Mindfulness and resonance in an era of acceleration

a critical inquiry

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Mindfulness and Resonance in an Era of Acceleration: A Critical Inquiry

Abstract
The paper emerges from the trend towards a commodification of mindfulness practices, known as McMindfulness. Drawing on a critique of late-modern temporality, the paper examines the use of mindfulness practices as a remedy for the consequences of societal acceleration. However, the paper suggests that mindfulness practices risk reinforcing the problems they were expected to solve. Against the backdrop of Rosa’s (2016) notion of resonance, the paper suggests a non-instrumental path for mindfulness practices, which have the potential to counterbalance the acceleration in social and working life and to provide the basis for the good life by assisting experiences of resonant relationships. However, the institutionalized capitalistic logic that permeates societal acceleration challenges legitimation of such mindfulness-based experiences of resonance. Therefore, the paper advocates a more humanistic logic that embraces deeply rooted universal human capacities and needs for attention, awareness, relationality and caring.

Keywords: mindfulness, McMindfulness, acceleration, resonance, critical reflection
Introduction

This paper emerges from the trend towards spiritual narratives and mindfulness interventions in the workplace. In this paper, mindfulness refers to a conscious awareness of and attention to one’s thoughts and actions moment by moment (Baer et al. 2004; Brown and Ryan 2003; Lau et al. 2006; Walach et al. 2006; Germer 2013; Petchsawang and McLean 2017). A large pool of mindfulness researchers argue that corporate mindfulness has beneficial effects, e.g. on organizational performance and productivity (e.g. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003; Reb and Atkins 2013; Brendel 2015). The paper responds to a call for critical perspective (Purser and Ng 2017) and joins the critical voices concerned about the commodification and instrumental uses of mindfulness, known as McMindfulness (Purser and Loy 2013).

Drawing on German sociologist Hartmut Rosa’s (2010, 2014, 2016) critique of late-modern temporality, the paper offers a critical examination of corporate mindfulness from a sociological perspective. The paper critically discusses the nature and effects of mindfulness practices in an era of acceleration where ‘upwards’ and ‘onwards’ seem to be the only legitimate path for individuals and organizations. In this context of acceleration, the practice of mindfulness appears to constitute a prominent counter-movement. However, a paradoxical situation emerges when the decelerating mechanisms like those provided by mindfulness simultaneously prepare the ground for higher performance and productivity and enable further acceleration. Consequently, the ills of acceleration are being treated and reinforced at the same time. Rosa’s (2010, 2014, 2016) social critique elucidates the challenges of using mindfulness interventions as a remedy for the consequences of acceleration in society in general and in working life more specifically. In its essence, the paper joins recent critiques of capitalism and its inherent growth requirement (e.g. D’Alisa et al. 2015; Bjerg 2016; Chertkovskaya et al. 2016; Johnson et al. 2017; Chertkovskaya et al. 2017), and
contributes with a reflexive account of uncritical uses of corporate mindfulness as a remedy for a variety of individual and organizational challenges.

Against the backdrop of Rosa’a (2016) notion of resonance, the paper suggests a different and non-instrumental path for mindfulness practices, which have the potential to counterbalance the acceleration in social and working life and to prepare the ground for the good life. In that respect, the paper answers the call for an alternative use of mindfulness that is not economically driven (Purser and Ng 2017). The capitalist logic that is deeply embedded within the corporate worldview, though, challenges such non-economically driven uses of mindfulness. Therefore, in order for real change to happen, a more humanistic and socially driven logic that embraces deeply rooted universal human capacities and needs for attention, awareness, relationality, and caring has to be legitimated in society at large.

**The Acceleration of Society**

Over the last couple of decades, researchers have emphasized how society is being transformed by successive waves of time-space compression (Harvey 1989). This has been caused by an acceleration of the pace of life (i.e. time measurement, multitasking, an increase in working pace and the number of tasks performed) and an annihilation of space through time. We never have enough time, and we become focused on time restrictions and limitations. People “never really find the time to do the things that they actually like to do most” (Rosa 2010, 90). Time pressures and time compression have been singled out as overarching challenges in modern life in general (Levine 1997; Szollos 2009). Accordingly, the compressed temporal structures of late-modern society have been sturdily critiqued for producing a social acceleration of society (Rosa 2010, 2014) that is being promoted and reinforced by conditions of modern life, and is manifested in working life through in increased work intensity, a speeding up of production processes, and the experience of feelings of
work-time pressure (Paoli and Merllié 2001; Parent-Thirion et al. 2007; Ulferts et al. 2013). Parallel to the acceleration in time, Rosa (2010) argues, there is an acceleration in space (because digital globalization has expanded space such that we can build strong relationships across large distances and be close without being physically close); an acceleration of things (because they never persist and a logic of renewal is dominant); an acceleration of actions (because information overload and distractions impede our immersion and focus and the changing circumstances make us ask existential questions and doubt the right way to live life); and an acceleration of ourselves and others (because our commitment is eroded, and the fragmentation in late-modern life complicates our integration of actions and experiences).

At the collective level, magic buzzwords like growth, innovation and change seem to appeal to a broad range of stakeholders in politics and in corporate life as the indispensable variables of efficiency and development. Accordingly, in academia as well as in politics and business environments, a discourse of constant change, continuous growth and innovation has become the standard in modern Western societies (Alvesson 2013; Rosa 2010, 2014). Subsequently, it has become the most natural thing in management and organization studies to investigate and develop methods to make production, leadership, relationships, and collaboration, for example, even more effective, cost-effective, competitive, innovative, entrepreneurial, etc. Therefore, innovation, growth and continued change have become requisite ingredients in the modern workplace.

The growth and innovation discourse has become established as a panacea for a great variety of challenges in all types of organizations, e.g. in higher education. In the Danish higher educational system, for instance, students with an entrepreneurial profile are favored, e.g. in applications for dormitory rooms, in applications for exemptions from exams and requirements for study activity; higher education programs including innovation and entrepreneurship are emerging at a fast pace; and research projects with developmental and innovative potential and purposes are prioritized in
the distribution of private and public funds. Even at primary and secondary school level, we see an increased emergence of courses focusing on innovation and development of new ideas and products. Likewise, in the knowledge industry, there is a race to become the next inventor of a revolutionary communication technology, software application, or technological development that will make our lives more efficient, protect us from spending too much time on any task, and bring everything comfortably within reach.

However, in his analysis of the speeding-up of social, institutional and material structures, Rosa (2014) finds that pathologies of desynchronization and alienation are intrinsic to the very fabric of modern society.

**Motivational Energy upholding Acceleration**

The motivational energy to keep the engines of acceleration going at an individual level, comes according to Rosa (2016) from both positive forces, expressed in the human’s inherent striving towards the good life, and negative forces, expressed in a fundamental fear of missing out, falling behind and being excluded. The modern human being’s longing for the good life is by what he calls the ‘Triple A Approach’ that guides individual and collective practices, and consists of a longing for making the world available, attainable and accessible. As subjects, Rosa (2016) argues, we are attracted to bringing the world within reach. This attractive power is systematically sustained by two basic human conditions: needs and wants (Rosa 2010, 2014). Our needs are driven by an urge to improve and increase on multiple capital parameters: financial improvements (economic capital), more authentic and intense social commitment (social capital), identification with cultural values and ethics (cultural capital), and improvements of physical appearance and mental state (physical and psychological capital). Further, Rosa (2010, 2014) emphasizes the human’s tendency to want more of everything within and even beyond his/her reach, because the world of growth is constantly
increasing the pool and scope of opportunities available to the individual human being. The evolving wants are driven by the attractiveness of growth and a subsequent promise of the good life. For example, by learning new languages (increase in cultural capital), the world opens up to us in new ways and is brought within reach. Collectively, we try to make more and more parts and segments of the world available, attainable, and accessible through science, through technology, political regulation, economic efficiency; and in our individual lives, we strive for the same through money, education, improved health and fitness, social networks and so on.

Among the negative forces motivating the acceleration of society, Rosa (2016) argues that the foundational logic behind the acceleration tendencies is a systemic and societal need for growth that has emerged from the capitalistic society and to which the individual is bound to. The capitalistic logic forces the individual to strive towards growth and innovation in order to even maintain the status quo. Notwithstanding the seemingly positive outcomes for the economy, the job market, the expansion of knowledge, the development of ever-more intelligent technologies for communication and production methods designed to save time, etc., the embedded and all-encompassing acceleration of society has paradoxical implications. Despite all attempts to sub-optimize and increase efficiency in all aspects of life, we continuously have the impression of running faster and out of time only to maintain the status quo. Alvesson (2013) argues that the pursuit of affluence and grandiosity triggers a self-reinforcing spiral of growth that develops into a zero-sum game where growth and development are incessantly outmatched. Seldom do we see the opposite. As Alvesson (2013, 225) puts it “even if you stretch up and stand on your toes, you don’t see any better if everyone else is doing the same”. This type of competitive stance seems to have become a paramount pillar in modern society. Accordingly, Rosa (2016) defines the capitalist society as one that is only able to stabilize itself dynamically.
The dynamic stabilization of society impedes the individual from taking non-productive breaks from the acceleration. Rosa (2010) notices a societal reluctance to accept pauses without clear and productive purposes. Consequently, Rosa (2010) observes an increased practice of instrumental breaks from acceleration, which he labels ‘functional decelerations’, meaning that the break serves to reach a certain goal. The functional deceleration becomes a technical mechanism for a technical problem, not a social, relational, cultural, structural, political, institutional, ideological or another type of problem. The functional deceleration appeals to the capitalistic growth logic and makes it difficult for the modern human being to take what is considered non-functional breaks from our fast-paced society. In an acceleratory society, the perception exists that during a break you are at severe risk of being outpaced, because you are unproductive while others are still in the game and surpassing you. Accordingly, only functional breaks, or in Rosa’s (2010) terminology functional decelerations, are legitimate. Consequently, for example, such a logic causes young women to be worried about getting pregnant, about going on maternity leave, and about developing baby brain syndrome, which could lead to a decrease in cognitive performance, distance her from her work professional skills and make her lose pace. By contrast, not many people are afraid to take a break from work and enroll on a professional master study program or spending time at a professional conference, because these activities represent competency-building breaks that develop person’s skills and knowledge, and consecutively improve that person’s performance levels. The difference between the two types of break resides in the level of productivity and advancement gained during the pause.

_Meaning Loss, Alienation and Emptiness_

The push for extensive and incessant dynamic stabilization traps the human being in a systemic need for growth and innovation, triggers a loss of meaning, feelings of alienation towards time,
space, things, actions, and ourselves and others (Rosa 2010), which creates an emergent social structure of stress and burn-out (Harvey 1989; Rosa 2010, 2014, 2016). In Rosa’s (2010) words, the individual has trouble resonating with the surrounding acceleratory society. Other sociologists like Weber, for example, have identified the loss of meaning as one of the big problems in modern life, closely connected with the effects of dynamic stabilization. Within this line of thinking, Alvesson (2013) states that behind the pursuit of affluence and grandiosity, which almost spontaneously presents itself as a solution to every societal problem, lies a paradoxical triumph of emptiness and hollowness. Resources are expended on improving the surface, leaving little to improve the depth and substance (Alvesson 2013).

Another stream of research suggests the emergence of an increasing alienation not from the self and the world but into the self. The ever-present pressure to maximize our wellness is working against us and provoking us to withdraw into ourselves (Cederström and Spicer 2015). The search for increased physical and psychological capital causes people to aspire to become happier and healthier. Cederström and Spicer (2015) argue that the new spirit of capitalism incites individuals to explore their unused potential in order to express flexible, action-orientated and endlessly changing selves. Consequently, the individual is continuously chasing his/her potential self in the pursuit of an incessantly developing better, stronger, and faster version of the self. Such preoccupations with physical and psychological advancement set the tone for a particular type of work ethic that values strength, force and power. This trend can be exemplified by the emerging culture of self-tracking. Self-trackers measure every single aspect of a person’s life such as physiological elements (body temperature, heart rate, weight, etc.), mental states (emotions, alertness, anxiety, creativity, spirituality, happiness, etc.), behavioral elements (bathroom habits, sleep patterns, work performance, running routines, eating behavior, etc.), and social, environmental aspects (day of the week, weather, location, noise, group status, relationships, etc.) (e.g. Cederström and Spicer 2015;
The purpose of this self-quantification is to optimize and structure the conditions for better performance and productivity and to maximize returns for the self (Mirowski 2013), just as the organization is increasingly obsessed with performance measures, key performance indicators, return on investment and limiting wastage of resources. Further, self-knowledge is emically constructed as a prerequisite for the self-tracker to improve physically, emotionally, professionally, socially and spiritually (Wilson 2012) and become a more knowable, calculable and administrable object (Swan 2013). Thus, these self-optimizers have embraced and adopted the acceleration into their lives and contribute through their self-quantification practices to reinforcing the pace of the acceleration.

Overall, Rosa (2016) believes that alienation from society and loss of meaning are not the responsibility of the individual. Rather these ills are structural and relational problems that need to be handled at a societal level.

**Counterbalancing Acceleration through Mindfulness**

Parallel to the obsession with growth and innovation, promoters of mindful work (Gelles 2015) and mindful organizing document its success in helping people and organizations adapt to life in challenging and high-velocity environments (Sutcliffe et al. 2016). Accordingly, researchers emphasize the capacity of mindfulness practices to cope with such conditions of modern working life as constant hurry mobile technology and demands for constant availability (Kossek and Lautsch 2012), blurring boundaries between work and non-work (Fleming and Spicer 2004), tight deadlines, multitasking, interruptions and disruptions (Wajcman and Rose 2011). Further, research suggests that the interest in mindfulness represents a reaction against the social and business upheaval, the loss of meaning and the resulting alienation (Naylor et al. 1996; Mitroff and Denton 1999; Burack 1999), as well as a desire to recapture the connection between employer and employee (Giacalone
and Jurkiewicz 2003). By focusing moment by moment, being in the present and letting go of distracting thoughts, Payutto (2002) argues, mindfulness practices help to prepare people’s minds to be calm, powerful and ready for work and to strengthen and empower the individual to cope with contradictory effects of modern working life like stress, burn out and alienation. Accordingly, substantial research argue that mindfulness practices are positively correlated with stress reduction (e.g. Kabat-Zinn 1990; Davis and Hayes 2011; Wolever et al. 2012; Foureur et al. 2013; Barker 2014; Shapiro, Wang and Petalsan 2015), and health and well-being (e.g. Williams and Penman 2011; Hülshege et al. 2013; Bazarko et al. 2013; Wilson 2014). Hence, mindfulness practices seem capable of helping the individual to handle fast-moving and ever-changing working life.

The trend towards mindfulness as a solution to modern societal problems is popularized in established imageries of meditation ‘on the cushion’ and ‘nature’ in harmony (Wilson 2014) and in heuristics such as Goleman’s (2013) ‘triple focus, Huffington’s (2014) ‘third metric’ of success and happiness, packaged corporate programs such as Google’s ‘search inside yourself’ (Tan 2014), and self-help methods and apps such as Headspace (Puddicombe 2012). Further large US-based organizations, such as Google, the US Army, Harvard Business School, IBM and Microsoft offer mindfulness training programs to their workforce (Gupta et al. 2014; Hyland et al. 2015). Hence, what was once confined to the retreat centers of California or the Buddhist monasteries of Southeast Asia has become a central element in Western societies, cultures and institutions. The corporate embracing of spiritual narratives and mindfulness interventions marks a search for new ways and approaches to re-think, re-write and re-examine the role of organization and management. The overall claim is that mindfulness results in a calmer yet stronger and more productive self, leading to positive outcomes for the individual and the organization.
Despite the seemingly obvious capacity of mindfulness practices to mitigate the social consequences of societal acceleration, Purser and Loy (2013) capture such use in a substantial critique of the commodification of mindfulness practices in the concept of McMindfulness. In their commodified form, mindfulness practices have, according to Hyland (2016), been transmuted into an all-pervasive and superficial McMindfulness phenomenon (Hyland 2016) that is taking over and ignoring the ethical foundations of the meditative practices and traditions from which mindfulness has emerged (Purser and Loy 2013). To underline this superficiality of McMindfulness, Bazzano (2014, 164) suggests that mindfulness programs have come to represent “a quick fix for the anxieties of late-capitalist society”. These mindfulness quick-fixes might be more palatable to the corporate world as they exclusively pursue corporate objectives and commercial profit disguised in a discourse of caring for the individual. Hyland (2016) further argues that McMindfulness techniques fully satisfy Ritzer’s (1993) original model of McDonaldization – the commodification of all aspects of life through standardization, calculability and control in the relentless capitalist pursuit of profits – and are distinguished by their denaturing and reductionism of basic practices and the divorcing of these from their ethical groundings in contemplative Buddhist traditions.

In line with the McMindfulness tendencies, an overwhelming body of corporate mindfulness research is concerned with quantitative measurements of mindfulness (Baer 2013) and focus on the outcome-oriented doing of mindfulness instead of on the present-moment being. Davies (2015), for example, characterizes mindfulness as an objective, measurable, administered solution to the problems facing corporations and government. The overriding question in this line of research becomes how mindfulness can increase profits (Hyland 2015); for that reason, this research investigates the effects of mindfulness practices on processes indicative of resiliency, performativity and productivity. Accordingly, research has thoroughly investigated the correlation...
between mindfulness and performance (e.g. Ho 2011; Chaskalson 2011; Petchsawang and Duchon 2012; Reb and Atkins 2013; Dane and Brummel 2014; Brendel 2015; Davies 2015; Good et al. 2016), and work engagement (e.g. Alfes et al. 2013; Leroy et al. 2013; Aikens et al. 2014; Petchsawang and McLean 2017). Likewise, in practice we see management consultancies like the Danish mindfulness agency Potential Project providing organizational effectiveness programs with titles like ‘Mindful strategies to enhance performance’ and ‘Mindfulness as a driver for business results’ (Hougaard et al. 2015).

Thus, the commodified mindfulness practices are reoriented towards market needs, and towards releasing hidden resources to be used in the context of the corporation rather than towards a critical reflection on the causes of our collective suffering (Purser and Loy 2013).

**The Responsibility of the Individual**

An important explanation to the disregard of the collective suffering may be found in a larger disregard of the societal problems as being structural or systemic. When societal problems are defined as individual problems, it is only natural that the treatment is expected to come from the individuals themselves. Accordingly, self-tracking, self-centered, and self-medication techniques are developed and pursued without the source of the ills being questioned. Within this context, Buddhist critics argue that the mindfulness movement is reinforcing the self-centred individualism that seems to be a basic problem in Western society (Hewapathirane 2015). Individual mindfulness, in this view, is restricted to enhancing and developing the self. Accordingly, mindfulness is connected with the broader discussion on neoliberal (Harvey 2005) and neo-individual (Elliot and Lemert 2006) tendencies that emphasize individual responsibility and belief in individuals’ capability and need to renew themselves constantly. However, by use of mindfulness practices the individual is only able to treat the symptoms at a personal level and not the triggering factors behind
societal-based problems like stress and burnout. The individual is left with the responsibility to self-medicate, even though the problem has developed at a societal and structural level. In this line of thinking, Barker (2014) argues that mindfulness practices have been turned into a ‘do-it yourself’ project. Instead of questioning and considering why stress is so pervasive in modern business institutions, the instrumental-oriented mindfulness movement has delivered a mindset that conveniently shifts the burden of societal problems onto the individual employee. Accordingly, for example, stress is framed as a personal problem, and mindfulness is offered as just the right medicine to help employees work more efficiently and calmly within toxic environments. Thus, when the responsibility for fostering one’s own well-being and happiness is projected onto the individual, the organization is released from responsibility to handle these issues. Thereby, the corporation absolves itself from making any effort to minimize for example stress-inducing conditions in the workplace, for example (Guthey and Jackson 2005).

Following these critical reflections, the paper elaborates on the paradoxical condition that seems to follow from the commodified use of mindfulness as a panacea to mitigate the ills caused by societal acceleration.

**The contradictory Effects of Mindfulness**

Notwithstanding the ostensibly positive effects of mindfulness in working life in terms of its functional, cognitive, mental, emotional and health-related benefits for the individual and the organization (Hyland et al. 2015; Petchsawang and McLean 2017), the application of mindfulness practices in an acceleratory society appear oxymoronic when the individual is using mindfulness exercises to understand better, look farther, harder, wider, deeper and closer (Gavetti and Levinthal 2000; Langer and Moldoveanu 2000; Rerup 2009); the individual is simultaneously recharging his/her batteries. An example could be a person going on leave, e.g. for mental restitution in a
Buddhist temple. With released and renewed energy, the individual comes back as an empowered version and has become capable of re-entering the fast-moving treadmill or perhaps even of working harder than before the retreat. Hence, this individual is at best reproducing a status quo or, at worst, reinforcing the dynamic stabilization of the fast-paced work environment. In this way, the practice mindfulness serves as a functional deceleration (Rosa 2010) that overpowers the individual by the zero-sum game (Alvesson 2013). In this light, then, mindfulness practices serve as a treatment for a problem, which is successively reinforced through that very same treatment. Thereby, mindfulness practices come to represent a productive break with a contradictory effect of retaining or aggravating the ill it was intended to cure.

Hence, the individuals are caught in a game, where he or she actively enacts and reproduces the institutionalized capitalistic growth logics that they were trying to escape through mindfulness practices. In the same line of thinking, Hickey (2010) has argued that mindfulness, used as an individualized and psychologized technique, has become a servant of capitalistic society (Hickey 2010), as it is introduced to organizations as a mechanism capable of tuning the workforce for even higher performance levels. In their discussion of McMindfulness, Purser and Loy (2013) identify this same contradictory effect and state that mindfulness is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce the ills it was supposed to treat (Purser and Loy 2013). In a similar way, Zizek (2001) argues that, although Western Buddhism presents itself as a remedy for the stressful tension of capitalism’s dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain some inner peace, the concept of mindfulness has become expropriated by capitalism to ensure its hegemony and even function as its perfect ideological supplement. Likewise, critical research into school-based mindfulness training, argues that mindfulness is a biopolitical human enhancement strategy that aims to protect young people from digital capitalism’s economization of attention (e.g. Stiegler 2010; Reveley 2015). However, the research suggests that this training is a
double-edged sword that contains both the poison and the remedy. The overall argument is that school-based mindfulness training prepares the schoolchildren to reproduce digital capitalism and thereby to produce the problem that their mindfulness training was supposed to remedy. All in all, there are strong indications that the practice of mindfulness, in its commodified version, does not challenge the external world and its institutionalized capitalistic logic; rather, it reproduces this logic. This leads to the conclusion that mindfulness practices, as an instrumental technique to solve the pathologies of acceleration, have limited normative effects.

**Counterbalancing Acceleration through Resonance**

As a response to his critique of the acceleratory society and the capitalistic logic that generates it, Rosa (2014, 2016) introduces the concept of *resonance* as a solution to counterbalance the pathologies of the societal developments. A central part of the societal problem lies, according to Rosa (2016), in the triple A orientation, which implies an instrumental, manipulative, mute relationship towards things, earth and people. Therefore, the core aspiration of resonance is to replace this orientation with a new way of relating to the world through *listening* and *answering* instead of *controlling* and *commanding*. Thus, the alternative to the mode of dynamic stabilization is a mode of resonance, which is about relating to the world. Resonance is a temporary, ad-hoc or fleeting form of association created in the moment. Hence, it is not part of any enduring social structures in the sense of sharing a formality, or mutual responsibility, commitment, or even a level of permanence (Miller 2015). Sociologists and social scientists use resonance as a concept to describe fluid forms of belonging and affinity achieved in everyday life contexts. Simmel and Hughes (1949) acknowledged everyday forms of association (sociability), which are beyond instrumental or practical interest, but contain within them “a feeling of the worth of association as such” (Simmel and Hughes 1949, 255). Accordingly, they promote the idea that
everyday aspects of being together in purely social circumstances is not about accomplishing goals or tasks, but is merely about enjoying the company of other humans. In this understanding, resonance becomes mostly a matter of relating and associating with other humans. Rosa’s (2016) interpretation of resonance echoes this understanding, but expands the scope of the resonant relationships to include relating to all aspects of human life.

Rosa (2016) distinguishes among three axes of resonance, along which resonant relationships emerge and provide the individual with a sense of coherence with those aspects of life that move the individual. The first axis of resonance is the horizontal or social axis of resonance, i.e. resonance between human beings. We find it in relationships of love, e.g. with friends and family. The second axis of resonance is the diagonal or material axis that connects us to material things, objects or artefacts in the mode of work, sports, music, education, art, or consumption. Finally, the third axis of resonance, the vertical axis, gives us a sense of how we are connected to the world, nature, history, religion or life as a totality, hence representing an existential axis of resonance. All three axes provide opportunities for the individual to relate to a human, an object or a totality in a way that touches the individual. Accordingly, Rosa (2016) presents resonance as the solution to alienation because resonant relationships can compensate for the loss of connections in the social world.

Rosa (2016) discerns two different levels of resonance: an ontological level and a normative level. At the ontological level, Rosa (2016) understands resonance as synonymous with a basic entanglement in the world, and claims that existentially we are closer to others and to the objects around us than to ourselves as self-identical and demarcated subjects. Consequentially, Rosa (2016) explains that resonance is the very process through which we are formed as subjects and through which the world we encounter and experience is constituted. At the normative level, resonance is an inherent element of the good life, which is defined by Rosa (2016) as the capability to enter into
non-instrumental relations and which permits the person, the object or the activity to move us. Therefore, Rosa (2010, 100) states that “a ‘good life’ in the end might be a life that is rich in multi-dimensional experiences of ‘resonance’; a life that vibrates along discernible ‘axes of resonance’.”

Rosa (2016) characterizes the essence of resonance as four qualities: affection, emotion, transformation, and elusiveness. Resonance is about affection, because in the resonant relationship, the human feels truly touched or moved by that with which he or she associates, e.g. listening to music, talking with people, or doing a work task right. The resonant relationship affects us when we feel that the element we interact with is important. Second, through our emotions for the subject, the object or the totality that has moved us, we react to it emotionally with body and mind by reaching out to it, and experience self-efficacy in this encounter. These two processes happen as we listen and answer in the relationship. Third, in the process of being touched and affected by someone or something and of reacting to and answering it emotionally, we are transformed – or we transform ourselves in the sense of a co-production. Whenever someone has an experience of resonance – with a person, a book, an idea, a landscape or even a work task – he or she comes out as a different person and the relationship is transformed. Fourth, resonance is characterized by an element of elusiveness, which describes the uncontrollable and fleeting character of resonance. It is not possible to plan or guarantee a person’s getting into a mode of resonance with someone or something. For example, buying the most expensive concert tickets for your favorite band or meeting someone you regard as an icon, does not guarantee affection, emotional movement or and transformation. Hence, the elusive character of resonance means it is impossible to predict or control the result of resonant relationships. Instead of producing relationships through command and control, the resonant relationship emerges through listening and answering. In other words, it is a dialogical relationship (Rosa 2016). From these characteristics of resonance, it is clear that Rosa (2016) does not see resonance as an inward oriented state of mind or emotion, but as a state of
relating to the world outside us, which is able to move and touch us, and creates resonance in and
with us in a non-instrumental way. Accordingly, Rosa (2016) asserts that the quality of a human life
cannot be measured in terms of resources, options or moments of happiness. Rather, we should turn
our attention to the connection with the world that informs that life and which, as long as that
connection is intact, provides us with stable axes of resonance.

Rosa’s (2014, 2016) suggestion that resonance is a solution to the alienation of the individual
taps into the efforts of the de-growth movement (e.g. D’Alisa et al. 2015; Bjerg 2016;
Chertkovskaya et al. 2016; Johnson et al. 2017; Chertkovskaya et al. 2017). Connected to the de-
growth movement, an anti-consumption trend of digital detox emerged a couple of years ago (Booth
2014) like the de-growth movement. The concept of resonance represents a longing for a concrete
physical presence and an analogous life, where the feel of the wind or the smell of nature makes the
individual resonate with the actual and analogous presence without necessarily having an exact
purpose for the activity other than to resonate with it. Such a deceleration of life at a very physical
level gives life to the wise words of the Danish author Michael Strunge “only move forward at the
pace of life” (Strunge 1978).

The difference between the capitalistic logic and the more humanistic logic underlying the
ideas of de-growth and resonance can be described through the narrative about three African
fishermen resting in the shade of a tree by a lake in the middle of the day when a white businessman
walked by. He approached the three fishermen and asked them, what they were doing. “Relaxing
and enjoying life”, they answered. “But why?” the businessman wanted to know. “You still have
time left in your working day to catch more fish!” “We have already caught enough fish to feed our
families for today,” the fishermen replied. “But why don’t you catch more fish and sell them at the
market?” the businessman asked. “Why should we?” the fishermen asked, confused. The
businessman explained. “Because then you can earn enough money to buy a bigger boat that can
take you farther out on the lake, where you will be able to catch more and larger fish, which you can then sell and invest in an even bigger boat. Eventually you will be able to employ other fishermen and perhaps own an entire fleet of fishing boats.” The fishermen looked at the businessman, stupefied. “And why would we want to go through all that trouble?” The businessman lightened up and smiled: “Because then you will become very rich and be able to do whatever you want.” The fishermen looked content and replied happily, “But that is what we do already!”

In this brief narrative, the businessman is not able to escape the strong capitalistic market logic, believing that the individual should always optimize and capitalize on his/her skills and efforts. This institutionalized logic is contrasted by an alternative logic of sufficiency and social relationship, where enough is what is sufficient and the individual is relating to others and his/her circumstantial conditions without capitalizing on these conditions and options. This latter logic is important for the legitimation of resonance because it allows the individual to spend time resonating with his or her surroundings without being expected to attribute an instrumental rational purpose to his or her actions.

**Mindfulness-based Experiences of Resonance**

Drawing on Rosa’s notion of resonance, this paper suggests that the good working life may be achieved through stable relations along axes of resonance that provide a counter-logic to the capitalistic logic. Thereby, the paper advocates for an alternative humanistic logic that advances practices in working life that are capable of rethinking social processes and practices in the organization. Defining mindfulness as a conscious awareness of and attention to one’s own thoughts and actions moment by moment (e.g. Petchsawang and McLean 2017) bears witness to an inwardly directed practice. However, this paper proposes individuals as well as organizations need to apply mindfulness techniques as an outwardly directed practice to assist the individual in
listening, answering and relating to immediate aspects of human life along the three axes of resonance that Rosa (2016) accounts for. Likewise, Purser and Loy (2013) advocated a change in the uses of mindfulness to become a genuine force for positive personal and social transformation oriented towards an ethical framework and aspiring to loftier purposes that take into account the well-being of all living beings. Within this line of thinking, mindfulness practices serve a different and humanistic purpose instead of being a technical solution to a technical problem. It is a type of mindfulness that is deeply rooted in universal human capacities for attention, awareness, relationality and caring. Hyland (2014) emphasizes that the central quality of mindfulness practices that provide present-moment awareness can assist the individual in connecting with all aspects of personal and social life. The awareness of the social surroundings provided by mindfulness, is supportive of the intrinsic social dimension of the resonant relationship that provide the individual with a sense of coherence with the social world. Accordingly, this paper suggests that mindfulness practices is able to create opportunities for experiences of resonance. It involves resonating familiarity and intimacy with aspects of everyday experience that we often take for granted. These include our experience of the present moment, our own bodies, our thoughts and emotions and, above all, our tacit and constraining assumptions and highly conditioned habits of mind and behavior, both as individuals and in society at large. Granger (2006, 118) explains the idea of such analogous attention in the following way: “…attending to things... means reaching out as complete beings to meet the world in a way that brings us closer to it as an equal partner in the full lived situation, and in the concrete and particular here and now”. Hence, mindfulness practices defined as present-moment awareness are thus obvious techniques to create opportunities for the emergence of resonant relationships.

Despite the elusive character of resonance, the intense level of attention to self and the social world in mindfulness practices creates an ontological awareness that forms the basis of a stable
connection with the world, thereby creating stable relationships of resonance on all three axes of resonance. Accordingly, this paper suggests that mindfulness interventions have the potential to assist and foster resonant relationships. Not only do mindfulness practices, at their ontological level, have the potential to assist the emergence of resonant relations, the use of mindfulness for the normative purpose of resonance to reach the good life and happiness, may also contribute to a counterbalancing of the contradictory effects of acceleration.

An important feature of such mindfulness practice as a facilitator of resonance experiences is that they do not have market-oriented objectives to increase performance levels by recharging mental batteries. The mindfulness practices proposed in this paper permit the individual to associate beyond instrumental or commercial intent and instead relate to immediate, analogous surroundings in a way that serves a purely normative purpose of reaching happiness and well-being just for the sake of the good life.

**Challenges to Resonance**

The hegemony of the capitalistic logic in the modern business world is a serious challenge and limitation to the initiation of mindfulness-based experiences of resonance. The capitalistic logic causes business corporations to focus on efficiency and rationality and to be concerned with finding optimal ways to lead, produce, develop, distribute, control, motivate, etc. Such efforts require techniques to coordinate, reduce or eliminate activities that do not lead to economic gains. In this institutionalized capitalistic logic, the good life is evaluated on the basis of key performance indicators and other economically driven indicators. Such rational performance-driven ways of evaluating and legitimizing corporate actions problematize activities that are not economically sustainable. Accordingly, the initiation of mindfulness practices that aim to foster resonant relationships is challenged by the institutionalized capitalistic logic.
The problem with this hegemonic capitalistic logic is also reflected in the critique that some organizations are subjected to when they engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. When critics evaluate CSR initiatives against the backdrop of capitalistic market logic, they are not able to escape the valuation of rationality and productivity and are therefore unable to recognize claims of altruistic objectives. Altruism and doing good merely for the sake of it are irrational and non-legitimate activities in capitalistic logic. Thus, when we are trapped inside the capitalistic logic, the scope of our action and perception is restricted. This challenge arises because we suffer under the TINA principle asserting that the market economy is the only legitimate system. As Gelles (2015) states, we live in a capitalistic economy, and mindfulness is not able to change that.

Advocates of the de-growth movement assert that in order to succeed, there is a need for new a discourse and vocabulary (D’Alisa et al. 2015) that enables us to explore a society beyond growth (Bjerg 2016). Fournier (2008) calls for a re-ordering of our value systems in order to approach the issue of growth, post-growth and de-growth, as it:

… is not just a quantitative question of doing less of the same, it is also and, more fundamentally, about a paradigmatic re-ordering of values, in particular the (re)affirmation of social and ecological values and a (re) politicization of the economy. It aims to take us out of the economy, of the domain of the calculable and economic rationality, and ask fundamental questions about the nature of wealth, its distribution, its use, and misuse. Thus de-growth is not just a quantitative question of producing and consuming less, but a tool proposed for initiating a more radical break with dominant economic thinking. (532)

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1 TINA stands for: there is no alternative. A slogan often used by the British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.
Accordingly, the de-growth movement as well as Rosa’s (2014, 2016) concept of resonance challenge the collective realization in the capitalistic society that there is no alternative to growth (Atzeni 2012; Parker et al. 2014). For Rosa (2014, 2016), as well as for the proponents of de-growth, the objective is not to inhibit or obstruct progress and development. Rather, it is to challenge the embedded capitalistic logic in contemporary Western societies, where more is never enough.

In market-oriented capitalistic logic, most social problems are framed as technical problems. Therefore, a technical take on mindfulness, illustrated through the concept of McMindfulness, is inevitable. It prevents problems from being defined as, for example, social, relational, cultural, structural, political, institutional, ideological or another type of problems and therefore prevents solutions of those very types. In order to sophisticate our diagnosis of corporate problems, we need an alternative logic that encompasses and acknowledges other types of needs and wants besides those driving the societal acceleration. When our perspective is limited to capitalistic logic, we simultaneously delimit our attention to those parts of human nature that cannot be quantified or measured on a numeric scale, such as, for example, our passions, emotions, sorrows and joys. Consequently, the capitalistic logic may obstruct the mission of a more humanistic mindfulness that operates along the axes of resonance. Therefore, in order for resonant relationships to develop, among others through mindfulness practices, an alternative logic that acknowledges more humanistic needs and wants needs to become legitimated in society at large and in business life more specifically.

**Conclusion**

This paper emerges from two developments that interact and collide. First, there is a tendency in society towards an incessant and persistent acceleration driven by a capitalistic logic of constant
growth and innovation. Second, a trend towards the commodification of mindfulness practices in working life known as McMindfulness seems to have established itself as a remedy to the pathologies of societal ills caused by this acceleration. Notwithstanding the stated positive outcomes of mindfulness practices in corporate life, this paper argues that, in a context of societal acceleration and corporate commercial interests, the practice of mindfulness suffers from a contradictory effect in that it reinforces the problems it was supposed to treat. The boost in mental resources that the individual achieves through mindfulness practices gears up and recharges the batteries for a new sprint towards further acceleration, which again demands for a renewed recharging of the batteries. Hence, the solution reinforces the problem. Within this framework, this paper contributes to the critique of the instrumental approach to mindfulness practices as quick-fixes for all aspects of life.

As an alternative to the instrumental commodified approach to mindfulness, known as McMindfulness, this paper draws on critical sociologist Hartmut Rosa’s (2016) concept of resonance as a solution to counterbalance the pathologies of the acceleration in society and in working life. A central aspiration of the resonant mode of being is to counterbalance controlling and commanding relationships permeated by capitalistic logic. The goal is to create the foundation for the good life through resonant relationships with humans, objects, artifacts and life as a totality, and to provide a more fluid form of belonging and affinity for the individual with the social world.

Notwithstanding the elusive character of resonance, this paper suggests that stable connections with the social world are capable of providing the foundation for resonant relationships. The individual and social insights gained through mindfulness practices permit the individual to associate beyond instrumental or market-driven interests and instead to relate to the immediate analogous surroundings in a way that serves the purely normative purpose of increasing the individual’s happiness and well-being.
The initiation of mindfulness practices to foster resonant relationships is challenged by the institutionalized capitalistic logic. Within this logic, it is not easy to escape the pull towards market-orientation and performance optimization. Therefore, in order for mindfulness-based resonant relationships to become legitimate activities an alternative logic that values the deeply rooted universal human capacities and needs for attention, relationality, coherence and affection needs to be institutionalized in society at large.
References


