

Mindfulness for group facilitation: An example of Eastern philosophy in Western organizations

Hanne Kirstine Adriansen

Department of Education

Aarhus University

hka @ edu.au.dk

Simon Krohn

Mindyourself

simon @ mindyourself.dk

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that mindfulness techniques can be used for enhancing the outcome of group performance. The word *mindfulness* has different connotations in the academic literature. Broadly speaking there is ‘mindfulness without meditation’ or ‘Western’ mindfulness which involves active thinking and ‘Eastern’ mindfulness which refers to an open, accepting state of mind, as intended with Buddhist-inspired techniques such as meditation. In this paper, we are interested in the latter type of mindfulness and demonstrate how Eastern mindfulness techniques can be used as a tool for facilitation. A brief introduction to the physiology and philosophy of Eastern mindfulness constitutes the basis for the arguments of the effect of mindfulness techniques. The use of mindfulness techniques for group facilitation is novel as it changes the focus from individuals’ mindfulness practice to that of the collective group, and has a subsequent effect on participant’s attention, levels of energy, and experience of the group atmosphere. We discuss some of the problems encountered when mindfulness techniques are used in organizations and provide recommendations for facilitators wanting to employ mindfulness techniques.

KEYWORDS

Mindfulness, Presence, Attention, Energy Level, Atmosphere, Technique, Group Work, Team Work, Group Facilitation.

INTRODUCTION

It is 8 am. We are in a conference room overlooking the harbor of Copenhagen in Denmark. An organization has decided to develop a comprehensive environmental initiative, and this is the first time that all the experts have gotten together to coordinate the different sub-projects. I have been hired as the meeting facilitator, but the project manager has chosen to begin the meeting with a presentation of the project in its entirety before introducing me. Thus, the meeting starts out with some important words, which are intended to focus the conversations for the rest of the morning. While the project manager speaks, I take a look around the conference room. At least one third of the participants seem focused on something other than the project manager. Several people are looking over the notes for their own presentations, a few are looking for coffee, and a young guy is flirting with the woman across the table. The presenter senses the lack of enthusiasm and presence in the room and responds by speaking faster. This

means that his points are not delivered properly, and the final ten minutes of his presentation might as well have been skipped.

When he is done with his presentation, he introduces me. I explain to the participants that I am going to guide them through a six minute mini-meditation, a so-called ‘guided landing’, as a way to increase their capacity for shared focus and openness. I ask everyone to sit up straight and place both feet on the floor. Then I ask them to either close their eyes or focus their gaze on a spot in front of them. A few respond with crossed arms but everyone follows my directions. I then invite the participants to feel their feet on the floor and the seat of their chair underneath them. I invite them to breathe deeply for about a minute and to feel the effect throughout their body. Following that, I ask the participants to pay attention to sounds around them, both inside the room and from the harbor outside. I ask them to

sense the dimensions of the room and the other people in the meeting. Finally, I invite them to explore whether they sense any difference after sitting for six minutes.

When they open their eyes, the atmosphere in the room has changed. Everyone seems more present and the atmosphere feels warmer and safer. When the next presentation begins, the participants are focused and the meeting is back on track.

This is one of the author's examples of how Eastern mindfulness techniques can be incorporated in group facilitation in a Western organizational context. We (a researcher with facilitation experience, and a mindfulness instructor with a M.A. in philosophy and facilitation experience) have collaborated for a number of years to use mindfulness as a tool for facilitation of group processes both in organizations and management education. In this article, we discuss how, when and why this can be done.

Until the 1960s, the use of techniques to induce mindfulness was perceived predominantly as an existential practice rooted in Buddhist traditions and philosophy. However, since the 1970's, mindfulness techniques have also won recognition as a form of therapy within parts of Western psychology and medicine (Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), and over the past decade, mindfulness techniques have expanded further to be considered a practical tool in organizations (Hunter & McCormick, 2008). We focus here on the latter employment of mindfulness techniques, and discuss ways in which facilitators can employ mindfulness techniques for enhancement of group performance and how they can be used in work situations, e.g., in meetings¹ and conferences, where a group of people come together to learn or to collaborate.

What is new about the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation is that it shifts the focus from the individual to the group. As an existential practice and as therapy, mindfulness techniques are usually employed by individuals. Similarly the focus on mindfulness in the workplace tends to be on the individual, such as the manager meditating in her office, or employees meditating in the same room. In contrast, facilitation is fundamentally directed at a group and its collective goals².

¹ In this paper, we use the term *meetings* as a collective term for meetings, seminars, workshops and conferences. The central point here is not the specific type of meeting, but its facilitation.

² It should be noted that a facilitator also can employ mindfulness techniques to enhance her practice and performance as a facilitator. This, however, is similar to other individual applications of techniques to induce mindfulness and is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, it seems likely that a facilitator who employs regular mindfulness practice will prove a more adept

While the use of facilitators to steer group processes is more common in the US than in Europe, it is increasing and spreading to various sectors - from community meetings to the workplace. Today, facilitation of processes is used for a number of different purposes and different types of meetings, for instance, as a means to enhance peer learning in study groups in higher education (Adriansen & Madsen, 2013), and as a leadership style intended to increase employee engagement in meetings (Bens, 2006). Hence, an increasing number of people are likely to meet facilitators during their work life. Groups do not normally encounter mindfulness techniques – at least not in a European context – therefore it is important to bear in mind how these techniques are introduced and applied.

In this article, we analyze ways in which a facilitator may employ techniques to induce mindfulness to create a shared focus, calm, and openness – desired qualities in most meeting situations. We, the authors, describe a relatively simple mindfulness technique which we use in our own facilitation work and which can be easily picked up by facilitators, and adapted by managers, instructors, and others working to help a group of people learn or accomplish something together. As we have based our arguments about the effects of mindfulness techniques on physiology and philosophy, these are outlined in the following section. Following that, we provide a short introduction to facilitation in order to point to relevant aspects of literature in relation to the use of mindfulness techniques. Our focus then shifts to three areas where mindfulness techniques can be employed to enhance facilitation in groups: attention, energy level, and enhancing group atmosphere. We discuss the specific use of mindfulness techniques in each of these areas, and address potential difficulties of combining facilitation and mindfulness techniques. Before the concluding remarks, we provide recommendations for facilitators using mindfulness techniques.

Mindfulness – physiological and philosophical aspects

In colloquial English, the expression *mindfulness* has been used for more than three centuries to describe the act of being conscious and/or attentive. Thus, the expression was used long before British researcher Thomas William Rhys Davids first translated the Pali³ word *sati* as mindfulness in English, thereby linking mindfulness and Buddhism [see Dryden and Still (2006) for an historical analysis of mindfulness in a Western context].

Today, the term mindfulness is often used in two different ways – to denote a state of mind (this can be done through a

guide for a mindfulness-based activity than a facilitator who does not – as we argue later.

³ Pali is a Middle Indo-Aryan language of the Indian subcontinent and the language of the earliest Buddhist texts.

number of techniques deriving from Buddhism and yoga⁴ or to denote the cognitive process “of drawing novel distinctions” (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 1). The latter use of the term mindfulness is seen within the field of psychology where a number of researchers have done work on mindfulness without meditation. Social psychologist Ellen Langer in particular has written extensively about the use of mindfulness and learning based on a non-Buddhist understanding of the term (e.g. Langer, 1989; 1992). This line of inquiry distinguishes between *mindfulness* and *mindlessness*. According to Carson and Langer (2006), being mindful means to be actively engaged in the present, perceptive of both context and perspective. Mindlessness refers to automated processes that we engage in without giving them our full attention. This use of mindfulness to designate a focus on attention in learning processes can also be found in Holland’s (2006) study on contemplative learning. A similar understanding of mindfulness without meditation can be seen in Salamon and Globerson (1987) in their use of mindfulness to understand learning and transfer. Only two articles in *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal* to date mention mindfulness, and both concern the non-Buddhist (i.e. mindfulness without meditation) understanding (see Burson, 2002; Shaw et al., 2010)⁵.

In the present article, we employ the term mindfulness to designate meditation-based techniques to induce engagement in the present; what has been referred to as an “Eastern conception of mindfulness as opposed to the Western conception without meditation” (Weick & Putnam, 2006). Inspired by Kabat-Zinn (1990, 1994), we have developed the following conception of mindfulness: *Mindfulness is to be present in the moment and to cultivate a state of non-judgmental openness in order to relinquish our control of the world, including our own cognitive processes* (Adriansen & Krohn, 2011, p. 69, translated from Danish). Mindfulness techniques often incorporate a great number of yoga poses, as well as breathing (pranayama)⁶

⁴ Yoga refers to a system of physical and mental prescriptions and originates from India. In the form described here, yoga consists of only three elements: meditation, breathing technique (pranayama) and poses. Singleton (2010) discusses the historical development of yoga. Transnational yoga (Singleton’s concept), which has become increasingly popular in the West (and in India) over the past two decades, focuses primarily on poses. When we mention yoga, it is as transnational yoga.

⁵ Yet, the issue of being present (i.e., actively engaged in the present) is important and is mentioned in different ways, ranging from ‘sense of presence’ to ‘transcendent self-presence’ and presence as a contemplative practice (e.g. Thomas, 2008, 2006; Watts . Miller & Kloepfer, 1999).

⁶ The Sanskrit term pranayama means ‘extension of the life force (prana)’ and refers to breathing techniques (conscious, controlled, rhythmic breathing) intended to affect the mind and body in

and meditation techniques (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Different mindfulness techniques are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Mindfulness Techniques

Mindfulness Techniques	
Focus meditation	Meditation in a sitting (or lying down) position, where attention is directed toward the breath (without altering it), a particular part of the body or other physical sensations.
Body scan	Conscious attention to different body parts. It may begin with the toes, the arch, the heel, the ankle and then allow the attention to gradually move through the entire body.
Landing	A combination of body scan and attention to the world around such as sounds and temperature. Often guided by an instructor.
Walking meditation	Walking slowly, preferably barefoot, observing all sensory impressions under the feet.
Breathing technique (pranayama)	Conscious, controlled, rhythmic breathing intended to affect the body and mind in various ways. The techniques can involve inhalation through the nose, exhalation through the mouth as a sigh, or altering through the right and left nostril.
Yoga	A series of yoga poses performed with continual body awareness, preferably synchronizing the breath with the movements.

What the techniques have in common is their capacity to create mental calm and increased presence. Generally, however, mindfulness practice is associated with meditation. Mindful meditation seeks to observe and experience the present moment as it is and is most often practiced in a sitting position on the floor or on a chair (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In order to explain why mindfulness techniques may have a positive effect on the work climate at meetings or conferences, we will point to the relevant physiology.

Effects on the autonomic nervous system

Meditation is often associated with a mental realm, and this is by no means a misconception, since it is primarily Meditation is often associated with a mental realm, and this is by no means a misconception, since it is primarily experienced as such when practicing the techniques. However, the act of creating mental calm also includes a

different ways. More than 50 different types of pranayama exist (Rosen, 2002).

physiological function, which is controlled by the limbic system in the brain and is stimulated through the autonomic nervous system (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). We will illustrate how mindfulness techniques function, and explain the different aspects of this effect by looking at mindfulness from the perspective of its effect on the autonomic nervous system. This is relevant to an understanding of the ways in which mindfulness techniques may affect the capacity for collaboration and learning among group members.

The name given to the autonomic nervous system refers to the fact that it operates outside the domain of conscious control; it performs vital functions, which we do not need to remember how to perform such as controlling the heart rate, breathing cycles, digestion, sleep and wakening (Baer, Connors & Paradiso, 2006).

The sympathetic nervous system

The autonomic nervous system is divided into two parts: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The sympathetic nervous system is referred to as such because the heightened stimulation of this nervous system affects a number of different bodily functions simultaneously (Baer et al., 2006).

The functions of the sympathetic nervous system are essential to our lives. Without them, it would be difficult to respond in dangerous and difficult situations. These functions are unproblematic until the body for some reason loses its ability to regulate itself. If this happens, a person may find themselves in an unnecessarily heightened state of alertness in relation to one's actual situation. This might weaken one's capacity for participating in specific social contexts (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Thus, an unnecessarily heightened stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system may decrease our ability to gain perspective and prioritize, and may also impair crucial social competencies such as openness, security and empathy (see e.g., Beddoe & Murphy, 2004; Collard & Walsh, 2008; Kernochan, McCormick & White, 2007).

The parasympathetic nervous system

The parasympathetic nervous system regulates the same bodily functions as the sympathetic nervous system, but with the opposite suppressive effect. Rather than heightened stimulation, the parasympathetic nervous system actively slows the nervous system down. Thus, stimulation of the parasympathetic nervous system will result in a decrease in heart rate, redistribution of normal blood flow, and the sensation of warmth in hands and feet. Digestion is stimulated and one may begin to yawn and even fall asleep (Baer et al., 2006). Similarly, social competencies will be affected contrary to the effects of stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic nervous

system is stimulated when the limbic system does not perceive any immediate danger in a specific situation (Baer et al., 2006). This results in increased trust, openness, and empathy, as opposed to the mistrust, competitiveness and insensitivity characteristic of someone whose fight-or-flight reaction has been mobilized.

Over the course of a typical day, the body will continually regulate the stimulation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. We are roused and settle back down again repeatedly. Sometimes, however, this regulating mechanism does not function seamlessly. We may receive so many stimuli that the sympathetic nervous system receives constant stimulation, which puts us in a constant heightened state of alert. If such excessive stimulation continues over a longer period of time, the autonomic nervous system may lose its ability to regulate itself and leave the body in a perpetual state of over-alertness, a condition we generally refer to as stress (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Mindfulness techniques have an effect of stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. This causes the body and mind to calm down, and produces an increased sensation of bodily presence (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). These physical responses are important for an understanding of why and how the techniques work. We should mention that research demonstrating the effectiveness of these techniques (e.g., Baer, 2003; Baer, Fischer & Huss, 2005; Kernochan et al., 2007; Collard & Walsh, 2008) is based on studies of individuals using the techniques for longer periods of time and with different purposes than the one we are describing here. We, the authors, presuppose that the physiological effects generated by the techniques are similar when the purpose of using them is different e.g., when used for generating a sense of presence during a meeting.

The philosophical basis of mindfulness

The earliest evidence of techniques that might be referred to as mindfulness techniques can be traced back with to approximately 500 years BCE. At that time, the historical person to be eventually known as the Buddha, Siddharta Guatama, was living in India, and some of the techniques taught in mindfulness classes today date back to early Buddhism and to much earlier, Hindu practices (on which the Buddhist practices were based). Originally, however, the purpose of mindfulness practices was different (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Traditionally, meditation was part of the path to extraordinary self-knowledge, and thus should lead to the eradication of suffering. Having reached a state of self-knowledge, those meditating may attain existential liberation, or what Buddhists refer to as *Nirvana* or enlightenment (Williams, 2000).

Even in original practices, different schools of thought (e.g. Theravada, Mahayana) prescribed different techniques for the attainment of enlightenment (Harvey, 2000). However, the different schools and instructors apparently agreed on the necessity of calming the mind. The core principle is that all human suffering is a result of erroneous conception in the sufferer's mind. Hence, we all have misconceptions of who we are and of our relation to the world. Thus, according to Buddhists, there is nothing wrong with the world - only with our conception of it (Kernochan et al., 2007; Williams, 2000).

Traditionally, the purpose of meditation in Buddhism was to quiet the mind as a means to end our misconceptions and to cultivate an open, accepting attentiveness for experiencing reality as it is (Williams, 2000). A number of techniques were developed for such purposes, and some of these have now been extracted from their traditional Buddhist context and have been given the name mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

A Western approach to mindfulness

One might question whether it is possible and desirable to simply remove these techniques from their original context and apply them in a contemporary Western context. We believe it is. Traditionally, the techniques were designed to quiet the mind and to cultivate an open and accepting presence. The idea is that a quiet mind and peaceful openness allow the individual to achieve insight into some of life's deeper connections. This insight is considered essential in the process towards achieving enlightenment, which is the 'natural' outcome of following Buddhist practices. Enlightenment is often described as the complete elimination of suffering and represents a mystical, final and existential redemption. Thus, traditionally these techniques were used as a means to achieve an existential ideal.

Today, mindfulness techniques are generally used for purposes of wellbeing and presence of mind. The techniques still quiet the mind and still cultivate open, accepting attentiveness; but more often, the traditional striving for enlightenment no longer accompanies their use. A Buddhist practitioner might find the contemporary Western use of mindfulness techniques superficial because the striving for an existential ideal is lacking. However, the techniques work well without an existential ideal, and nothing prevents their use for the sole purpose of reaping their beneficial and positive effects.

FACILITATION AS HELP FOR GROUPS

Justice and Jamieson (2006) define facilitation as "*enabling groups to succeed*". More specifically: Facilitation is the design and management of structures and processes that help a group do its work and minimize the common

problems people have working together." (p. 4). A facilitator is responsible for designing and guiding the processes that lead the group towards its goal. In short, the facilitator is concerned with what needs to be accomplished, who needs to be involved, the order of tasks, degree of participation, use of resources, group energy⁷, momentum, and capability, as well as the physical and psychological environment (Justice & Jamieson, 2006). Here, we analyze ways in which to use mindfulness techniques to affect group energy and the psychological environment, more specifically to regulate attention, energy levels, and atmosphere.

A facilitator needs to be familiar with a set of techniques for designing and creating processes (see e.g., Doyle & Straus, 1982; Justice & Jamieson, 2006). These techniques are used to create productive processes that allow participants to play an active role, be heard and seen, contribute their knowledge, share it with others, and whatever else is needed in the specific meeting. The most important technique to mention here is silent reflection. A silent reflection is when the group takes a few minutes to quietly reflect on a question. Silent reflection is a simple but effective technique. Mindfulness techniques can be another tool in the facilitator's toolbox. As we will demonstrate below, mindfulness techniques can promote the ability to handle the silence in the context of silent reflection.

Mindfulness techniques can also be employed to improve one's performance as facilitator, no matter if the facilitator is external or internal. In her book *Extreme facilitation: Guiding groups through controversy and complexity* (2005), Suzanne Ghais describes the characteristics of a good facilitator. Among the needed qualities are presence, authenticity, calmness, trustworthiness and self-confidence. The first three of these qualities relate to contemporary interpretations of what a practice of mindfulness techniques may achieve (see e.g., Hunter & McCormick, 2008). We have both used techniques to induce mindfulness for the purpose of preparing for facilitation and can highly recommend doing so. A facilitator's use of mindfulness techniques to optimize his or her role remains an individual practice comparable with a manager's use of mindfulness techniques to become a better manager. As this has been analyzed elsewhere (see Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Carroll,

⁷ Please note that Justice and Jamieson (2006), like other handbooks on practical facilitation techniques, use expressions such as 'group energy' and 'goal of the group'. These expressions may be in agreement with our everyday experience of working with groups, yet they are not correct in a pure academic and psychological sense – it is the participants of the group, who have a shared goal; the group in itself does not have energy. When we refer to group energy in the following, it is with this everyday experience in mind, and it does not imply that we think groups have energy levels.

2007), we will not further discuss the individual use of mindfulness techniques, but focus on group situations.

MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES IN FACILITATION

What follows is a reflection on our experiences with the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation. We are inspired by Kernochan, McCormick and White and their 2007 paper *Spirituality and the management teacher: Reflections of three Buddhists on compassion, mindfulness and selflessness in the classroom*. Instead of presenting traditional empirical data, they reflect on how their Buddhist practices affect the way they approach their work life. They do not, however, mention facilitation. The combination of mindfulness techniques and facilitation represents relatively uncharted territory, and we have not been able to locate any examples in the international literature⁸. A few leadership-training programs combine facilitation and mindfulness techniques; however, these programs still only approach mindfulness techniques on the level of the individual – as a way to strengthen the role of leader/facilitator – and not in the context of group processes in need of facilitation⁹.

There are several mindfulness techniques available to facilitators who want to focus on group energy and the psychological environment (see Figure 1). These could be physical yoga poses and breathing techniques (pranayama). While such techniques can be incorporated into specific facilitation situations, we have a few reservations. First, physical practices such as yoga carry some risk of physical injury if not taught carefully and correctly; this should only be done by a properly trained instructor. Breathing techniques (pranayama) often require a longer period of use in order to generate a noticeable effect, but a facilitator with knowledge of different breathing techniques may use these. However, in our experience, breathing techniques can affect people with anxiety issues negatively. Therefore, we refrain from using pranayama in an organizational context. Consequently, we will focus on a simple meditation technique which we find the most efficient and appropriate for the purpose of facilitation. This is the technique called a *guided landing*: a mini meditation that lasts between two and ten minutes, during which the facilitator verbally draws

⁸ In this paper, we focus on techniques to induce mindfulness in the 'Eastern' understanding, as a state of mind. Therefore, we have refrained from looking into other fields which might appear similar, but where the philosophical and physiological underpinnings would be quite different.

⁹ Also, a web-search will show various courses in 'mindfulness facilitation'. So far, all the courses we have come across are training courses for mindfulness instructors i.e., courses where the participant learns how to teach mindfulness techniques to others, often to a group of people; the UCLA Certificate in Mindfulness Facilitation is a case in point (UCLA, n.d.). However, these courses have a different understanding of facilitation than the one employed in this paper (and journal).

participants' attention to a range of different experiences which are immediately available to them (as described in the introductory example). These might be physical (individual) experiences, such as the sensation of the touch of clothing on the skin and the sensations of breathing, or shared experiences such as the sounds and temperature in the room. It seems to make a difference whether the facilitator guides participants towards a focus on individual or shared experiences. We will return to this point below in our analysis of the effect of mindfulness techniques on three important meeting parameters: attention, energy level and atmosphere.

Attention

When people arrive at a meeting, they are likely to be preoccupied with all sorts of thoughts, feelings and moods. A central facilitation goal, therefore, is to help participants feeling present and attentive, and to provide room for openness in the new meeting situation. This is particularly important at the beginning of a meeting, but is also crucial in other situations, e.g., when changing the topic during a meeting.

As explained earlier, guided landing helps participants experience the present moment, which increases their capacity for attentiveness and presence of mind. For this purpose, a guided landing might last anywhere between two and ten minutes. It helps people let go of their thoughts and become more present in the specific situation here and now. Often, participants have the experience of being more present in their bodies and feeling more grounded after a guided landing.

In Buddhism, this effect is described by means of a comparison of the mind and a glass of dirty water. If one keeps shaking the glass, the dirt will continue to swirl around and the water will remain unclear. If, on the other hand, one allows the glass of water to sit on a table without touching it, the movement of the water will gradually begin to slow down and eventually allow the dirt to settle on the bottom of the glass. The water will turn clear. Using mindfulness techniques to 'still the mental noise' achieves more or less the same effect (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). We might say that our thoughts and feelings are fueled by our engagement in them. When we engage in reflection we fuel them, like the shaking of the dirty glass of water. As long as we engage our thoughts, they continue to swirl around and keep our minds busy. Doing a guided landing with a group of people means to intentionally direct their attention towards experiences that can only be perceived through their body. Thus, one guides their attention away from their thoughts, which blocks the flow of fuel. In the same way that the water's movement gradually stops when one stops shaking the glass, the mind's movements will gradually slow down when one no longer engages mentally. And in

the same way that the water becomes increasingly clear as the movement stops, the mind will be experienced as clearer and more open when the mind quiets down. After only a few minutes of guided landing, most people will report a sense of greater mental calm and greater sense of being present.

It is very important that the process is guided – facilitated. What makes the technique effective is, as we mentioned above, the effort not to pay attention to one's thoughts and to focus exclusively on the experiences that the present moment makes available. Doing this alone requires a very strong ability to concentrate, including strong control of one's meta-cognition – that is, the ability to reflect on our own thinking (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Someone not trained in mindfulness techniques trying to employ the techniques on their own will most likely be unable to keep their attention away from their thoughts and feelings, and will often experience frustration instead of increased calm and focus. Additionally, the facilitator's instruction toward shared experiences, such as sounds and the temperature and dimensions of the room, create another dimension of shared experience and focus for the group which is different from an individual, un-guided meditation.

When we speak of *presence*, we mean a state of mind in which one is present with one's senses. Presence, in this sense, stands in contrast to a state of mind marked by reflection and analysis. Both are important competencies, and both often coexist harmoniously. The relationship between them is that the more one thinks, the less one experiences, and the more one experiences, the less one thinks. A meeting situation generally requires thinking and reflection, so it might seem counterintuitive to begin a meeting by turning up the level of experience and turning down the level of reflection. However, it is important that the reflection that takes place at the meeting is relevant to the content of the meeting. A guided landing helps meeting participants quiet the thoughts they already had in their minds before the meeting, thus making room for more relevant reflection. It increases their ability to listen to and focus on the content of the meeting and thus strengthens the collective process.

We consider it suitable to begin with a guided landing in order to establish focus and attention from the very beginning. We successfully did this at a seminar for an action research project: *The participants consisted of 25 educators and 3 project managers who met after work at 5 pm. This was considered a thankless time to meet because everyone was preoccupied with events and experiences from a long day of work. That was why we choose to begin the meeting with a guided landing. The facilitator welcomed the participants and gave a short presentation of the guided landing concept and acknowledged that everyone probably was a bit preoccupied with their*

experiences from the workday. The landing, including the introduction, lasted less than ten minutes. When it is over, the project leader took over and welcomed participants in a more traditional way; the facilitator moderated the rest of the meeting without further use of mindfulness techniques.

Energy level

The energy level of participants in a group (which Justice and Jamieson [2006] label 'group energy') can be regulated in different ways. A number of things should be considered during the planning phase: Are there enough breaks? Is the process monotonous or varied? When do participants eat? However, although good planning is important, some factors cannot be anticipated or controlled. Thus, energy levels may suddenly decrease. If that happens, one might use a so-called energizer. An energizer is a technique designed to quickly raise the energy level of the participants in the group. These are often physical techniques that might incorporate a competitive element. Mindfulness techniques can be used as the opposite of energizers, and as such can be an important tool for the facilitator. But why would anyone want to lower the energy level in a meeting situation? The answer to this question requires us to clarify the term 'energy level', which means that we have to revisit the autonomic nervous system.

As we have already described it, the autonomic nervous system is split into the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system respectively. The sympathetic nervous system is the part of the nervous system that raises the body's energy level and places the body and mind in a heightened state of alertness (fight/flight response) in relation to the world around it. The parasympathetic nervous system works oppositely by calming us down and creating a mood of greater calm, trust and openness. Thus, when a facilitator senses that the participants in a group are tired, he or she may use an energizer to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system in participants and thereby re-energize the participants in the group. However, it would be overly simplistic to simply associate a high energy level with something positive and a low energy level with something negative. Instead, it is a question of understanding that both energizers and mindfulness techniques most often are used at a certain cost. Understanding the changes of energy level in the context of the functioning of the autonomic nervous system mentioned above, we argue that if the energy level is raised, it often results in a less comfortable and sensitive atmosphere, and, by contrast, a comfortable and sensitive atmosphere often creates a lower energy level. Thus, the task of a facilitator is to interpret the energy level and mood in relation to the group's task at hand at the time.

If a facilitator does not properly interpret a meeting situation, the process of adjusting energy levels and moods

can become difficult. We once used a guided landing in the middle of a long talk where the audience was already tired. The result was that the participants lost what little energy they still possessed. In that case, lowering the energy level by means of mindfulness techniques was not appropriate, but in other situations, it can be a good intervention.

Maintaining the energy level is often a challenge in meeting situations, and meeting participants may not have the same level of energy. Thus, only rarely does one want to specifically lower the energy level among participants in a group process. However, sometimes the energy level is artificially high and unfocused. In our experience, breaks often raise energy levels in unconstructive ways. During breaks, participants may generate a good amount of excitement, often while consuming large quantities of caffeine and sugar. Thus, after a break it can be difficult for people to sit still, and the atmosphere may seem restless and unfocused. In this kind of situation, a guided landing has a positive effect and can generate a general sense of calm and synchronicity in energy level among participants.

Other situations will require the cultivation of a warmer and safer atmosphere, which is something a facilitator can help generate, but with the awareness that it will cause the energy level to decrease. In some meeting situations, for instance when working with innovation, it can be particularly important that participants feel safe and open-minded (Darsø, 2012). Presenting new ideas and thoughts often make people feel vulnerable. If participants feel insecure in the social context, they might choose to keep their ideas to themselves and deprive the group of valuable input (Adriansen, 2010; Darsø, 2001). Moreover, the atmosphere is also important for participants' ability to listen to each other in a friendly, kind and attentive way.

Meeting situations vary, and levels of energy and moods constantly change, therefore it is a good idea for a facilitator to have the right tools to adjust the process in the specific situation. Moreover, the scope of the adjustment will vary in different situations. Thus, both energizers and mindfulness techniques can be given in doses. If a facilitator wants a warmer atmosphere, but senses that the energy level is already low, she might want to use a short two-minute guided landing. If, on the other hand, the facilitator wishes for a clear change of atmosphere among participants who are very energetic, she may want to spend ten minutes using the same technique. We have also noticed that ending an energizer with two minutes of techniques to induce mindfulness can have a positive effect. This allows the group to maintain the slightly elevated energy level, but to avoid the unfocused atmosphere that the use of energizers sometimes results in. Finally, it should be noticed that breathing techniques (pranayama) might be another good tool for adjusting energy levels. However, this may need to be balanced against the possible effects for

participants with anxiety issues. There are a number of different techniques which affect the energy level in different ways, from calming the mind down to increasing the oxygen and thereby the collective energy level.

Atmosphere

We perceive atmosphere as a part of what Justice and Jamieson (2006) refer to as the psychological environment in facilitation. Above, we have mentioned ways in which the atmosphere can be affected by a facilitator's use of mindfulness techniques. Now we will discuss the importance of creating an atmosphere marked by openness and a sense of security and trust. These are important conditions for creative thinking and the exploration of new solutions – a general requirement in knowledge-based work (Darsø, 2012).

When the sympathetic nervous system receives stimulation and activates the fight-or-flight response mode, one's capacity for creative thinking is drastically reduced (Pedersen & Baldursson, 2002). On a basic physiological level, we might say that the body has the experience of being in a life-threatening situation, and therefore chooses familiar solutions, which reduces the capacity for innovation. The body is essentially conditioned for two very non-innovative solutions – fight or flight. In a situation where a group of people is called upon to collaboratively develop new ideas, a facilitator can use mindfulness techniques to improve conditions for the creative process. The fundamental idea behind the use of techniques to induce mindfulness is to promote a condition of non-judgmental openness, and thereby let go of the need for control in relation to the world – including in relating to our own cognitive processes. This openness may improve the capacity for innovation and creativity (Darsø, 2012).

The effect of techniques to induce mindfulness on moods and atmosphere is that participants become more secure and improve their ability to handle silence. The fact that mindfulness techniques improve the capacity for participants to be quiet together is useful for facilitation because a range of facilitation techniques require silence. It makes it easier for participants to actually be silent during a silent reflection. This is an interesting 'side effect' of mindfulness techniques, which we have experienced in practice, e.g., having done a guided landing during a lecture. The students themselves noticed this effect. They sensed that there was less anxiety during wordless pauses, e.g., following a question from the lecturer or when waiting for something to happen.

We have worked with the use of mindfulness techniques to create a sense of community within the group as a way to generate a safe, warm and open atmosphere. When we use a guided landing specifically with a view to cultivating a

positive atmosphere, it is beneficial to direct the participants' attention toward shared circumstances. Instructing the members of the group to listen to the sounds of the room, feel the temperature, and sense the room they are in and each other, cultivates a greater sense of community and reduces self-absorption more effectively than directing the participants' attention toward individual physical experiences such as breathing, body temperature and specific body parts. These are subtle differences, since both approaches generally will regulate the autonomic nervous system and calm body and mind.

Hunter and McCormick (2008) have conducted a study of the use of mindfulness techniques in the work environment. Based on interviews with managers and teachers who have an active practice of mindfulness techniques, they conclude that this can have the following effects in a work environment: fewer conflicts and a greater willingness to compromise, creativity in planning, improved relations, more openness, greater acceptance of others, less need for control, and improved adaptability in relation to others and to circumstances. It should be noted that the individuals interviewed for the study all had a considerable (individual) mindfulness practice, which differs from the short-term group process of our analysis here. Our use of techniques to induce mindfulness is intended to achieve an effect in the specific meeting situation. We do not imagine that the short-term process has the same range of positive effects discussed by Hunter and McCormick. But our experience tells us that it is possible to affect the atmosphere in a meeting to make it more comfortable, open and accommodating, even with a five minute guided landing, and even with a group of people unaccustomed to mindfulness techniques.

Hunter and McCormick (2008) point out that techniques to induce mindfulness can increase the ability to reduce or manage conflicts at work. We believe that the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation can create a warm, open and accommodating atmosphere, and thereby reduce the risk of unproductive conflicts. In this way, techniques to induce mindfulness can be used preventatively. We, the authors, do not have practical experience with using mindfulness for extreme facilitation (Ghais, 2005). We would, however, be reluctant to try to solve conflicts using a guided landing or other facilitating mindfulness techniques. In our experience, the greatest challenge to the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation is the occasional reluctance from participants. We imagine that this reluctance might increase if participants were already frustrated and their autonomic nervous systems were in a state of fight-or-flight.

IMPLICATIONS OF COMBINING FACILITATION AND MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES

A number of the same terms and concepts are used in literature describing the effects of inducing mindfulness and the literature on facilitation, e.g., calm, presence and authenticity. Therefore, it is tempting to conflate the approaches when discussing the use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation. However, we have been careful not to do so because it is important to keep in mind that quite a few of these concepts have been formed by different systems of thought, i.e., an Eastern (mindfulness) and a Western (facilitation) tradition¹⁰. Hence, when Ghais (2005) and the International Association of Facilitators (IAF, 2003) write that a facilitator must be authentic, they undoubtedly perceive the idea of selfhood and authenticity differently than a Buddhist would. Moreover, we have stressed the importance of differentiating between an Eastern and a Western understanding of the concept of mindfulness. This is because we base our arguments on evidence of how Eastern mindfulness techniques affect the nervous system. While Western mindfulness (without meditation) and Eastern mindfulness entail similar cognitive elements (Weick & Putnam, 2006; Kostanski & Hassed, 2008), there is no evidence to suggest that Western mindfulness (without meditation) affects the nervous system in the same manner meditation-based mindfulness does. This is argued out by Baer (2003) who points to a fundamental difference, because meditation requires resting with one's internal experience whereas the other form of mindfulness addresses external experiences. Hence, we have refrained from transferring research on *mindfulness without meditation* to the meditation-based understanding of mindfulness to which we refer, despite their similarities and joint focus on attention and being present.

The use of mindfulness techniques in facilitation can be subject to various points of criticism. One point of critique is what happens to the unprepared individual. When we use mindfulness techniques in facilitation, we invite people to meditate. These will most often be people in a work situation in which they do not expect to have to meditate. This is not without problems. As Kabat-Zinn (1994) points out, one has to be prepared to meditate, and it has to happen at the right time in one's life – at a time when one is willing to feel oneself and listen to one's inner voice and breathing. It is far from certain that a group of meeting participants all find themselves in that position. Moreover,

¹⁰ A similar distinction is used by Weick and Putnam (2006) in their paper on 'Eastern wisdom and Western knowledge' and by Dryden and Still (2006) in their account of historical aspects of mindfulness. Yet in other parts of the literature, this distinction does not seem relevant, and mindfulness techniques such as meditation and yoga are seen as a contemplative practice no different from Western contemplative practices (see e.g., Duerr, 2011; Wah, 2004).

meditation should be by choice, and people may not feel there is a choice if their manager is present and compliance is expected. The reason we still suggest that mindfulness techniques can be effective in facilitation despite these concerns is because the mindfulness technique we promote – a guided landing – is a ‘gentle’ one. It is gentle, both because it is so brief and because it is guided, which means that participants are not left with their own inner voice in the same way as in non-guided meditations. Nevertheless, we always make it optional to participate in the mindfulness activity and also suggest that people can keep their eyes open which may be a way to opt out without leaving the room.

Another point of criticism is that using techniques to induce mindfulness can be seen as ‘technologies of the self’ and function as means of disciplining employees within a Foucauldian perspective (Grünenberg, Walker & Knudsen, 2009). In writing about the use of mindfulness meditation in general (and not in a facilitation context), Grünenberg et al. argue that the perception of effects attributed to mindfulness meditation should be viewed in relation to some of the challenges faced by late-modern people - challenges inscribed in discourses of efficiency and authenticity. It would be interesting and highly relevant to analyze the use of mindfulness techniques as a technology of the self. Likewise, mindfulness techniques can be seen as an example of the tendency for people to be required not only to sell their labor but also to be present as ‘whole beings’ and willing to invest themselves personally and privately in the workplace (Duerr, 2004). These issues, however, deserve a more sustained analysis than what is possible here. Bearing these points of criticism and warning in mind, we have the following points of recommendation for facilitators who want to try out techniques to induce mindfulness:

- Choose the meeting carefully and explain to participants why you have chosen to use mindfulness techniques;
- Always give the participants permission not to participate, if they are not comfortable doing so;
- Rehearse the guided landing (or other technique you may choose to apply) so you feel confident taking on the role of mindfulness instructor. Usually one uses a softer voice when guiding a landing;
- The instructions from the opening vignette can be used for guiding: Ask everyone to sit up straight and place both feet on the floor; ask them to either close their eyes or focus their gaze on a spot in front of them. Then invite the participants to feel their feet on the floor and the seat of their chair underneath them. Invite them to breathe deeply for about a minute and to feel the effect throughout their body. Following that, ask the participants to pay attention to sounds around them and feel the temperature in the room. Invite them to sense the dimensions of the room and the other people in the

meeting. Finally, invite them to explore whether they sense any difference; and

- Having a mindfulness practice yourself may enhance your performance as mindfulness facilitator.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have discussed ways in which mindfulness techniques can be used in facilitation, and we have argued why it may be a good idea. Techniques to induce mindfulness can have an effect on three important elements in a meeting, namely attention, energy level and atmosphere¹¹. From the perspective of a physiological understanding of mindfulness techniques, we have analyzed how a facilitator can regulate these three elements by using a guided landing of varying duration and at different times during a meeting. While we find it beneficial to use techniques to induce mindfulness, some reservations should be mentioned.

In order for mindfulness techniques to function in a facilitation situation, several things have to be in place. First, the specific type of meeting makes a difference – an internal weekly hour-long meeting is often more routine than the annual employee seminar where everyone is prepared to socialize and try something new. Thus, it makes sense to choose the type of meeting carefully when considering using mindfulness techniques as a facilitation tool. Second, the facilitator has to justify and explain the use of a tool as relatively untraditional as techniques to induce mindfulness. While facilitators often do not have to explain their choice of certain tools and techniques, the participants need to know why the facilitator has decided to employ a tool this personal and physical. In some Western organizations, mindfulness techniques derived from Buddhist practice may seem somewhat inappropriate. Denmark, for instance, is a very secular society and religion a very private matter; therefore we have had to introduce mindfulness techniques in a ‘scientific’ manner without an air of spirituality. This varies from one cultural context to another, and the facilitator should therefore take the cultural specificities into consideration. Third, the facilitator must feel confident in his or her use of techniques to induce mindfulness. If not, the facilitator may jeopardize his or her legitimacy and convey insecurity. This point has also been made in relation to mindfulness-based cognitive behavior therapy (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013). Some might even argue that it is necessary for the facilitator to have a regular mindfulness practice herself. In regard to the use of mindfulness for therapeutic purposes, Dryden and Still

¹¹ Many of the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) Core Competencies for Certification match the potential outcomes we have described above e.g., ‘provide effective atmosphere’, ‘create a climate of safety and trust’, and ‘stimulate and tap group energy’ (IAF, 2003). Participants’ attention was the only aspect we could not find directly in the guidelines.

(2006) found that the clients were more successful when the therapists had a mindfulness practice themselves. However, they also noted: “Few would dispute this need for personal practice, but it has not been scientifically demonstrated. There was nothing like the exemplary randomized control usual in the work of these researchers, and it is possible that the use of the word mindfulness already had a resonance for many people (clients and therapists) that gave the practice a power lacking in ‘attentional control training’. Whatever the reason, this [personal practice] was an important change, and personal mindfulness practice is now a routine requirement for trainers in mindfulness” (Dryden & Still 2006, p. 7). Our experience is that practicing techniques to induce mindfulness on a regular basis makes using the techniques in facilitation more natural.

This article has argued that mindfulness techniques can be beneficial, albeit not without difficulties, in organizations. However, we are often met with the sentiment that it can seem like a waste of time, or it is entirely irrelevant to incorporate a guided landing into the beginning of the meeting instead of proceeding directly with the tasks of the meeting agenda. This sentiment is understandable, and if a facilitator decides to use mindfulness techniques in a meeting situation, she should be prepared to explain its purpose, in some depth if required. It is difficult to measure meeting participants’ capacity for attention and focus, but the main point is that it pays to invest five or ten minutes in order to achieve a more focused meeting with a more open atmosphere. There is still much work to do in lifting the consciousness of people and the importance of the non-task activities that create individual, team and group success.

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AUTHORS



Hanne Kirstine Adriansen is an associate professor at Aarhus University in Denmark. She holds a Masters in applied science from University of New South Wales in Australia and a Ph.D. degree in human geography from University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Hanne's research and teaching include, but is not limited to, facilitation of knowledge processes especially in relation to creativity and innovation in higher education. Furthermore Hanne is a facilitation practitioner and is a sought after facilitator of academic conferences, seminars and workshops. Hanne has practiced yoga and mindfulness for more than six years.



Simon Krohn has an MA in philosophy from the University of Copenhagen. He has specialized in Indian philosophy and is a guest lecturer on several university programmes. Last year he published a bestselling book on yoga philosophy. In 2007 Simon founded the company MindYourself which offers courses on mindfulness and facilitates seminars for companies. Furthermore Simon is one of the most sought after yoga teachers in Scandinavia. He has practiced yoga and meditation since 1996 and teaches at a number of different yoga teacher trainings in Denmark and internationally. Within Yoga Alliance he holds the highest certification (E-RYT 500).