to employ new ideas as resources in the pursuit of organizational goals.

Third, organizational learning is a *cultural* orientation. In this conception of organizational learning, the primacy of improvement and innovation is stressed, and organizations are characterized by cultures of flexibility and openness (Autunes & Pinherio, 2020; Do & Mai, 2020; Macpherson et al., 2021). Understanding that organizational learning must be supported by processes, capacity building, and cultural orientations, underscores that organizational learning requires more than the episodic implementation of initiatives or strategic plans. Done well, OL occurs over time and requires that organizational members experience, interact with, and employ new ideas in ways that change "the ways we do things around here." Michela Flores of Bear Lake Schools describes how her district learns:

> We try, really hard, to create experiences where everyone learns. It's more than in-service, I mean we need that, we need to bring new ideas into the district, but then we structure ways for teachers to process what we've

TABLE 7.1

Organizational conditions that support mindful organizational learning

Processes of Learning	Single–& double-loop learning structures Absorptive capacity (i.e., ability to learn) Adaptive capacity (i.e., ability to change)
Internal Factors	Organizational complexity Motivation to learn Helpful sources of in-house expertise & resources Transparent & unambiguous communication structures Interdependence, empowerment, & autonomy of faculty, staff, & families/community members
External Factors	Access to & timeliness of supplemental expertise & resources Environmental certainty Political, social, economic, & legal context(s) Interorganizational networks & alliances
Organizational & Leadership Attributes	Trust & credibility Psychological safety Strong relationships Openness & dialogue Inclusive leadership Systems perspective
Organizational Outcomes	An environment of creativity & curiosity Collective responsibility for goals & results Agile, nimble problem-solving & decision-making Responsiveness to challenge, uncertainty, & ambiguity Member engagement, commitment, dignity, & happiness

Source: Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Baston & Haamann, 2018; Higgins et al., 2012; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Yurkofsky et al., 2022.

offered them. If we're going to spend the money on something new…we need to figure out what we're going to do with [it] once [it's] here…

Flores adds:

> I'm of the belief that we do professional learning because we want something to change. That's our work, learning what we need to know to do better… We want to be better than we are now. That's a hard message. I try to soften it by saying, "we did the best we could when we had that knowledge, but now we have the opportunity to know more so we have the responsibility to our kids and families, to learn about it." Professional learning should change us…it should challenge us…it should make us think.

Flores relates several important characteristics of mindful organizational learning in schools. These include the district's orientation to learning, internal and external factors that stimulate learning, leadership's role in creating conditions that support learning, and how professional learning connects to district goals.

Individual and Organizational Learning

Organizational learning begins with individual learning. However, while individual learning is necessary for organizational learning to occur, it is not sufficient (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Berson et al., 2006; Macpherson et al., 2021). Organizational learning requires interaction. It requires that once an individual learns something of importance, they share it with others, and engage in communal inquiry and reflection around it. Therefore, organizational learning is inherently social and interactive (Drago-Severson, 2009; Weick, 2002). In schools, organizational learning is frequently coupled with that of professional community (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Kruse & Louis, 2009) resulting in a professional *learning* community (PLC) (Bolam et al., 2005; Hord, 1997). However, organizational learning is not limited to formal structures or groups. Rather, organizational learning is the result of both formal and informal professional interactions with new ideas in the context of the school.

Mindful principals and curriculum directors already know that for professional learning to be effective, it should be contextually situated and appropriate, and inclusive of opportunities for teachers and staff to discuss, practice, and interact with new ideas (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Drago-Severson, 2009). Absent rich discussion no matter how good a professional learning opportunity might be, it is unlikely that the strategies presented will be adopted in any consistent or coherent fashion (Knapp, 2003). Moreover, rich discussions are as likely to occur over lunch as they are in a PLC. As Macpherson et al. (2021) suggest, often the richest organizational learning is the result of shared improvisation in which individuals, within an organization, simultaneously explore new ways to learn by exploiting what they already know.

However, not all organizational learning is created equal. In some cases, new learning is introduced, and it fits into existing organizational values and beliefs quite easily. In others, new learning challenges the status quo, causing long-held beliefs and assumptions to be considered in a new light. Known as single–and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1996), both forms of learning are necessary for an organization to improve.

Single–and Double-loop Learning

Single-loop learning is most likely to be effective when the intent is to teach someone *how to do* something new. Single-loop learning answers the question, "Are we doing things right?" Double-loop learning answers the question, "Are we doing the right thing?" and is necessary when organizations are *learning to learn* (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Rowley, 2006a; Tosey et al., 2011). Whereas single-loop learning leads to improvement, double-loop learning leads to innovation.

Single-loop learning changes the strategies one uses to do something (Antunes & Pinherio, 2020; Argyris & Schon, 1996). It directs a learner's attention toward knowing what and knowing how. By focusing attention on routines and systems that contribute to "getting things done," single-loop learning assures that new routines are implemented in consistent and coherent ways. Single-loop learning is especially important to organizational mindfulness when safety, precision, and accuracy matter. However, single-loop learning is not simple. Single-loop learning requires significant individual and organizational *absorptive* capacity. Even modest change requires motivation and energy for success.

Double-loop learning prompts us to explore why we do the things we do. Double-loop learning requires *adaptive* capacity, the ability to change. In double-loop learning, pre-existing norms are not taken for granted. Rather, they are the object of mindful analysis and reflection. In schools, double-loop learning is evidenced through processes of continuous improvement or design science initiatives. In each, probing questions of why alongside those of how, offer opportunities for members of the school community to engage in focused inquiry and analysis. As a result of inquiry promoted by double-loop learning, meaning-making is enhanced and new practices are more likely to be incorporated and retained (Higgins et al., 2012; Ryu et al., 2022). Thus, double-loop learning has the potential to result in profound change.

School discipline practices offer a salient example of single–and double-loop learning. If approached from a single–loop-learning lens, the solution to student misbehavior is to refine existing practice. If approached from a double-loop learning lens, the solution might include evaluating the assumptions teachers and parents hold regarding power and control, reward and punishment, and respect and trust. Potentially, revising the current discipline policy might suffice. Equally possible, is that by discussing the values that underscore school discipline policy, teacher and staff perceptions of student behavior are altered, resulting in changes to how classroom discipline is approached.

TABLE 7.2

Single–, double–, and triple-loop learning

	Single-Loop Learning	Double-Loop Learning	Triple-Loop Learning
Definition	Learning to do	Learning to learn	Learning to learn to learn
Research Support	Empirical Theoretical Conceptual	Empirical Theoretical Conceptual	Theoretical
Focus of Inquiry	Are we doing things right?	Are we doing the right thing?	How do we know what is right?
Learning Behavior	Accommodate	Adapt	Evolve
Learning Cycle	Episodic Linear	Continuous Recursive	Generative Propagative
Knowledge	Codified Competency-based	Experiential Contextual	Inventive Imaginative
Learning Domain	Rules, routines, & systems	Values, norms, & assumptions	Systemic & structural patterns
Learning Foci	Knowing what Knowing how	Knowing why	Knowing the why of the why
Change Occurs	Absent questioning of governing values & norms	Inclusive of examination & alteration of organizational norms or assumptions	Inclusive of examination of the systems where norms & assumptions are nested
Learning Outcome	Improvement	Innovation Development	Disruption Revolution Transformation

Source: Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Argyris & Schon, 1996; Rowley, 2006a; Tosey et al., 2011.

This is not to say that double-loop learning is superior to single-loop learning. Sometimes, otherwise effective school routines need adjustments. It does not require an analysis of the governing values of the school to change how parent pick-up functions. Nor is it necessary to question long-standing beliefs when fast action must be taken. However, there are times when a thorough examination of organizational assumptions, values, and beliefs is necessary.

Moreover, when schools and other organizations fail to regularly question the assumptions on which practices and processes rest, they run the risk of mindlessly adopting unproductive initiatives. At best, poorly adopted initiatives are not well-matched or responsive to the problem at hand and, at worst, can perpetuate systemic inequities (Berson et al., 2006; Levinthal & Rerup,

2006; Rowley, 2006a, 2006b). Thus, effective organizational learning requires a balance of single–and double-loop learning. In practice, this means that mindful leaders must consider when an issue can be addressed by changing *how* something is done and when it requires an examination of *why* it is done.

Recently, a theory of triple-loop learning has been advanced (Flood & Romm, 2018; Tosey et al., 2011). Triple-loop learning suggests that leaders contemplate questions like, "How do we know *what* is right?" and focuses on *knowing the why of the why* underlying our assumptions and norms. Certainly, we currently live in a society that must examine the systems on which our norms and values are exercised, and, as such, triple-loop learning has its place in the literature. However, to date, triple-loop learning has yet to be empirically studied nor does it offer a clear conceptual lens for thinking about leadership practice. This is not to say that leaders should shy away from asking hard questions. Rather, it cautions against an uncritical preference toward the adoption of triple-loop learning at the expense of single–and double-loop learning efforts.

Influencing Internal and External Factors of OL

Huber (1991) suggests that organizational learning is a process of knowledge acquisition, interpretation, distribution, and storage. Mishra & Reddy (2021) describe a dynamic process of individual, group, and organizational learning comprised of intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing new ideas within an organization. Berson et al. (2006), explain that organizational learning requires leaders to facilitate the exploration of new ideas, stimulate shared understanding, and guide the integration of new learning into current practice. Writing from the lens of educational research, Schechter & Qadach (2012) describe organizational learning as the collective process of processing, understanding, and applying knowledge about teaching and learning. Leading for organizational learning is described well by Sophie Urbaine of Great Plains Middle School. She argues:

> It's important to me that my teachers learn together. I think that if they figure out how to do some new thing by working out among themselves, it's theirs. So, I try to give them opportunities to think deeply about their work. Their PLCs are the place for that. We really work to keep junk tasks out of that time and use it for discussion about issues that matter for student learning… The PLCs, they know coming up with a good instructional question, especially one that we can take on as a staff, is the coolest. Last year, the third-grade team got interested in how to teach kids to compare and contrast. We boiled that down to, "What does it mean to teach the skill of comparing?"… We keep coming back to that discussion. How did we know this or that was better? Were the kids getting it? …it's the best example I have of the big people [in our school] learning together and learning from each other.

Therefore, school leaders must be intentionally mindful of what new ideas are brought into the school (i.e., intuiting needs, acquiring information). How they are used once introduced (i.e., interpreting, understanding, distributing,

applying information) and in what ways new practices are to be retained (i.e., storage, institutionalization). However, as with so much school leadership, internal and external factors influence the absorptive and adaptive capacity of schools. In other words, organizational *context* matters if organizational learning is to be robust and impactful. Clearly, school leaders have little influence over many of the external factors that can impede or enhance organizational learning. Factors such as faculty, staff, and parent motivation to learn and organizational complexity are often tough to navigate. So is environmental uncertainty related to the political, social, economic, and legal context of the school.

Yet, there are many factors school leaders can control. These include the creation of transparent and unambiguous communication structures, the identification and nurturing of in-house expertise and resources, and the encouragement of interdependence, empowerment, and autonomy of school community members with the potential to support learning efforts. Similarly, school leaders can facilitate and support connections to inter-organizational networks and alliances and develop accountability structures that are conducive to organizational learning. Undeniably, all school leaders face barriers to organizational learning. Likewise, school leaders can influence many of the organizational conditions that facilitate organizational learning. As Berson et al. (2006) suggest, mindful leaders intentionally identify and capitalize on supportive factors while acknowledging and mitigating barriers as successfully as they can.

Essential Leadership and Organizational Attributes for OL

The research (Berson, et al., 2006; Do & Mai, 2020; Ryu et al., 2022) is unambiguous. Leadership matters if organizational learning is to be effective. Furthermore, effective organizational learning requires leaders to embrace organizational complexity and complicate, rather than simplify, their attentions (Provera et al., 2010). In practice, this means that leaders must intentionally build systems and routines into their daily work that encourage learning. Doing so requires that school leaders attend to five complementary and organizationally mindful foci.

First, leaders are well advised to adopt a *systems perspective* that explores how existing policies, practices, and procedures are (or are not) contributing to organizational goals. Second, leaders must develop their *perspective-taking* skills so that trust can be established, and credibility maintained. Third, it is imperative that leaders work to make the school a *psychologically safe* place for teachers and staff to work and for students and their families to belong. Fourth, leaders working to build their organizational learning capacities focus efforts on building strong relationships and crafting opportunities for *inclusive leadership*. Finally, organizational learning is supported by an environment of *openness and dialogue*, where surfacing both success and difficulty is encouraged.

However, an organizational learning approach acknowledges that not all learning is virtuous (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006). It is easy to draw inappropriate inferences or frame an issue incorrectly. Even

seemingly obvious signals can be misunderstood, and well-meaning, smart, people can reach different conclusions given the same information (Baston & Haamann, 2018; Rowley, 2006b). Complacency can undermine organizational learning as can being risk-averse or undaunted in the face of real threats (Sullivan, 2014). Therefore, to suggest that organizational learning is universally effective is a bit optimistic. However, it would be equally dangerous to suggest that organizational learning is not worth the effort. No doubt, organizational learning is hard. However, as Michela Flores of Bear Lake Schools states: "That's our work, learning what we need to know to do better."

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

At the heart of organizational mindfulness is the notion that change is required for organizations to thrive. However, this is not the same as saying that organizations must be constantly changing. Rather, it suggests that effective leaders attend to when, how, and why change is needed (Dumas & Beinecke, 2018; Naslund & Norrman, 2022; Rowland, 2017). As Oreg and Berson (2019) assert: "one cannot talk about leadership without, at least implicitly, referring to the process of change" (p. 272). As Eva Morin of Thelon Middle School suggests:

> Change is important but so is stability, it's like a tightrope…keeping all the plates spinning. I try to get the policies right, they always need attention, but what worked last year may not be right [for kids] this year. I mean, I want things to run smoothly, routine is good, right up to when it's not. That's the hard one… I don't want my teachers to think all we do is change. I want them to know that when we do change something it's done for a good reason. When I was teaching it was like a revolving door of stuff… Like we had to trust that someone, somewhere, knew how it all fit together… That experience led me to want to be different. I want people to know that I've been thoughtful about what I ask them to do. If they understand [the change], then hopefully they'll be more likely to be part of it.

As Morin notes, change requires building understanding and thoughtful action. The change literature echoes this idea and provides nuanced, evidence-based, conceptions for how leaders can best lead change.

Understanding Change

What is change? Naslund and Norrman (2022) suggest that change moves an organization "from an *as is* condition to a *to be* condition" (p. 4, emphasis added). Rowland (2017) defines change as, "the disturbance of repeating patterns" and notes that this definition, "applies equally to your own way of perceiving and acting as it does to the system you are seeking to change" (p. 218). Panayiotou et al. (2019) suggest change is, "a continual experience driven by a complex set of interrelationships within and across organizational

levels as opportunities become threats and vice versa" (p. 26). More straight-forwardly put, change is the act of becoming different.

While there are many ways to "become different," the change literature assumes that well-managed change results in positive outcomes. Undeniably, failure to manage change well has been linked to organizational dysfunction, turmoil, and instability (Bridwell, 2015; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Schwarz et al., 2021). The popular change leadership literature (Heath & Heath, 2010; Kotter, 1996, 2014; Little, 2014; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) and academic studies of change (Cameron & Green, 2012; Dumas & Beinecke, 2018; Naslund & Morrman, 2022) suggest that managing change is a major role, if not the most important role, of leadership. This is echoed in writing about school leadership as well (Adams et al., 2022; Schechter & Qadach, 2012; Spillane et al., 2019; Yurkofsky, 2022). Indeed, proving oneself to be a change manager, change agent, or change leader is considered a sign of leadership skill no matter the venue (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Moreover, the literature has coalesced around the notion that leaders are responsible for change readiness (Dumas & Beinecke, 2018; Naslund & Norrman, 2022), developing change purpose (Rowland, 2017; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), coordinating change processes (Oreg & Berson, 2019; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015), assuring positive change outcomes (Pina e Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Schwarz et al., 2021), and helping others to sense make throughout the experience (Sparr, 2018; Weick, 2001, 2015). The literature has been consistent in suggesting that change, no matter the context, is about getting from A to B and that doing so is a distinct process with a clear beginning, middle, and end. However, recent work has challenged this assumption as well as several others about change leadership.

Episodic and Continuous Change

While early work described the process of change to be episodic, linear, and discontinuous (Deming, 1950; Lewin, 1947; Tuckman, 1965) more recent writings have surfaced the idea that change is more likely to be continuous, emergent, and iterative (Panayiotou et al., 2019; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This distinction is important. Considering change as episodic, linear, and discontinuous suggests that change is an organizational property that leaders can control. Furthermore, it suggests that if controlled well, change will lead to organizational growth (i.e., increased profit, improved test scores) and positive outcomes (i.e., intensified collaboration, strengthened school/community engagement).

Certainly, positive outcomes are the goal of practicing organizational mindfulness. However, change does not necessarily result in growth nor is all change positive. Anyone who has lived through a levy or bond failure, shifting community demographics, or a global pandemic, knows that change can result in layoffs, shrinking budgets, and school closures. Of course, it is equally true that change can produce positive results. Furthermore, as Schwarz et al. (2021) contend, the literature's focus on successful change masks how failure can result in important learning.

Elliot Barcia, at King's Canyon High School describes how the changes Covid necessitated have impacted his school:

> We're not always great at [change]. Especially the early months of online. All we could do is react and pivot. It's not how I like to do things. We just threw things at the wall and hoped they'd work. I'm not dissing my staff; they worked their asses off. But it was like the biggest thing we learned was how to get through it… Funny thing though after we came back, we held meetings, a bunch of them, to work on what we wanted to keep. The stuff that worked. Some of it is really good. Sure…we had kids that bombed out on Zoom. But there were some kids that thrived. Frankly, the question now is how do we meet the needs of both those groups going forward? How do we circle back and use some of it more often? I don't want to lose the good stuff… All that work, it has to have been worth something.

As Barcia suggests, when leaders embrace change as continuous, emergent, and iterative, they are more likely to focus their attentions on mindful activities that result in questioning, learning, and innovation (Dumas & Beinecke, 2018; Kotter, 2014). Additionally, they are more likely to seek new perspectives, encourage participation, empower others, and respond to mishaps and errors more quickly and effectively (Cameron & Green, 2012; Rowland, 2017). When change is viewed as ongoing, rather than something to complete, it offers the opportunity for learning to be institutionalized within a school's culture. Yet, here too, it is important to accept that embracing change as continuous, emergent, and iterative does not ensure against failure. Rather, it changes the focus of leadership effort in several ways.

Rarely does change come out of nowhere. Needs evolve, opportunities present themselves, and issues arise. Embracing change as continuous, emergent, and iterative acknowledges the *reality* of organizational change. Even if the issues are easily resolved, they usually require some change in organizational behavior. At the very least, change requires others to learn about the new policy, practice, or procedure. However, the reality is that organizational change, no matter how minor it may seem, can cause tensions. Tensions arise as members struggle to make meaning of change, how to respond to it, and ways to connect changes to prior practices and one's understanding of the organization. By acknowledging organizational tensions, school leaders can balance discomfort with encouragement for individual and organizational learning and the attainment of shared and valued goals.

Second, viewing change as ongoing provides school leaders the room to *modify and adjust* as implementation occurs. When experienced as an ongoing phenomenon, change aids in increasing trust and respect among faculty, staff, students, parents, and caregivers because it does not require immediate perfection (Blustein et al., 2019; Bryer, 2020; Rowland, 2017). As trust is developed throughout the change process, subsequent work becomes easier (Naslund & Norrman, 2022; Panayiotou et al., 2019).

Third, as Panayiotou et al. (2019) and Oreg & Berson (2019) suggest, ongoing change efforts can prompt *conversation* regarding who is privileged

and who is marginalized by change. When change is considered continuous, emergent, and iterative, it opens a space for further inquiry and creative response. In turn, leaders benefit because teachers, parents, students, and families know that there is room for purposeful feedback and mindful adjustment.

Finally, understanding what *kind* of change is needed matters if leaders are to be effective. All change is not equal and therefore all change cannot be handled in the same fashion. Historically, the change literature has drawn distinctions between first-order and second-order change (Bartunek & Moch, 1987), technical and adaptive change (Heifetz, 1994), and structural and cultural change (Rowland, 2017). The distinction between first-order and second-order change is similar to that of single–and double-loop learning. First-order change works within the existing structures of an organization while second-order change involves seeing the world in a new way.

Likewise, technical and adaptive change draws a distinction between change that is clear and straightforward (i.e., technical change) and change that requires organizational learning and adaptation (i.e., adaptive change). Heifetz (1994) further distinguishes between Type I, Type II, and Type III change suggesting that situations can be defined by how easily the problem is defined and how much learning is required to find a solution. Type I change requires no learning as both the problem and solution are clear (e.g., dress code violations) and can be solved by a technical or already known solution (e.g., application of policy). Whereas Type III problems require learning to understand both the problem and the solution (e.g., systemic inequities in schools). Type II problems fall in between. In Type II situations the problem is clear (e.g., decreasing reading achievement) but the solution requires learning (e.g., adoption and implementation of new pedagogies).

Determining whether an issue is structural or cultural follows a similar pattern. Structural change (e.g., rebuilding the district website) is considered episodic and cultural change (e.g., inclusion of students and families in decision-making processes) more adaptive and iterative. However, while first-order, technical, and structural change can be addressed through the application of well-known routines, handling them well is not a mindless act. In fact, solving technical problems can be quite complicated, requiring multiple analyses, trials, and evaluations prior to uncovering the best course of action. Yet, in the end, even a complicated problem can be broken down into its component parts and the interconnections between those parts understood and altered as needed. Second-order change, adaptive, and cultural problems are complex, unpredictable, and multifaceted, necessarily requiring individual and organizational learning as well as intentional leadership action. However, labeling what kind of change is occurring is less important than ensuring that leaders engage in the right kind of learning for the problems they are facing and the intended outcomes and goals.

Process Models of Change

Even when change is characterized as an ongoing adaptive process the literature has traditionally focused on identifying key stages of the change process

(Kubler-Ross, 1969; Lewin, 1947; Tuckman, 1965) and recommendations for leadership action (cf. Cameron & Green, 2004, 2009, 2012; Heath & Heath, 2010, Kotter, 1996, 2014; Little, 2014; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). No doubt, this research has been instrumental in providing useful roadmaps for understanding the stages, phases, steps, or actions that support a leader's change process. However, while descriptive, most process models frame change as singular, situational, and bounded, failing to fully capture the pervasiveness, open-endedness, and fluidity of most change. As Tsoukas & Chia (2002) remind us, when change is described in this fashion, it fails to account for what goes on in between, in response to, and because of leadership practice and school community response.

In other words, like most roadmaps, process models can only offer directions for navigation. They cannot account for roadwork, cranky passengers, car trouble, or bad weather. Eva Morin, Principal of Thelon Middle School describes this dilemma:

> Our district has spent a lot of time trying to scaffold change. Particularly in things like curriculum and instruction. It's just that we're doing so much. All. The. Time. We want it to go well. We look at data, we try to get folks to understand the urgency of doing things differently. We vision, we pilot initiatives… We [try to] get folks on board. Coalition of the willing and all that. I think we try to communicate it all… I think we miss the mark there. It just takes so long and we're doing so much. By the time we get around to full implementation it's hard to link it all back to why we started it in the first place. Just so much has happened in between. Water under the bridge, you know? We talk about celebrating our successes but really… [we] never get around to that happening and when it does, it's hard to convince people that it was worth it. I mean, it's just all so hard…

While Morin's description of her district's change process does not fit neatly into any one model of change, it has features of many. Her district tries to establish urgency and purpose for new initiatives. They vision, pilot, and communicate each effort. They attempt to generate short-term wins and celebrate long-term success. However, as Morin suggests, even the best change process roadmap cannot account for the social and contextual realities of change. This is not to suggest that these models are without value. It is simply to say, like a roadmap, they cannot account for all the detours, disruptions, and dilemmas along the way.

Importantly, process models of change rarely capture how *complex* responses to change efforts can be (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2015; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2021). Change, no matter how small, is likely to elicit a range of emotions and reactions. Under the best conditions, people are happy and their responses are positive. While it is unlikely that everyone is equally happy about any change, the research (Blustein et al., 2019; Higgins et al., 2012; Weick, 2001) is clear, well-managed change efforts are more likely to produce a positive reaction. However, even well-managed change efforts

Representative models of change

Author	Year	Stages, Phases, Steps, & Actions	Orientation to Change
Lewin	1947	Unfreezing, Changing, Re-freezing	Episodic/Linear
Deming	1950	PDSA—Plan, Do, Study, Act	Episodic/Linear
Tuckman	1965	Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning	Episodic/Linear
Kubler-Ross	1969	Shock, Denial, Frustration, Depression, Experimentation, Decision, Integration	Episodic Discontinuous
Waterman, Peters, & Phillips	1980	7S Model—Structure, Systems, Strategy, Skills, Style, Staff, Superordinate goals (More recent versions drop Superordinate goals as the seventh S and replaces it with Shared values)	Emergent Continuous
Kotter	1996 2014	Create a sense of urgency, Build a guiding coalition, Form a strategic vision & initiatives, Enlist a volunteer army, Enable action by removing barriers, Generate short-term wins, Sustain acceleration, Institute change	Emergent Continuous
Cameron & Green	2004 2009 2012	Establish the need for change, Build a change team, Create vision & values, Communicate, engage, & empower others, Notice & celebrate improvements, & Consolidate results	Emergent Continuous
Thaler & Sunstein	2008	Clearly define the change, Explore options from additional perspectives & feedback, Make change easier than status quo, Use positive reinforcement	Emergent Iterative
Heath & Heath	2010	Follow the bright stops, Script critical moves, Point to the destination, Find the feeling, Shrink the change, Grow your people, Tweak the environment, Build habits, Rally the heard	Emergent Iterative
Schlechty	2011	Identify organizational trailblazers, pioneers, settlers, stay-at-homes, & saboteurs, Tailor efforts to the needs of each, Create commitment to change	Continuous Iterative
Little	2014	Employ Insights, Options, & Experiments to Create alignment for change	Emergent Iterative

Source: Cameron & Green, 2004, 2009, 2012; Deming, 1950, Heath & Heath, 2010; Kotter, 1996, 2014; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Lewin, 1947; Little, 2014; Schlechty, 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Tuckman, 1965, Waterman, Peters, & Phillips, 1980.

cannot guarantee a warm and supportive response. *Resistance* to change is a well-known leadership challenge. Although resistance is generally seen as a barrier to change, mindful resistance can help to identify where cultural mismatches and contextual problems may exist. In other words, there are times when resistance is a positive force, and it is worthwhile for school leaders to take early opposition seriously.

More commonly, resistance to change is an impediment to innovation and growth (Oreg & Berson, 2019; Panayiotou et al., 2019; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Therefore, defining and promoting change in ways that make adoption more feasible is foundational to successful change efforts. Key leadership actions suggested to counter resistance are the importance of mindful problem framing, vision, communication, inclusive involvement, and developing commitment to change. Supporting factors are suggested to be trust in leadership, attention to system capacity, active listening, and the allocation of necessary resources to support change efforts. Yet, no matter how mindful leaders are about change, change remains paradoxical because it requires balancing competing individual and organizational understandings and actions.

Paradoxes of Organizational Change

A paradox is a statement that contradicts itself or contains contradictory features. However contradictory, contained within every paradox is an inherent truth. Therefore, paradoxes are considered unsolvable, although the tensions that paradoxes create may be. Particularly salient to organizational change efforts are learning, organizing, belonging, and preforming paradoxes (Neumerski & Cohen, 2019; Pina e Cunha & Putnam, 2019; Sparr, 2018). *Learning paradoxes* require balancing new ideas with older ones and flexibility and fidelity. *Organizing paradoxes* ask that order and stability be sacrificed for change and adaption. *Belonging paradoxes* pit individual and collective identity against each other suggesting a forced choice between "buying in" and "selling out." Finally, *performing paradoxes* raise tensions between learning and developing, and doing one's best. No wonder change efforts are often met by confusion and resistance.

Furthermore, individual and organizational tensions are uncomfortable, and it is human nature to attempt to resolve discomfort. However, when individuals feel like they must choose between the extremes that organizational paradoxes present, change efforts can be undermined. Forcing a choice between, for example, stability and adaptation, is unlikely to engender trust or advance change efforts. Likewise, when posed as an *either/or* proposition paradox resolution has been suggested to increase emotional load, burnout, and cynicism, none of which are conducive to change (Panayiotou et al., 2019). To avoid unproductive responses to change, most leaders adopt a *both/and* approach to paradox resolution hoping to restore organizational equilibrium as quickly as possible (Rowland, 2017). However, if executed poorly, both/and approaches can backfire because leaders run the risk of sending unclear and inconsistent messages further intensifying the paradox (Sparr, 2018).

A more productive leadership choice is approaching paradox management from a *more/than* approach (Panayiotou et al., 2019). More/than approaches, connect paradoxical tensions, situates them in a relationship to organizational actions and decisions, and reframes tensions in ways that promote individual and communal reflection (Panayiotou et al., 2019; Sparr, 2018). More/than approaches to paradox management promote individual and organizational learning and spotlight deep learning as an integral part of change efforts. Moreover, when leaders acknowledge the tensions paradoxes pose and allow the opportunity for school community members to discuss their responses and reactions to them, resistance is better managed. As Murphy (2019) contends, when people feel heard, even when resolutions are few, they are more likely to thoughtfully participate and contribute.

IN CONCLUSION

Organizational mindfulness embraces learning and change as points of inquiry and leadership. To do each well, leaders must intentionally incorporate elements of single–and double-loop learning and episodic and iterative change into their leadership repertoire. Foundational to doing so, is the ability to see issues, concerns, and problems as starting points for learning and change rather than as failure. For leaders who pride themselves on having all the answers, being independent, and being in charge, this is likely an unwelcome conclusion. However, for leaders who can embrace intentional, mindful learning as the beginning of meaningful change, the news is better. By welcoming, rather than resisting the enduring nature of challenge and change, school leaders can promote learning, organizational mindfulness, and skillful response and action.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Scanning the Body

As the meditations in prior chapters demonstrate, the practice of mindfulness is multifaceted. Whether we are focused on our breath or emphasizing loving-kindness (metta bhavana), appreciative joy (mudita bhavana), compassion (karuna bhavana), or equanimity (upekkha bhavana), meditations offer us a way to step back from the stresses of life and find stability of mind. Offered here is a different kind of meditation, the body scan. Body scan meditation offers a powerful way to connect with the physical body, directing attention to areas of held tension, pain, or stiffness. Based on the observation that our bodies react to our emotional states, a body scan offers insight into how our bodies respond to and store emotion. Body scanning has been found to lessen anxiety, decrease stress, improve sleep quality, reduce chronic pain, and improve focus (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Varela et al., 2017).

Like other forms of meditation, body scanning offers information. What you do with that information is for you to decide. However, acceptance is generally considered more productive than resistance or judgement. Obviously, this is not the same as denying reality. Sometimes things are stressful, sad, and unfair. In response, many people feel overwhelmed, distressed, or angry. These are real and natural reactions that cannot be meditated away. However, body scanning can provide a window for knowing ourselves and becoming more aware, awake, and engaged in our lives.

Body scanning involves paying attention to the parts of your body (e.g., face, shoulders, arms, torso, legs) in a gradual sequence from feet to head. Offered here is a straightforward, easily learned, sequence.

- Start by getting comfortable. Lying on a yoga mat, a folded blanket, or a well-carpeted floor works well. If you are lying on the floor, try to find a location free of drafts or direct sunlight. Being too cold or warm can detract from the experience. Rolling a small towel and placing it under your neck is helpful as is resting your head on a small pillow. If you are looking to use this meditation before going to sleep (or as a way to get to sleep) lying in bed works as well. If lying down is uncomfortable or impractical, try sitting in a chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Take several long slow breaths. This is a good time to practice following where the breath naturally goes. It is also a good time to work on developing a slightly longer exhale than inhale. Doing so signals your body's natural relaxation process.
- When you feel ready bring your awareness to your feet. You might try wiggling your toes or gently rocking the feet side to side. Attend to how your toes feel, the ball of your foot, the heal. Do the tops of your feet feel different than the soles of your feet? If you feel discomfort, acknowledge it and any thoughts or emotions that it brings, and gently breathe through it. As always, if you feel real discomfort, feel free to adjust your position.
- When you are ready, move up your body, including the ankles, calves, knees, the whole lower leg, the upper leg, and your entire lower body. Continue this practice, moving slowly closer to your head. Focus on how the different parts of your body feel.
- You may pause at any time to concentrate on one place, one feeling, or one emotion. You may want to ask yourself, "What am I feeling in this spot?" It may take a moment for something to arise. Maybe nothing will. Just allow yourself to feel what is happening as you focus on each area of your body.
- The point is not to change how your body feels. However, it is useful to observe where you feel tension, pain, or pressure. If you would like, you can practice focusing your breath on the tense or painful areas, and breathe into those muscles and ligaments. It may prompt a noticeable

change, perhaps relaxing or softening. If nothing changes, just allow yourself to feel the experience as you are having it.

- As you come to the end of the session, you can expand your awareness to your whole body starting with the soles of your feet and ending at the crown of your head. Wiggle your fingers and toes to wake the body. A few gentle stretches might feel nice.
- End with several rounds of breath, noting how your breath may have changed. Perhaps it lengthened or shortened, or maybe you feel it more in your stomach or the sides of your body than you did before you started. Be as slow and deliberate as possible. Making a thoughtful transition to the world beyond the mat helps solidify the benefits of the practice.

Variations. You can play with this meditation. Two common variations are to target the sides of your body, taking one leg first, moving up that side of the body to the crown of the head, and ending at the sole of the other foot. Another alternative is to play with progressive muscle relaxation. Progressive muscle relaxation follows the same process of isolating different areas of the body but adds a step of purposely tightening and relaxing each muscle group as you move throughout the exercise.

Activity

ACTIVITY 7

ORGANIZATIONAL MINDFULNESS SELF-ASSESSMENT (KABAT-ZINN, 2003; LEVINTHAL & RERUP, 2006; WEICK & SUTCLIFFE, 2015)

This scale is designed to allow you to reflect on organizational mindfulness in your school. Each item is worded in two ways; the first prompts you to consider how you perceive your leadership. The second is focused on your perception of your school's organizational mindfulness. Your two rankings may align or they may not. The point is not to aspire to perfect alignment. Rather, it is to note the differences and to consider how organizational mindfulness might be further developed.

	Comfort	Stretch
As a school leader, I encourage questioning.		
In my school, questioning is encouraged.		
As a school leader, I seek additional, relevant information prior to making decisions.		
In my school, it is commonplace to seek additional, relevant information prior to making decisions.		
As a school leader, when something goes wrong, I help others as they work to correct it.		
In my school, when something goes wrong, we work together to correct it.		
As a school leader, I respect the knowledge and skills of everyone.		
In my school, everyone's knowledge and skills are respected.		
As a school leader, I do not give up.		
In my school, we do not give up.		
As a school leader, I have the time I need to understand the problems I face.		
In my school, we have the time we need to understand the problems we face.		
As a school leader, when things go wrong, I bounce back quickly.		
In my school, when things go wrong, we bounce back quickly.		
As a school leader, I am not reluctant to change.		
In my school, we are not reluctant to change.		
As a school leader, it does not matter who thought of a good idea (or a solution to a problem) for me to accept the idea.		

	Comfort	Stretch
In my school, it does not matter who thought of a good idea (or a solution to a problem) for the idea to be accepted.		
As a school leader, I know what teachers, staff, students, and families are doing to support student learning and well-being.		
In my school, everyone knows what teachers, staff, students, and families are doing to support student learning and well-being.		
As a school leader, my colleagues are a source of support and help.		
In my school, other teachers and staff are a source of support and help.		
As a school leader, my colleagues know learning matters to me.		
In my school, everyone knows that learning matters.		

Leading a mindful organization is difficult work. Reflecting on one or more of these questions might help you to determine your next steps:

- Are there differences in how you ranked yourself and your school?
- Are those differences significant and why?
- How might you act in more organizationally mindful ways?
- How could you encourage schoolwide organizational mindfulness?
- What might be a challenge to increased schoolwide organizational mindfulness?
- What might be a benefit of increased schoolwide organizational mindfulness?

Additional Resources

Much of the hard work of organizational and educational leadership is related to handling organizational learning and change. Getting it right can feel like a Sisyphean task. Numerous good resources exist to support leaders in these efforts. Here are three recommendations that hopefully can support your leadership.

- Marcus, L., McNulty, E., Henderson, J., & Dorn, B. (2019). *You're it: Crisis, change, and how to lead when it matters most.* New York, NY: Hatchet. Published right before the pandemic hit, *You're it* was a prescient guide to navigating difficult situations. Drawing examples from the Boston Marathon Bombing response, the Deepwater Houston Oil spill, and other familiar crisis situations, the authors provide examples of meta-leadership (e.g., leadership focused on multiple dimensions of organizational activity) during crisis. Encouraging leaders to seek the bigger picture and to develop understandings of how multiple actors and factors interact in a crisis situation, *You're it*, provides practical examples and insights for thinking and acting with clarity, intention, and confidence in the face of problems.
- Rigby, D., Elk, S., & Berez, S. (2020). *Doing agile right: Transformation without chaos.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press. In *Doing agile right* Rigby and colleagues offer insights into how agile change can happen and how it can go wrong. The authors argue that balancing order and structure with innovation and change matters if leaders are to succeed. Stressing the role of communication, decision-making, and organizational measurement and reward structures in agile leadership, Rigby and colleagues focus on how leaders contribute to organizational equity. Happily, the authors acknowledge that organizations differ, as do leadership styles. Doing so, *Doing agile right* offers a realistic portrayal of change and leaders' roles in it.
- Ted Talks—Listening to a quick Ted Talk can kick-start creativity and renew organizational commitment. Ted Talks are updated regularly, and it is worth searching for topics that interest you or might be a better fit for current circumstances. However, here are five talks directed related to the ideas in this chapter.
  - Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas, (2022), *Why great leaders take humor seriously.*
  - Ken Chenault, (2022), *How great leaders innovate responsibly.*
  - Adie Delaney, (2020), *An aerialist on listening to your body's signals.*
  - Frances Frei, (2018), *How to build (and rebuild) trust.*
  - Ashley Grice, (2022), *The power of purpose.*

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Mindfulness and Communication

KEY VOCABULARY

Communication—The act of transmitting, exchanging, or sharing information.

Conversation—An interpersonal exchange that involves sharing of ideas, opinions, or observations.

Dialogue—A communicative process in which listening, reflection, self-expression, and idea-sharing are of equal importance.

Discourse—A purposeful use of language to favor one interpretation of events over another.

Meaning-making—An internal process of interpretation of events, situations, or ideas in relation to our current and previous knowledge and experience.

Sensemaking—A retrospective process by which people give meaning to collective, often ambiguous or complex, shared experiences.

Weaving is the process of taking one material and interlacing it with others to create an altogether new object. Baskets are created by weaving grasses, wire, or plastic. Stories are fashioned by weaving together plot, characters, settings, and issues. Fabric is made by weaving fibers together. When things are woven together each individual thread contributes to the whole.

When fabric is woven, warp threads are strung across a loom to form a sturdy foundation for the project. Warp threads need to be tight enough to create structure but loose enough so that the weft (or woof) threads can be woven between them. Absent the weft threads, warp threads lack purpose. Absent the warp thread, the weft threads have nothing to hang on to. Together,

held in place by the loom, when complete, the warp and weft threads create something that includes both but is wholly distinct.

Contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness function a bit like the loom, warp, and weft threads. Separately, they each have substance. Individually, each can be used as a tool for individual and organizational discovery. However, each is more useful when utilized together. When woven together, contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness create powerful leadership practice.

Indeed, and as research (Good et al., 2016; Langer, 2014; Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015) supports, these three traditions rely on many of the same orientations, skills, and competencies. Contemplative mindfulness hones our skills of focus, concentration, and attention. It prompts us to be curious about our inner worlds and pay attention to how we respond to the external world. Cognitive mindfulness turns our awareness outward, openly seeking and considering the perspectives of others. Both contemplative and cognitive mindfulness prompt us to resist premature judgement and categorization so that our responses to internal and external stimuli are better informed. Organizational mindfulness further broadens our attention, encouraging us to learn from day-to-day organizational events and with the intent of increasing resilience. When woven together, the practices of attention and curiosity, awareness and openness, and learning and resilience, form and inform mindful leadership.

Yet, weaving these constructs together is only the beginning. Mindful leadership requires *action* and action requires preparation and skill. All too often, leadership is presented as a series of simple steps that, once followed, assure success. If only we could develop a values-driven vision, provide the necessary encouragement and resources to attain the goals associated with the vision, muster an organizational culture supportive of that work, and think strategically about evaluating those efforts, all will be well. Yet, as any school leader knows, it is far easier to outline the work than to accomplish it.

Furthermore, it is easy to misinterpret what taking action means. The myth of the heroic leader depicts leaders as strong characters who know all the answers. Conceived of this way, leadership action is conflated with decisive decision-making, demonstrated by leaders who "call the shots," especially in times of crisis and difficulty. Here too, practiced school leaders know better. They understand that school leadership requires more than the heroic efforts of one person. Furthermore, they understand that if their actions are to be effective, attention to the intention behind the action (i.e., the desire to make something better), the execution of the action (i.e., the application of knowledge and skill), and the outcome (i.e., what comes of the effort) is necessary. They must act mindfully. Jade Lee, principal of Frasiers Creek Middle School reflects on what it takes to lead mindfully:

> I try to direct people away from chaos and drama. That's important. Being schools…it's hard, no one thinks we're doing things right. But, I think, if we start from the place that the world is coming to an end every time we

face something hard, it's really unproductive. Being aware of that…it's important. I try to communicate clearly… For me, it comes down to the way I communicate our work and then how I help [others] make sense of what it means for them and their work… That means I have to really plan how I introduce [something new].

Lee continues:

I have teachers…they let me know if they think I'm wrong…and they'll tell me why. They don't mince words. But, if I skip the step…if I don't listen…well, let's just say things can get really [messed] up… Too, I draw the distinction, and I think this is important, between developing a plan that changes what we do for a good reason and just doing change. We don't change here just because. We do new things for a purpose [and] that purpose…it's not enough that I know it, everyone has to know it, and know why it matters…everyone needs to know the story. To have a part in it… We don't [all] see things the same way. Sometimes we have to…backtrack. But we can, I can, survive that. What we can't survive is not doing anything.

Lee describes how she plans for purposeful action, demonstrating that action requires planning, attention to execution, and awareness of outcomes as they unfold.

Lee's words demonstrate how she intentionally weaves the three traditions of mindfulness together. Drawing from contemplative mindfulness, she stresses how recognizing and reflecting on the pressures that educators face informs her thinking and acknowledges, but is not paralyzed, by them. From cognitive mindfulness, she describes how identifying and respecting others' perspectives informs the school's work and how that work is linked to purpose and change. Finally, from organizational mindfulness, Lee explains how she engages others in the school's work and creates a shared story about that work. For Lee, purposeful action includes many of the systems and practices that leading mindfully requires. Moreover, Lee's words emphasize how communication and sensemaking contribute to mindful leadership practice.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is essential to leadership (Adams et al., 2022; Cunningham et al., 2020; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). A quick Google search offers over one million lists of traits, characteristics, and attributes of effective communication. Among the most popular (Baird & Stull, 1992), are the seven C's, including clarity, correctness, conciseness, courtesy, concreteness, consideration, and completeness. Other lists include traits such as assertiveness, confidence, the ability to establish connection, and persuasiveness. Still, others stress characteristics such as transparency and honesty, listening with empathy, and patience.

TABLE 8.1

Weaving contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness with leadership systems & practices

Leadership System & Practice	Contemplative Mindfulness	Cognitive Mindfulness	Organizational Mindfulness
Acting in ways that support...	*Recognizing & reflecting on...*	*Identifying & respecting...*	*Engaging with others about...*
Accountability	What matters to you	What matters to others & why it matters	Which goals are key to success & what barriers are present
Authenticity	How your values & beliefs inform who you are	How others' values & beliefs inform who they are	How organizational values & beliefs inform decision-making & problem-solving
Awareness	How to pay attention to the world around you	How differentiation, openness, & perspective-taking inform your thinking	What can go wrong & what data is needed to prevent failure
Belonging	How places, people, & situations make you feel	How others experience their worlds & how that differs from your experience	What is needed to create welcoming, inclusive spaces in schools
Change	How change is an ongoing, emergent process	How process can help or hinder progress to important goals	How to balance continuous, recursive, & paradoxical events & situations
Communication	How to listen with curiosity & interest	When to use what form of communicative message & for what purpose	How narratives are built, sustained, & changed
Learning	How to learn to learn	When to employ single & double loop learning	How organizational learning is created & supported
Meaning-making	What is meaningful to you	How complexity shapes individuals' interpretation & narrative	How social worlds are shaped & the role of power dynamics in that shaping
Perspective-taking	Your own positionality	How & why others see the world as they do	How others have equally valid narratives & explanations for events & situations

(*Continued*)

TABLE 8.1 CONTINUED

Leadership System & Practice	Contemplative Mindfulness	Cognitive Mindfulness	Organizational Mindfulness
Sensemaking	How to question your own sensemaking assumptions & preferences	What is happening in the present that has implications for the future	How shared interpretative narratives are retrospective & partial
Systems thinking	That belonging & connectedness are felt experiences	Which routines, practices, & processes support values & goals	How systems fail & that failure can be prevented

Source: Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Langer, 2014; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015.

No matter the lack of consensus, the message is clear. Communicating well matters if leaders are to be effective. Likewise, effective communication has been linked to numerous positive outcomes for individuals and organizations. Focusing only on studies in educational leadership, efficacious communication has been suggested to build trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015), increase goal attainment (Leithwood et al., 2020; Robinson & Gray, 2019), and mitigate conflict (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020; Folger et al., 2021).

While the importance of communication is uncontested, what communication is, and entails, is decidedly muddled. Traditionally, the literature has focused on the role of the sender and the medium of the message in the communicative process (Coffelt & Smith, 2020; Lee & Chon, 2021). Seen in this light, communication is episodic and transmissional. Yet, recent research has suggested that prior studies have conflated communication methods and communication purpose, and the roles of speech, power, and complexity in the communicative event (Cunningham et al., 2020; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Highlighting the role of communication in connection and learning, this literature suggests that meaning-making, listening, and dialogue, rather than the transmission of information, should be central to leadership communication efforts (Adams et al., 2022; Anderson & Mungal, 2015; Fairhurst, 2005; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Marshak, 2019; Rubin & Gogliotti, 2016).

Before we move on to a deeper discussion of transmissional, meaning-centered, and dialogic communication, it is important to discourage passive categorization of these constructs. Each can be executed in a mindful fashion. Conversely, each can be done mindlessly.

Transmissional Communication

Based on the assumption that leadership is fundamentally about influencing others, transmissional communication focuses on exercising that influence (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). As Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) describe, transmissional communication is marked by "the intentional creation of messages with particular influence outcomes in mind" (p. 470). No doubt, most school leaders have experienced training or coursework focused on how and to whom communication should be directed, identification of specific behavioral outcomes, and the use of instrumental tools (e.g., email, texts, Twitter) for efficient and effective message delivery. Certainly, these skills matter.

However, as Fairhurst (2005) cautions, performance-centered, directive leadership communication focuses on the use of communication as a tool of authority. Portrayed as an episodic, linear process that leaders are able to manage and control, transmissional communication models suggest that communication is effective *because* the communicator achieved the results their communication was designed to produce. Therefore, it is unsurprising that transmissional communication has been critiqued for being top-down, one-sided, and characterized by interpersonal dominance and autocratic action (Arendt et al., 2019; Cunningham et al., 2020). Moreover, transmissional

communication theory assumes that messages are received as intended and minimizes the possibility of miscommunication and misunderstanding. From a leadership lens, these are clearly failings of the transmissional communication paradigm.

However, there is a place for mindful transmissional communication. Transmissional communication directed toward conveying the right message, in the right way, focuses leadership intention on messaging that engenders transparency, clarity, and coherence. Transmissional communication works well when leaders need to convey timely information and strive to do so in ways that are sensitive to their audience. Likewise, when messages are carefully crafted, expectations clear, and an appropriate vehicle is used, transmissional communication can be exactly what is needed in that moment. Transmissional communication works less well when leaders use it as their exclusive communication form or when messaging is unclear, insensitive, or divisive. Furthermore, transmissive communication fails when depth is needed, when messages are complex, and when meaning may be contested.

COMMUNICATION AS MEANING-MAKING

Communication as meaning-making assumes that talk and text do more than share objective or directive information. Meaning-centered models of communication place attention on the importance of understanding meaning-making as constructed and subjective. Assuming that communication is relational and synergistic, meaning-centered models of communication stress the internal and *individual* nature of meaning-making. As Michaelson (2021) observes, meaning-making is informed by the "perceptions and preferences of the individual" (p. 414). Therefore, meaning-making is defined as an internal cognitive process and highlights the role of individuals' interpretation of situations, events, and actions in light of their own worldviews, values, and goals (Arendt et al., 2019; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Marshak, 2019).

This is not to say that meaning-making is not open to influence. Rather, it suggests that influence is less a product of direct transmissive communication and more a product of negotiation and built understanding. Moreover, it suggests that when the message sent is aligned with the values, attitudes, and expectations of the receiver, it is more likely to be accepted and acted upon. As Ruben and Gigliotti (2016) stress, "meaning is not easily controlled by the leader, but rather it results from interactions between leaders and followers" (p. 470). Simply put, meaning-making may be informed by the thoughts and actions of others, but in the end, it is wholly individual and personal.

Communication, when viewed through a meaning-making lens, draws on *awareness*. For one to make meaning one must be aware of what matters to them and why it matters. Similarly, if meaning is to become shared, as it must be for people to act in communal ways, significant leadership attention and effort must be directed toward perspective-seeking, perspective-taking, and authentic action (i.e., self-awareness, self-understanding, self-regulation).

Therefore, meaning-making, as a communicative process, is contingent on three interwoven ideas. First, it is essential that the meaning of *meaning* be understood. Second, *framing*, the process whereby situations, events, and actions are shaped by choosing one set of meanings over others, is a critical consideration. Third, unlike transmissional communication, meaning-making is *ongoing* and *socially constructed*. Therefore, understanding the processes that shape the construction of meaning is important.

What Meaning Means

Meaning is a tricky concept. It can convey significance, intention, and consequence. When someone states, "This means the world to me" they are suggesting that whatever "this" is, is of significance. Likewise, when someone says, "I mean to be on time" they are conveying an intention. Finally, the words, "This means trouble" communicate the sense that a consequence may follow. Therefore, meaning is *explanatory* and *informative*. Meaning explains what matters to someone and consequently informs the choices and decisions that individual makes.

Take, for example, the idea of meaningful work. Most school leaders believe they are engaged in meaningful work. As Leah Willson states, "[My work] has a purpose, it matters, it's worthwhile. I'm contributing, in my own way, to making this community better. That's meaningful to me." Willson's description focuses on purpose, worth, and contribution, describing her work as meaningful *because* performing it holds meaning for her. Undoubtedly, Willson would like others to recognize her work as important as well. However, the evaluation of others is not a factor she includes in defining what is meaningful to her. To the extent that similar values, ideas, and actions have meaning to others, they *may* be of value in developing shared meaning. However, what makes something meaningful *is* independent of whether or not it is meaningful to others (Michaelson, 2021).

Moreover, meaning is informed by our perceptions. Leah Willson perceives that her work has meaning. This is based, in part, on her perception of what is required to "mak[e] this community better." She may be right. Her work may be integral to the betterment of her community. She also could be wrong. Her perception might be based on her own biases, projections, or preconceptions concerning what makes a community "better." Therefore, meaning-making is inherently fragile. Because meaning-making is based on experiences, and experiences are limited, so is meaning-making. Thus, meaning-making is always subject to the ways in which issues, events, and situations are framed and how those framings influence our interpretations (Arendt et al., 2019; Fairhurst, 2005).

Framing and Reframing

As Fairhurst (2005) and Fairhurst and Connaughton (2014) suggest, framing is a process in which people describe events, ideas, and actions in ways that assert their *interpretations* as superior to that of other interpretations. As

Entman (1993) suggests, "framing is the promotion of a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 166–7). Therefore, framing contributes to meaning-making because it is communication that shapes subsequent interpretations of events, ideas, and actions.

Framing, as a communicative process, occurs at the individual, communal, and societal level. When someone suggests that something is important because they say it is important, they have framed the conversation. When units, teams, or groups of people agree and communicate that this is "how we do things around here," communal framing is in play. Measures of student success and well-being, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and the role of parent engagement in the school are all societally framed constructs.

Moreover, framing can be overt or covert. Overt framing occurs when a problem is openly defined as one thing or another. When events, issues, situations, or people are categorized, framing is at play. When Simon Kimberson states, "I see myself as constantly being critical of a lot of the hierarchical structures that exist within organizations... I don't see myself fitting into a hierarchy where I have the power to judge others" he is overtly framing school organizations as hierarchical, and that power is bestowed (or limited) by one's place in the hierarchy. Similarly, when Maryam Khot suggests that "No matter what, our job is to educate kids...no matter what else is going on, and there's always something going on, our job is to teach," she is explicitly framing the purpose of schooling (i.e., educating students) and the role of teachers' contributions (i.e., providing instruction) to achieving that purpose.

However, Khot's statement might be understood in a more covert way as well. She may be suggesting that education also includes the kinds of things schools provide beyond instruction. Covertly, she may be suggesting creating a safe environment, feeding students breakfast and lunch, and offering tutoring, coaching, or counseling so that students are better able to participate in the educative process. Likewise, when Rosa Fortin asserts, "The past, it ain't coming back," she implies that, in her school, there is little tolerance for nostalgia, especially if it interferes with making progress in the present. In this case, she may be framing how she plans to structure future discussion, or she may be reframing the present, signaling the kinds of conversations that are acceptable and those that are not.

Inasmuch as framing suggests acceptable and unacceptable topics for communication, it has the potential to be used manipulatively or mindfully, to heighten and mask relationships of power, or to foster understanding and openness. Used manipulatively, framing can limit opportunities for real and deep discussion, minimize dissent, and distort meaning-making. Used mindfully, framing can create space for the development of shared meaning, self-awareness, and learning. It can make space for curiosity about and receptivity to the perspectives of others and foster organizational learning. Thus, framing helps (or hinders) the construction of shared meaning within and about the school organization. It creates a framework for the social construction of meaning.

Social Construction of Meaning

The distinctions between acquisitional models of learning and those that suggest that learning (i.e., knowledge) is constructed in situationally and socially meditated contexts are well-established in the literature (Donaldson & Allen-Handy, 2020; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Stated in general terms, acquisition models of learning depict knowledge as a value-neutral commodity that can be transferred from one source to another. Constructivism suggests that learning is not a passive act. Rather, *constructivist* models of learning suggest that learning is a social activity and that ideas, values, and beliefs are inseparable from and co-constructed within the context from which they arise (Cunningham et al., 2020; Maines, 2022). Additionally, constructivism focuses attention on an individual's engagement during learning and how understandings and representations of ideas are formed.

However, even in cases of individual learning, scholars of *sociocultural* learning theory argue that the materials of learning (e.g., books, lessons, announcements, images) represent a singular perspective of knowledge. Therefore, learning is an act of enculturation and is unavoidably value-laden (Donaldson & Allen-Handy, 2020; Newman, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). Put differently, an object or idea is considered legitimate (i.e., right, true, valid) because people have given it value. Sociocultural theory suggests that, in any situation or claim, there are multiple realities that compete for legitimacy. Thus, sociocultural theory argues that legitimacy is determined by societal structures designed by those who have traditionally held power.

Like sociocultural theories of learning, sociocultural theories of communication recognize that language plays an important role in communication (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Consequently, *how* language is used is integral to how meaning is made, the ways issues and ideas are framed, and how our social worlds are shaped and experienced. Therefore, sociocultural theories of communication suggest all communication is a complex process of construction and reconstruction of our social worlds. Moreover, this perspective contends that communication is embedded in a context that informs and constrains meaning (Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Accordingly, like other social acts, communication is buffeted by issues of power and control and is subject to the preferences and predispositions of whoever is part of the communicative process (Schildt et al., 2020).

Understanding how power is evidenced through language is critical to understanding how meaning is created and disseminated. Certainly, through the natural give and take of conversation, meaning can be negotiated. However, it is essential to recognize that power often determines whose viewpoints and understandings are privileged. Therefore, within any organization, meaning-making may reflect dominant voices over those with more peripheral power (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Moreover, pressures from external sources can manipulate meaning-making, inhibiting the ability of less powerful voices to influence meaning-making. It is in these circumstances that the importance of mindful leadership action matters most.

Consequently, how leaders choose to communicate determines if their communication inspires or inhibits organizational belonging and connection. Clearly, school leaders communicate in many ways. Their presence in the school's hallways can communicate a message of connection or one of authority. How they handle performance evaluations communicates their values. Likewise, they communicate their commitment to the school by attending afterschool events, lobbying for resources, or encouraging participation in school events. But mostly, they talk. As Gronn (1983) argued over four decades ago, *talk* is central to the work of school leaders. Talk occurs in formal and informal contexts and is a primary form of leadership communication. Therefore, how leaders manage talk, be it in conversation or discussion, matters, if leaders are to be successful.

DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION

As Adams et al. (2022) observe, "Talk is constant in schools, but actual dialogue is rare" (p. 3). Historically, the communication literature has focused on three primary forms of communication including monologue, information-centered dialogue, and dialogic communication (Arnett, 1986). *Monologue* is self-centered talk. It favors the speaker, providing them with an opportunity to express their opinions, ideas, and feelings. It limits interaction and seldom creates a space for the exchange of perspectives or worldviews. Moreover, people often participate in parallel monologues, where each speaks on their own, making (or scoring) points rather than listening or engaging. Monologue rarely creates a sense of connection between people.

Information-centered talk focuses on the technical transmission of facts, data, and directions. To some extent, information-centered talk provides an opportunity for more interaction than monologue. However, because it focuses on information exchange, information-centered talk assumes that what is being shared is objective and impartial. Thus, information-centered dialogue often ignores the complexity of and nuances within language and meaning-making.

To be fair, there is a place for both monologue and information-centered dialogue in schools. Each has the potential to expand the knowledge base of the listener by providing a foundation on which more substantive conversation may be based. However, monologue and information-centered dialogue is neither sensitive to audience nor does it foster a sense of belonging or connection (Schein, 2003, 2013). Fostering belonging and connection requires *dialogue*.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a two-way communicative, meaning-making process that is motivated by and motivates learning. It stimulates change. Moreover, dialogue evolves over time and contributes to individual and communal meaning-making. Dialogue differs from discussion in that discussion focuses on exploring options and choosing one over the other. Discussion is a valid problem-solving process. However, discussion rarely surfaces deeply held assumptions, biases, and preferences. Discussion assumes that all members of the group share

common understandings and are "speaking the same language." Conversely, dialogue, "aims to build a group that can think generatively, creatively, and together" (Schein, 2003, p. 30).

Additionally, dialogue differs from discourse. The research literature (Anderson & Mungal, 2015; Fairhurst, 2005) defines discourse as the distinctive use of language to restrict meaning or favor a particular stance. Discourse analysis reveals how language is used as an exercise of power. This is not to say that dialogue assumes that all language is equal or that all voices are equally heard. Rather, dialogic communication assumes that language is constructive, symbolic, and literal, and is a central element in organizational transformation (Marshak, 2019). It takes differing perspectives, ideas, ideals, and worldviews into account and centers learning from and about them in significant ways.

Therefore, dialogue favors complexity over simplicity. Dialogue promotes conversations designed to build deep, significant, and common understanding. Like contemplative and cognitive mindfulness it requires participants to confront their own assumptions, reveal feelings, and be willing to accept others' worldviews. Like organizational mindfulness, it fosters social cohesion, collective learning, and can stimulate change. Moreover, unlike transmissional communication, dialogue is dependent on effective listening.

Listening

For decades, effective listening has been equated with active listening (Floyd, 2010; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Certainly, effective listening is nonjudgmental, responsive, and includes attention to verbal and non-verbal cues. However, listening-centered dialogue (i.e., dialogic listening) assumes intentional, relational action. Dialogic listening is not contrived. Nor is it nodding, making eye contact, paraphrasing and backchanneling (e.g., what I hear you saying is…), or waiting your turn to speak. Dialogic listening is dependent upon a stance of openness, frankness, and nonmanipulative intent. It is focused on learning, understanding, and the development of mutually beneficial relationships. Yet, as Murphy (2019) notes, authentic listening is rare. Naomi Schapiro, principal at Spring Mountains Elementary School explains the importance of listening in this way:

> Seek first to understand then to be understood. It sounds great. To do it is really hard. I think the first step is I have to really understand where that person is coming from, and I have to be able to say it back to them so that they feel I completely understand them. For example, if I would have a parent come in that was really fired up, and really angry. The first thing that I would do is I would greet the parent, sit down. I would say, "Do you mind if I take some notes because I want to make sure that I fully understand your concern?" 99.9%, absolutely. So, they're talking. I'm writing notes, really trying to keep eye contact. And then when we're done, I say, "I want to read back to you the concerns that you shared, and I really want you to tell me have I fully captured it." I'll go back…not censoring anything. I will just say,

"This is what I'm hearing." Many times, they will correct me and say, "No, no, I didn't mean that." So, I'll go back [and ask them to clarify.]

Shapiro explains the outcomes of listening in this way:

Just doing that lowers the emotion. They feel heard. They feel concern. I always say, "It doesn't mean that we're going to come to an agreement but the one thing that is important to me is that you feel that your concerns are heard." ... I don't want [anyone] walking out of here feeling like, "[Schapiro] didn't even listen to me. [Schapiro] didn't understand me." ...I approach [situations like this] like I'm going to listen with the perspective that maybe my mind could be changed... At very first you have to really listen to understand, and that's hard. It's hard to hear what they are saying because your mind already is going. I'm already strategizing how I'm going to work my way out of this one. You've got to suspend that. That's where the mindfulness can be very beneficial because you're going to take a breath and say, "Okay, in this moment I'm going to be fully present for this person. I'm going to be fully present." I owe it to that person to be fully present for them in that moment where they need to share something important.

As Schapiro suggests, listening creates new possibilities for learning, connection, and meaning-making. As she also notes, it helps others to feel heard and be seen. She continues:

Then, only then, do I ask questions. Just a few, to add some detail I thought of. My next line always is something like, "Now I need to talk to the teacher or the bus driver"...or whoever. I always make a point to tell them that I will follow up with them. I ask how the best way to get ahold of them is, I make a point of asking what time of day is best... Then I do what I have promised. It works. Even if I have to come back to the parent to explain a consequence, by then they've calmed down...it's devastating [for people] not to be acknowledged, be seen, just doing that, it helps so much.

Predictably, and as Naomi Schapiro's words demonstrate, listening has been found to be an important component in building trust, shared understanding, and interpersonal relationships and relationship satisfaction (Arendt et al., 2019; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Schein, 2003). Yet, most of us have been implicitly or explicitly taught that speaking is more important than listening. Intentionally or not, these messages center on the importance of the speaker in the communicative process. However, effective listening requires *decentering* oneself in the communicative act (Jones & Joyner, 2020; Schein, 2013).

Decentering. Decentering promotes focus. Decentering encourages mindful engagement in conversation and dialogue. Drawing on skills of self-awareness and self-regulation, decentering shifts attention and awareness away from oneself and directs it to others. Moreover, it inhibits habitual responses and actions and opens the door to curiosity and learning. Decentering exposes patterns

of passive categorization and premature commitment. It requires perspective-taking. Done well, decentering builds connectedness and generates compassion and empathy.

Questioning. As a leadership tool, decentering is practiced through *questioning* (Jones et al., 2019; Murphy, 2019; Schein, 2013). Questioning provides others a chance to speak. Optimally, questioning surfaces new ideas, reduces anxiety and worry, and stimulates joint problem-solving. To be clear, for questioning to produce productive dialogue it must be genuine. Questions that lead (e.g., Why did you do that?), embarrass (e.g., How could you have possibly…), or are rhetorical (e.g., Who knows?) are not productive. Productive questions, as Naomi Schapiro suggests, "seek first to understand."

As Schein (2013) suggests, productive questions are humble questions. Humble questioning is "the skill and the art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person" (p. 21). Humble questions require school leaders to set aside their preconceptions, perspectives, and presumptions. A humble question asks rather than assumes and clarifies rather than confuses. Examples of humble questions include:

- What does that look like to you?
- Why do you think…?
- How did others react?
- What do you wish would have happened?
- What have you already tried?

Humble questions are mindful because they create an opportunity to learn individually and organizationally. Furthermore, they promote connection and belonging. However, decentering and questioning are only useful when they lead to further conversation, resolution, or generating new ideas and understandings.

Integration. To be fruitful, decentering and questioning require *integration*. Integration is an important outcome of productive dialogue. Absent a focus on integration, schools risk inaction and stagnation. As Declan Rhee of Wadins Middle School lamented, "We can't just get caught in a loop where all we do is talk and nothing happens…my old school…we could talk, we could talk so much nothing ever happened." Clearly, every idea is not a good idea, and (at least in its early stages) dialogic listening often raises more questions than answers. All listening cannot result in immediate understanding or connection, nor would we expect it to. However, listening should activate and amplify individual and organizational learning. Moreover, people learn when they mindfully listen.

Inasmuch as mindful communication is essential to meaning-making and learning, it must also be linked across an organization if it is to have an organizational impact. Yet, especially in large or geographically dispersed organizations (e.g., high schools, school districts), dialogue that includes

all members is not possible. Moreover, what is relevant to one sub-group is not relevant to all. Yet, if schools are to educate students from kindergarten through twelfth grade, it is important that their actions are (at least somewhat) coordinated. Sensemaking offers a window into understanding how organizational action can be coordinated and communicated in mutually relevant ways.

COMMUNICATION AS SENSEMAKING

Meaning-making is an internal and individual activity (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014; Weick, 2020). Meaning-making is informed by our own knowledge and experience. People make meaning about and from ideas, information, and events in relation to what each signifies or represents for them. Conversely, sensemaking is a process by which people give meaning to their *collective* experiences. Sensemaking differs from meaning-making because it generates a *shared* interpretive narrative about why and how an event occurred rather than a *personal* explanation for what happened. Likewise, sensemaking highlights how organizational narratives are socially constructed and reliant on interconnected observations, interpretation, and action (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Weick, 2001, 2015, 2020; Weick et al., 2005). Weick (2001) has suggested that sensemaking has seven properties. These include:

- Sensemaking occurs in a *social context* and is created in concert with the people with whom we are currently interacting.
- Sensemaking is informed by one's *personal identity* and a person's sense of who they are within the context of an event or situation.
- Sensemaking is *retrospective*. Only after people experience an event or situation can they make sense of it.
- Sensemaking is reliant on *salient environmental cues* derived from events and informs theorizing and cognition about those events.
- Sensemaking is *ongoing* because our interactions with and experiences of the world are constantly changing.
- Sensemaking is less a matter of accuracy and more one of *plausibility*. In other words, sensemaking generates *a* story but not *the* story of any given situation.
- Sensemaking results in *enactment*, suggesting that we *act into* situations, discovering the bits and pieces of events as we engage with them and prior to making conscious sense of them.

Taking these properties into account, Weick et al. (2005) define sensemaking as "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (p. 409). Elaborating, Weick (2020) concludes, sensemaking is a process that turns "hunches into words" (p. 1422), "give[s] form to experience" (p. 1423), and "is about frames and not decisions" (p. 1426). As Thompson (2011, p. 114) poetically states, "Living is sensemaking in precarious conditions."

Considering that all organizational life is somewhat precarious (e.g., we never know how things are going to turn out), sensemaking serves as a way to promote predictability, trustworthiness, and psychological safety. People sense make to feel secure. Knowing why something happened the way it did is reassuring. More to the point, because sensemaking is reliant on social context, environmental cues, and ongoing interactions with others, sensemaking favors narratives marked by consistency, certainty, and explanatory conclusions. In other words, sensemaking narratives simplify events and issues. By favoring a narrative that neatly explains why something happened the way it did, unavoidably, resultant narratives are seldom comprehensive nor are they fully inclusive.

Indeed, researchers (Introna, 2019; Schildt et al., 2020) have suggested that sensemaking theory, like that of highly reliable organizing (HRO), is overly deliberate and instrumental in focus and ignores issues of power and oppositional narrative. Therefore, sensemaking has been critiqued because it favors the creation of plausible explanations at the expense of considering how understandings are formed and what narrative they advance (Schildt et al., 2020). In this way, sensemaking, in practice, is as much a process of *framed awareness* as it is a process of *emergent awareness* since explanations of organizational events are dependent on the perspective that has framed them and the narrative that supports them.

By recognizing that sensemaking is not a neutral act and that any explanation of an event or situation is partial, the importance of mindful communication becomes evident. In fact, when school leaders act mindlessly, they risk creating narratives that suppress, rather than enhance, inclusive organizational sensemaking. Furthermore, when narratives that exclude alternative perspectives and framings are crafted and publicized, school leaders chance the loss of respect and trust. This is especially true of well-worn stories about "who we are" and "how we got here" that have not been reconsidered in light of changing pedagogy, demographics, or shifts in values and goals.

Moreover, organizational sensemaking is not limited to formal communication. Even *gossip* is a form of communicative sensemaking (Fan & Dawson, 2022). Gossip is unescapable in any organization. Gossip has value. Whether shared in confidence or openly, gossip communicates information. Importantly, gossip functions as an assurance of organizational membership and power. Like dialogue, gossip facilitates social cohesion (Bietti et al., 2019). The rumor mill is useful because it clearly demonstrates who is "in the know" and provides an opportunity for reshaping the organizational narrative. No matter if the interpretation is correct or not, gossip serves as a sensemaking process because it provides plausible interpretations of otherwise non-routine, novel, and uncertain issues and situations. Undeniably, what makes gossip pervasive is its practicality. It serves to offer alternative organizational narratives to those that may be biased by others' worldviews or agendas. Insofar as sensemaking generates plausible organizational narratives, gossip serves to offer equally credible counternarratives.

Consequently, like contemplative, cognitive, and organizational mindfulness, communication, meaning-making, and sensemaking are interconnected. Each is a significant feature in the co-construction of organizational life and serves to intensify or weaken connection and belonging, leadership effectiveness, and organizational success. That mindful communication can enhance the potential for positive organizational outcomes seems obvious. However, absent intentional, purposeful attention to what is communicated, how it is communicated, and how it is received and used, school leaders are less likely to achieve the outcomes they seek.

IN CONCLUSION

Communication is the vehicle by which mindfulness becomes evident. When leaders communicate well, they do so with awareness. Their communication is intentional and purposeful, it shares information and creates a space for others to share what matters to them. Leaders who communicate well understand that reflective and responsive communication takes time. It unfolds slowly and takes intentional effort. However, good communicators recognize that their time and effort also generate rewards. One reward is the development of meaning and sensemaking. Another is individual and organizational wisdom.

Wisdom, as generated by mindful leadership action, relies less on what any one person knows and more on how shared communal knowledge is produced and put to use. Moreover, leaders who are good communicators strive to foster learning. Whether that learning is about oneself, others, or the places we live and work, learning is foundational to good leadership. It is mindful. Interestingly, mindfulness teaches us that no one decision, statement, activity, or interaction is anything special. However, over time, patterns are. Developing mindful patterns is essential for strong, consistent, and responsive leadership action.

Yet, acting mindfully does not spontaneously happen. Mindfulness begets mindfulness. Mindfulness evolves over time and builds on itself. One mindful action becomes two. Another facilitates better, more informed decision-making. A third may stimulate dialogue or build connection and belonging.

Developing mindfulness requires leaders to *stay present*. To pay attention and be aware of their own thoughts, reactions, and emotions and be tuned to those of others. Mindful leadership is enhanced by cognitive *curiosity*. Curiosity creates a space for openness, new ideas and perspectives, and skillful action. Finally, mindfulness requires that leaders *pay attention to the whole*. Doing so provides useful information, data, and perspective on how the system is functioning and where it might be faltering.

Thus, mindful leadership is not something one can do alone. Mindful leadership is dependent on others. This dependence has less to do with traditional constructs like distributed or transformational leadership (however, each can facilitate mindful activity) and more to do with building capacity and synergy

within the school community. Likewise, mindful leadership is not a one-and-done proposition. It is not a place one arrives and then stays. Rather, the exercise of mindful leadership is an exercise of construction and reconstruction in each moment, situation, or circumstance, and with each interaction or decision. The good news here is that you always get a second (or third) chance to act mindfully. More good news is that acting mindfully makes school leaders more human, more present, more aware, and more hopeful. Mindful action creates the conditions under which school leaders are able to lead with grace and wisdom, awareness and imagination, and curiosity and resourcefulness. Ultimately, leading mindfully helps school leaders to thrive, no matter the challenges they face.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Contemplative Meditation—Zen Koans, Kindness, and Joy

All meditation has the same goal, to know yourself more deeply and by knowing yourself, know others. Meditation offers us a way to take an emotional and physical time-out, allowing us to reset, mentally and emotionally. No matter how brief, meditation increases our ability to be more self-aware, reflective, and thoughtful. It creates space. It allows us to pause and readjust. It forces us to notice what is happening around us and within us. It prompts us to shift into neutral and simply pay attention to the hum of our mind, the sensations of our breath, and the feelings in our bodies.

Earlier meditations included in this volume were inspired by the Theravada and Mahayana traditions of Buddhist meditation. This is because they are commonly practiced in the West and are, in many ways, quite accessible. They offer the structure of repeated phrases and clear foci. They help us to stay with an intention and foster a connection between the mind and the body. One could spend many years working on mastering the richness they have to offer. Another popular form of meditation is the Zen koan (ko-an).

Zen traces its origins to the Indian Mahayana tradition but was formalized in China around the 5th century BCE. It is thought to have come to Japan in the 13th century BCE. As with much of this history, those dates are an estimate as the written record has been lost (Harvey, 2009). Traditionally speaking, Zen is not an adjective. Things cannot be "Zen," it is not an art or a productivity system, nor does it mean simple or minimal. Sorry, but you cannot be Zen, nor can your living room. However, you can practice Zen, and practicing Zen can be quite rewarding.

Zen translates from Sanskrit to mean concentration or meditation. As with other traditions, Zen is quite diverse, but its common features include an emphasis on the teachings of nonduality and nonconceptual understanding. Nonduality asserts that things are not entirely unified, nor are they fully distinct from one another. Sometimes defined as "not one, not two," the concept of nonduality highlights interconnection while acknowledging that even when

things are interconnected (e.g., mind and body) they are not the same nor are they separate. Nonconceptual understanding refers to the notion that things, feelings, and ideas are "as they are" and no matter how carefully one tries to explain what they think or feel, our labels (i.e., words) fall short. Labels are never, and can never convey, the full experience.

Zen practitioners meditate on koans (ko-an). Well-known koans include, "Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of one hand clapping?" "When you can do nothing, what can you do?" and "What is the color of wind?" Koans provide a mental workout, simultaneously giving the mind something to think about (i.e., experience nonconceptual understanding), with the intent of creating a space for you to observe your thinking (i.e., experience non-duality). By design, koans are unanswerable. In fact, when given a koan, replying with an answer is not the goal. Additionally, koans are not about finding the same answer as someone else who has pondered the koan. Instead, the point is to practice introspection, ask questions, and see past our preconceived ideas by focusing on what is right in front of us. As Tarrant (2008) suggests, there are seven things to notice about koans. Tarrant writes:

> Koans show you that you can depend on creative moves,
> Koans encourage doubt and curiosity,
> Koans rely on uncertainty as a path to happiness,
> Koans will undermine your reasons and your explanations,
> Koans lead you to see life as funny rather than tragic,
> Koans will change your idea of who you are, and this will require
>   courage, and
> Koans uncover a hidden kindness in life.
>
> *(pp. 2–4)*

For those interested in a challenge, *The Blue Cliff Record* (Translated by Cleary & Cleary, 2005), offers one hundred classic koans. It also offers commentary and notes about each and grounds them in their historical and philosophical roots. However, one can practice koan meditation without the depth *The Blue Cliff Record* provides. Offered here is a meditation that employs a modern-day, Western koan (Bolleter, 2018).

- Find a place that allows you to sit undisturbed for at least 20 minutes. Zen koan meditation takes time.
- Get comfortable. Find your seat. Sitting is an important starting place for Zen meditation. It sets the stage for seeing how the body, mind, and breath are inseparable. Yet, we experience them separately. This is the first lesson of Zen practice.
- Breathe a few rounds in whatever pattern suits you. It might be useful to feel the sensations of the air, listen for sounds that may be present, and attend to being grounded in your seat.
- Repeat the words of the koan:
  - How do you find true freedom in a challenging workplace?

- Don't try too hard, just show up and sit with the koan. Trust that staying focused on where your mind goes and what feelings arise *is* the process. Remember koan meditation is not about finding an answer, it is about the conversation you have with yourself about the question. Try not to judge, assess, or criticize.
- Once you have sat with the full question, break the koan up a bit. Spend some energy on its parts. What is freedom? What is challenge? What is a workplace? What is work? Enjoy being curious. As Zen philosophy suggests, any part of the koan contains its fullness. In this way, understanding even one small piece offers insight.
- After you feel complete, or your time is up, return to the breath, your seat, and the room. You may want to commit to making the koan your companion for a while. Enjoy revisiting it in random moments. Sleep on it. See what comes up.

Variations. It may be that this koan does not interest you. In that case, feel free to try one of these:

- In this unrepeatable moment of right now, who are you?
- What is your timeless innate landscape?
- What do you experience when you stop?
- What would it take to make the mountains dance?

Happily, meditators can spend as much time as they wish with a koan. Since solving it is not the goal, it is sometimes helpful to mentally release the effort of meditating on a koan and return to it later. The purpose of practicing koan meditation is to develop meditative discipline, inspire curiosity, and highlight the different aspects of our reality. Like other meditations, koans encourage us to show up for our own lives absent judgement, criticism, and attachment.

Bonus Meditation. Understandably, koan practice is not for everyone. However, there are other practices that allow meditators to watch their minds at work while exploring something of interest. One-word mediation offers that opportunity. One-word meditation helps to focus the mind and explore where it goes all at once.

- The practice begins by choosing a single word. Generally, it is suggested that beginning with a positive word although any word can work. Positive or not, it is worthwhile to take a moment and choose a word that matters or feels important.
- Once you have settled on a word, repeat it. Repetition can be silent or spoken. The point of repetition is to focus attention on the *sound* of the word. Does it flow easily? How many syllables does it have? Where is the emphasis?

- Once you have examined the sound of the word shift your attention to the *meaning* of the word. Spend some time here, does the word have multiple meanings? Does one meaning stand out for you? What are some synonyms? Are they as powerful to you as the word you first picked?
- Expand your focus to your body. How does this word *feel*? Where is it located within you? Is there an emotion that it evokes? Sit with the felt sense of the word and allow that feeling to be.
- When you feel like you have exhausted your inquiry, let the word go. As it fades, pay attention to that feeling as well. Like with koan practice, the idea is to simply follow where your mind travels without judgement or criticism.

Activity

ACTIVITY 8

VALUES REFLECTION (JONES & JOYNER, 2020; MURPHY, 2019; SOFER, 2018)

Our values define what we believe in and what we think is good or important. However, people do not value the same things and even if they do their definitions may vary. Yet, in conversation, people often believe they are talking about the same thing. This activity is designed for you to identify, consider, and define your own core values. The point here is to provide an opportunity for reflection, meaning-making, and (hopefully) increased clarity. Likely, it is best completed over time as you reflect on your thinking, refine your ideas, and revise your responses.

Choose one core value:

- *What is its dictionary definition?*
- *How did you come to believe this value is important?*
- *What do you think this value says about you?*
- *Is this a value you hold across contexts or is it limited to your workplace or personal life?*
- *How would others know you hold this value?*
- *How would it be evident in your leadership actions?*
- *Is it important to you that others' share this value? Does it matter if they do?*
- *Is it risky to hold this value? If so, why is the risk worth it?*
- *Do you hold other values that are inconsistent with this value? How do you make sense of that?*

Upon completing this exercise, you could consider the following questions:

- What have you learned?
- How might your responses inform your leadership practice?
- What values might others on your leadership team, faculty, staff, and community choose?
- Would they define this value in the same way you did? Why or why not?
- What do those differences mean for your school?

Additional Resources

- Murphy, K. (2019). *You're not listening: What you're missing and why it matters*. New York, NY: Celadon Books. Focusing on listening as essential to genuine communication, *You're not listening* suggests that listening, rather than talking is the key to connection, developing empathy and compassion, and happier, healthier relationships. Murphy outlines why listening is important, how to genuinely listen, and what prevents us from listening to others. Drawing from interviews with CIA agents, journalists, and therapists, the book provides examples of good listeners in action and suggests that to listen well is to understand, and to hear and be heard is life-changing.

- Sofer, O. (2018). *Say what you mean: A mindful approach to nonviolent communication*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications. As Joseph Goldstein notes in his beautifully written forward to this book, "one way or another, we spend our lives communicating" (p. i). *Say what you mean* takes this truth to heart, offering useful tools designed to strengthen our awareness of our habitual patterns of communication and cultivate new, more effective, communicative practices. Broken into three steps—lead with presence, come from curiosity and care, and focus on what matters—the book offers practical suggestions for how to mindfully implement the practices it offers. Chapters end with a summary of key points and a question-and-answer section based on transcripts from students who have taken Sofer's workshops. The volume includes an index of all the recommended practices. Several are linked to guided audio exercises at Sofer's companion website www.OrenJaySofer.com/book-audio.

- Tarrant, J. (2008), *Bring me the rhinoceros: And other Zen koans that will save your life* and Bolleter, R. (2018), *The crow flies backward and other new Zen koans*. Tarrant and Bolleter both place koan meditation squarely in the modern world. While Tarrant unpacks over a dozen traditional koans and Bolleter offers 108 Western koans (he provides commentary on 40), each is written in straightforward language, making the paradoxical accessible while taking time to dissect the wisdom and insight koans have to offer. Both books can be read a chapter at a time, allowing time to digest what has been read and return to a new discussion later.

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INDEX

Note: Page numbers in **bold** indicate tables in the text.