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## Mindful Leadership and Climate Action

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## **Mindful Leadership and Climate Action**

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## **Abstract**

Organizations must get serious about reaching the goals for addressing Climate Action outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)13. The problem to solve is how the leaders who created the climate issues can be the leaders to make climate action happen. The development of mindful leaders within an organization is the answer to the problem. Mindful leaders are developed not only with the Inner Development Goal (IDG) framework which is developed to align and support the 17 SDGs of the United Nations. The development of mindful leaders comes from ancient and modern practices that draw from Buddhism, secular practices, neuroscience, modern psychology, and contemporary leadership research. One great intersection between mindful leaders and climate action is that many traditions across the centuries draw on powerful practices for leaders to be in tune and in touch with personal history and nature in the present moment. Within Europe, the effects of climate change are happening at an ever-increasing rate, and extreme weather events are becoming common. The time for mindful leaders who bring teams together to create the radical innovations required is urgent for climate action to occur.

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## **Mindful Leadership and Climate Action**

There is a need for society, organizations, and corporations to do more to develop and nurture mindful leadership. There needs to be a discussion on the importance of mindful leaders in corporate environments and society, where narcissism and arrogance are often rewarded (Rothberg, 2018). Within business, there are so many trends and best practices where success is promised, but what is forgotten is that the fundamental premise of the secrets of success goes back to the basics of the importance of interconnectedness with all living things in nature and with climate. This paper's thesis connects to the premise that mindful leaders are essential in politics, companies, organizations, and society to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and prevent future mass extinctions by protecting nature and the planet with climate action (SDG 13). Climate action is also a source of considerable anxiety within European society because the impacts of climate change cause trauma and suffering concurrently with the efforts to mitigate and stop the impact of climate change. Mindful leaders are present and non-judgmental and consider all viewpoints when making decisions (Gunaratana, 2019). Mindful leaders are also equipped to deal with climate anxiety that may arise in themselves and support others facing climate anxiety.

“Mindfulness belies its foundational nature and influence not only on what people pay attention to but also the qualities of how they pay attention to all the experience” (Ormstrom, 2023, p. 8). Mindful leaders are business-conscious leaders aiming to progress and support bipartisanship, employees, customers, and the planet. Different groups are developing several frameworks with three aims in three time horizons. The first is supporting the development of mindful leaders in a way that connects and heals the past trauma of the leader. The second is how to lead in the present, especially as climate issues are creating and will continue to create extreme weather events. The third leads to the future of radical and disruptive innovation that will result in climate action. Innovation best occurs when leaders rally and motivate teams

with trust, compassion, courage, and presence. Innovation can flourish by incorporating ancient secular and spiritual practices; Buddhist and indigenous people's learnings about nature, spirituality, modern day psychology and neuroscience, and contemporary studies and research on leadership. After all, the "entire planet is the precious possession of all of us" (Olendzki, 2010, p. 135).

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are 17 global targets devised, ratified, and adopted by the United Nations member states in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 6). Figure one in the appendix outlines a graphic of the sustainable development goals. The aim is to achieve a sustainable future by focusing on economic, social, and environmental issues. The goals include eradicating poverty, providing quality education, promoting gender equality, ensuring clean water and sanitation, reducing inequality, combating climate change, and promoting sustainable cities and communities. By working towards these goals, society can create a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable world for society and future generations. Practicing mindfulness can help leaders stay focused and motivated. The SDGs provide a shared blueprint that when the targets are achieved, the world will be a better place for living things and the planet in terms of peace and prosperity.

The date set for achieving the goals is 2030, with a yearly report published. This thesis focuses on just one of the SDGs, number 13, concerning climate change or, as the 2023 United Nations report calls it, "Climate Action" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 38). Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, the collective agreement was to keep global warming under 2 degrees Celsius. Substantial change is needed: "exponential progress in economic, social, and environmental wealth creation" (Elkington, 2021, p. 9). The thesis has a focus from a European point of view to show that mindful leaders are needed to lead organizations to address climate change in both acceptance and innovation. The European point of view is

important because the effects of climate change are happening concurrently as organizations work to address and reverse change. Leaders must be personally equipped to deal with climate anxiety, simultaneously deal with the complexity of Europe, and bring together collaboration and innovation across groups.

The premise is what needs to happen to the skills and mindset of leaders for leaders to support reversing and fixing climate change (UN Sustainable Development Goal number 13). While the goals and vision of SDG 13 are clear, how society can develop the required human capacity and capabilities needs to be clarified. The current leadership in organizations must deal with large complexity and uncertainty and manage the scale of challenges, including climate change causing traumatic and devastating events. “Students and youth globally are demanding climate action and comprehensive and quality climate education to prepare for a greener future” (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 39). What needs to change if the same people (leaders) who made the current problems and issues are expected to be the same leaders who will fix the problems caused? A fundamental and substantial shift in leadership skills and mindset must occur in organizations, corporations, and politics.

### **Inner Development Goals Framework**

Inner development goals (IDGs) are an important aspect of personal growth and self-improvement. While Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on improving society, inner development goals focus on improving oneself (Wright, 2017). These goals include developing a positive mindset, cultivating self-awareness, improving emotional intelligence, and building resilience. Inner development goals can help individuals become more mindful, compassionate, and empathetic, contributing to a more harmonious and peaceful society.

Individuals can practice meditation and self-reflection and seek personal development resources such as books, courses, retreats, and workshops to achieve inner development goals. It is important to approach these goals with patience and self-compassion, recognizing

that personal growth is a process that takes time and effort. Individuals can enhance their well-being by prioritizing inner development goals and contributing to a more positive and sustainable future for themselves and others (Elkington, 2021).

Inner development can be described as the lifelong, ongoing process of development of human cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal capacities, expressed within relationships and ultimately orienting us towards service to the world (IDGs, 2023). “In an increasingly frantic and complex world, mindfulness allows me to step into the moment and be present” (Ormstrom, 2023, p.14).

Leaders play a critical role in shaping the culture and environment of their organizations. Leaders must understand how trauma impacts individuals and communities to create a safe and supportive workplace (Limbach, 2019). When leaders are aware of the signs and symptoms of trauma, they can create policies and practices that support the healing and growth of their employees. Additionally, understanding trauma can help leaders avoid re-traumatizing their employees (Treleaven, 2018). Trauma survivors may be triggered by certain words, actions, or events, and leaders need to be sensitive to these triggers and create a safe space for their employees (Treleaven, 2018, p. 29). By prioritizing trauma-informed practices, leaders can foster a culture of empathy, compassion, and resilience in their organizations. In short, leaders who understand trauma are better equipped to create a healthy and supportive workplace for their employees, leading to better outcomes for everyone involved (Clarke, 2020, p. 136).

Leaders must care deeply about the state of our society; it is important to raise awareness that focusing on inner development goals is essential in fixing the issues that society currently faces and will face in the future. While it may seem counterintuitive, the problems seen in the world often reflect the inner turmoil and suffering that many individuals experience. By prioritizing our personal growth and well-being, society can create a ripple



effect that positively impacts those around us and ultimately leads to a more peaceful and harmonious world.

Some of my inner development goals include practicing mindfulness and meditation, cultivating a sense of gratitude and positivity, and working on my communication and interpersonal skills. I can better understand and connect with others by becoming more self-aware and in tune with my emotions and thoughts. I can contribute to a more compassionate and understanding society by approaching every situation with kindness and empathy. Of course, inner development is a lifelong journey; there is always more to learn and improve upon. However, by committing to this process and prioritizing it daily, I can improve my well-being and contribute to a better world.

### **Mindfulness Supports Climate Action**

Climate action is needed now; the United Nations report on climate action “unequivocally states that human activities, particularly over a century, have caused global warming of 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels” (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 38); there is a need for society, organizations, and corporations to do more to develop and nurture mindful leadership. The population of Europe approaches 742 million in 2023, up from 605 million in 1960 (Europe Population 1950-2023, 2023). What concerns Europe the most is the prevalence of climate change disasters affecting the region and how this also affects the lives of young and old citizens. For example, fires threaten many communities, especially in the summer.

Even in places like Venice in Italy, rather than being worried about too much water in canals, there is a water shortage due to less snow and ice in the mountains. In communities in France, ski resorts have closed because there is not enough snow in the winter to allow one traditional family skiing holiday to continue (Climate Change Impacts, Risks and Adaptation, 2023). Climate change has brought abrupt changes to traditional industries and livelihoods,

which has upended the European political landscape. Inside Europe, radical right-wing parties have come to power, and war and unrest have even swept through the region. At the same time, thousands of refugees are trying to leave Africa and make the dangerous journey to Europe, often by way of people smugglers and modern-day slavery. By many estimates, the number of people who are subject to modern-day slavery is as high as it has ever been in human history. From a climate change perspective, extreme weather events also plague Europe. For the first time, even tornadoes have touched down in Eastern Europe. The Arctic cold blasts have damaged vast areas over the region, and the El Nino effect is causing considerable harm and discomfort. One-third of all European bees and insects have declined due to weather changes and conditions (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023).

There is a requirement to “reinvent what capitalism means, to be inclusive that leaves no one behind” (Elkington, 2021, p. 18). There needs to be a discussion on the importance of mindful leaders in corporate environments and society who can handle the pressures of climate change and have compassion for people inside and outside their organizations dealing with climate anxiety (eco-anxiety). It is time that businesses put mindful leaders at the forefront not only to accept that climate action is needed but to ensure that innovation and creativity occur to address climate change; “Businesses should make a declaration that leaders face a climate emergency and organize a case for urgent action” (Elkington, 2021, p. 225).

Contemporary thinking on a new form of all-inclusive capitalism (Elkington, 2021) shows an abundance of discussion, thinking, and research out in the world on the importance of mindful leadership and how to introduce this to organizations. However, the research and discussion must be aggregated and put together properly through mindful leadership and social change in groups, communities, and larger systems (Rothberg, 2006, p. 49). The current literature must link the importance of following Inner Development Goals (IDGs)

starting at the highest levels of the companies, the boardroom, and what is referred to as the C-Suite, which includes the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Human Relations Officer (CHRO), Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Chief Operation Officer with achieving the corporate SDGs. Linking the achievement of the SDGs with the attainment of the IDGs is a much-needed discussion taken up in this paper (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 38).

The powerful connection between mindful leaders and climate action is that the Buddhist worldview lends to environmentalism, an understanding of the ongoing interdependence of all elements of reality, and the relationship between things rather than the things themselves (Wright, 2020, p. 192). The UN outrightly states, “Failure to act leads to intensifying heatwaves, droughts, flooding, wildfires, sea-level rise, and famines” (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 20).

The first time horizon to be considered by leaders is to deal with the past. Leaders must ensure that biases and prejudices are left behind for innovation and collaboration. Collaboration occurs when leaders are the best authentic version of themselves and when “the team does not make assumptions about what each other or other team members may know or not know; everyone is a trusted equal” (Blomstrom, 2021, p. 12). “Individual psychological transformations, as societal transformations, are catalyzed by individuals who develop new social practices, technologies, or wisdom from a worldview of greater complexity or depth, then communicate and share these insights with others” (Riddell, 2013, p. 132).

To innovate with collaborations, leaders must “ask, not spy, hide nothing, ignore nothing, be open, be clear, be forensic” (Blomstrom, 2021, p. 134). The required radical innovations will happen by welcoming all “hearts and brains to come to the table with innovation and solutions that are also changing behavior, cultural values, and social structures” (Riddell, 2013, p. 131). Furthermore, by not working to understand the past, there

is a cause for inaction that can arise in leaders: “issues of a lack of empathy as an explanation for climate inaction” (Benoit, 2022, p.53). The research shows that change is needed from leadership because how can leaders who create the need for climate action be the same ones who can fix the climate unless fundamental changes in the hearts and brains occur?

The second time horizon to work on is the present moment and dealing with climate anxiety. “The increase in temperature is accompanied by extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and wildfires, which become more intense and frequent over time” (Hadzic, 2022, p.3). The need to fix and innovate for climate actions will only get more intense as leaders need to have resilience for peace of mind and to be able to positively reassure and support teams who will also be going through more intense and problematic climate change events. “Natural disasters are sure to disrupt sectors such as energy and water supply, construction, transport, and tourism, destroy critical infrastructure, and endanger lives” (Hadzic, 2022, p.8). Climate change threatens human security because it disrupts housing livelihoods, threatens culture and individuality, increases migration that people would rather avoid, and can undermine the ability of the state apparatus to provide the conditions necessary for human security. Many of the recent events of war and unrest in the world can be linked to an absence of meeting SDG goals and targets, especially SDG 13. The cost of addressing SDG 13 is high. In 2023, total climate finance that has been provided and mobilized by developed countries for developing countries “amounted to \$83.3 billion in 2020, a 4% increase from 2019, but still short of the \$100 billion target” (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 21).

The situation is commonly discussed with large organizations, unions, and foreign governments. The minimum cost of adapting to climate change in 2020 is projected to be € 100 billion, and in 2050, it will be € 250 billion per year for the entire European Union. (European Trade Union Confederation, 2020). When dealing with the pressures of ongoing

climate change, the impact is especially going to be large with the younger generations and with people directly working in the fields responsible for making positive change and innovation occur: “Young people who may experience higher levels of climate anxiety are those choosing to pursue education and careers in the environmental sector” (Daeninck, 2023, p. 2).

Coping with climate anxiety will require leaders to develop the methodology of “defining the problem, meaning, and emotionally focused” (Daeninck, 2023, p. 8). Rather than gravitate toward solutions for innovation and real climate action, people will gravitate towards more activism, protests, civil unrest, and propagating more suffering. Leaders will need to rise above the pressures of the in-the-moment stresses and incidents of climate change. Climate anxiety is expected to increase in prevalence, and certain populations, including young people, individuals who feel most closely connected to nature, and those who; “work in environmental protection or related careers, remain disproportionately burdened” (Daeninck, 2023, p. 5). “Existential concerns triggered by climate crisis are an opportunity for personal growth, societal change, and spirituality” (Benoit, 2022, p. 53).

One case study or example of innovation needed in Europe is innovation towards maritime transportation. Due to many ports and high shipping activity, Europe is considered “the industry and region of one of the most critical sources of pollution” (Russo, 2023, p.12). Therefore, considering the European Commission's long-term objective of “zero-waste, zero-emission” for maritime transport (Russo, 2023, p.1) is important. Air pollution is recognized as the highest environmental threat to human health, and a large part of the European population is still breathing air with pollution levels exceeding the EU standards and World Health Organization Air Quality Guidelines (Russo, 2023. p. 1).

In 2023, Maersk launched Maersk Laura, the first ship to run on alternative fuels; the innovation was possible with Maersk's mindful leadership. Maersk has already been

recognized as the best-in-class climate change advocate. Maersk's ranking is the only organization that has reasonable integrity in terms of transparency and integrity. Maersk pledges to be net zero by 2040. No organization has yet scored at the level of high integrity (Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2023, 2023, p. 100). Maersk Laura was recognized as one of the innovations of 2023 (Wilser, 2023). The innovation of Maersk Laura is a great example of mindful leadership meeting the need for climate action. Maersk Laura is a climate action innovation for using alternative fuels and responsible shipping to ensure all components used have an afterlife use. What is required within Europe to fix this problem is that multiple leaders from politics, corporations, and universities all need to come together to work on critical and urgent innovation.

Leaders can imagine a cultural transformation that catalyzes policies and actions to meet climate and sustainability goals. How would such a transformation come about? Specifically, what factors and experiences might contribute to cultural tipping points for sustainability (O'Brien, 2019)?

The innovation of Laura Maersk is just the beginning; the alternative fuel solutions must also consider potential aftershocks; could solutions also cause wicked problems? A wicked problem is a contemporary term championed by climate action to refer to how one innovation can lead to unforeseen consequences (Elkington, 2020). Companies like Maersk are already working on solutions like vessels on green fuels, but this will also need additional solutions at the ports where the vessels with alternative fuels are stopping, such as ship-to-shore power, smaller supply chains, and reduction of waste in the whole value chain that also ensures a comprehensive communication plan with the local community, politicians, and unions/works council. The context is that all the stakeholders need to have mindful leaders: "Cultural shifts can be initiated by a minority, establishing new norms, rules, and standards that then draw in the majority, such that change happens more broadly and rapidly" (O'Brien,

2019, p.2.). One of the main stakeholders is customers, and in the case of Laura Maersk, there are already customers who are signing up to take advantage of the innovation towards climate action. One example is in Norway, Europris, with more than 260 supermarkets, which will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by partnering with Maersk to transport alternative fuels with ships like Laura Maersk (Future Fuels, 2023).

### **Four Noble Truths**

The opportunity is the assertion that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are all measures of dukkha, defined as suffering in the world, which can be linked to the concept of the four noble truths (Goldstein, 2016, p. 289). “With mindfulness, leaders can manage those pointless negative thoughts that get in the way of leaders doing things properly or in the right sequence” (Ormstrom, 2023, p.11).

As the SDGs have been introduced, reflecting on the Buddhist concept of the Four Noble Truths is also a great idea. While a key teaching of Buddha, the Four Noble Truths have been refined over thousands of years to help the human condition understand and deal with suffering. Under the lens of sustainable development goals, the Four Noble Truths are even more important and relevant today than when the Buddha first handed these to his disciples in the fifth century BCE. Humans developed brains rather than having skin that was not penetrable, the sharpest teeth, or the fastest runners. Part of the development of human brains was that humans built communities and a sense of belonging to those communities (Unerman & Jacob, 2022). It is interesting to note that the population of Earth was only 100 million at the time of the Buddha versus the 8 billion alive right now (Ritchie, 2023). The impact and stress that eight people have on the planet is irrefutable; the lessons from the Four Noble Truths must be put into practice.

Through the SDGs, the First Noble Truth can be expressed in statistics such as incidents of death or violence. These rising ocean temperatures raise sea levels and cause

flooding and coastal erosion, illiteracy rates, or measures of lower life expectancy or infant mortality. The Noble Truths help us to turn our conventional Western thinking upside down and focus on suffering. Rather than chasing fortune and success, it is important to remember that suffering is inevitable. While suffering is part of life and impermanence is constant, these aspects of the human condition can be improved. “Skillful understanding leads us to act with a comprehension of cause and effect” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 54).

Considering contemporary conventional thinking, human happiness entails maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Contemporary leaders should aspire to a state where people can encompass pain and handle it, understanding that impermanence is a part of life and people move towards handling, not the unrealistic suppression or avoidance of pain (Olendzki, 2010).

The Four Noble Truths are a protocol for recovery: “identifying symptoms, understanding causes, using knowledge to counteract, removing the cause, and it is possible to have the remedy and cure” (Olendzki, 2010, p.7). Truth is when dukka (suffering) happens (Smith, 2007 p, 176). “An action that comes from greed, hatred or delusion causes suffering” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 54). One simple example is Steven lining up for a coffee and cake on an autumn Saturday morning. Steven arrived at the coffee shop 20 minutes later than expected and noticed several people ahead. Steven had dreamed of coming all week for coffee and a slice of the famous chocolate cake. Eventually, when Steven makes it to the cashier, the shock is that the last slice of chocolate cake is just sold, and only banana cake is left. Immediately, Steven suffers, lamenting to have been late and upset about being stuck with a banana cake.

The Second Noble Truth concerns craving as the origin of suffering (Smith, p.12). The second Noble Truth calls us to check into, investigate, and end suffering from a technology and innovation point of view and how leaders relate to others. The second Noble



Truth teaches people about the importance of losing materialism, craving, and attachment, which can give rise to eliminating suffering (Wright, 2020, p. 74).

Another way to look at the Second Noble Truth is around the reasons that cause the suffering (Gunaratana, 2011, p.30). In the example of Steven and the chocolate cake that is no longer available, the second truth is around the craving only to accept to have chocolate cake. The banana cake may be just as good, if not better. There are also examples of many people who could not afford any cake, so Steven is suffering even from a position of privilege that many people can only dream of attaining.

The Third Noble Truth is the fact and realization that suffering can end (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 30). The Third Noble Truth is that craving must be avoided; people must practice letting go and rejecting the negative craving, depression, and guilty thoughts (Smith, 2007, p.14). For Steven, this means accepting and being open to the experience of any cake. To have gratitude for the experience. The Third Noble Truth is also relevant to the SDGs in that there is hope that suffering can end, and the SDGs can improve. However, suffering will only end when the world and society stop craving, guilt, hate, depression and always longing for more material and wealth, especially compared to others. Leaders must “take responsibility for our desire and the intentional acts it motivates” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 55).

The Fourth Noble Truth is the remedy or cure; it is to follow the eightfold path that the Buddha also explained to his followers. The eightfold path is about being a mindful leader, a conscious leader, and a good politician; it is about having the right view, speech, and action (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 16). The Fourth Noble Truth is the belief that a way leads to the cessation of suffering (Wright, 2020). The fourth way is the positive path of change. The eightfold path of enlightenment is a specific way for us to come towards the 17 SDGs to make a lasting impact and believe leaders can solve the SDGs. The key to the eightfold path is wisdom, virtue, and meditation (Wright, 2020, p. 74). Mindful leaders can learn a lot and

be guided by the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths; the best time to return to the “Four Noble Truths is when dukkha is happening” (Smith, 2007, p. 176).

The linking of the need for IDGs so that society can achieve the SDGs is a critical conversation that needs to occur with many cultures and countries. Fundamentally, within mindfulness, there is a natural shift in leaders who can support the reduction of dukkha; mindful leaders who have worked on themselves can extend their mindfulness to benefit others and the teams, community, and society. Mindful leaders connect with people through empathy, but leaders must lead with compassion; this is a critical difference. Compassion is to move from a place of knowing based on views, fears, needs, and anxiety to a place of not knowing. As suggested by Feldman (2017), "Not knowing is a way of being present, and individuals can question and learn" (p.74). A mindful leader's success comes not just from having empathy. The mindful leader uses compassion to make a difference, so the leader "engages with people, and they know how the people will benefit" (Carter, 2022, p. 53). Compassionate and mindful leadership is about humanly doing hard things; it requires active listening, seeing all the points of view, tough conversations, a willingness to help, and personal action and time to help (Carter, 2022).

In addition, mindful leadership is needed to support the development of innovation and creative solutions to ensure that society can rectify the climate change situation. Mindful leaders are not only aware of the need for change and improvement, but the research also suggests that mindful leaders are in the best positions to bring people together for innovation and creative solutions to fix the problems of climate change: “Mindful leaders are needed to lead organizations to address climate change, especially as a wicked problem with hundred-year storms and freakish tornadoes all the more common” (Elkington, 2021, p. 109). Mindfulness is needed to support the initiatives to bring climate action to the world; it is time to have all the heart and brains in the game to make climate action a place. Mindful “leaders

need to admit they are human and none the wiser than any of their teams” (Blomstrom, 2021, p. 81).

Mindful leaders are obsessed with building connections, compassion, and listening (Blomstrom, 2021, p. 81). Mindful leaders prioritize having and practicing a good understanding of themselves with self-compassion and self-care. Then, the compassionate leader must ensure they are not displaying signs of busyness to those around them (Carter, 2022). A compassionate leader creates psychological safety in the team. With psychological safety, it is possible to give tough feedback and have "difficult conversations without the need to tiptoe around the truth. People will believe that if they make a mistake, they can talk about it and will not be penalized" (Brown, 2018, p.36). Demonstrating compassionate leadership requires four key activities. The first is to have a caring presence by being present in the moment. Second, is having caring courage or putting the need for action before feeling comfortable by avoiding the challenging work. Then there is caring candor, practicing being direct with wise speech. Last, caring transparency is the right action, as well as kindness (Carter, 2022). With compassionate leaders ready and present when doing hard things, they dare to show up with candor and transparency, creating trust and psychological safety in the team (Carter, 2022, p. 9).

### **Mindful Leader Support**

The path to happiness is often passed to Buddhist teaching, but mindful leaders can also look to the wisdom of the ancient Romans: "Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within oneself, in one way of thinking" (Aurelius, 2022, p. 55). Exponential change needs exponential leaders (Elkington, 2021, p. 237). Leaders can learn to let go of feeling the need to be aggressive and competitive and to conquer and dominate others and nature as primary ways to prove their self-worth (Forbes, 2022, p. 11). On personal and interpersonal levels, through conscious mindfulness practice over time, leaders can become aware of

internalized messages and beliefs about manhood that they have been conditioned to adopt and that reflect neoliberal notions of hegemonic masculinity (Forbes, 2022, p. 11). Two main factors contribute to how leaders are not mindful. The first is childhood trauma, and the second is conditions from society. The narcissistic manager has often experienced a combination of both events (Rosenberg, 2018). By becoming compassionate towards their feelings, leaders can develop and express their many-sided qualities and act with greater self-care, care, and compassion for others (Forbes, 2022, p. 11).

Trauma is an emotional response to a distressing event or experience that overwhelms an individual's coping ability (Treleaven, 2018, p. 57). Traumatic events can range from natural disasters and accidents to abuse and violence. The effects of trauma can be long-lasting and impact an individual's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Trauma can lead to various symptoms, including anxiety, depression, dissociation, and hypervigilance. It can also affect an individual's ability to form and maintain healthy relationships and contribute to self-destructive feelings such as depression and anxiety. It is important to seek support and treatment if a leader has experienced trauma. Therapy, support groups, and other resources can help individuals process the experiences and develop coping strategies to manage the impact of trauma on a person's life. It is possible to heal from trauma and move towards a healthier and more fulfilling life (Clarke, 2020).

### **Mindful Leader Practice**

The question is often asked about what it takes for a mindful leader to be developed and what it takes for a mindful leader to maintain a practice to remain business-conscious and mindful. Senior leaders, by design, are often the busiest and most stressed in an organization. Since leadership starts at the top, if the leaders do not have practice, then uncontrolled emotions and behaviors will affect the team that the leaders touch or connect with. When anger or hatred enters the mind, there is “no space for problem-solving relaxation, friendly

feelings towards others or the environment (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 70). Several mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are available to ensure leaders are developing mindfulness in themselves (Kabatt-Zinn, 2013). From dozens of possible MBIs several are mentioned in this paper (MBI a to j). Just as recently as 20 years ago, a leader was expected to be tough and not show weakness, and no matter how hard things appeared, managers, peers, or the team never knew that the manager was struggling mentally or physically. Working out in the gym was a means to be dominant, not a means to be resilient. The culture of toxic masculinity created a culture where burnout, heart attacks, and divorces were high. People often understood not being able to sleep at night to be normal and not taking holidays to be acceptable. Working long hours on weekends and airplanes was expected. However, while not referred to as MBIs, the first basis of mindfulness is ensuring that leaders have adequate sleep, rest, thinking time, regular exercise, and healthy eating. Parallel to these initial tenets for physical health, the foundations of mindful leaders are also talked about with the five precepts (MBI a) of Buddhism, which are the principles of “abstaining from killing, stealing, speaking falsely, sexual misconduct and misusing intoxicants including alcohol” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 109). While these five precepts are wisdom that has been around for 2500 years, the precepts are just as vital for ensuring mindful leadership that results in climate action. The precepts are aligned with what a mindful leader needs to be and what climate action requires from a leader.

After the five precepts (MBI a) and a healthy lifestyle (MBI b) of sleep, exercise, and eating well are established, MBIs can be considered. From my own experience, the breakthrough was with various forms of sitting meditation (MBI c), and it has always been important to have a grasp of various forms of sitting meditation that can either be completed in silence, alone with guided audio, or in a group setting with a guiding teacher speaking to the sitting group. Meditation should only begin for a leader with careful instruction from

certified instructors since it is a researched and known phenomenon that meditation can bring forth unknown and hidden trauma in leaders, which may require additional therapy and support to proceed (Wolf, 2015).

Given that a mindful leader has the approval from approved physicians and therapists to proceed with meditation, there are several types of meditation to follow (Treleaven, 2018). Meditation of body scan (MBI d) is the peak of leader self-awareness. The basis of body scans is that once leaders have an insight into the nervous system, they can continue deepening the mind-body connection (Wolf, 2015, p.99). Leaders can see how things come out, tightness in the chest, soreness in the neck, and tired extremities. The body scan self-awareness loops back to understanding the leader's physical health and how the surrounding world and people interact, affecting the nervous system and reactions and understanding how the body is “experiencing both safety and danger and the autonomic nervous system that regulates involuntary body functions such as heart rate and breathing” (Treleaven, 2018, p.70).

Meditation of metta loving kindness is an amazing tool for dealing with and processing suffering, starting with the leader first. The practice considers loving kindness (MBI e) for people close to the leaders, people known, trusted, and loved, and then the focus shifts to loving kindness for strangers and then finally, offering the leaders shifts to the practice of loving kindness to challenging or difficult people in life (Wolf, 2015). The loving kindness practice is powerful for workplace leaders when dealing with hard business decisions and competition for talent and budgets. Loving kindness is also powerful in politics; by nature, representatives from different points of view must work together peacefully and productively.

“Mindfulness entails uninvolved receptivity of experiences in a non-doing mode” (Wolf, 2015, p.17). Meditation embodies this, and a mindful leader would be doing well to

set aside a meditation practice that may vary each day, perhaps even just sitting in silence each day for at least 20 minutes. For connecting with nature, a mindful leader can also practice walking meditation (MBI f), which is great for connecting with nature and us and, from experience, is fantastic when done with no shoes and direct contact between the body and nature. Moreover, it is excellent when done in group practice and on retreats.

The practice of journalling (MBI g) has been powerful in getting problems down on paper, helping guide what particular MBIs should be used in the coming week to address the current issues, helping shape intentions, and ensuring the right action is occurring in life. Journaling (MBI h) several times a week can ensure the leader can write down and articulate a problem, and then the leader has half-solved the problem. Intention-setting and manifestation practices have been long attributed to the power of achievement and something; “acting in skillful ways leads to positive outcomes” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 27).

Journalling on problems and gratitude (MBI i) practice in the journal is healthy and valuable and is the distinction and attitude of “having” versus “not having.” Gratitude and generosity also deepen the leader’s sense of interconnectedness to nature and all living beings (Wolf, 2015, p.12). For a mindful leader working towards climate action, the work of combined practices of sitting, intention setting, and journaling is critical for the basis of “being connected to a mindful leader’s true purpose of life, feeling connected to others and nature, living by ethics and values” (McGrath, 2023, p. 258).

From my experience, a mindful leader cannot just practice in isolation; sitting with groups or sangha is important. The term sangha refers to the community learning about the teachings of Buddhist dharma, and it can refer to professionals, beginners, monks, nuns, or laypeople (Gunaratana, 2011). A regular sangha allows leaders to sit together and discuss what is coming up and to ask questions and share issues with others openly and safely. Membership in several sangha regularly occurs; some sangha is from a purely Buddhist

teaching or Dharma point of view, some are related to nature and climate action, while others are support groups including specific affinity groups around race, gender, and background. Then, at least once a year, a longer retreat occurs in my practice to contemplate and connect with nature. Retreat centers such as Plum Village in France or the Insight Meditation Society in the USA are attuned to community and nature. In several retreat centers, the monks make/sew their clothes and even dye their robes with plant/wood dye made at the center. This immersion with community and nature is critical to keep leaders grounded, and they move back into corporate life to work proactively on climate action. The summer holidays have always been a special and sacred affair from the European perspective. In many ways, this rest and recuperation in summer was the mindful activities of family and leaders in generations long gone. In recent years, extreme temperatures, wildfires, and overcrowding have ravaged the summer in Europe. Without climate action, the cherished European summer vacation will not be possible. Leaders should also switch to ensure more mindful vacations are undertaken; perhaps part of the summer vacation can include retreats and additional practice and MBIs.

Finally, there is the concept of shadow work. Shadow work combines modern-day psychology from Jung and Freud with Buddhist psychology—the complex relationship between Western psychology and Eastern spirituality, “an unconscious aspect of your personality that the does not identify” (Shaheen, 2023, p. 10). When a leader has meditation practice and good physical health, they can start to work on triggering emotions, what happened in childhood, and how to integrate all emerging past events and emotions into current life and understand how the leader can be successful without destroying other people’s lives. With practice, a mindful leader brings skillful action to the world. The unclouded mind can focus on every passing moment, bring all the “skills and intelligence to



the task at hand, and understand how the leader interacts with the world” (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 127).

### **The Spectrum of Mindful Leaders**

Even within the mindfulness community, there are polarizing views on how mindful leaders can impact the world. Polarizing is not to be referred to as extreme views of mindfulness, but at least two ends of the mindfulness spectrum exist. One side of the spectrum is that mindful leaders have a socially responsible, ethical calling to take their inner discipline and equanimity from mindfulness practices (including meditation) and bring socially conscious mindfulness to the masses. “It is a blessed gift to create that half-a-second difference between an immediate reaction and a response” (Ormstrom, 2023, p.19).

People like the beloved late Thich Nhat Hanh and Jack Kornfield championed this spectrum, who said, “With an engaged understanding, inner work can transform the world” (Rothberg, 2006, p. ix). Leaders must be encouraged to be mindful and contribute to society's greater good: “Be a leader, not an algorithm. If a leader has built a chaos factory, the leader cannot dodge responsibility for the chaos” (Elkington, 2021, p. 224). Taking the work (our practice) off the cushion for the betterment of society is important: “Developing a skillful approach to anger is central to ground social action spiritually and builds on our exploration of interdependence” (Rothberg, 2006, p. 150). Mindfulness can become a natural part of daily life, helping people live in the present moment with greater clarity and peace to have wise discernment and loving kindness (Goldstein, 2016, p. 102).

At the other end of the mindful leadership spectrum is the thinking that most leaders are conditioned to support capitalism: “Many of the men were emotionally and socially detached from communal and socially supportive ties of family, career, and religious institutions, and instead engaged with more autonomous forms of work, childrearing, and spirituality” (Forbes, 2022, p. 3). Personal experience is different; taking just a few minutes

each day to sit still and quiet my mind has improved my decision-making skills, helped me cultivate a sense of inner peace, and allowed me to lead with greater compassion and clarity. Investing in self-care through meditation has ultimately led me to adopt a more productive and successful leadership style, benefiting my team and me. “Cultivating a practice and understanding sustains ourselves and our communities” (Rothberg, 2003, p. 93). Mindfulness works to help us to have better versions of ourselves. On the other side of the mindfulness spectrum, “Mindfulness becomes McMindfulness when it is applied to improve neoliberal structures and relationships: to hold oneself personally responsible for reducing stress, rather than questioning and challenging with others the troublesome sources of stress from workplaces, schools, and society” (Forbes, 2022, p. 8).

A decade or two ago, managers could get away with being narcissistic and selfish leaders; many attributes of being tough and a dictator were often rewarded with promotions. Popular culture showed how managers were rewarded for such behaviors, but this is far from acceptable or tolerable today. Climate change is happening, and people are waking up to increased fire, floods, and extreme weather affecting lives. The need for innovation is greater than ever, and innovation will only occur when leaders give space to teams for full collaboration and an openness to ideas that nurtures psychological safety and allows creativity to flourish. There needs to be more discussion on the importance of mindful leaders in corporate environments and society. What is also needed is that mindful leaders band together and build a community together. From my personal experience at the global headquarters in Holland, each week there are three sessions in the mornings and three sessions in the afternoons where stretching and meditation are offered at the company's expense; this benefits the employees. However, for the two years I have been participating consistently, I have often been the only person with the instructor and the only leader attending. It would be a significant shift in organizational performance if a cohort of leaders

could attend together simultaneously. In parallel, while the company sponsored mindfulness sessions, the abundance of burnout in recent times has grown exponentially (Moss, 2023). The conclusion is that sponsoring mindfulness practices that no one attends is not the solution; organizations need to understand the importance of leadership engagement to make the necessary steps for inner and organizational change.

With mindfulness comes openness, trust, and psychological safety: “I am more relaxed. I am more able to do a higher volume of work. I can move between things more easily” (Ormstrom, 2023, p.11). The shift from today’s narcissist leader to the mindful leader of tomorrow is occurring and must happen, but this remit also goes against the McM mindfulness point of view, where mindful leaders lead “to increase corporate productivity and efficiency; to manage anger and difficult emotions to actual push employees to work more” (Forbes, 2022, p. 8). It is easy to be a tough manager; it is much more difficult to be centered and to take everyone’s point of view in mind; climate action requires teamwork, collaboration, and radical innovation that is only possible when mindfulness conditions exist for leaders and teams.

The movement of change for addressing climate change, from climate inaction to climate action, must be exponential; there are recent examples where exponential change has occurred in technologies such as ChatGPT or YouTube, where it is inherently obvious that billions of people are using the technology in a short period; “to address climate change, we must embrace an exponential leadership model that can reach over a billion people” (Elkington, 2021, p. 34). Mindful leadership is essential to effective leadership and can help create a culture of well-being, success, and joy (Johansen, 2017, p. 119). For leaders, including politicians, sustainability is a business imperative (Elkington, 2021, p. 210).

If leaders thrive in a future of extreme disruption, they must “manage their energy and encourage, model, and reward positive energy in others” (Johansen, 2017, p. 119). Mindful

leaders create a positive and productive work environment where team members feel supported and valued. Leaders who prioritize mindfulness also lead by example and encourage their team members to practice mindfulness daily. This improves well-being and leads to greater innovation, productivity, and success (Johansen, 2017, p. 119). Mindful leaders understand the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and take a holistic approach to achieve them. Mindful leaders foster a culture of sustainability, collaborate with others, act, educate others, and measure progress toward achieving the SDGs. They set specific goals and hold themselves accountable for achieving them (Elkington, 2021). Future mindful leaders will embrace the importance of well-being for themselves, their families, teams, and society. Wellbeing in the future will be mindful, societal, work, spiritual, physical, financial, interpersonal, and societal (Johansen, 2017, p. 120).

### **European Organizations Must Change**

Mindful leaders must lead organizations to address climate change (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023, p. 38). Mindfulness is already being introduced into different organizations, including positions such as the Chief Mindfulness Officer and to politicians such as the Mindfulness Project at Westminster, UK. “Mindfulness has helped Westminster politicians to become much better at listening, to think about what is going on with the particular person or this particular group” (Ormstrom, 2023, p.21).

European directors must identify, end, prevent, mitigate, and account for the company's negative human rights and environmental impacts (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, 2022).

For the European Union, leaders (directors) in companies must “contribute to sustainability and climate change mitigation goals” (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, 2022). Mindful leaders know the SDGs are interconnected and require a holistic approach,

especially (SDG 13). Research has shown that mindful leaders can support the achievement of climate action (SDG 13) in the following ways:

1. Foster a culture of sustainability: Mindful leaders must encourage their teams to adopt sustainable practices by providing training, resources, and support. Mindful leaders set an example by implementing sustainable practices in their work and personal lives (Elkington, 2021).

2. Collaborate with others: Mindful leaders must work with other organizations, governments, and stakeholders to align their strategies with SDG 13 (climate action). This is essential for innovative solutions and greater impact (Johansen, 2017).

3. Act: Mindful leaders must talk about sustainability and act. They must set specific goals and targets for their organization and hold themselves accountable for achieving them (Clarke, 2020).

4. Educate others: Mindful leaders must educate their employees, customers, and stakeholders about the importance of the SDGs and how they can contribute to achieving them. This is essential to create a shared vision and a sense of purpose (Eastwood, 2021).

5. Measure progress: Mindful leaders must track their progress towards achieving SDG 13 and use data to inform their decisions (Neale, 2018). Mindful leaders must be transparent about their progress and share their successes and challenges with others. By adopting these practices, mindful leaders can significantly contribute to achieving SDG 13 and creating a better world for everyone. Leaders must take these actions seriously and implement them immediately (Elkington, 2021).

Organizations are being asked to have an Environmental, Social, and Governance Strategy (ESG) to show how the organization intends to contribute to the SDGs and also comply with European directives, such as the corporate responsibility and due diligence directive that mandates the contribution to the Paris agreement and at the same time respects

humans rights of employees, “to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behavior and to anchor human rights and environmental considerations in companies’ operations and corporate governance” (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, 2022). The principal premise around the ESG is that the ESG strategy “should create value for all stakeholders, including shareholders. People are intrinsically at the core of this” (McGrath, 2023, p. 99).

I have focused heavily on my inner development goals, specifically mindfulness-related skills. I have significantly improved my overall well-being by consistently meditating and being aware of the present moment. Practicing mindfulness has allowed me to feel more relaxed and less stressed and has given me a more positive outlook on life. What I appreciate most about mindfulness is its accessibility. It requires no special equipment or much time to practice. Whether at work or in line at the grocery store, taking a few deep breaths and focusing on the present moment is all it takes to cultivate gratitude and positivity. By practicing mindfulness, I have learned to appreciate the small things in life and focus on the positives in any situation. It is a powerful tool that has helped me become the best version of myself. I am committed to continuing my inner development goals and practicing mindfulness because I know it will positively impact my life.

Personal experience with research draws upon two successful corporate surveys with a great history of success and draws on insights to drive change. The first is the Gallup polls (2023) and customer Net Promotor Score (2023), which tie into employee and customer experience. Organizations need leaders with high emotional intelligence and highly controlled egos (Clark, 2020, p. 137). Fundamentally, there must be a significant shift in thinking and a pivot toward radical and fundamental change (Elkington, 2021, p. 123).

While mindfulness has many interventions that can be drawn from Buddhism, the narrative of this thesis is that organizations need to ensure that their leaders have regular mindfulness practice. Hence, leaders will be personally in the best place they can be. Leaders

of organizations must have the skills for mindful collaboration and innovation. Mindful leaders nurture positive progress internally in organizations and enable cooperation with other organizations so everyone can work to achieve the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs), specifically towards creativity and innovation for climate action (Neale, 2018).

Investment in companies and organizations responsible for addressing climate action is already occurring. Many investors and investing organizations already believe that companies and organizations that do not take the responsibility of addressing climate action seriously will not exist in the next decade. Not only will investors not invest in the company themselves, but customers will not want to buy the products, and employees will not want to work in these companies. The European Union adopted the directive on corporate sustainability due diligence that will have controls in place to ensure that leaders (directors) in the organization have a robust program to ensure climate action occurs on February 22, 2022. In addition, customers can act by refusing to work with organizations that do not take climate action seriously, as reflected in the NPS scores. As expressed by the Gallup engagement scores, employees will leave companies that do not take climate action seriously. Investment companies will only invest in companies with a robust environmental, sustainability, and governance (ESG) program. Within Europe, the momentum for ensuring alignment towards climate action from regulatory, customer, employee, and investment needs to be higher for leaders within organizations to pay attention to.

Innovation in technologies is going to be needed at a faster rate than ever before, and this will require leaders who not only nurture a culture of innovation but create a work environment of trust and openness that allows employees to be the best version of themselves and to bring forth the innovations possible. Humankind must collaborate on new technologies beyond previous generations' wildest dreams and imagination. The level of openness and

transparency will also be at new levels; there is a point now where governments cannot hide the truth behind sea temperature changes, loss of habitat, or the simple fact that bees and ecosystems are dying in Europe.

### **Inner Development Goals for Mindful Leaders**

IDGs were conceived in 2020 to ensure that the people who caused suffering in the world were equipped to fix the problems that have been caused. For leaders and employees with IDGs, any organization and society can “increase the chances of tackling the complex, adaptive, and wicked problems that humanity now faces” (IDG, 2023, p.9). An example of a wicked problem is plastic consumption. While the invention of plastic has been great for packaging, we are now seeing all sorts of unforeseen issues, such as the great plastic garbage patch in the oceans and even more concerning is that microplastics are now present all over the food chain, even including within some salts harvested within the ocean. Plastics are a terrifying example of a wicked problem, “12 billion metric tons is about 35,000 times as heavy as the Empire State Building. Plastics were the future, and now they are under a global cloud” (Elkington, 2021, p. 92).

The IDGs are also evolving; in late 2023, a new global survey to reach two million responses was launched to ascertain if the current 23 skills and qualities should be expanded or decreased. A cottage industry has also emerged to help organizations integrate and adopt the IDGs into the culture, especially on how companies can develop ESG strategies aligned with European directives such as the Corporate Responsibility Due Diligence (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, 2022). The IDG framework is one of many to develop mindful leaders. Still, it is one of the best examples for organizations to develop mindful or conscious leaders to enable organizations to achieve ESG goals that are intrinsically linked to the SDGs, particularly for achieving the SDGs 13.



The development of IDGs within organizations also needs to consider different time horizons. While the essence of mindfulness is to be in the present moment without judgment, mindful leaders must be comfortable with understanding the past, present, and future time horizons, of which the IDGs are critical in this manner. For example, when it comes to being at peace and comfortable with the past, there are many examples before leaders and organizations that need to consider that we first need to remove the biases from the past. True collaboration and innovation can only occur when every contributor can come to the table with openness and transparency for all participants to contribute without bias and the belief that the input of all others can be beneficial.

We need to ensure that we do not have climate anxiety at this present time. Then, as people look to the future, it is essential to have innovation and bring technologies into development that could never have been conceived unless there were the past (biases) and present (anxiety) contained. Collaboration is bringing authentic selves (without bias) and opening up to everyone else's bias. Bias is the kryptonite (anti-thesis) of collaboration. The focus should be more than just how we can influence the regimes and power structures we want to change. The IDGs should be ways that the movement for change is a “lifelong, ongoing process of development of human cognitive, emotional and interpersonal capacities; expressed within the relationship and ultimately orienting us towards service to the world” (IDGs, 2023, p.4). The IDGs are one framework that leadership can use. The model, like the SDGs, is around the framework of SDG 17, which is about building partnerships for change, and then four SDGs around the economies of countries, such as decent work, SDG 8, and good infrastructure. There are eight SDGs around society such as good health and well-being, SD 3, gender quality (5), and quality education (4), and then four SDGs related to the biosphere, which include climate action (13) and life below water (14) and life on land (15).

The IDGs consist of 5 dimensions and 23 skills and qualities. There is an ongoing global survey to get 2 million responses to understand if this should be expanded or reduced in dimensions and skills qualities. All 23 skills and qualities can be considered “collective qualities of any group or society, cultivated at a collective level” (IDG, 2023, p. 9). The first IDG dimension concerns the relationship to self and is called being. With being, the leader is cultivating inner life and developing and deepening the relationship to thoughts, feelings, and body to help the leader to be present, intentional, and non-reactive. These skills of being help the leader face complexity. The five skills and qualities within the being dimension are inner compass, integrity and authenticity, openness and learning mindset, self-awareness, and presence. “The conversation around the IDGs can become quite intellectual and analytical; care must be taken not to alienate people” (Jurisic, 2023, p. 17).

Many of the skills of being are aligned with Buddhist teachings. As organizations start to propagate and nurture the dimension of being inside leaders, it has been observed that these skills often take more work for organizations and leaders to discuss in the context of work. Being can be more easily developed for the individual but more difficult from within an organization. The first dimension (being) can be difficult for organizations to introduce into the culture, but leaders must recognize it. Focusing on the present moment with climate anxiety and working with others has many benefits. Are leaders doing the work to be the best version of themselves? In the context of mindful leadership for climate action, it is important to dive deep into one skill per dimension aligned with Buddhist practices; this paper does not have the scope to go into all 23 skills and qualities, which may be a task for another paper or book.

The fifth skill of the first dimension of the IDGs is presence. Presence is, in many ways, embodying mindfulness, the ability to be in the here and now, without judgment and in an open-ended presence (Kabatt-Zinn, 2020). An interesting aspect of presence is awareness.

A leader cannot be present if there is a distraction, thinking about other problems, trying to multitask on the phone, or trying to have multiple conversations at the same time. A leader with presence will practice “wise attention, sticking to what they know is true from the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste) of the leader” (Gunaratana, 2019, p. 162). While the skills and qualities have been defined and refined in a current ongoing survey, there is much work to be done to integrate and teach leaders about them and to understand the cultural and indigenous relevancy of these topics. We are talking about how they come together from science, contemporary thinking, and traditional, secular, and, in some cases, spiritual practices. “The company needs more skills in ‘being’: a new program in which thirty-two managers will go to the forest for more than two days to reflect on self and leadership” (Jurisic, 2023, p. 17).

The second dimension in the IDG framework is thinking. The thinking dimension is about developing our cognitive skills by taking different perspectives, evaluating information, and making sense of the world as an interconnected whole, which is essential for wise decision-making. Thinking is around the development of cognitive skills; within the thinking dimension are the skills and qualities of critical thinking, complexity awareness, perspective kills, sense-making, long-term orientation, and visioning (Jurisic, 2023).

**Critical Thinking:** Skills in critically reviewing the validity of views, evidence, and plans. From a Buddhist perspective, critical thinking comes out in several ways and forms; these include understanding different mind states and mental objects. One term resonant in mindful leadership and climate action is skillful thinking and concentration without hindrances. This concentration is wholesome and free of greed, hatred, or delusion” (Gunaratana, 2019, p.224).

**Perspective Skills:** Skills in seeking, understanding, and actively using insights from contrasting perspectives. Perspective highlights the importance of understanding

impermanence: “not to push through thoughtfully, wisely and energetically if life does not matter what happens and to accommodate differences with different types of people and points of view” (Wright, 2020, p. 115). These skills are developed through meditation and skillful thinking. The leader begins to sort out what is happening in the mind, and the “thoughts and feelings become more manageable and with less fear and a better understanding of others” (Gunaratana, 2019, p. 65).

The thinking cognitive skills dimension is something that many organizations can take on board and collectively improve relatively quickly. The organization can quickly improve the collective IQ. Cognitive skills refer to the ability to reason (5’s for the lessons on the brain): attention span, problem-solving, and learning. In the context of cognitive skills, one of the best examples of the developed human brain at work is the detective who has to use cognitive skills to deduce, draw conclusions, gut instincts, emotions, and pattern matching to work out who a guilty party may be no matter how small or insignificant the detail. Likewise, thinking skills are needed to deduce how to develop and master hidden technologies. Were the pyramids made by modern-day technology or perhaps by a long-lost cognitive skill set?

The third dimension is relating caring for others and the world. Relating is about appreciating, caring for, and feeling connected to others, such as neighbors, future generations, or the biosphere. When people cultivate relationships, they help create more just and sustainable systems and societies for everyone. The skills to be developed within relating are appreciation, connectedness, humility, empathy, and compassion. Many of the insights towards relating skills come from Buddhist teachings; for example, empathy and compassion are developed from the ability to relate to others, oneself, and nature with kindness; specifically, empathy and compassion address how people can support and be related to suffering. With empathy being able to relate to a situation or a person’s situation, a great way

to think about compassion is to consider that compassion is empathy with action. Empathy is about relating to how someone is suffering and going through pain. However, compassion is the recognition of this suffering and saying how support and action can be given to end the suffering. There is the concept of interconnectedness that leaders also need to consider how their exploits could harm others and nature (Smith, 2002, p. 117). The IDGs also want to make sure that leaders connect and relate to all living things and the planet, “But it is not just about the “inner” in an individual, it is also about the “inner” in an organization” (Jurisic, 2023, p. 19).

The fourth dimension is collaborating, which also means social skills. Collaboration is progress on shared concerns; leaders must develop the abilities to include, hold space, and communicate with stakeholders with different values, skills, and competencies. Collaborating is about losing egos, forgetting biases, and giving others space to do the same. The five skills within the collaborating dimensions are communication, co-creation, inclusive mindset and intercultural competence, trust, and mobilization skills. Specific to the skill of inclusive mindset and intercultural competence is a willingness and competence to embrace diversity and include people and collectives with different views and backgrounds.

The collaboration dimension is where people drop biases to think about how everyone else can contribute. Mobilization skills within the collaboration dimensions and skills in inspiring and mobilizing others to engage in shared purpose require “real, raw, and honest dialogue (Blomstrom, 2021, p. 12). Leaders mobilize but with integrity. The collaboration dimension also reaches back to the Sangha principle of integrity and discipline; “everyone is welcome, but integrity is an integral part” (Wright, 2020, p. 40) and is critical to bringing innovation and creativity to the forefront. To develop technologies that have never been dreamed of to solve climate change. Leaders “must remember to collaborate, co-create, and complement each other. The competition mindset must go (Jurisic, 2023, p. 17).

The fifth dimension is acting, which is also enabling change and transformation. The four skills within the fifth dimension of acting are Courage, Creativity, Optimism, and Perseverance. Qualities such as courage and optimism help us acquire true agency, break old patterns, generate original ideas, and act with persistence in uncertain times.

To expand and explore the skills of courage within the acting dimension, courage is the ability to stand up for values, make decisions, take decisive action, and, if need be, challenge and disrupt existing structures and views. Courage is the quality “that powerfully energizes our heart as we walk on the path, the quality to run towards our difficulties” (Goldstein, 2016, p. 241). Running away from tough conversations or hard situations does not require much skill or energy. Cultivating courage is essential for mindful leaders to make progress for climate action. Part of courage is being able to understand that life has impermanence and emptiness, and courage requires leaders to come to focus on climate action with a strong sense of non-striving; “the delusion of a permanent self often causes suffering” (Smith, 2007, p. 18).

The courage skill also manifests in several forms: heart, mind, intellectual, social, and moral courage (IDGs, 2023). From a Buddhist perspective, courage is understanding that life is suffering, and leaders know that life will always present difficulties courage is about how the leaders approach the challenges of life; life is not always sitting in meditation, but the power of a leader is to bring the “purification of the mind that is in life practice that is facing and seeing unwholesome states whenever and where ever they arise” (Goldstein, 2013, p. 57).

The 23 skills and qualities of the IDGs are only an initial framework that IDG researchers and practitioners are currently working out how to bring to the organization; there are no experts in all 23 skills and qualities, and with a global survey now ongoing seeking 2 million new responses the 23 skills and qualities may grow or consolidate (IDG 23). What is

clear is that the IDG framework is one of the best currently available, with a roadmap for how mindful leaders can work towards climate action: "Research has shown that no one is amazing at all 23 competencies, so organizations need to build a team that has the competencies that can work together" (Jurisic, 2023, p. 19).

### **Conclusion**

While many consider the last few decades from the 1980s until now to be the peak of Western civilization and progress, these times have also stood out for what they embody as the definition of successful leaders and what society incidentally have created a catalyst for the scientifically proven fact that climate change is a reality and that SDG 13, climate action, is needed to save the environment and the planet. For decades now, many leaders have been openly criticized for not being tough enough. Leaders are told no one will get anywhere in a career until they learn about tough love and expect more from the employees. People are encouraged to work long hours, send emails late at night, work during vacations, be always available, forget wedding anniversaries, miss kids' graduations, and be absent parents or spouses in the name of the organizational goals. What this culture of toxicity does not realize is that being the tough manager, the "asshole," is the easy path and way out. Being present, listening, and having compassion for others, especially those the leader does not agree with, is hard work. Being connected to nature, walking in grass with bare feet is needed and should be easy. Also, dropping the bias in a leader's life, coming to terms with the leader's childhood, and understanding the leader's triggers are the struggles that must be done.

In November 2023, the world was officially above 2 degrees Celsius for the first time, along with more flooding in Belgium, which was more frequent than ever (Page, 2023). The challenge is that for society to move forward to ensure SDG 13 happens, there must be a step change in collaboration and innovation. For collaboration and innovation to occur, workplace well-being, trust, and psychological safety must occur. Leaders must have a practice that

ensures that leadership can show up as the most authentic version of leadership and inspire others, including peers, to be the most authentic version. No employee will give the best work when stressed, burnt out, fearful, and untrusting. Innovation is born from failing fast and being open, honest, and candid about how events and situations did not work out. Innovation will also have to occur simultaneously with climate inaction that has caused extreme weather events and mishaps to occur in real-time to employees and families.

Right now, organizations cannot ignore the need to take mindful leadership seriously; an organization must have a robust ESG strategy and leadership team. ESG has gone mainstream, and the investment community has also noticed. The sustainable investing sector now manages assets worth over \$30 trillion (Elkington, 2021, p. 208). The time for mindful leaders who make climate action take place is right now.



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## Appendix



Figure One: Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Statistics Division, 2023).

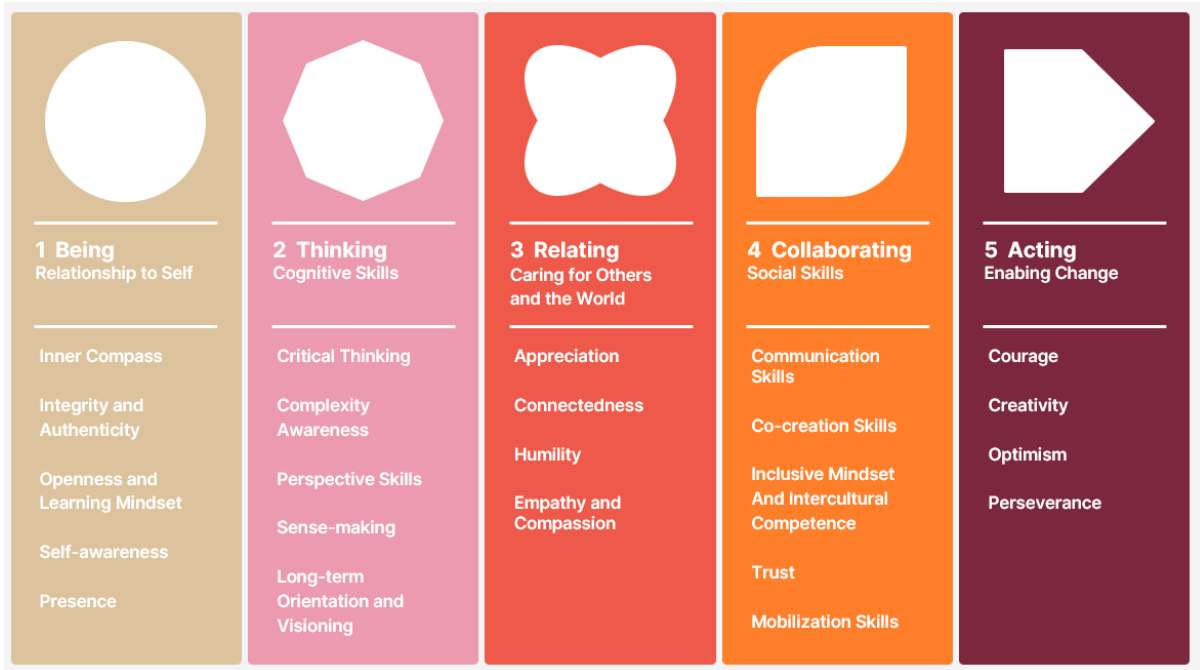


Figure Two: Inner Development Goals (Jurisic, 2023, p. 3)