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# The Light and the Dark of Mindful Social Capital: Right Mindfulness and Social Capital Development

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*Despite the literatures on spirituality and social capital development remaining largely disconnected, we address how right mindfulness encourages organizational-level social capital. We connect the philosophical foundations of 'right mindfulness' to bonding and bridging social capital, and the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital. We conclude that a skilful approach to right mindfulness, coupled with organizational learning heuristics, has much to offer the conversation on social capital development, and yet its potential has not been fully recognized. Despite this promise, we draw attention to a 'dark side' to the co-optation by organizations of mindfulness practices and draw some further boundary conditions. We argue that a secular interpretation of right mindfulness limits its potential in organizational contexts. We conclude with managerial implications and pathways for future research.*

**Keywords:** social capital; mindfulness; Buddhism; spirituality

## Introduction

Management scholars continue to call for an expansion of research that connects religion and spirituality to management and organization studies (Neubert, 2019; Tracey, 2012; Chan-Serafin et al., 2013). This paper seeks to contribute to that call. Existing literature has variously attested, for example, to the relationship between spirituality and sustainability (Stead and Stead, 2014; Suriyankietkaew and Kantamara, 2019), enhanced stakeholder relationships (Bandsuch and Cavanagh, 2005; Steingard, 2005), and HRM outcomes (Weicht et al., 2016), as well as emerging evidence of more effective entrepreneurship and innovation (Nandram, 2016; Neubert et al., 2017). There is also a strong body of evidence that spirituality at work can contribute to the resource base of organizations that results in enhanced organizational performance indicators (Belwalkar et al., 2018; Mahmood et al., 2018).

Separate streams of research, but largely disconnected from research on spirituality, have examined the extent to which organizations develop different kinds of capital, such as human capital and social capital as a socially

complex and inimitable resource (e.g., Hitt and Ireland, 2002; Wolfson and Mathieu, 2020). Human capital refers to the stock of generic and specific knowledge, skills and capabilities that an organization strategically invests in and can draw upon to improve organizational performance (Fernández et al., 2000; Lepak and Snell, 2002; Ployhart and Moliterno, 2011; Stokes et al., 2016; Manuti et al., 2017; Methot et al., 2018). However, for organizations to leverage advantages from investments in human capital, the social dynamics of group and team composition need to be addressed. Social capital, thus relates to the efficient use of intangible resources and assets that arise from and are accessed in social networks through the web of relationships in intra- and inter-organizational contexts (e.g., Colbert et al., 2016; Inkpen and Tsang, 2005; Arregle et al., 2007; Ellinger et al., 2011; Payne et al., 2011). Given that there is also a strong body of evidence that social capital development is important for improved organizational performance (e.g., Adler and Kwon, 2002; Sirmon and Hitt, 2003; Andrews, 2010), recent studies on social capital have particularly focused upon its application to strategic issues, including competitive advantage (Arregle et al., 2007) and strategic HRM (e.g., Sozen et al., 2016; Methot et al., 2018; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2019).

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However, the connection between spirituality and social capital has been largely overlooked. While *spiritual capital* has attracted interest in the sociology (e.g., Verter, 2003) and religion and theology literatures (e.g., Baker and Miles-Watson, 2008, 2010), few studies have examined how spiritual capital may contribute to management and organization research, although Dsouli et al. (2012), Neubert et al. (2017) and Stokes et al. (2016) are notable exceptions. Prosocial spiritual practices emphasize strong social networks, and shared values and norms that are associated with the key dimensions of social capital (Marsh, 2007; Stokes et al., 2016; Neubert et al., 2017). Specifically, like much of the human capital literature, the philosophical foundations of many spiritual traditions advocate that stocks of knowledge, skills and capabilities can become a constraint if they become isolated from the social and relational context in which they are embedded (Vu et al., 2018). Prosocial spiritual traditions such as right mindfulness (Berry and Brown, 2017; Condon, 2017; Donald et al., 2019; Hafenbrack et al., 2019; Van Doesum et al., 2019) – and the foci of this paper – are intrinsically-motivated and enable organizational actors to generate network resources based upon prosocial behaviours and high levels of trust because of non-altruistic motivations (Fry and Cohen, 2009), and deemphasizing one’s own status (Shankar Pawar, 2009; Liu and Robertson, 2011).

We adopt a conceptualization of social capital similar to that utilized by scholars such as Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) and Inkpen and Tsang (2005). Given that we are concerned with how right mindfulness encourages organizational social capital, our assumption is that individuals are embedded in the social structure of an organization. Thus, the logic of our view is that the psychological traits associated with right mindfulness (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, motivations) can and do encourage

social relationships which, over time, may constitute an asset and resource for the focal organization. To explore this individual-sociological interdependence further, we deliberately synthesize existing models of bonding and bridging social capital elaborated by scholars such as Putnam (2000) and the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital articulated by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). By doing so, we locate right mindfulness as a facilitator of six types of organizational social capital development: (1) bonding/structural; (2) bonding/relational; (3) bonding/cognitive; (4) bridging/structural; (5) bridging/relational; and (6) bridging/cognitive. This typology subsequently enables us to more precisely specify the connections between right mindfulness and organizational social capital which, we argue, have practical implications for leaders and managers (see Figure 1).

To signpost our contribution, we advance organizational social capital scholarship in three ways: first, we advance an understanding of *mindful social capital* by connecting right mindfulness to each of the six types of organizational social capital and elaborate the way in which its philosophical foundations encourage different kinds of social capital. Second, by focusing on right mindfulness in particular we also depart from much of the (albeit limited) literature on spiritual capital which is often spiritually-agnostic and treats spirituality as a monoculture. Third, we caution that a secular interpretation of mindfulness limits its potential as a facilitator of social capital in organizational contexts.

Our paper is structured as follows: first, we begin reviewing the literature on social capital. Following, we introduce right mindfulness and connect it to each of the six types of organizational social capital in our framework. Next, we show how right mindfulness encourages organizational social capital, both within and across

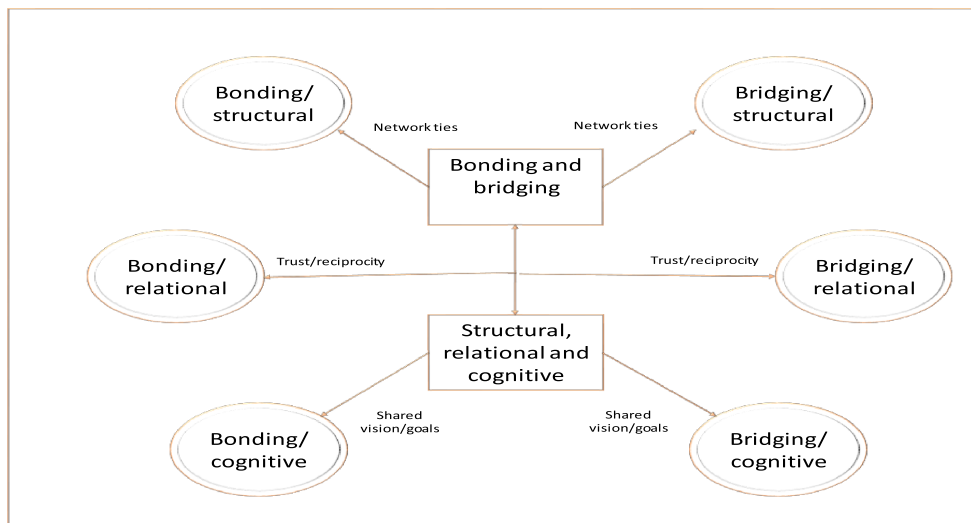


FIGURE 1 Six types of social capital development [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

organizational boundaries. We then discuss the dark side of co-optation of spiritual practices by organizations by showing how a secular interpretation leaves its potential unfulfilled. We end by reflecting on managerial implications and pathways for future research.

## Social capital literature

Social capital can be traced to the initial ideas of Bourdieu (1980), Burt (1992), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993a, 1993b). The first analysis of ideas relating to social capital were discussed by Bourdieu (1980) who argued that “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 248). Bourdieu argued that social capital constitutes relational resources that can be appropriated by certain actors for desired outcomes, providing network members with collective benefits ((Bourdieu, 1980, 1985). Bourdieu (1985) argued that social capital is an outcome of the size of the network and volume of capital possessed by the members, and this enables network members to leverage their social position – via mutual obligations – to convert the benefits into economic capital. Bourdieu, thus, conceptualized social capital as a class-based phenomenon that sustains and reinforces the elite (Bourdieu, 1991, 1994).

While Bourdieu expressed social capital as a collectivized form of capital, Burt (1992) defined social capital at the individual level of analysis and located it within personal relationships from which economic capital could be generated. For Burt (1997), the development of social capital arises from information and power asymmetries and is constitutive of “brokerage opportunities in a network” (Burt, 1997, p. 355) that arise in open or sparse networks characterized by the presence of structural holes between otherwise unconnected groups. Unlike Burt, Coleman (1988, 1990) viewed social capital as arising from closed and interconnected groups that encourage behavioural norms (Portes, 1998) and demarcate group boundaries through symbols, language and identity. For Coleman, social capital is derived not from a class-based perspective, but rests upon the social roles of education and family. Kinship represents the strongest form of social capital as the family unit is embedded is stable, dense, and non-permeable relationships that are appropriable in other social contexts (Coleman, 1988, 1990). In contrast, Putnam (1995) defined social capital at a social level by positioning it within communities and the networks of relationships that exist within and across social groups that give rise to prosocial norms of reciprocity, cooperation and trust (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b, 2000).

Since this initial scholarship, studies of social capital have adopted these two broad perspectives: (1) as a micro-level phenomenon (individuals); or (2) as a macro-level phenomenon (intra-organizational and inter-organizational). Building upon the work by Burt (1992, 1997), scholarship that has examined social capital at the individual level of analysis has emphasized the personal benefits and private goods that can be acquired from social capital. Scholars building upon work by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam however, regard social capital as a public good such that social relationships confer network benefits associated with privileged access to knowledge and information (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Payne et al., 2011). In the context of organizations, social capital can reduce agency costs, reduce transactions costs, improve the flow of information, and encourage knowledge sharing and co-production to compete effectively in the market (Arregle et al., 2007). Further, Hitt and Ireland (2002) drew upon the resource-based view to argue that social capital also has the equivalence of a ‘resource’ and its imitability and social complexity can be a source of competitive advantage.

Payne et al. (2011) confirmed that the most utilized dimensions of organizational social capital in the literature have been offered by Putnam (2000) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). Putnam (2000) argued that social capital takes two forms: (i) internal social relations (“bonding” social capital) and (ii) external social relations (“bridging” social capital). Bonding social capital represent inward looking networks that reinforce homogeneity and encourage group closure (Putnam, 2000) to facilitate the pursuit of collective goals. In contrast, bridging social capital is defined as networks that are ‘outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages’ (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). As Arregle et al. (2007) noted, given that most organizations engage with other organizations along an industry value chain, bridging social capital may be an especially important form of social capital that spans two or more organizations to encourage inter-organization cooperation. In bridging relationships, members are more likely to be heterogeneous leading to the creation of heterogeneous resources, information flows and knowledge (Oh et al., 2004).

Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) deployed the resource-based view of the organization to elaborate the relationship between social capital development and organizational performance, arguing that social capital has structural, relational and cognitive dimensions. The structural dimension refers to the accumulation of social interactions and the pattern of relationships that constitute the assets within a network (Bolino et al., 2002; Leana and Pil, 2006). As network characteristics influence knowledge and information flows and intra- and inter-organizational learning (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005),

the network can be analysed with respect to its ties that assess the frequency, interaction or strength of relations, or its configuration that determines the structure of the linkages among network members (e.g., degree of closure or presence of structural holes, centralization or decentralization, etc.).

The second dimension of social capital relates to the relational aspects of the network, such as the presence or absence of trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b; Leana and Van Buren, 1999; Adler and Kwon, 2002) that create social norms and encourage emotional connection. Trust is constructed through a history of personal interactions with others to foster cooperation to 'define collective goals that are then enacted collectively' (Leana and Van Buren, 1999, p. 542). Trust permits the transfer of knowledge and information to foster cooperative action in the absence of formalized legal or quasi-legal mechanisms. Further, trust should reduce appropriation risks and limit opportunistic behaviour. As a consequence, Putnam (1995) noted that intra-organization trust can spill over into inter-organization networks. Similarly, reciprocity creates solidarity, reduces egocentricity, and binds groups together into members of a community with shared interests and goals (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

Finally, the cognitive aspect of social capital relates to the extent to which actors share a vision and share goals (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005; Leana and Pil, 2006). Coleman (1990) argued that when members of a group or organization share a common vision and goals this encourages collective responsibility (Coleman, 1990) and the coordination of activities aligned with organizational vision (Leana and Van Buren, 1999). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) noted that when a shared language and shared narratives (myths, stories, and metaphors) exist, members more readily discuss ideas, share knowledge and exchange information, and interpret events in similar ways which serve to increase cohesion among organization co-members.

By synthesizing the dimensions of social capital described by Putnam and Nahapiet and Ghoshal, our six categories enable us, in a more fine-grained manner, to elaborate how right mindfulness can encourage organizational social capital. For example, to analyse the structural dimension, we analyse network ties given its centrality in the literature, and we postulate how right mindfulness can encourage closer network ties within a focal organization and across organization boundaries (bonding/structural and bridging/social). To analyse the cognitive dimension, we consider how right mindfulness contributes to the generation of shared vision and goals within a focal organization and across organization boundaries (bonding/cognitive and bridging/cognitive). Likewise, we then examine the relational dimension in the same way (bonding/relational and bridging/relational). We now turn to examine the

practices of right mindfulness and, following, discuss how it encourages or limits social capital development.

## Right mindfulness

Buddhism emphasizes avoiding attachments that override good intentions and which lead to suffering based on the Four Noble Truths (Sanskrit: *catvāri āryasatyāni*; Pali: *cattāri ariyasaccāni*). Suffering is prevalent in life (Shonin et al., 2015) and arises when individuals perceive that there is an ultimate state of self and reality (Gampopa, 1998). At the individual level, Buddhist mindfulness is part of the eight principles of the Noble Eightfold Path (Pali: *ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*; Sanskrit: *āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*) (right action, right intention, right view, right effort, right livelihood, right concentration, right speech and right mindfulness). We use 'right mindfulness' in this paper to connect to social capital development because right mindfulness (Pāli: *sati*; Sanskrit: *smṛti*) represents an ethics-based state of mindfulness, considering the impermanent and dependent-arising nature of both internal and external relationships, guided by the other Noble Eightfold Path principles.

The notion of right mindfulness is different from the Westernized and popular interpretation of mindfulness that emphasizes moment-awareness and stress-reduction (Good et al., 2016; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Purser and Milillo, 2015). Instead, right mindfulness refers to a presence of mind based on the capability to recollect past experiences to expand the breadth of attention and moment awareness to accumulate wisdom (Anālayo, 2010; Bodhi, 2011a). The practice of right mindfulness is directed towards the liberation of suffering based on knowledge and wisdom (Swierczek and Jousse, 2014). Thus, right mindfulness is not merely about meditation (Brown and Ryan, 2003), but rather wisely using the accumulation of experience and knowledge, and mastering past experience and moment awareness to enhance personal development, learning and self-transformation (Purser and Milillo, 2015).

Despite these potential benefits to organizations, mindfulness in the management literature has been preoccupied with its intrapersonal characteristics (Dane, 2011; Kudesia, 2019), and yet its potential to encourage interpersonal relations in the work organization has not yet been fully explored (Sutcliffe et al., 2016; Donald et al., 2019). As noted by Sutcliffe et al. (2016, p. 57), mindfulness is 'a more social construct than its name, implied mechanisms, and measurement implies.' Based on ideas of Buddhist 'truth,' wisdom-embedded mindfulness practices in organizations can foster various positive outcomes, since wisdom 'is the ability to perceive and evaluate the long-run consequences of behaviour'

(Ackoff, 1999, p. 14). The notion of wisdom in mindfulness practice, if applied wisely, can facilitate moral, emotional and cognitive development for prosocial and organizational citizenship behaviours, such as developing relationships with stakeholders (Waddock, 2001), dealing with institutional and contextual constraints, and moral and ethical dilemmas (Vu et al., 2018). Moreover, right mindfulness can also facilitate a vision for the organization, by developing moral reflexivity (Vu and Burton, 2020) to enhance wisdom, and moral and emotional development that attend to the growing complexity of corporate citizenship (Waddock, 2001). Right mindfulness develops a degree of maturity and insight that fosters an insightful understanding of different stakeholder perspectives.

Organizational mindfulness reflects the capability of an organization to promote a heightened awareness among its various actors (Weick et al., 2008; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2012). It can facilitate learning through avoiding a preoccupation with failure, and embedding a commitment to resilience (Weick et al., 2008). Being mindful helps to facilitate a mindful awareness, a consideration of situational ethics, and an appreciation of the consequences associated with decision-making (Selart et al., 2020) and the way in which internal and external relationships are managed. For individuals, the state of right mindfulness can foster a holistic interpretation of network relationships (Yu & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018) in order to consider their effectiveness, not just for the short-term, but with reference to long-term purposes and outcomes. Such an awareness motivates a consideration of the 'relational other' to encourage inter-personal relationships and an adaptability in different should conflicts among different stakeholder groups arise.

Right mindfulness has also been associated with promoting pro-social behaviours. For example, in recent years, mindfulness has been introduced in the field of positive psychology under the construct of social mindfulness (Van Doesum et al., 2013, 2019; Van Lange and Van Doesum, 2015). Social mindfulness refers to the consideration of the needs and wishes of others before making decisions or taking action, and thus encourages prosocial behaviours and individual well-being (Van Doesum et al., 2019). Mindfulness also enhances an actors' empathy, a felt connection with others and the world around them (Shapiro et al., 1998), reducing non-empathetic emotional and cognitive habits (Kang et al., 2013; Vago, 2014), and facilitating 'the transition of pro-environmental intentions into more sustainable behaviour' (Ericson et al., 2014, p. 77). The practice of right mindfulness of an individual has always been for the purpose of correcting the self and guiding the self to have higher awareness of the impermanent and dependent arising nature of the universe to facilitate individuals' adaptability, flexibility and context-sensitivity to different

phenomena around in the spirit of being compassionate to all sentient beings (Dalai Lama and Ekman, 2008; Vu et al., 2018).

## The light side of right mindfulness and social capital

### *The structural dimension of social capital – bonding and bridging*

By combining heightened moment awareness and past experiences, the state of right mindfulness encourages the structural dimension of social capital as an actor can mindfully and context-sensitively configure network interactions based on accumulated past experiences and an appreciation and awareness of the current situation. Learning from past experiences in network relationships helps make sense of and resolve outstanding issues with other actors within the network and identify ways to improve or even abandon certain networks that are no longer complimentary. Right mindfulness can enhance individuals' direct attention and observation of potential hazards, problems and contextual constraints, foster the ability to observe the needs of others and respond to them mindfully and context-sensitively (Brown and Ryan, 2003; Chiesa et al., 2011; Condon, 2017). Having a holistic understanding of networks ties both within and across organization boundaries is a crucial aspect in developing and nurturing networks ties at all levels in the value chain. Past experiences inform potential problems while moment awareness raises consciousness towards current contextual constraints, as well as identifying opportunities to further strengthen network relationships and to deal with interpersonal relationships, resolving issues with a heightened awareness of stakeholders' needs and the effectiveness of certain networks. However, it is important to acknowledge the dependent arising nature of all relationships and to have right intention (*samma san-kappa*) in order to develop and sustain strong network ties.

Mindfulness guided by right intention can encourage bonding social capital by fostering support among homogeneous groups since right intention guides the purposive or conative aspects of mental activity for the intention of encouraging goodwill, empathy towards others and doing no harm (Bodhi, 2011a) to build up a common culture and common goals. For instance, rather than relying on literal truths as permanent, right mindfulness facilitates prosocial behaviour by considering thoughts as mental events that do not inhibit momentary or future judgements. This can strengthen ties within a group when actors have the right intention to subsume their personal interests within the collective as a whole. Right mindfulness can generate a relatively 'stable'

network based on the willingness to adapt and be flexible to impermanent changes. Thus, right mindfulness can more flexibly cultivate new or reconfigured network relations rather than emphasizing inflexibility and adherence to a pre-determined structure.

To enhance structural/bridging social capital, right mindfulness, guided by right effort and right view, facilitates a reflexive and positive attitude in creating, maintaining and developing strong networks ties across organization boundaries. Right mindfulness guided by right effort (*Samma Vayama*) helps to overcome the five hindrances (*pañcanivarana*) of sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and worry, and doubt, which can often constrain learning and un-learning, knowledge-sharing and cooperation, since compromise and consensus-building is often crucial in inter-organization relationships. For example, organizations often have different goals in mind when they enter a relationship and therefore relationships are often formed on the basis of cultural compromise among the partners concerned. It is important that individuals make the right effort in avoiding pushing forward their own predetermined ways of doing things that may block nurturing relational networks. Being mindful with right view (*Samma Ditthi*) provides a roadmap to understand the starting point, destination, and the successive landmarks to pass (Bodhi, 2011b) for attaining closeness and cooperation that minimize agency and opportunistic behaviour. This is because, in inter-organization contexts, social ties will likely be initially cautious, because each partner is wary of divulging valuable knowledge to other partners until relational social capital has been established.

#### *The relational dimension of social capital – bonding and bridging*

Based on the notion of dependent-arising as the fundamental basis of right mindfulness practice, right mindfulness encourages actors to move away from ego-centric and self-interested pursuits for the common good, facilitating an openness towards collective goals through trust and reciprocity, which are basis of the relational dimension of social capital. This notion is embedded in right mindfulness to facilitate prosocial behaviour by liberating the sense of self as a rigid entity that needs to be protected to a more flexible, interdependent and non-attached self (Berry and Brown, 2017). Mindfulness guided by right livelihood (*samma ajiva*) can facilitate both the bonding and bridging relational dimensions of social capital through generating high-levels of trust and reciprocity among network actors.

Right mindfulness guided by right livelihood reflects an awareness of living in a 'right' way. When activated by right livelihood, the state of mindfulness develops the relational bonding dimensions of social capital based on

the notion of 'rightness regarding actions' – an awareness of diligence and consciousness, 'rightness regarding persons' – respect and consideration to colleagues and stakeholders, and 'rightness regarding objects' – an awareness of truthfulness in business transactions (Bodhi, 2011b). In other words, the three 'rightness' principles of the right livelihood encourage affective relationships between employees, in which co-workers build up mutual trust and respect towards one another, even 'friendship' (e.g., Grey and Sturdy, 2007). Being truthful, respectful and conscious of others, rather than maintaining ego-centric desires, enables an open transparency within a focal organization, generating a context of support which encourages actors to lend assistance to others while promoting engagement, equity and fairness. However, being mindful in nurturing mutual trust is also about recognizing that trust should not come from clinging onto expectations because of the impermanent nature of the universe – in sharp contrast to much of the literature on trust that emphasizes expectations regarding others' behaviours (Kramer and Lewicki, 2010). Therefore, given the impermanent nature of external phenomena, clinging onto static expectations of others' behaviour can be a form of suffering. Hence, a mindful approach is needed to encourage trust based on right livelihood, without rigid expectations of reciprocity to cultivate a constructive, encouraging and trustful working environment rather than depending on others' fulfilment of expectations.

In relational bridging relations, being mindful with right livelihood prevents opportunistic behaviour associated with dishonesty, deceit, treachery, soothsaying, trickery and usury (Bodhi, 2011b), to foster high-levels of trust and reciprocity within more heterogeneous network actors. Given that trust is process-based, organizations regularly test each other's integrity, moving from discrete exchanges of limited risk to more open-ended relations that entail more risk. It is important to highlight that even though the state of right mindfulness is attained individually (Vu and Gill, 2018), subject to actors' contextual situations and capabilities, it is developed in response to the relational contexts surrounding the actor. While individual effort is central to accumulating wisdom and gaining mindfulness, it is the relational context surrounding it that shapes the opportunity. For instance, since life is 'impermanent' in the view of Buddhism, right mindfulness reflects the ability to respond and adapt to constant organizational change, and in particular this involves changes such as the structure and stability of networks, and the unstable character of networks. To foster such relationships, mutual trust and reciprocity are crucial dimensions. The state of right mindfulness guides that although there is a dependent nature in all relationships that embraces mutual trust arising from exchange reciprocity, such relational dimensions are



guided by the principle of right livelihood in practising mindfulness.

#### *The cognitive dimension of social capital – bonding and bridging*

Having a relational state of mindfulness, the cognitive dimension of social capital can be further advanced. For example, moving away from rigid attachment to a personal ideology and viewpoint, the cognitive dimension of social capital can be nurtured through a shared and collective vision (Coleman, 1990; Leana and Pil, 2006), facilitating a shared culture and corporate citizenship behaviours (Waddock, 2001).

Bonding cognitive social capital is based on the notion of non-self (Pali: *anattā*; Sanskrit: *anātman*) – bringing down the determinate view of self (Pye, 2004) – which allows an actors' objective views and collective efforts to embrace the inclusiveness of shared goals and culture for bonding social capital. In mindfulness, non-self plays a crucial role to allow actors to attain wisdom-enacted states of mindfulness based on both past experiences and present awareness (Purser and Milillo, 2015; Vu et al., 2018), to explore and open up to new knowledge, free from perceived assumptions and ideologies. By bringing down the self and ego, members are more likely to work toward a common corporate goal, share an overarching corporate culture, and trust one another. As a result, cognitive social capital will occur as a natural phenomenon. By natural, we mean that, by virtue of being part of a network without judgement or self-pursuit goals, members of the network can develop strong relations, and obtain mutual benefits such as organizational knowledge, which in turn promotes further prosocial behaviour. Right mindfulness, thus, guided by non-self cultivates shared vision and goals for nurturing a collective identity.

In bridging contexts, right mindfulness facilitates positive intentions to attain shared goals and establish a shared culture for better cooperation between organizations. This is particularly important in cross-cultural contexts, where there is often a divide among different institutions, philosophies and cultural values (Barkema et al., 2015), and there is a need to promote cooperative attitudes with right intention rather than imposing one particular value system as dominant. The principle of dependent arising embedded in right mindfulness practice is the fundamental factor in facilitating shared norms across organization boundaries, not in the sense of obligatory behaviour, but as a set of shared institutionalized rules and norms that govern appropriate behaviours in the network. Therefore, the notion of non-self in the practice of right mindfulness can also be applied at inter-organization levels by releasing individuals from rigid corporate expectations of obligatory behaviour to promote mutual understanding

and exchanges of ideas and resources, facilitating a shared culture governing relationships, embracing shared narratives and generating collective knowledge. Organizations need to be mindful and contextually sensitive to be aware that, unlike cognitive-bonding social capital, the existence of other organizations in the network does not guarantee a flow of knowledge between partners, who often have a competitive-collaborative relationship.

Based on the guiding principles of the Buddhist tradition, the practice of right mindfulness facilitates mindful social capital through: (1) wisdom articulation through learning from others since the practice of right mindfulness is about correcting the self and adjusting the self to relevant contexts; (2) mindful emulation of others through a combination of moment awareness and past experiences to understand other's motives, behaviours and needs because the practice of right mindfulness is embedded in altruistic and compassionate motivators; (3) openness through reduced inhibited judgements, assumptions and biases to attain context-sensitivity and flexibility; (4) the enhancement of ethical awareness in motives and behaviours for morality; and (5) sustaining the impermanent nature of relationships and network ties through flexible capabilities.

A summary of the mechanisms that connect right mindfulness practice to social capital development is shown in Table 1, and our mindful social capital model is shown in Figure 2.

### **The dark side of mindfulness and social capital**

Our argument so far has elaborated that right mindfulness can encourage mindful social capital development both within and across organization boundaries. However, the connection between mindfulness and social capital is not without costs and risks and may constitute a 'double-edged sword'. Inkpen and Tsang (2016) have, for example, suggested that the double-edged sword of social capital includes the costs of maintaining social capital ties and the need to limit excessive ties that impede other organizational processes or outcomes resulting in a dark side of social capital. This raises the question again, and posed by Neubert et al. (2017), is there a dark side to spiritual forms of social capital? Beyond these examples of 'unsocial' capital, we suggest that an unskillful or instrumentalized mindfulness practice could also limit the development of mindful social capital.

#### *The dark side of mindfulness*

Spiritual practice at the organizational level runs the risk of misappropriation for instrumental ends (e.g., Case and Gosling, 2010) which may serve to undermine its full potential to generate social capital. The modern

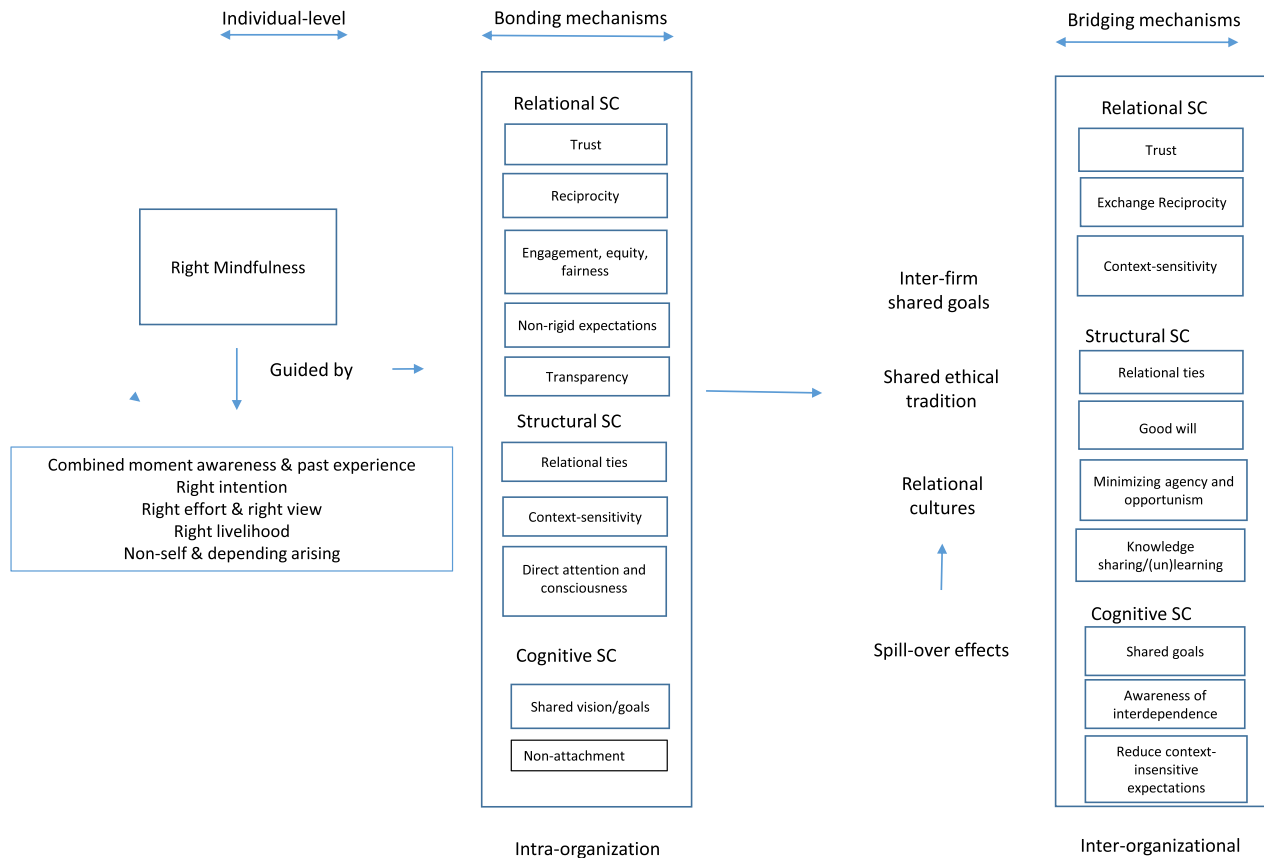
**TABLE 1** Linking the philosophical foundations of right mindfulness to social capital

<i>Right mindfulness practices</i>	<i>Psychological states</i>		<i>Impacts</i>	
	<i>Intra-personal</i>	<i>Inter-personal</i>	<i>within firm</i>	<i>Across firm</i>
Combined heightened moment awareness and relevant past experiences	Enhanced attention to potential hazards and consciousness over current contextual constraints	Enhanced observation towards others' needs and expectations and consciousness over potential harmful inter-personal relationships	Enhanced observation towards organizational needs and expectations to resolve outstanding issues with other actors within firm	Enhanced context-sensitive and context-relevant responses for enhanced observation towards stakeholders' needs and expectations
Mindful emulation of others and context				
Guided by right intention	Enhanced purposive or conative aspects of mental activity to goodwill	Enhanced empathy and non-harmful approaches towards others to inhibit judgements	Enhanced right intention to subsume personal interests and enhance appreciation and willingness to cultivate culture and goals for organizations	Non-resistance to change and appreciation for flexible network relation rather than pre-determined structures
Sustaining the impermanent nature of relationships and network ties through flexible capabilities				
Guided by right effort and right view	Abandoned personal hindrances: desire, ill will, drowsiness, restlessness, doubt	Minimized agency and opportunistic behaviour to enhance closeness and cooperation	Openness to knowledge sharing and willingness to (un)learn and compromise context-sensitively	Enhanced social ties, unblocking relational networks, and balancing cultural compromises
Enhanced wisdom articulation through learning from others				
Guided by right livelihood	The prevention of unethical behaviour and enhanced rightness regarding actions, persons, and objects	Reduced overemphasis on expectations of other's behaviours to promote support and assistance to others and eliminate ego-centric desires for open transparency	Enhanced open transparency within firms, support within firms for engagement, equity and fairness	Enhanced high levels of trust and reciprocity to move away from discrete exchanges of limited risk to more open-ended relations that entail more risk
Enhancement of ethical awareness in motives and behaviours for morality				
Guided by non-self and depending arising	Elimination of ego-centric and self-serving orientations to embrace collective identity	Appreciation for relational context, information flow to sustain collective knowledge to embrace personal meaning and contribution to greater purposes of the firm	Embracing shared narratives and generating collective knowledge and shared norms to govern appropriate and mindful behaviours	Departure from rigid corporate expectations of obligatory behaviour for mutual understanding and exchanges of ideas and resources
Openness through reduced inhibited judgements, assumptions and biases				

mindfulness movement is not an exception. Donald et al. (2019) claim that secular mindfulness meditation programmes do not focus on the moral and ethical dimensions of individual behaviour, and paradoxically the practice reinforces an individuals' sense of self and ego rather than transcending it which may result in the creation of social liabilities (Inkpen and Tsang, 2016). Mindfulness has also become the new capitalist spirituality (Purser, 2019).

In the case of Westernized mindfulness, multinational companies such as Google, General Mills, Procter & Gamble, Monsanto, and the US Army have all brought mindfulness into the workplace (Stone, 2014). The rising application of mindfulness practices in organizations has been characterized as a quick-fix McMindfulness programme (Hyland, 1999, 2015; Purser and Loy, 2013). Purser and Loy (2013) have defined Westernized mindfulness as 'McMindfulness' – a

decontextualization of mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose, as foundation in social ethics. Rather than applying mindfulness skillfully as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is often recast into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique. Vu et al. (2018) identified three reasons for the McMindfulness phenomenon. First, research and the application of mindfulness practices are mainly based on attention enhancement, moment-awareness, stress-reduction, and present-centered awareness, which is far from the Buddhist right mindfulness tradition based on the recollection of both present and past experiences (Gethin, 2011; Bodhi, 2011a). Second, mindfulness has been reduced to its utility to serve organizational purposes rather than embracing its ethical and longitudinal holistic practice that promotes intellectual wisdom and physical concentration (Qiu and Rooney, 2017; Vu and Gill, 2018).



**FIGURE 2** Mechanisms that link right mindfulness to organizational social capital [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

Third, mindfulness tends to be a marketable technique for organizations, neglecting its diversity and tradition (Fiol and O'Connor, 2003; Goleman, 1988; Singh, 2010). Mindfulness in organizations runs the risk of being decontextualized (Bazzano, 2014), ignoring the differences in transferring individual mindfulness to the organizational level (Vu et al., 2018; Vu and Gill, 2018). As a result, according to Glomb et al. (2011), mindfulness-based interventions in the workplace tend to emphasize instrumentality rather than linking mindfulness to social capital and prosocial behaviour. Thus, the instrumentalization of mindfulness often subsumes its authenticity under the economic rationale of the organization.

## Conclusions and implications

We have suggested that individual-level practice is critical for the development of organizational-level social capital. In particular, the field of sociology has stressed individual behaviour connects to community learning and development (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1993b). Following this line of thinking, our paper has elaborated how right mindfulness practised by leaders, managers

and employees is important for developing social capital in organizations. Our paper has contributed to the literature in three important ways. First, we advance an understanding of *mindful social capital* by connecting the traditioned philosophy and practice of right mindfulness to each of the six types of organizational social capital we identified by synthesizing the categories previously developed by Putnam (2000) and Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998). By doing so, we also hope that these six types of social capital may provide utility to other researchers in articulating a more fine-grained analysis of organizational social capital in other contexts. Our mindful social capital model highlights how being mindful to both moment awareness and the history of past experiences, and through developing network interactions through learning and raised consciousness can help deal with contextual constraints in organizational life. For example, structural social capital can be enhanced if right intention – which encourages goodwill towards others, right effort – facilitates reflexivity and knowledge-sharing, and right view – which provides the blueprint for action – are skilfully practised. Right mindfulness minimizes ego-centricity for the common good, facilitating mutual trust and reciprocity, which are also the fundamental dimensions of relational social capital.

The mechanism of right livelihood can contribute to relational social capital, and in particular the way in which ‘rightness regarding actions’, ‘rightness regarding persons’, and ‘rightness regarding objects’ encourage affective network relationships. Finally, the cognitive dimension of social capital can be activated through the right mindfulness notion of non-self which removes pre-conceived assumptions and ideologies and facilitates an inclusiveness towards shared goals among network actors. Third, we articulate a dark side to mindfulness in organizations, and argue that a secular or unskilful interpretation of mindfulness limits its potential as a facilitator of social capital. Co-optation and misappropriation of mindfulness have become a hazard to its ethical and liberative tradition. Furthermore, the McMindfulness phenomenon may also serve to undermine social capital across all three dimensions (and thereby limiting its spillover into bridging contexts), due to its instrumentality and inauthenticity. While some multinational organizations have embedded Westernized mindfulness programmes, its secular interpretation may lead to its promise not being fully realized.

Locating right mindfulness as a facilitator of organizational social capital is in many respects provocative. Throughout our review and theorization, we have acknowledged the role that social capital plays in networks and attempted to provide some suggestions for how leaders and managers should not only think about spirituality at work but also how to leverage spirituality while stopping short of instrumentalization. In many organizations, however, the social culture will enhance or diminish the effectiveness of mindful social capital. Starkey and Tempest (2004) have already noted how the ‘American’ system of management is characterized by values and practices that are at odds with the development of social capital. However, we hope that our elaboration of mindful social capital helps leaders and managers to be able to re-evaluate the possible benefits of spirituality at work. Further, the institutional context in which a firm is located may also be an important and under-studied factor that impacts upon the efficacy of mindful social capital. A number of scholars have already commented upon how religious or spiritual practices may act as quasi-regulatory and behavioural mechanism in the presence of institutional voids (e.g., Mair and Marti, 2009; Neubert et al., 2017).

Mindful social capital also holds implications for the creation or adoption of specific work practices. Our mindful social capital model has implications for how organizations create a relational learning culture. By practising right mindfulness, leaders, managers and employees can embrace the principles of the Buddhist tradition that decentralize ego and foster an inward, ethical orientation that is socially expressed in relationship with others to develop greater cohesiveness and connectedness.

To create and sustain the kind of organizational culture where mindful social capital can flourish, leaders need to create a climate conducive to learning about self, about others, about how we are connected, and lead by example. The transformative learning potential of right mindfulness suggested by Vu and Burton (2020) encourages utilizing mindfulness as a form of moral reflexivity in the work organization context, whereby individuals and groups can be helped to question ways of being and relating, and critically examine assumptions underlying social and organizational practice to guide responsible and ethical action (Cunliffe, 2009, 2016; Hibbert and Cunliffe, 2015). Mindful reflexivity – a right mindfulness approach to moral reflexivity (Vu and Burton, 2020) – can encourage organizational social capital by encouraging learning from past experiences, detaching self-interest, and foregoing ego in order to adjust personal beliefs and values to the context. Developing mindful reflexivity is central to creating the type of work routines (e.g., Sargis-Roussel et al., 2017) that centre upon silence, stillness, and inward reflection where group relational closeness can be both developed and flourish.

A further implication of mindful social capital is its effect upon leadership. As Stokes et al. (2016) noted, leaders and managers need to enhance their awareness of the potential contribution of spiritual capital in the work setting. Connecting employees to the organizations’ larger purpose is already a key feature of contemporary leadership, although many leaders and managers still find this challenging. Further, the success factors of leadership and management are often associated with hard characteristics that are masculine in tone (Malloch, 2010). Right mindfulness may provide a way to foster a relational and ‘service’ culture (Middlebrooks and Noghiu, 2010) founded upon soft virtues of patience, humility and justice, for example, but which create organizational value in the long-run. The *quid pro quo* may be that organizations with purely economic aims and ambitions or masculine culture may find mindful social capital development counter-cultural.

Our paper also has managerial implications for extending bonding social capital across firm boundaries to encompass inter-relationships with other firms along an industry value chain. For example, mindful social capital could be directed towards bridging across structural holes in a network to link individuals, teams and groups not otherwise connected (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Given that right mindfulness encourages non-attachment, an openness towards others and an ability to find common ground, mindful social capital development may extend an individual’s ‘personal range’ (Tasheva and Hillman, 2019), and enhance the performance of low-interdependence connections by providing access to valuable information and resources. In other words, practitioners of right mindfulness may be

well-placed to take advantage of brokerage opportunities in networks, as envisioned by Burt (1992).

Although there will likely be benefits to leaders and managers, we also caution in order to avoid inappropriate use. We do not believe that an individual needs to be an experienced practitioner to acquire some of the benefits we have outlined. Nonetheless, proselytizing is likely to be counter-productive. Further, inexperienced practitioners need to avoid the pitfalls of an over-attachment to right mindfulness and the pursuit of an ego-driven and 'enlightened' persona which could result in negative reactions from others thereby destroying social capital. Further, practitioners need to be mindful that adhering to Buddhist practices such as non-attachment are not perceived by others as an 'indifference' to work outcomes which may create negative judgements and feelings (see also Chan-Serafin et al., 2013). Non-attachment should not be thought of as uninterested. Thus, there are opportunities for European leaders and managers to consider afresh the teachings and practices of Eastern spiritual traditions which, viewed as an aspect of organizational diversity and as a potential resource, have an ability to contribute to competitive advantage.

## Future directions

The aim of our paper has been to elaborate a theoretical understanding of the potential of right mindfulness to encourage social capital. It is clear to us that spiritual practice matters in the work organization. We have illuminated the so-called 'black box' of right mindfulness, and our analysis may offer further insights for researchers interested in the ways in which organizational social capital can be encouraged. There is fertile ground for further studies. First, future studies might usefully examine how different spiritual traditions can contribute to social capital development by shifting away from the agnostic character of much of the religious and spiritual capital literature. Further studies that examine the philosophy or theology of different traditions would be welcomed. Second, further explorations of how social capital can be developed through 'Eastern' spiritual lenses would redress the balance of the Christian emphasis in the literatures on religious and spiritual capital. Third, we have taken a normative approach to spirituality. Research that examines the normative-instrumental interpretation of mindfulness, and how different interpretations link to firm outcomes would be extremely valuable. Lastly, the boundary conditions we identified offer multiple opportunities for further research on spiritual capital that examine contingencies in different organizational, industrial and institutional contexts.

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