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The Dark Side of Mindfulness: Workplace Socialization, Neoliberalism and the Self

António Carvalho
Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal
antoniomanuelcarvalho@gmail.com

Rita Grácio
Lusófona University, CICANT, Portugal
rita.gracio@ulusofona.pt

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of our paper is to analyze the role of mindfulness in organizational socialization, particularly how these techniques are mobilized by corporations to reshape employees' subjectivities.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Mindfulness is a process of awareness to moment-to-moment experience, allowing subjects to deal with emotions, sensations and thoughts in a non-judgmental way (Kabat–Zinn, 1991). Mindfulness has been characterized as the new opiate of the masses (Dawson and Turnbull, 2006) and the flagship technology of the self of neoliberal capitalism (Zizek, 2005), adjusting individuals "to the very conditions that cause their problems" (Purser, 2019, p.5). Over the past decade, several mindfulness interventions, such as MBSR (Mindfulness-based-stress reduction), have been implemented in corporate settings, aiming to improve employees' resilience, flexibility, well-being and self-control. Recognizing that neoliberal selfhood requires individuals to rely on self-regulation devices to enhance their health and happiness, mindfulness interventions are emblematic examples of organizational socialization, as workers should undergo a set of performances to control, manage and regulate their affective states, thus increasing their productivity. By the "dark side of mindfulness", we refer to the ways in which these practices are promoted, disseminated and applied to reconfigure workers' subjectivities, leading to new articulations of neoliberal governmentalities coupling technologies of the self, affect and efficiency. Mindfulness becomes a disciplinary tool of self-control that aims at maximizing productivity through the moment-to-moment management of affect. Our paper draws on a qualitative methodology, including the thematic analysis of 44 papers published in the Harvard Business Review, and the examination of a specific mindfulness program carried out by the big tech corporation Amazon, which generated controversy.

Findings: Our empirical findings are organized around four main themes: corporate mindfulness as an expansion of neoliberal selfhood; mindfulness and the ability to turn inner work into a driver of productivity; corporate mindfulness as an epiphenomenon of late capitalism; mindfulness as a technofix.

Research Limitations: Our paper relies on a relatively limited data set, and by extending our research into a wider range of journals it would have been possible to identify alternative themes. Moreover, our theoretical framework (stemming from the neoliberal critique) may overshadow relevant phenomenological and embodied aspects.

Theoretical and practical implications: This paper contributes to scholarship within Social Studies of Mindfulness and Organization Studies, unpacking the contemporary articulations of mindfulness, neoliberalism, affect and governmentality.

Keywords
Mindfulness; Workplace socialization; mindfulness-based corporate programs; Technologies of the Self; emotional labor

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to reflect on the ways in which mindfulness has been turned into a tool of neoliberal subjectification, and its potential role in organizational socialization within the scope of a sociopolitical paradigm that emphasizes reflexivity, individual responsibilization and self-care. Drawing on a theoretical approach informed by the critique of neoliberal governmentality, our paper delves into some of the current sociopolitical controversies surrounding mindfulness in the context of organizations, showing how it is particularly emblematic to illustrate the couplings of affect, neuropower and neoliberal governmentality, assuming itself as a potential device of organizational socialization within the neoliberal workplace. Affect is a difficult concept to grasp and define – it is distinct from "emotions" due to its collective, pre-individual, performative and emergent dimensions, and it can be characterized as "fluctuating intensities that arise from encounter, as bodies of all kinds (not only human) come into contact" (Ashcraft, 2020:4). This article sheds light on how the neoliberal workplace relies on a particular set of practices - mindfulness – to trigger certain forms of affect in order to enhance resilience and productivity.

Mindfulness is frequently characterized as a process of non–judgmental awareness to moment–to–moment experience – this includes emotions, sensations, thoughts and movements (Kabat-Zinn, 1991). Mindfulness is a secular version of Buddhist practices of meditation and includes a wide range of techniques, as we will see in the following section. For the sake of our argument, we are interested in the ways in which practices of mindfulness are enrolled in the context of organizational socialization, i.e., how mindfulness is appropriated by the neoliberal workplace to generate certain kinds of people and forms of affect. Although meditation may display distinct ontological politics (Carvalho, 2021), the "dark side" of mindfulness refers to how this set of practices, stemming from Buddhism, have been appropriated to enhance resilience, efficiency and productivity, drifting away from its spiritual and contemplative past and turning into a technology of the self (Foucault, 1988) that articulates some of the tensions of neoliberal selfhood.

2 Mindfulness and Medicalization

According to Peter Conrad, "most medicalization analysts contend that increasing parts of life have become medicalized and that medical or quasi-medical remedies are often explicitly sought for an expanding range of human difficulties. To put it crudely, medicalization of all sorts of life problems is now a common part of our professional, consumer, and market culture." (Conrad, 2007: 14). One could argue that mindfulness is a medicalization of Buddhist practices of meditation, no longer focused on the liberation and enlightenment of subjects but on the adaptation of neoliberal selves to the demands of an ever-demanding social system; moreover, the permeability of contemporary institutions – such as corporations – to mindfulness illustrates how these, in turn, have been "medicalized", i.e., how medical discourses, apparatus and techniques are both mobilized and co-produced by the neoliberal workplace in order to better govern workers' affective states.

In fact, this article is particularly concerned with how secular versions of mindfulness are widely promoted within numerous institutional settings to foster certain forms of subjectivity, thus strengthening contemporary devices of medicalization. There are two main iterations of mindfulness that are of interest here. The most popular one, Mindfulness–Based–Stress–Reduction–Therapy (MBSR), was initially developed in the late 1970s by Jon Kabat–Zinn. The initial aims were focused on improving the wellbeing and health of patients suffering from a wide range of conditions - high blood pressure, back pain, cancer, AIDS and anxiety (Kabat–Zinn, 1991). Another relevant iteration concerns Mindfulness–Based–Cognitive–Therapy (MBCT), a coupling between mindfulness and cognitive-behavioral therapy. This approach was developed in the 1990s and its emphasis is "on changing awareness of and relationship to thoughts' (Teasdale et al., 2000, p. 616).

Mindfulness has been considered an example of medicalization, as it relies on medical and psychological models to reshape individual conduct. In fact, according to Kirstin Barker, it consists of moment-to-moment medicalization, requiring subjects to constantly assess their emotional, physical and mental states, incorporating forms of contemplative – and medical – power. According to Barker, "mindfulness represents a significant expansion in the definition of disease beyond that advanced by mainstream medicine (…) its etiological model intensifies the need for therapeutic

surveillance and intervention (…) it permanently locates individuals within a disease therapy cycle.” (Barker, 2014, p. 168).

Over the past 15 years, scholarly literature on mindfulness has shown how these practices can increase well-being, self-control, emotional intelligence, mood regulation and be used in the treatment of anxiety, depression and substance abuse (Bowen et al., 2006; Davis & Hayes, 2011; Grossman et al., 2004; Heeren & Philippot, 2011; Shapiro & Walsh, 2003; Zeidan et al., 2010), indicating how mindfulness is often framed, understood and promoted through a medical(ized) discursive apparatus. Particularly emblematic of the couplings of mindfulness and medicalization are the ways in which the neurosciences are frequently mobilized to justify the capacity of these practices to drive subjective change.

In fact, it has been argued that mindfulness leads to a novel “moral economy of the brain” (Carvalho, 2017), since mindfulness can lead to changes in the insular cortex and the amygdala, linked to anxiety (Ricard et al., 2014). Matthieu Ricard, a French Buddhist monk who became famous for being the “happiest man in the world” (Shontell, 2020), was portrayed in the popular press as a poster child for the benefits of meditation due to research conducted by Richard Davidson and Antoine Lutz. These scientists conducted a series of studies with this advanced meditator – resorting to medical imaging technologies – that showed how his brain significantly behaved in a different way than the brain of non-meditators.

These findings were often framed as a clear evidence that meditation “works”, displaying visible impacts on the brain scans and electroencephalograms (EEGs) of advanced practitioners. This example is particularly relevant to illustrate how mindfulness, medicalization and neoliberalism go hand in hand – while mindfulness requires individuals to carry out a series of practices and techniques to attain specific ways of attending to one’s mental and physical assemblages, neoliberalism emphasizes principles of individual responsibility and reflexivity (Rose, 2006) – by engaging the neurosciences and medical imaging technologies, these couplings are rendered visible and can be potentially replicated.

In order to become a device of medicalization, mindfulness went through a long process of transformation and adaptation to western neoliberalism, becoming ‘enmeshed in medical, psychological and scientific frameworks . . . Removed from the realm of religion and professionalized to become the property of psychologists [and] doctors’ (Wilson, 2014, pp. 101–103). This critique also extends to modern Buddhism itself, often presented as the spiritual foundation of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, with some authors claiming that mindfulness became the new opiate of the masses (Turnbull & Dawson, 2006).

3 Mindfulness as a Technology of the Neoliberal Self

We argue that mindfulness can be interpreted as a strong indicator of how current governmentality devices attempt to make up specific types of people, taking subjectification (Foucault, 1982) as a core dimension of contemporary forms of power. Within neoliberalism, there is “an increasing emphasis on the responsibility of individuals to manage their own affairs, to secure their own security with a prudential eye on the future’ (Rose, 2006, p. 4). This emphasis is often entwined with a disciplinary and biopolitical archipelago that assents on numerous governmentality devices and forms of knowledge, such as the “psy” and “neuro” sciences (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013). Mindfulness is frequently portrayed as enhancing “self-control” and “well-being”, tenets of advanced neoliberal societies, allowing individual citizens to mobilize particular technologies of the self that turn their thoughts, sensations, movements and inner lives into an object of power/knowledge that can be stabilized and “governed”.

Zizek’s potent critique of western Buddhism is particularly interesting to reflect on how certain technologies of the self – such as mindfulness – have been appropriated by neoliberal capitalism, allowing subjects to be better governed and normalized:

> “The ‘Western Buddhist’ meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in the capitalist economy while retaining the appearance of sanity. If Max Weber were alive today, he would definitely write a second, supplementary volume to his Protestant Ethic, titled The Taoist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism.”
> (Zizek, 2005, p. 20)

Zizek’s critique echoes current scholarship on **“**emotional capitalism” (Illouz, 2008), where “emotional and economic discourses mutually shape one another so that affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior, and emotional life, especially that of the middle classes, follows the logic of economic relations and exchange” (Illouz, 2008, p. 60). Within emotional capitalism, mindfulness is a powerful tool to generate forms of contemplative and spiritual capital (Arat, 2016), allowing subjects to enhance their individual well-being and happiness. These aspects are no longer disconnected from forms of economic management. According to Davies, they are actually key dimensions of neoliberal capitalism:

> "Happiness, in its various guises, is no longer some pleasant add–on to the more important business of making money, or some new age concern for those with enough time to sit around baking their own bread. As a measurable, visible, improvable entity, it has now penetrated the citadel of global economic management. (…) the future of successful capitalism depends on our ability to combat stress, misery and illness, and put relaxation, happiness and wellness in their place. Techniques, measures and technologies are now available to achieve this, and they are permeating the workplace, the high street, the home and the human body."
> (Davies, 2015, p. 8)

Within this framework, emotional work and management go hand in hand, as specific forms of affect can be cultivated to enhance productivity, efficiency and socialization. This inevitably extends to the workplace, turning mindfulness into a driver that subjectifies contemporary workers. Drawing on Zizek's critique, Ronald Purser argues that mindfulness became the new capitalist spirituality, as it consists of a technology of the self that embodies the premises and modes of action of neoliberal governmentality. The pervasiveness of secular practices of mindfulness – such as MBSR and MBCT –, indicate that the contemporary meditation movement has turned meditation into a self-help tool that is mobilized to allow subjects to better adjust to a deeply inequal and contradictory socioeconomic system. According to Purser,

> "What remains is a tool of self-discipline, disguised as self-help. Instead of setting practitioners free, it helps them adjust to the very conditions that caused their problems… The neoliberal order has imposed itself by stealth in the past few decades, widening inequality in pursuit of corporate wealth. People are expected to adapt to what this model demands of them. Stress has been pathologized and privatized, and the burden of managing it outsourced to individuals."
> (Purser, 2019, p. 5)

Purser's quote indicates that mindfulness has been appropriated by the neoliberal order. Although secular versions of mindfulness were initially deployed in therapeutic contexts, they were progressively incorporated in a wide range of settings, such as schools, the military and even the workplace. On the one hand, this indicates a growing medicalization of society, and how contemporary biopolitics are deeply entwined with medical discourses and devices; on the other hand, it is also emblematic of how institutional spaces – and forms of economic management – reproduce and mobilize neoliberal discourses of well-being and happiness.

Drawing on Foucault's notion of the "disciplinary archipelago" (Foucault, 1995) we could argue that we are now witnessing the emergence of a mindfulness archipelago, characterized by the dissemination of a series of devices that allow individual subjects, private and public institutions to draw on these practices to optimize individual and institutional well-being. Currently there are several meditation apps that can be downloaded to a smartphone, and millions of users worldwide resort to Headspace or Calm to manage and optimize their affective states. It was estimated that these two apps generated an annual revenue close to 200 million dollars in 2019 alone (*Buddhism by the Numbers*, 2019). Moreover, several corporations now incorporate mindfulness courses as part of their well-being programs (Schaufenbuel, 2015; Tomassini, 2016).

This is particularly problematic as it blurs the boundaries between workplace and home, since subjects should ideally carry out these practices even when they are not in their workplaces. This echoes broader concerns within social theory – according to Deetz (1992), modern corporations colonize every dimension of society, such as the family, schools, media, and personal identity. This process can be understood as an example of what Habermas described as the "colonization of the lifeworld", i.e., the fact that "the subsystems of the economy and state become more and more complex as a consequence of capitalist growth and penetrate ever deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld" (Habermas, 1985, p. 367). Although mindfulness can be understood as a tenet of these forms of corporate and lifeworld colonization, workers are not passive subjects. As Foucault wrote, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1979, p.5), and Mumby has argued that, in organizational contexts, control and resistance are "mutually implicative and coproductive" (Mumby, 2005, p. 21), calling for a dialectical approach to unpack these complex dynamics.

3.1 Mindfulness and workplace socialization

Organizational socialization can be defined as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Hence, socialization within organizations is a form of control (Czarniawska, 2007), and it comes with no surprise that research has been conducted on socialization contents and tactics (Ashforth et al., 2007; Cable et al., 2013; Taormina, 1997, 2009).

Not just physical and cognitive labor, but also emotional labor needs to be learned. Recently, studies on organizational socialization have criticized the lack of attention to the way newcomers not only acquire knowledge,

skills and information, as well as values and norms necessary to perform tasks, but also how they learn emotional behavior and manage emotions, often also necessary to perform job-related tasks – most prominently see Myers on how firefighters manage emotions (Scott & Myers, 2005).

One important aspect of emotion management is stress management. Hence, several organizations have been developing stress management programs as part of their socialization processes, within the "positive psychology" paradigm, and psychological capital is key to contemporary workers. Psychological capital is a construct composed of self-efficacy, resilience, optimism and hope (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Socialization plays a role in promoting psychological capital by providing several resources, such as training and mentorship, job characteristics, social support and leadership. For what matters here, organizational socialization programs oriented to stress management are considered very important to promote psychological capital, such as resilience (Gruman & Saks, 2013). Our interest in studying mindfulness arises in this context, as we aim to understand how mindfulness is currently being appropriated, implemented and discussed by managers and corporations, thus contributing to organizational socialization.

4 Case Studies

In order to empirically understand to what extent mindfulness has been used as part of processes of organizational socialization, we selected two case studies. The first one is focused on the Harvard Business Review, and the analysis of its discourse on mindfulness. The second one revolves around a specific mindfulness program implemented by Amazon, The Amazon's Working well program, which included a mindfulness practice room, known as the Amazon's ZenBooth.

The Harvard Business Review (HBR) is a USA-based publication, and one of the main sources for managers around the world. The HBR is a practitioners' oriented magazine, where organizational behavior research findings are summarized and "translated" into practical interpretations, bringing evidence-based management guidelines (Robbins & Judge, 2013, p. 622). Not only it is important in the USA and in English speaking countries, but it has a wide world reach, because it is translated into many different languages. In fact, the Harvard Business Review is a widely quoted source, and it also has a great impact on management research itself (Schulz & Nicolai, 2015).

The Harvard Business Review was chosen as an example of how the discourse on mindfulness circulates among leaders, managers and CEOs of corporations – who are the target group of this specialized press. It allows us to understand what and how are the ideas (in the format of opinions, research, interviews) on mindfulness circulating in one of the most popular and relevant magazines in the world of business.

The Amazon's Zen Booth or "AmaZenbooth" was chosen as an example of how companies are implementing specific mindfulness programs. We chose this example for two reasons. First, because Amazon is a US-based big tech corporation, hence it has a huge impact on the world of business. Second, because the implementation of the Amazon's program generated controversy, as reported by online media. This is relevant to our argument, because controversies are moments when the "taken for granted" is disrupted, and where the contradictions of social life emerge and power relations are made more explicit. The fact that the controversy around Amazon Zen Booth spread beyond the stricter world of business, into the public eye, makes this a suitable example of the "dark side of mindfulness".

These two case studies are both based on the analysis of texts. One is constituted by the HBR articles, and the other one is constituted by online media on the Amazon Zen Booth. The data gathered around each case study is small in size, and there is also a difference in the size of our corpora, which has limitations, for example, regarding comparability and generalizations. However, we chose each of these case studies separately, for their heuristic value. Even if our case studies have data sets which are small in size, they are still relevant, as we are analyzing one of the most popular journals in the world of business, and one of the largest tech corporations in the world. The relevance of these two case studies can provide us with clues to empirically understand how mindfulness techniques are being used to reshape employees' subjectivities. Moreover, it is always more difficult to access data on "the dark side" of organizations; therefore, the availability of texts, especially online texts on Amazon, was also a reason to choose this dataset (even if small in size). These are two case studies on how and with what consequences mindfulness techniques are being put into practice in the corporate world. We chose each of these case studies for its relevance to answer our research question from two different perspectives: one aims to capture the practices from managers and high-rank corporations, and the other one delves into the consequences of the implementation of a specific mindfulness-based program that generated controversy – so much, that it was quickly cancelled. Hence, on the one hand, the HBR allows us to explore ideas, concepts and broader discussions about corporate mindfulness; on the other hand, the Amazon Zen Booth allows us to examine the controversial implementation of a specific mindfulness program. Having said that, we do not posit/postulate a cause-effect relationship between the two case studies - we do not claim that the Amazon Zen Booth is a direct consequence of the discourse circulating on HBR. Instead, we contend that each of these case studies

enables us to see two different sides of the same coin: the mobilization of mindfulness as a device to enact neoliberal workers.

In order to analyze our data sets, we relied on thematic analysis (TA). Thematic analysis consists of the following procedures: after familiarization with the data, and generating initial coding, the researcher searches for themes in the data, that should be reviewed – to ensure internal coherence and external heterogeneity until – and finally, they are to be named and defined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic Analysis shares with other methods such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse Analysis (DA) the search for certain themes or patterns; however, it is not bound to specific theoretical traditions, as CDA and DA are, and it does not require a high level of technical expertise (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 81-82). Because of its flexibility, and given the different sizes of the datasets for each case study, we choose this method for analysis. As with every other method, there are, off course, limitations (for instance, it does not allow us to understand language itself as social practice, or the power/social relations embedded in discourse, to name a few). However, for the purpose of this study, exploratory in nature, a thematic analysis provides us with relevant empirical clues on how and with what consequences mindfulness techniques are being put into practice in the corporate world.

From the HBR analysis (which we explain in section 4.1), and the textual analysis of the online media on Amazon ZenBooth (which we explain in detail in section 4.2), we derived four main themes, namely: corporate mindfulness as an expansion of neoliberal selfhood; inner work as a driver of productivity; corporate mindfulness as an epiphenomenon of late capitalism; mindfulness as a technofix (which we explain in detail in the section 5. Discussion).

4.1 Harvard Business Review on mindfulness

We searched for the term “mindfulness” in the Harvard Business Review articles, through the database b-on (www.b-on.pt), without defining a specific time frame. We found 44 HBR publication items, from 2008 to 2021. Most of them were published between 2014 and 2016 (around 55%) - which is not surprising giving that 2014 was considered “The Mindfulness Year”, the year when mindfulness become popularized (George, 2014). The publications were mostly articles (41), and a couple of interviews (3). Around 60% of HBR authors in our *corpus* had a university affiliation, and only one article did not have an identified author at all. The most frequent authors’ University affiliations are Harvard University (6) and Hult International Business School (6), followed by New York University (4) and Stanford University (4), then University of Pennsylvania (3) and finally, Rutgers University (2). It is Daniel Goleman, from Rutgers University, who writes twice in HBR (in 2011 and 2017), as well as Ellen Langer (2014 interview with Ellen Langer, and an article in 2016). Daniel Goleman and Ellen Langer are two main figures of the scholarly study of workplace mindfulness, but other scholars also publish on the topic in HBR. After the characterization of our *corpus*, we conducted the analysis through NVivo11.

Our analysis was based on a thorough literature review on mindfulness in the workplace. We adapted the codes from Eby and colleagues (2019), and in our analysis we used the following four main codes: training programs, types of practice, target population, and training programs’ outcomes. There were subcodes within these four main codes. We coded for training programs, regarding their content (eg: reference to MBSR, meditation or yoga sessions, as well as references to any specific company training program) and length (e.g. session length; number of training sessions). We also coded for the type(s) of practice, more specifically, where mindfulness would take place, in case there was a specific opportunity for practice (e.g. at the workplace, at home, both). We also coded to whom is mindfulness aimed at, that is to say, we coded for the target population, i.e., employees, leaders/managers, specific jobs, specific sectors, and what are the target outcomes - the outcomes of practicing mindfulness at the individual, group and organizational level (eg: stress/strain reduction, performance, productivity, etc.).

We used these codes because they help us understand the “what, how, when and why” of mindfulness in the workplace. That is to say, they allow us to analyze mindfulness practices in the world of business, as they are being presented through the popular magazine *The Harvard Business Review* to managers, leaders and CEOs.

4.1.1 Training programs

Mindfulness is referred for leaders themselves and/or for leaders to apply among their teams and/or employees. There are only two references to Jon Kabat-Zinn’s program of MBSR, and it is not about its application to a specific company: it is used to provide a definition of mindfulness (Gale, 2017), and to situate the context of the mindfulness buzz (Langer, 2016). In our data set there are references to companies that hold successful corporate-based mindfulness programs. One of the most cited companies is Google and the specific Google program “Search Inside Yourself”, which has also been studied by scholars (Caporale-Berkowitz et al., 2021). There are references to other companies in many different sectors (but not to their specific training programs), from IT and software companies, such as Google, Apple,

Intel, Medtronics; but also in the financial sector and insurance companies (Aetna, Bridgewater capital, Goldman Sachs), Consulting firms (eg: Mckinsey), as well as the food sector (General Mills, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters), Retail (Target), Education (Engineering education, business education), Government institutions, the Cultural and Creative Industries (HBO), as well as sports teams and players (eg: American football's team Seattle Seahawks; tennis player Novak Djokovic, Basketball team Chicago Bulls).

Several HBR articles include guidelines/instructions on how one can practice mindfulness. Hence, HBR articles can be considered as sources of self-learning for individuals. Most of the mindfulness actions that are recommended in HBR articles are breathing and meditation**.** This self-learning has self-applications, but it can also serve to practice mindfulness collectively, with one article mentioning breathing as a collective mindful moment to be integrated as part of regular group meetings (Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016a).

4.1.2 Practice: time and place

One of the recurring ideas across the articles is that mindfulness can be improved through practice, that it can become a habit. Even if there are corporate-based mindfulness programs, sustained practice is required, and it demands individual responsibility. Although mindfulness should be practiced over time, some of these articles present it as a "quick fix" that does not take too long to reconfigure affective states. In fact, we witness a compression of the time required to practice mindfulness: from "regular" to "daily", to "a few minutes" to "two minutes", to "6 seconds" and, finally, just one second, the time of one breath before a meeting. Mindfulness is squeezed in into specific workplace communicational events, such as meetings – instead of considering diminishing the number of meetings, for instance. This idea of meditation as quick/fast-paced is also highlighted with the use of the adjective "short" ("Short meditation", "short period of mindfulness training", "a single short session", etc.). Although some articles mention "hours", they usually point to the fact that, although research on mindfulness is conducted with participants undergoing hourly or weekly programs, workplace mindfulness is not very time consuming (Tan, 2015).

Unlike time, which seems to compress, space appears to expand. Many articles advocate for the practice of mindfulness throughout the day, which becomes a *spatialized* practice: it must be practiced at work, but also in the car, while commuting, and also at home, more specifically "in bed" (Hougaard & Carter, 2016). This means that the space for mindfulness is not only the workspace, but other daily and personal spaces such as homes and cars – in fact, there is one article devoted to in-car mindfulness (Gonzalez, 2014), and another one devoted to mindfulness parenting (Gale, 2017), implying at home mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness has been hailed as "portable", hence, suitable "for deployment in any situation in which having more options would be helpful" (Healey & Roberts, 2015, p. 3). Hence, the responsibility for self-learning and for practice increases, as there are no spatial obstacles, and no time constraints: "even if you're busy, there are really basic steps you can take—anywhere, anytime—to make you more aware of the present." (Torres, 2014, p. 3) This idea of mindfulness as an anywhere-anytime practice, that is of the responsibility of the individual, adding to the job-description of at-work tasks, is a dark side of socializing emotions within an organization, as we will argue in the discussion.

4.1.3 Mindfulness outcomes: individual, team and organizational

Across the articles, there is this "promise" of the effectiveness of mindfulness to achieve positive outcomes, the majority being individual outcomes. Only a few articles mention group outcomes, at team level, and specific organizational outcomes.

What are the positive outcomes from the HBR authors' perspective? If we analyse how the articles are distributed across the different HBR standard sections, we easily get a sense of the target outcomes of mindfulness. Of the 40 articles referring mindfulness, most are in the "Managing Yourself" (20%) and "Stress" (20%) sections, followed by "Emotional Intelligence" (12,5%) and "Leadership" (12,5%). The sections "Conflict", "Creativity", and "Decision Making" represent 5% each of the articles, and the rest of the articles are spread across the following sections: Business Education, Collaboration, Organizational Culture, Productivity, Psychology, Sales, Strategic Thinking, and Developing Employees (2,5% each).

The articles' sections show how mindfulness serves the purpose of the management of the self, which includes the self-management of cognitive functions (such as focus, decision-making), as well as self-management of emotions, or "emotional intelligence", especially negative emotions such as stress. We see that over time the target outcomes of mindfulness become more specific - for instance, emotional intelligence is one of the outcomes that only shows up in more recent articles. Moreover, mindfulness can also be effective in managing others, mostly team members.
This is reinforced by the articles' keywords: besides the keyword mindfulness (38), the two most frequent keywords are Executive ability (Management) (7), and Stress management (6). This is followed by Teams (5), Creative ability in

business (4), Leadership (4), Meditation (4), Corporate culture (3), Management (3), Attention (2), Brain (2), Organizational behavior (2), Self-management (2).
Although two articles claim a lack of studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness on leaders (Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016a, 2016b), HBR articles on mindfulness outcomes vary according to whom they are to apply to, either leaders or employees. For instance, some articles mention that mindfulness can "enhance both leader performance and employee wellbeing" (Goleman, 2017), "strengthen their employees' emotional intelligence and well-being" (Byrne & Thatchenkery, 2018), promote "emotional intelligence and well-being in their employees." (Rieken et al., 2019).
In our *corpus* of 44 publications, only five have a critical outlook on mindfulness, and its potential negative outcomes. Three 2015 articles point to: the risks of mindfulness-imposed practices at work (Brendel, 2015); the real effectiveness of mindfulness in the workplace beyond its use as a commodification tool, given its decontextualization as a Buddhist practice (Lieberman, 2015); the full experience of becoming mindful includes the possibility of experiencing negative feelings such as anger, sadness, jealousy, anxiety, vulnerability, or loneliness (Su, 2015).

While discussing mindfulness training programs there is an analysis of the pitfalls of companies' training programs. If, on one hand, some articles praise corporate-based mindfulness, others, on the other hand, show they are top-down, hence, imposed (Brendel, 2015). As one article sums up: "Potential risks of mindfulness programs can be avoided and advantages enhanced when workers engage voluntarily and proactively in the process" (Brendel & Stamell, 2016, pp. 2–3). The solution of turning mindfulness into a "voluntary" and "proactive" practice" depending on individual responsibility is, however, also problematic, as it weighs on individuals' emotional labor in the workplace, and beyond, as mindfulness can be practiced by individuals alone "anytime, anywhere".

Given the hype on mindfulness on organizations, and also some of its criticisms, it comes with no surprise that Daniel Goleman, in 2017, wrote an article entitled "Here's What Mindfulness Is (and Isn't) Good For" (Goleman, 2017). Goleman criticizes alleged benefits of mindfulness that are not properly evidence-based, and through a revision of the existing scientific literature on the effectiveness of mindfulness, he proposes that there are four real [*sic*] benefits: stronger focus, staying calmer under stress, better memory, and good corporate citizenship - which refer to the social role of companies, broadly speaking (Matten & Crane, 2005). The other two HBR publications which have a critical outlook on mindfulness are one interview with scholar Andrew Hafenbrack, who explains how his findings show that mindfulness can be demotivating ('Mindfulness Is Demotivating', 2019); and a 2021 article claiming that mindfulness can in fact decrease job performance (Lyddy et al., 2021).

4.2 Amazon's Zen Booth (AmaZen Booth) or Mindfulness Practice Room

In order to study the Amazon Zen Booth, we conducted a web search on Google News, a personalized news aggregator, using the word "Amazon Zen Booth" and "Amazen Booth" as search key words. Overall we found 23 results, and we selected the news from reference newspapers (The Guardian, BBC, New York Times, euronews), as well as the news from business magazines (Forbes and Business Insider), in a total of eight news.

The Amazon's Working well program is a telling example of the dark side of the organizational socialization of emotions, more specifically stress management. On May 2021, Amazon launched its WorkingWell program, aimed at giving staff "physical and mental activities, wellness exercises, and healthy eating support" (BBC, 2021). In fact, the Wellness program was presented as a way to decrease work hazards and work injuries rates (Hamilton, 2021). Due to the pandemic, Amazon hired over 300,000 people (Kelly, 2021). Despite the companies' large profit, the working conditions of warehouse workers are harsh (Leonhardt, 2021).

As part of the program was Amazon's Zen Booth, a mindfulness practice kiosk or station, named AmaZen booth, where employees could "watch short videos featuring easy-to-follow well-being activities, including guided meditations, positive affirmations, calming scenes with sounds." (BBC, 2021).

It was this small booth, in the middle of the Amazon Warehouse, which created a fuss. In the video presenting the interactive AmaZen Booths one could see a small room with one chair, a small computer table, a few small plants on shelves, a fan, and the ceiling was an impression of the sky – painted as a blue sky with clouds. This booth was so small that it was dubbed a "coffin-sized" booth.

There were highly critical voices of this Amazon Zen Booth, and also mocking comments on social media, pointing out that it did not solve the real lack of safe and decent working conditions and the absence of a solid company health policy (Crispin, 2021; Paul, 2021). For instance, workers were allegedly prevented from going to the bathroom during their breaks (Jones, 2021).

Not just that, as the AmaZen Booth was compared (through texts, images and memes) to the Suicide Booths in the dystopian sci-fi series Futurama, and were also dubbed "Despair closets" (Bateman, 2021), and crying rooms (Jones, 2021).

The company withdrew the social media videos presenting this program, and the fuss went away.

This "coffin-sized" booth, as it was dubbed on the newspapers, renders workers' free time more productive and wholesome, allowing them to control their emotions, enhancing their resilience and well-being. Once again, we are reminded of Zizek's and Purser's remarks: the company, instead of improving working conditions, raising salaries and so on, specifically targets the ways in which workers react to working conditions themselves: the affective realm becomes "governed" within the framework of emotional capitalism, and responsibility is delegated from the company to individual workers, who are now in charge of mobilizing a set of well-being practices – such as mindfulness – to better adjust to the working environment, to comply with the companies' norms (e.g. fast-paced productivity) and values (e.g. neoliberalism).

In fact, Amazon's concern with making their employees more attentive to the present moment to avoid injuries and save company's costs is in line with what has been found in other companies, which use mindfulness to the same end. This is particularly problematic in countries like the USA, where healthcare is highly privatized, especially when compared with European countries that benefit from the Welfare state and the right to access public health. Moreover, the fact that Amazon has warehouses in several countries in the world (namely in the Global South) makes this practice even more problematic regarding distinct national and organizational cultures.

5 Discussion

Here we articulate our empirical findings with the literature and theoretical concerns mentioned in the earlier sections of our article, focusing on the following themes: corporate mindfulness as an expansion of neoliberal selfhood; inner work as a driver of productivity; corporate mindfulness as an epiphenomenon of late capitalism; mindfulness as a technofix.

First, corporate mindfulness emphasizes the individual responsibility of workers to enhance their emotional, psychological and affective states in order to better serve economic goals. These technologies of the self can thus be understood as tools of organizational socialization that train employees on how to manage their selves; how to deal with certain negative emotions; how to mobilize specific kinesthetic reconfigurations to be "present" and to engage with other co-workers in a mindful way. Workers should take as their own responsibility the ability to manage certain mental states, uncoupling them from their real-world correlates. Mental and affective states are no longer indexed to aspects such as working conditions, salaries and the workplace environment but to the individual ability to manage emotions and affect. Corporate mindfulness not only medicalizes organizational socialization: it actually renders workers into supervisors of their own psychosomatic assemblages, relying on these psychospiritual techniques to enhance resilience, well-being and "happiness".

Second, corporate mindfulness blurs the boundaries between the self, inner work and "productivity". As we mentioned earlier, workers should deploy these technologies of the self throughout their daily lives, even beyond working hours: this means that the subjectification apparatus of corporate mindfulness is not limited to the workplace but extends to the entire life of the individual, a perfect example of corporate colonization (Deetz, 1992). Understood as a form of "training" or "contemplative education", it requires individuals to permanently assess and reconfigure their affective states, inevitably problematizing the notion of "free time". In fact, as we have seen with the example of the "AmaZen Booth", free time is no longer "free" from responsibilities - it should be spent enhancing one's ability to detach from certain negative feelings, mindfully dealing with whatever may happen throughout the day. Inner work thus allows workers to tailor their mental health to the workplace demands – anxiety, depression and burnout are no longer necessarily managed through the intervention of therapists or health professionals but by resorting to sensory deprivation, certain videos and guided meditations, turning malaise into an expression of the individual inability to optimally manage affective responses to their environment.

Drawing on the previous remarks, one could argue that corporate mindfulness is an emblematic example of late capitalism and its subjectification devices. In fact, as previously mentioned, mindfulness can be understood as an expression of "emotional capitalism", allowing workers to produce emotional, spiritual and psychological capital that should ideally enhance their productivity. This inevitably turns mindfulness into a regime of biocapital, as affective states, bodies and the psychological realm can be indexed to the individual aptitude to mobilize specific technologies of the self. In that sense, some of the tenets of mindfulness that we found in the HBR - such as creative ability; leadership; attention; emotional intelligence and well-being – are not pre-given but actively depend on the mobilization of a specific technology of the self that may enhance, optimize and allow these traits to flourish. In fact, and as we have seen through the example of Matthieu Ricard, mindfulness actively relies on the concept of neuroflexibility to put forward a performative approach to the affective realm, suggesting that through "inner work" one's psychosomatic assemblage can be enhanced. Consequently, corporate mindfulness can be interpreted as an avenue for the "capitalization" of the self and of its affective states, understanding workers – and leaders - not as static units with specific qualities and fixed capabilities but as flexible entities that can permanently reconfigure themselves, ideally generating more capital.

Finally, corporate mindfulness can be understood as a technofix. Although mindfulness stems from the religious tradition of Buddhism, it is presented in a purely technical fashion, where the spiritual dimension appears to be absent.

In fact, corporate mindfulness tackles socialization from a purely technical perspective, where affective states and interaction orders can be modelled and reconfigured through the enrollment of a specific technology of the self. Moreover, the broader working environment – permeated by economic, social and cultural aspects – is "suspended" and turned into a series of affective correlates that should be dealt with through a detached – mindful – attitude to cultivate positive emotions, modulating individual responses to sociopolitical problems. Corporate mindfulness thus reflects a broader tendency to rely on technologies and specific knowledge interventions to govern workers – with Nudge theory being a particularly perverse example of this – attempting to "capture" their agency and to better modulate their behavior. Considering that, within Buddhism, the aim of meditation is liberation from suffering, corporate mindfulness is a particularly perverse injunction of Buddhist Modernism. One could argue that what takes place is not individual liberation but the transformation of mindfulness into a device of technical control, as it prevents subjects from "freeing" themselves from those hegemonic mechanisms of governance put in place by specific companies to enhance their "emotional skills" and "productivity".

6 Conclusion

Our paper mobilized the neoliberal critique to delve into the topic of mindfulness in the workplace. We argued that corporate mindfulness is an emblematic example of neoliberal subjectification and socialization, inevitably transferring state – and corporate – responsibilities to individual workers, who are now in charge of modeling their affective states and responses to the working environment. This injunction inevitably depoliticizes the workplace, as individual malaise is not necessarily a rection to negative socioeconomic conditions but stems from the inability to generate positive emotions and to reshape affective states, something that can be achieved through "training". Our paper relied on the analysis of articles published in the HBR on mindfulness also examining the controversial example of the "AmaZen Booth".

Our empirical analysis delved into a relatively limited data set, constituted by two different corpora, which has limitations in terms of generalizations and comparison. Hence, it is possible that by extending our research into a wider range of journals and publications it would have been possible to identify alternative themes. Moreover, it has been argued that the neoliberal critique of mindfulness may be limited to engage with the more embodied and phenomenological aspects of meditation practice, inevitably overshadowing these more "intimate" dimensions. Corporate mindfulness may also be differently enacted throughout distinct companies and cultural and national contexts, instead of relying on a "one size-fits all" approach, thus requiring a more nuanced analysis of its multiple enactments.

As directions for future research, we believe it would be interesting to assess how techniques of mindfulness and workplace socialization are co-produced, namely by examining the practical intricacies of training programs, workshops and specific mindfulness tools deployed in corporate settings. Moreover, it would also be important to analyze how other practices and technologies are mobilized alongside mindfulness in the workplace, examining whether it is entwined with practices of the self, such as Yoga, psychotherapy and self-help devices; finally, research could be conducted on workplace mindfulness as a sociotechnical controversy, examining how a wide range of actors – such as Buddhist teachers, practitioners and those involved in contemplative research - perceive and position themselves regarding the articulations of mindfulness, workplaces and corporate settings.

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