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## Micromoments Matter: Finding Agency and Connection Through a Micromoments Mindset

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## Abstract

As humans, our tendency is to reduce uncertainty, leading us to want to hold things still rather than accept the inevitable change that comes (Langer, 2009). However, psychological and behavioral attempts to do so can result in clinging to outdated and erroneous information, limiting our perspectives and narrowing opportunities for meaningful choice. In this paper, we merge Western psychology and Eastern wisdom traditions and build upon conceptions of mindfulness from both perspectives, to present our theory of the micromoments mindset as a tool for well-being. We define a micromoment as both the instant opening into conscious awareness of the present moment, as well as the brief stretch of experience that follows, until awareness recedes. A micromoments mindset is the cognitive prioritization toward these openings. It serves as both an entryway into mindfulness and the experience of being more mindful within the micromoment. We argue that tapping into micromoments throughout our days can facilitate factors of well-being, particularly agency and connection, so that we have more tools for living with intention in the world of uncertainty and flux in which we find ourselves. We also present the PEACE framework for optimizing well-being within micromoments.

## Keywords

mindfulness, present moment awareness, well-being, positive psychology, Buddhism, yoga, agency, autonomy, acceptance, integration, connection

## Disciplines

Cognition and Perception | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Multicultural Psychology | Social Psychology | Somatic Psychology | Theory and Philosophy | Training and Development

Micromoments Matter: Finding Agency and  
Connection Through a Micromoments Mindset

Cindy Chou & Amanda Masters

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Katy Sine

August 1, 2020

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## Introduction

The aim of positive psychology is to provide an objective, empirically sound examination of the factors that contribute to a well-lived life (Seligman, 1999). Pondering precisely what defines a “well-lived life” and paying attention to what actions and attitudes lead to the good life has been a longtime pursuit across varying philosophies and traditions. Aristotle’s (384-322 BCE) theory of *eudaimonia*, humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow’s (1962) vision of self-actualization, social psychologist Carol Ryff’s (1989) model of psychological well-being, and Richard Ryan and Edward Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory have all contributed significant perspectives on what leads to a life of meaning, joy, and optimal functioning. This purview is also found in the Eastern wisdom traditions of Buddhism and the classical system of yoga as codified in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, whose comprehensive views of how we experience, understand, and enact our lives through mindfulness and integration are now incorporated into Western models of well-being. One common theme among the conceptions of well-being we highlight here is the emphasis on how positive functioning and a sense of well-being come from integrating the range of our experiences, including the difficult and the enjoyable. Well-being also comes through developing a sense of agency that allows us to connect with others and direct the course of our lives with greater intention and clarity.

### Definitions of Well-Being

Aristotle believed a good (*eudaimonic*) life to be one where we align activity, soul, and excellence (Melchert, 2002). *Eudaimonia* has been translated as “happiness” but refers to the *process* of living well and realizing human potentials, rather than an *outcome* of pleasure (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Central to Aristotle’s theory was the idea that practical wisdom, the combination of moral skill and moral will, was the key to a meaningful and well-lived life

(Schwartz, n.d.). Aristotle defined virtues as dispositions or habits that are tied to the choices and actions we make, and practical wisdom is the master of all virtues (Melchert, 2002). Finding the right virtue to employ, in the right amount, at the right time enables us to be skillful in our interactions with others and as we pursue goals within our contexts as individuals, communities, and societies (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006).

The concepts of eudaimonia and practical wisdom encompass much more than just feeling satisfied or happy with ourselves, though this can be a byproduct. These concepts also imply that we can align our lives and choices in such a way that we continuously move toward our highest good, which is toward our inherent potential (Melchert, 2002; Ryff, 1989). Growth toward our inherent potential was the central theme of much of Maslow's (1962) theory of human motivation and what he called *self-actualization*, the ongoing development and integration of capacities and potentials toward each person's intrinsic expression of "full-humanness." Maslow (1962) proposed that our behaviors are motivated by the desire to meet basic (deficit) needs for safety, belonging, love (i.e., connection), respect, and self-esteem. When we have reached a certain level of fulfillment of these deficits, growth needs drive us to explore, create, and express a universal love for and kinship with all of humanity (Maslow, 1962). Those who are most self-actualized and psychologically healthy exhibit such characteristics as a superior perception of reality, acceptance of self, others and nature, increased autonomy, and greater freshness of appreciation and emotional richness (Maslow, 1962).

Maslow's theories found empirical support in a recent study by Scott Barry Kaufman (2018), who re-examined Maslow's concepts in the light of modern psychological research. Kaufman (2018) developed a 30-item "Characteristics of Self-Actualization Scale (CSAS)," the validation of which showed that ten of Maslow's proposed characteristics of self-actualizing

people could contribute to a general factor of self-actualization. These characteristics correlated with higher life satisfaction and with all six of the contributors to Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being, as well as the satisfaction of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, core psychological needs identified in self-determination theory (Kaufman, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A higher self-actualization score also predicted positive outcomes in work and creativity across domains, affirming its value as a construct of well-being (Kaufman, 2018).

Ryff (1989) reviewed decades of theories and research on well-being to formulate a multidimensional and functional model based on her definition of psychological well-being (PWB). Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998) model identifies six dimensions of positive psychological functioning: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery (capacity to manage one's life and surroundings), purpose in life, and personal growth. By bringing in variables that look at our relationship to the world we inhabit and dynamic process variables, such as purpose in life and personal growth, PWB provides a rich and multifaceted depiction of the sources and expression of psychological health.

Central to the study of well-being is understanding the self and the sources of our motivation and choice. Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests that it's not just *what* we do, it's also *why* we do what we do, and that the nature of our minds and focus of our drive is vital for well-being. As humans, we may be proactive and engaged or be passive and alienated; we can skillfully respond or merely react to life (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan & Deci (2000) echo Maslow's (1962) assertion that a person at their best is curious, vital, agentic, and committed to their values. The expression of this type of engaged and integrated personality is contingent on the fulfillment of three core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy is

the sense of acting with personal volition and having opportunities for choice. Competence comes from our ability to be effective in environments and at tasks. Relatedness comprises a sense of caring, acceptance, and connection with others that is not based on utility (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The three psychological needs are related to what motivates us and how autonomous we feel in the actions we take (Brown & Ryan, 2015). Intrinsic motivators come from an internal drive from which we do something inspired by our own interests and values or for its own sake. Extrinsic motivators compel us to do something for an external goal, validation, perceived structure, or expectation (Brown & Ryan, 2015). Intrinsic motivation links to a sense of autonomy, competence, and sometimes relatedness, resulting in exploration, expansion, and mastery. Extrinsically motivated activities are dependent upon others and result in a contraction of self (Brown & Ryan, 2015). Pervin (1991) and Ryan (1995) emphasize that behaviors prompted by drives, impulses, and intense feelings of being overcome with emotion may arise from 'within' us, but are not necessarily experienced as self-caused and do not fall under the category of intrinsic motivation. Instead, because we do not feel in control of the behavior caused by these spontaneous impulses, our sense of self often feels violated or impinged (Pervin, 1991; Ryan, 1995). Intrinsic and well-integrated extrinsic motivations lead to the greatest satisfaction of the three core needs and result in the best outcomes in many domains of life, including health, relationships, and work (Brown & Ryan, 2015).

Brown and Ryan (2015) highlight the practice of mindfulness as a powerful internal tool for increasing intrinsic motivation and improving internal regulation. They define mindfulness in the context of self-determination theory as a conscious process that directs attention toward observing our patterned and automatic reactions to stimuli, thereby creating a window of

opportunity in which we can choose how to respond (Brown & Ryan, 2015). Cultivating an inner observer through mindfulness also shines a light on shadowy regions of the mind, including our motivations, to allow for better integration of all aspects of the self (Brown & Ryan, 2015). With a stronger self and ability to intervene between stimulus and reaction, we can choose not to give in to unhelpful impulses and thus behave with greater self-congruence.

### **Integration with Eastern Wisdom Traditions**

In the Eastern wisdom disciplines of yoga and Buddhism, cognitive processes are not separated from physiology, ethics, sociology, lifestyle, or spirituality (Shonin, Van Gorden, & Griffiths, 2014; Tigunait, 1983). In theory and practice, these things form an irreducible whole, with diverse paths toward well-being and full functioning all emphasizing exploration and perfection of the inner world of awareness (Tigunait, 1983). The word *yoga* derives from the Sanskrit verb *yuj*, which means “to unite”; thus, yoga means “union.” In Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras (codified around 2nd century CE), “union” can refer to many combinations such as mind with energy (Feuerstein, 2001). Ultimately, union encompasses a state of being in which the thoughts and ego-identification of the mind are stilled so that we can see reality clearly without distortion (Tigunait, 2014). Realizing one’s self as an integral part of a universal Self is the ultimate goal.

In the yogic approach, as exemplified in the Bhagavad Gita (written sometime 5th century BCE to 1st century CE), each person endeavors to discover and express their *dharma*, that work which is particularly theirs to do in service for the world, in order to transcend self-interest and eventually transcend personal identity (Mitchell, 2000). Interestingly, Maslow (1971) came to regard self-transcendence, the ability to simultaneously maintain one’s own sense of self while merging with a common humanity, as the ultimate goal of self-actualization. He specified that self-actualization, becoming all that a person is capable of becoming, is both an

end goal and a phase along the journey to transcending identity, “leaving behind self-consciousness and self-observation” (Maslow, 1962, p. 125). In Maslow’s version of union (self-transcendence), having a strong steadiness in our own identity comes first.

At a more general and practical level, yoga incorporates ethical precepts such as non-harming, truthfulness, and service to others, with physical and breathing methods, contemplation, and meditation. Together, these practices serve as a means of systematically building a completely integrated relationship to ourselves, the world, and ultimate reality (Tigunait, 2014, 2017). Working to integrate these different levels of experience leads to a harmonious sense of self, optimal access to one’s energy, increased clarity in perceiving the world as it is, and stronger ability to skillfully act in the world (Tigunait, 2014). One contribution such a comprehensive tradition can make to Western psychology is a fuller consideration of our bodies and nervous systems as an integral component of and specific avenue toward holistic well-being (e.g., Caplan, Portillo, & Seely, 2013). Famous yoga teacher B. K. S. Iyengar (2005) stated, “To a yogi, the body is a laboratory for life, a field of experimentation and perpetual research” (p. 22). Buddhism also incorporates physical awareness, such as mindful breathing, walking, and eating, as part of its worldview that prizes direct experiential inquiry (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). This quality of experiential learning within and by means of our idiosyncratic human lives defines the attitude of kind curiosity that is the hallmark of mindfulness.

In the Buddhist tradition, *mindfulness* is defined as the non-judgmental awareness of the present moment and is at the heart of maintaining the balance of our minds (Thera, 1962). Formal practices of meditation and contemplation, as well as informal mindful living and compassion in daily life, teach us not to avoid discomfort but to see the reality of all the joys and sorrows of life. They train us to examine how our attitudes and reactions toward events are what

lead us to suffering (Ricard, 2011; Thera, 1962). From a Buddhist perspective, the value of meditation is in clearing away the negative tendencies of the mind, particularly anger, jealousy, and fear (Ekman, Davidson, Ricard, & Wallace, 2005). This allows space for something more constructive to emerge (Ekman et al., 2005). According to the Dalai Lama, the training of our inner condition shows the way to altruistic love, compassion, inner peace, inner strength, and inner freedom and is what determines the quality of our lives (Ricard, 2011). As Batchelor (2020) expresses, mindfulness is learning to be “at home in oneself.” Both yoga and Buddhism name this quality *sukha*, an enduring state of flourishing happiness that comes from mental and emotional balance, mindfulness, and a sense of kinship with others (Ekman et al., 2005).

Buddhist scholar-practitioner B. Alan Wallace and clinical psychologist and mindfulness expert Shauna L. Shapiro (2006) developed a model that synthesizes traditional Buddhist teachings and Western psychology. Their fourfold model of mental balance consists of interrelated elements that, when united, train the mind to achieve exceptional levels of mental health. *Conative balance* involves reality-based intentions and aspirations that are conducive to our own and others’ happiness (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). This acknowledges that individual psychological flourishing cannot be cultivated while ignoring the well-being of others; we are interconnected, a finding affirmed by the positive psychology adage, “Other people matter” (Peterson, 2006, p. 249; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). *Attentional balance* consists of the ability to direct sustained, voluntary attention toward an object and a meta-aware quality of monitoring our thoughts (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). Conative balance gives attentional balance a wholesome direction by channeling attention towards tasks and subjects that support our and others’ well-being. *Cognitive balance* enables us to distinguish between the world we experience and the conceptual assumptions and ideas we ourselves supply, which distort the objective facts of the



world (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). This quality, which is a faculty of mindfulness, also benefits us relationally by helping us to interact with others without projecting our fears, assumptions, and perspectives (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). The fourth quality, *affective balance*, which is in effect emotional regulation, enables us to skillfully feel our emotions and respond authentically to different situations, without allowing emotions to control our behavior and without shutting down our capacity to feel (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006).

### **The Role of Mindfulness in Well-being**

“My experience is what I agree to attend to” (James, 1918, p. 402). This might have been said by an advanced yogi or Buddhist monk, but is actually the sentiment of early American philosopher-psychologist William James. Attention is a central concern of Western psychology as well as of meditative and contemplative traditions like yoga and Buddhism (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Styles, 2006). Mindfulness is a particular form of paying attention. Kabat-Zinn (2003) defined mindfulness as the “awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145). According to Stern (2004), a *present moment* is the subjectively experienced uninterrupted *now*, which he likens to a miniature lived story consisting of a minimal plot line and dramatic tension through rising and falling emotions. *Present moment awareness* is the lived and felt experience of a brief moment, as it happens (not as it is recalled), and which is a “holistic happening” that groups together feelings, thoughts, actions, and sensations (Stern, 2004). In colloquial terms, having awareness is “being in the here and now.” This generally refers to awareness of processes related to the body, feelings, thoughts, and external phenomena (Shonin et al., 2014).

Of all the Eastern-originating concepts, mindfulness and various methods for meditation have been the most researched and integrated within Western psychology. The most notable practical applications of mindfulness in well-being include mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for the treatment of depression (Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Kabat-Zinn, 2007) and mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992). Both of these therapeutic protocols have demonstrated efficacy in alleviating negative symptoms and promoting mental health (Gu, Strauss, Bond, & Cavanagh, 2015). The growth of mindfulness journal publications and doctorates publications has grown exponentially over the past 40 years, supporting the efficacy of these timeless traditions as tested by modern science (AMRA, 2020).

Scientifically, mindfulness is correlated with many beneficial outcomes. Neuroscience shows that mindfulness practices rewire the brain, leading to changes in neurotransmitters that enhance connectivity between the brain regions that govern attention and emotion regulation, whole-body awareness, and changes in perspective on the self (Hölzel et al., 2011; McLaughlin et al., n.d.). Research suggests that mindfulness practices reduce stress and improve vagal tone, which in turn modulates our sympathetic nervous system (fight-or-flight) reactions (Kok et al., 2013; Ratey & Manning, 2014). Physiological linkages to positive emotions broaden our awareness, creativity, and perspective, and build resources that buffer against hard times (Fredrickson, 2009; Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015).

Mindfulness has been found to decrease mind wandering, a resource-consuming state during which our attention to internal self-generated thoughts is prioritized over sensory information, leading us to withdraw our perception from the here and now (Stawarczyk, Majerus, Van der Linden, & D'Argembeau, 2012). Our minds wander frequently: a study by Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) showed that the 2250 adults sampled had minds that wandered

46.9% of the time, and excessive mind wandering was correlated with decreased happiness and well-being. What people were thinking about when mind wandering was also a predictor of happiness (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Stawarczyk et al. (2012) pinpointed that the relationship between higher frequency of mind-wandering and psychological distress was primarily explained by decreased attention to the present moment, suggesting that well-being is accessed in the here and now.

As Western psychological models continue to employ mindfulness for healing and desired treatment outcomes for patients, Buddhist teachers point out an additional consideration (Shonin et al., 2014). Mindfulness originated within a spiritual system aimed at enlightenment, or total self-knowledge, and it can direct us toward achieving our highest human potential (Shonin et al., 2014). Just as positive psychology raises the bar from surviving to thriving, mindfulness and Eastern philosophy can help us overcome our limitations, then continue toward full self-actualization.

### **Full Spectrum Psychology**

The purpose of psychology is to make life better for everyone, not only for those who are suffering, though this is also necessary (Peterson, 2006). Positive psychology began to coalesce as a field and broader movement within psychology when Martin Seligman gave his presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 1998. Seligman (1999) pointed out that mainstream psychology had become primarily focused on pathology and fixing problems rather than actively constructing beneficial qualities. He called for psychology to “articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound” so it could “show the world what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, to flourishing communities, and to a just society” (Seligman, 1999, p. 560). This moment initiated a more widespread “eudaimonic turn” (Pawelski & Moores,

2013) in psychological research and practice, toward the aspects of life that directly contribute to well-being.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of positive psychology from other approaches and popular self-help is the question of what it chooses to measure (Peterson, 2006). Ed Diener was one of the first researchers to design empirical methods focused on happiness, since the 1970s—well before happiness, positive psychology, and well-being were considered significant subjects in any broad manner. He helped legitimize the scientific study of positive states, in particular *subjective well-being*, a combination of self-reported life satisfaction and the ratio of experienced positive emotions compared to negative emotions (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Subjective well-being remains one of the most used outcomes measured by positive psychology researchers (Diener et al., 1999).

While a shift in focal point away from problems and pathology and toward building the positive is the original hallmark of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000), a “second wave” of positive psychology has begun to emerge. Lomas (2016) called for a redefining of positive psychology where the binary good/bad lens is replaced with a more nuanced view that recognizes the co-valence of multiple emotions at once and the inseparability of positive and negative in our experiences. He envisioned a perspective that synthesizes various dimensions of psychology into one whole (Lomas, 2016). The concept of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984), for example, has been criticized by some as being too narrowly focused on particular mental states and neglectful of other definitions of what a complex human being may count toward being well (Duarte, 2014). After all, it is not only positive phenomena but also negative and mixed emotions and experiences, such as growth after trauma or purposeful work, that give color and depth to our lives. Second wave positive psychologists focus not only on the

strengths and virtues of humans and institutions but also on areas of interest that have traditionally been ascribed to the dark side of life (Wong, 2011). Seemingly negative mental states and experiences can lead to growth, meaning, and enduring well-being (Held, 2004). Viktor Frankl (1984) studied how meaning-making and tragic optimism enabled survival and even growth through horrific experiences in Nazi concentration camps. Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) groundbreaking research on posttraumatic growth discovered that some people who undergo extreme levels of challenge develop a greater appreciation for life, more meaningful relationships, and a higher sense of personal strength than they had before the crisis. Other topics include suffering and mortality, righteous anger, adversity, and the limits of positivity (Ivtzan, Lomas, Hefferon, & Worth, 2015).

This movement toward full-spectrum psychology emulates teachings from the wisdom disciplines. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (sutra 2.48) and the Bhagavad Gita (verses 2.14, 2.38), core texts of classical yoga, describe an elevated state beyond the "pairs of opposites" such as pleasure-pain or attachment-aversion. In this state, we can find our contentment and well-being. The Buddha admonished his followers to walk the *middle way*, to realize the paradoxes of the universe and come to rest in the reality of the present, within and beyond all opposites (Kornfield, n.d.). Buddhist teacher Jack Kornfield (n.d.) says that walking the middle way means that we neither shun nor get lost in the drama of the world and "we learn to embrace tension, paradox, and change. Instead of seeking resolution, waiting for the chord at the end of a song, we let ourselves open and relax in the middle."

### **Micromoments Mindset: A Tool for Well-Being in Today's World**

By bringing together contemplative traditions like Buddhism and yoga with Western scientific fields, we may be able to achieve a more balanced and holistic depiction of the human

mind and experience, one that accurately considers each person within their spiritual, cultural, and scientific contexts (Kelly, 2012). A central question now is: How do we proceed? Self-determination theory showed that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are integral to well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Maslow (1962), with validation from Kaufman (2018), illuminated humans' inherent needs for both security and growth in our progression toward self-actualization. And Ryff (1989) included environmental mastery (capacity to manage one's life and surroundings) as one pillar of psychological wellness. However, many of these factors are heavily dependent on the quality of external conditions, such as social support, access to vital resources like health care and education, and opportunities for growth and contribution to society. In many ways, today's world is working against these factors.

At the time we are writing this, the United States is six months into the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) global pandemic. Record numbers of Americans have filed for unemployment (Schwartz, Casselman, & Koeze, 2020), students have been attending school virtually, if at all, for four months (Goldstein, Popescu, & Jones, 2020), and over half a million people have died of Covid-19 (Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, 2020). As countries all over the world struggle toward 're-opening' and finding a sense of new normalcy, the police murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, has touched off an uprising of non-stop protests against police brutality and systemic racism. There is heightened urgency for substantive changes that would prove that Black Lives Matter in the United States and across the world. It is a painful and intense time for everyone, particularly for vulnerable and under-resourced populations like communities of color, who are doubly impacted (Centers for Disease Control, n.d.).

It is human nature to conceive of our lives in long term story arcs, to view our actions in relation to the cherished goals we are aiming for, and to evaluate our endeavors by how they compare to past successes and failures (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007; Singer, Ryff, Carr, & Magee, 1998). But amidst the incredible disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people have been forced to abandon or pause such thinking. Longing for how things used to be when the world was “normal” without adapting to loss contributes to mental ill-health (Zhai & Du, 2020). Attachment to particular visions of our future selves as employees, friends, students, and citizens can frustrate and depress us (Berinato, 2020).

We propose that it is possible to cultivate what we are calling a *micromoments mindset*, which draws attention to and gives greater weight to the present moment, providing an entryway into mindfulness. We define a *micromoment* as both the instant opening into conscious awareness of the present moment, as well as the brief stretch of experience that immediately follows, until awareness recedes. A micromoments mindset is the cognitive prioritization toward those openings and an ongoing mental stance which asks us to bring our awareness to our lives as they are unfolding, within tiny snippets of time. We believe that tapping into micromoments throughout our days can facilitate factors of well-being, particularly agency and connection, so that we have more tools for living with intention in the world of uncertainty and flux in which we now find ourselves. We offer the micromoments mindset as a complementary way of thinking, one that places higher value on what is real right now, which gives us opportunities for insight, appreciation, relief, possibilities for meaningful action, and even the prospect of freeing ourselves from past thinking in order to envision a new and better future.

**What is a Micromoment?**

Micromoments are microscopic openings in time that offer us the opportunity to notice the details of our experience. They are, first, instances that take hold of our attention and invite us to dwell in the present, rather than in the past, future, or a state of what Langer (2014) calls *mindlessness*, a rigid mindset wherein the views we take on throughout our lives are adopted and sustained without thought. They are also a block of time and a unit of perception that may run from seconds to minutes, within which we may notice the richness of the present moment as described by Stern (2004): sensations, emotions, thoughts, phenomena normally outside our attention sphere, the environment, and interpersonal happenings. Through this openness, awareness, and the subsequent choices we make, we are able to learn something about ourselves and shift the interactions we have with others and how we shape our days (Langer, 2014). The journey from drawing novel distinctions about ourselves and the world we live creates a recognition of alternative possibilities we had not previously considered (Langer, 2014).

**Why Go Micro?**

Research studies revealing the imperceptible shifts that can occur in fractions of seconds within our physiology, neurobiology, and emotions in response to various phenomena signifies the importance of the micro in our inner states, our external perceptions, and how we interact with others in the world (Davidson, Ekman, Saron, Senulis, & Friesen, 1990; Ekman, Levenson, & Friesen, 1983; Levenson, 1992). Paul Eckman's (1989) work on encoding facial expressions, for example, shows that emotional displays typically happen within two to three seconds, and have effects on the central and autonomic nervous systems as well as on the subsequent emotions we feel (Cacioppo, Klein, Berntson, & Hatfield, 1993; Levenson, 1992). Dacher Keltner (1995) found that twenty-millisecond shifts in gaze coupled with specific muscle actions of the face



distinguished the ‘embarrassment smile,’ which mapped to different emotional stimuli compared to genuine and non-genuine smiles. A non-genuine or polite smile lasts as little as 250 milliseconds, compared with a genuine smile, which lasts from one to five seconds and is distinguished by the lifting of the eye muscles and lip corners (Ekman, Davidson, & Friesen, 1990). Keltner and Busell (1997) found that subliminal perceptions of another’s smile may have the effect of calming the fight or flight systems in our physiology—or not. Micromoments matter.

Leading social researcher Barbara Fredrickson (2013, 2016) defines love as not simply one giant feeling or emotion, but a series of micromoments of connection wherein we experience positivity resonance at the dyadic or group level. In these brief episodes of interpersonal connection, we share positive affect (positive emotion), mutual trust and concern, and synchronous behavior and biology with one another. These examples illustrate how much can happen in our inner and outer worlds in just a fraction of one to a few seconds. Even barely detectable micromoments in our systems have an impact on how we perceive, respond, and move forward in the world. Imagine if we brought more attention to these micro snippets of time.

William James (1918) described the stream of consciousness: “Like a bird's life, it seems to be made of an alternation of flights and perchings” (p. 243). In our use of this analogy, a micromoment is that instant of touching down onto the perch, when we have the opportunity to seize our awareness and expand consciously into our present life. A micromoment is also that immediately subsequent series of time, which can be stretched through focused attention, when our consciousness is ‘perched’ and life is actively happening. It is within the micromoment that we find our opportunities to pause habitual and reactive thoughts and behaviors, explore the specific phenomena of the external and internal world that exist right now, accept limits, and see

prospects for change, preservation, and action. Equipped with this more accurate view of the current reality, and perhaps also in touch with the deeper values and impulses that motivate us, we ultimately find greater choice in shaping the lives we wish to live.

### **Why Mindsets Matter**

A mindset is a system of beliefs about the nature of human attributes, and subsequently, how these beliefs shape our priorities, behaviors, and outcomes (Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Our mindsets are of great consequence: they frame our perceptions and expectations to influence the way we interact with the world, and in doing so, define the parameters of our experience and our sense of where possibilities and limitations lie (Adams, Schiller, & Cooperrider, 2004). For example, Carol Dweck's (2006) research on growth and fixed mindsets showed that children's beliefs about their own ability to change their intelligence, regardless of objective ability, largely influenced their motivation and achievement. A stronger belief that their intelligence is malleable (growth mindset) tended to correlate with higher academic achievement, compared to those who believed their intelligence is set (fixed mindset) (Dweck, 2016; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Mindset was thus key to the children's outcomes, iterated through their behaviors.

In addition to academics, mindsets have been shown to matter to our social relationships, emotional and physical health, and in the workplace (as cited in Dweck, 2012). Crum, Salovey, and Achor (2013) noted that stress mindsets, whether people perceived stress as enhancing or debilitating, were meaningfully associated with health, performance, and well-being. What's more, they found that stress mindsets could be taught using factual videos about the nature of stress to shift participants towards a stronger stress-is-enhancing mindset (Crum et al., 2013). In another area of research, Crum, Corbin, Brownell, and Salovey (2011) explored the impact of mindset on physiological satiation (feeling full) as measured by the gut peptide ghrelin. Study

participants consumed a 380-calorie milkshake that was presented either as an “indulgent” shake of 620-calories, or a “sensible” shake of only 140-calories. Ghrelin was measured via intravenous blood sampling at baseline, as participants studied the fictitious label on their shake, then as they consumed and rated the shake. Despite all participants consuming the very same shake, ghrelin levels indicated that those who had an ‘indulgent mindset’ responded as though they had indeed consumed a higher caloric food, and felt more satiated (Crum et al., 2011). Physical outcomes were mediated by a psychological mindset.

People often believe that personality traits are stable (Dweck, 2012), but research by Roberts and Mroczek (2008) shows that personal life experiences may cause a marked change in traits at any age. We have the capacity to change, but to do so, it matters whether we believe that our core qualities can be nurtured through our own persistent efforts (an incremental theory, or growth mindset), versus being built-in and fixed by nature (an entity theory, or fixed mindset; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008). A micromoments mindset brings us repeatedly back to conscious participation in our lives, presenting infinite chances to challenge or loosen our attachments to our fixed theories, shifting us toward openness. By focusing on micromoments not just as a phenomenon, but as the vital element of a flexible mindset that can be cultivated through practice and effort, we can change our relationship to our lives to become more open, present, and whole.

### **The Value of a Micromoments Mindset**

We have identified the themes of growth and potential, agency, and connection to ourselves and others as crucial elements in crafting eudaimonic well-being. We expect that a micromoments mindset increases well-being through three main mechanisms: perceiving reality more accurately, enabling openness to and acceptance of experience, and seeing and capitalizing on possibilities for agency, choice, and connection.

## **Perceiving Reality More Accurately**

Both Eastern wisdom traditions and Western psychology have identified numerous biases humans have which distort our thinking, perception, and experience of the world. The information we glean from the internal and external cues present in a given moment and the interpretation our minds make are colored by idiosyncratic, underlying patterns of thought that we have each developed throughout our lives (Langer, 2009; 2014). One way a micromoments mindset may support clear seeing and help us move forward with intention is by revealing, in real-time, the patterns of biases, thought, and categories that we have picked up along the way.

### **Identifying our cognitive filters.**

Knowing about our personal and universal human biases underlines the value of being attentive to our thinking and examining our minds through a micromoments mindset. *Confirmation bias* leads us to look for information that aligns with what we already believe and filter out anything to the contrary (Nickerson, 1998). We think we have irrefutable evidence that we are correct in our thinking, but we aren't working with all of the facts. Another tendency, *negativity bias*, leads us to notice negative feelings or events more often than the positive (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). However, most people experience positive emotions and events three times more often than negative (Gable & Haidt, 2017). Our brains are evolutionarily hard-wired to scan for potential dangers, disappointments, and interpersonal issues (Hanson, 2013). This negativity bias makes us zoom in and develop what Hanson (2013) called "paper tiger paranoia" (p. 23). This paranoia led our ancestors to make the mistake of thinking there was a tiger in the bushes when there wasn't, or thinking there wasn't one when there was. The cost of the negativity bias in the modern world is that we have become extra vigilant, even when there are no tigers (or bushes) in our environments, leading to needless anxiety (Hanson, 2013). By

slowing down and paying greater attention in micromoments, we increase the information available to us so we may make decisions that avoid proverbial paper tigers and which may buffer against stress.

On the other hand, when we are “situated in the present” (Langer, 2009, p. 279), as in a micromoment, we may notice our good experiences and register them more fully so that we can retain the good. Fortunately, systematically training ourselves to consciously take in the good as well as the bad within moments can help us level the playing field in the fullness of our human experience. We can even make choices in micromoments to amplify the good that we find. Practices like *savoring*, mindfully engaging in thoughts or behaviors that heighten the effect of positive events on positive emotions, and *capitalizing*, sharing our happiness with others, help us do this (Smith, Harrison, Kurtz, & Bryant, 2014).

Increasing our sensitivity to sources of happiness and well-being in our lives through the purposeful attention we pay within micromoments may also help us overcome the tendency towards adaptation. Bao & Lyubomirsky (2014) highlighted the importance of considering adaptation, the process whereby sources of happiness lose their effectiveness. Humans are generally unaware of how much we adapt to our circumstances, good or bad (Schwartz, 2016). The *hedonic treadmill* describes the endless pursuit of novelty when familiar activities and commodities no longer please us (Brickman & Campbell, 1971). Even though the novelty and pleasure from these new activities will also fade in time, we become caught up in the chase, and, like a runner on a treadmill, we always end up where we started. The *satisfaction treadmill* is similar: as things get better, our base level of satisfaction goes up, and our expectations for the desired state of satisfaction increases (Kahneman, 1999). Over time, we may lose our ability to pick up on the subtler experiences of pleasure and our senses become blunted by

overstimulation. An orientation toward micromoments invites us to pause and notice understated sensory experiences, like the scent of fresh flowers, something we might ordinarily rush past.

A micromoments mindset trains us to pay more considerable attention to the details of small moments, which helps us to become more receptive to the range of messages we receive, as well as attune more readily to the facts of the moment before jumping into action. Psychiatrist and neuroscientist Daniel Siegel (2009) describes how the human cortex processes information in two broadly construed manners. In “bottom-up” processing, a stimulus, like the sound of someone’s voice, impacts us first and is interpreted and labeled second. A “top-down” experience begins with an existing concept we hold, based on prior learning, which then constrains our bottom-up experience (Siegel, 2009). For example, if we see what we believe to be an impatient expression on a friend’s face, then when they speak to us, we may be more likely to hear a note of annoyance in their voice, whether it is there or not. As we age, we tend to place more importance on the heavily cognition-based messages received from the top downward (Siegel, 2009). The messages arriving from the bottom upward, like sensations in our bodies or sensory input, send a weaker signal (Siegel, 2009). In a repeating theme throughout this paper, we can see how it is that our pre-existing ideas about the nature of things can close us off from the truth of what is actually happening. Perhaps our friend is not annoyed at all, but feeling tired or disappointed about something. Still, because we are primed to respond defensively, we may easily say or do something that triggers a corresponding defensive reaction. We have allowed our prior learning and cognition to override our senses, in effect skewing our perception, shaping our emotions, and limiting our behavioral options (Siegel, 2009). Acting upon incomplete, outdated, or erroneous information means that we are not acting based on the actual

circumstance at hand (Langer, 2009). This has consequences on our relationships and our well-being (Siegel, 2009).

Becoming receptive and observant in micromoments also helps us become aware of the way we speak to ourselves. Our inner dialogue—the way we interpret and react to events and circumstances—largely drives our emotions and behaviors. So much of self-talk is automatic and habitual; it happens behind the scenes without our realizing how much our mental filter influences our experience of life (Beck, 1979). Aaron Beck (1979) pioneered cognitive therapy by describing the ATC (Activating event - Thought - Consequence) model. An activating event, which may be good or bad, occurs, and we automatically react with some sort of emotional, physiological, or behavioral response (consequence). The activating event seems to cause our reaction, but Beck (1979) illuminated a hidden middle step that mediates our response: thoughts. Our automatic thoughts, which show up as the “ticker tape” of self-talk (Reivich & Shatté, 2002), reveal our underlying beliefs, or schemas, and put our spin on the event. If our underlying belief, born out of life experience, is that “no one wants to hear me complain,” then when we are furloughed from our company, our response may be that we withdraw from friends and try to deal with our sadness and fear on our own. A different person who holds an underlying belief that “friends stick by you, no matter what,” is more likely to reach out for support. Having the ability to pause, notice, and explore our ticker tape thoughts helps us to discern the patterns under the surface (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). If our thoughts and our patterns are not helping us, it is important that we bring them to light so that we can understand their roots and gain more agency in how we respond. The micromoments mindset shines a spotlight on these ticker tape beliefs.

**Freeing ourselves from self-limiting beliefs and perceptions.**

Siegel (2009) proposes that cultivating the state of mindful awareness enables us to free ourselves from the prison we create through our dependence on and default to habits and prior learning. We can loosen the way that our top-down beliefs, built on memories, restrict us from authentically experiencing life (Siegel, 2009). As Langer (2009) put it, we are not condemned to trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's solutions. In the language of the wisdom traditions, this is non-judgment: the mind makes judgments, but we are not bound to them or imprisoned by them (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006).

A micromoments mindset helps us enter into what Thera (2005) refers to as the quality of the "bare awareness" of a fact without adding any evaluation or reaction to it. The Yoga Sutras (2.3-2.9) trace the source of human suffering to five *kleshas*, "colorings" on the lenses of our perception that distort our understanding. These colorings are: ignorance of our true nature as pure awareness; false identification with changeable, ego-based qualities (e.g., we might identify as honest or as a working professional); attachment to objects of desire, which leads to anxiety about losing what we have; aversion and avoidance of what we do not want, which leads to negativity and fear about the worst-case scenario; and fear of death, the ultimate form of clinging to something that will inevitably change (Yoga Sutras 2.3-2.9; Tigunait, 2017). If the truth of what the world is like and what we are like at our core is a shining light, these colorings alter the shape and shade of that light so that we see it as something other than what it is (Tigunait, 2017).

In Buddhist teachings, the source of suffering is similar: craving, hatred, and the illusion of self, which is in reality always in flux, arising in different ways, and interdependent with other people and our environment (Ekman et al., 2005). We obscure this changeable nature of ourselves and by extension all of reality, by "superimposing concepts of permanence, singularity,



and autonomy” (Ekman et al., 2005, p. 61) [note that “autonomy” here refers to complete independence from others, different from the “autonomy” of PWB and SDT, which imply a sense of acting from one’s own volition]. There is a saying, popularized by author Haruki Murakami (2009): “Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional” (p. vii). Understanding the role our minds play in creating unnecessary suffering can enable us to divorce our evaluation of the event from the event itself (Langer, 2009). A sensation exists on one level of consciousness; our evaluation of the sensation exists on another. When we bring attention to a micromoment, we may become aware of what Siegel (2009) describes as multiple streams of consciousness swirling along simultaneously, from the sensational, to the observational, to the conceptual, to the state of deep knowing that goes beyond words.

### **Openness and Acceptance**

Through a micromoments mindset, we may begin to take note of our thought habits as they occur—always in the moment—and take time to address unhelpful thoughts and systematically build more constructive thoughts. As we loosen the grip of top-down representations, we also strengthen our bottom-up messaging and allow real life to flow into that newly created mental space.

### **Mindfulness and mindlessness.**

Social psychologist Ellen Langer (2009a,b; 2014) has researched the role of perspectives that keep us open to change versus concretized, set in stone perspectives that keep us from growth and well-being. Langer (2014) promotes mindfulness as the remedy to the latter, defining it as a flexible cognitive state of mind that comes from drawing novel distinctions in our situations and contexts. By not only having an openness to novelty but also paying active attention to context and variability, a mindful state allows us to be present and discover new

wonders we didn't realize were right in front of us (Langer, 2014). Mindfulness, in both the traditional sense (i.e., open, non-judgmental awareness of the present moment) and the Langerian sense (i.e., seeking novelty and remembering our not-knowingness), is a key mechanism in the micromoments mindset.

Langer (2014) contrasts mindfulness with *mindlessness*, the tendency to accept beliefs without thought, especially when presented by an authority figure or in absolute terms. Mindlessness can bring about *premature cognitive commitment*, the propensity to encounter a situation and form a belief about it, then cling to that belief when we reencounter the same situation (Langer, 2014). However, we cannot know in advance how the information will be useful in the future, and in fact, it may be irrelevant the next time (Langer, 2014). By accepting beliefs at face value and thinking we already know how to handle a situation, we feel we don't need to pay attention, and thus fail to approach novel situations with an open and curious mind (Langer, 2009).

We also become mindless when we learn something new or seek the answer to a question, but then stop questioning or seeking (Langer, 2009). Mindlessness reflects one of our inborn tendencies for automaticity, the inclination to go on autopilot mode, particularly when we have learned a complex activity well or when encountering a familiar belief or task (Anderson, 1992). This adaptive learning process has the benefit of helping us build on cognitive or motor skills, is used for informational processing, and is typically associated with non-conscious systems that help us to function in the world (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Baumeister & Sommer, 1997). However, unquestioned automaticity in our thoughts and beliefs can result in our clinging to false or self-limiting cognitions. The tendency to be trapped by predetermined categories,

automatic behavior, and acting from a single perspective leads to mindlessness, often unbeknownst to the individual (Langer, 2014).

Micromoments serve as a setting for challenging the automatic mindlessness of how we operate by following Langer's (2014) advice to pay more attention in the moment while holding the underlying awareness that we don't know everything. It is simply impossible to know everything about every situation, and humans have difficulty in considering multiple points of view (Langer, 2009). For example, we forget the basic concept that people's behavior makes sense from their perspective; what seems stubborn to us may be steadfast from another's vantage point (Langer, 2009). We also overestimate how similar other people are to us, leading to a *false consensus effect* in which we presume that another rational person would do exactly what we would do in a given situation (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). When they do not, we judge them or ourselves (Langer, 2009). This locks us into evaluative thinking, assigning "good" and "bad" labels to things, people, and ourselves. Evaluative thinking leaves little room for change and is correlated with unhappiness (Langer, White & Welch, 2000; Yariv & Langer, 2000). In all these ways, we construct an idea of what is real without revisiting the source context and circumstances in which we made these determinations (Langer, 2009). Instead, through a micromoments mindset, we may perceive and act upon a broader and more accurate body of information, which is updated frequently and which we are not afraid to examine more curiously and objectively. At the same time, we hold in mind Langer's (2009) reminders that we can never know everything, that things look different from other perspectives, and that the world will continue to change.

**Facing change and uncertainty.**

Each time we enter a micromoment with awareness we find a new moment, different from all previous moments. In this way, the micromoments mindset leads gently toward the belief in the possibility of change. At a more fundamental level, it reminds us that *change simply is*. The micromoments mindset may be especially helpful for increasing our ability to welcome change and uncertainty. We can begin by becoming more aware of change through small, innocuous examples, like observing a growing child with full awareness more often or paying attention to the garden we pass on our commute each day. Over the course of many such micromoments, as well as from one micromoment to the next, we may see change happen and become more familiar with *impermanence*, a cornerstone of the Buddha's teachings (Dhammapada verse 277).

Western culture, in contrast, often compels us to reduce uncertainty, leading us to want to hold things still rather than accept the inevitable change that comes (Langer, 2009). Change brings uncertainty. Rather than attribute uncertainty to personal incompetence, allowing a universal attribution for our uncertainty can reduce the anxieties and inadequacies we may feel (Langer, 2009). It is said that the fear of death gives rise to all other afflictions (commentary on Yoga Sutra 2.9; Tigunait, 2017). Fear of death represents the most extreme form of a fear of change, which can be thought of as continual small deaths—and rebirths, from an optimistic standpoint. Fear as an emotion narrows our focus to a particular thought-action repertoire meant to help us survive an acute threat, usually by escaping or fighting (Steimer, 2002). When feeling fearful, our narrowed focus on disturbing thoughts or sensations, exacerbated by our worry about *potential* threats in the future, can result in a lack of awareness of what is truly happening

(Greeson & Brantley, 2009). We end up fighting the unpleasantness of our construal of the threat, rather than the threat itself (Greeson & Brantley, 2009).

Avoiding fear and unpleasantness exacerbates or prolongs it by binding us closer to it (Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda, & Lillis, 2006; Wegner, 1994). *Experiential avoidance* is the tendency to inhibit uncomfortable emotions like sadness, grief, and anxiety and to take action to avoid actual or mental scenarios that might trigger these feelings, even when doing so causes harm (Hayes et al., 2006). Experiential avoidance decreases our ability to explore and discover novel solutions and continue through challenging situations and restricts us in growth opportunities that require creativity and innovation (Kashdan, Breen, & Julian, 2010; Kaufman, 2020). And the faster and more automatically that we label something as negative and subsequently seek to avoid it, the lower our well-being (Robinson, Vargas, Tamir, & Solberg, 2004). When we become more accustomed to engaging directly with change and uncertainty through a micromoments mindset, we find that fear of the unknown or loss of the known do not need to be our default modes. This broadens our perspective and moves us from a place of deficit toward growth and exploration (Maslow, 1962).

**Acceptance facilitates agency and integration.**

By providing an entryway into mindfulness, the micromoments mindset may confer benefits of mindfulness identified by Greeson and Brantley (2009) such as increasing distress tolerance, interrupting habits of avoidance, and promoting adaptive self-regulation. A micromoments mindset brings our attention to a period of awareness wherein we witness our thoughts and emotions as passing phenomena, and choose to treat them as relevant information or allow them to pass by. This particular mental stance is a technique for *cognitive defusion*, the lessening of attachment to unhelpful thoughts, one beneficial psychological process presented in

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 2006). ACT promotes acceptance as an alternative to experiential avoidance, with acceptance defined as the “active and aware embrace” (Hayes et al., 2006, p. 7) of uncomfortable thoughts and sensations without attempting to change their form or frequency. Cognitive defusion combined with acceptance becomes a method of acting based on one’s values (Hayes et al., 2006). The ACT approach seeks to increase well-being through acceptance, contact with the present moment, values, defusion, seeing the self as a product of dynamic interactions within contexts, and committed action to intrinsic goals (Hayes et al., 2006). Mindfulness exercises are important interventions in ACT for developing these capacities (Hayes et al., 2006).

These processes support *psychological flexibility*, the capacity to recognize situational demands and respond flexibly, shift mindsets and behaviors as needed, maintain balance among life domains, remain open and aware, and ultimately take actions that are more consistent with deeply held values (Kashdan, 2010). Todd Kashdan’s (2010) review of psychological flexibility found it to be a vital component for helping us manage ourselves in the unpredictable world of novelty and change we live in. By providing the frequent opportunity for cultivating such processes in small doses, the micromoments mindset helps to build psychological flexibility, which enables us to navigate and thrive in uncertainty and flux.

When we consider agency and choice and how we navigate our lives, it is important to point out that choice does not have to involve making external changes. This may be one notion that wisdom traditions can contribute to Western psychology. In Eastern traditions, choice is not only about selecting actions based on how we want things to be, but also about the acceptance of what is available to us. A fundamental principle of acceptance is that all affect states, positive and negative, are functional and should not be avoided (Hayes et al., 2006; Williams et al.,

2007). Engaging, not avoiding, actively in our lives contributes to a sense of competence and autonomy and leads us towards assimilation and complexity, in other words, towards a higher integration of the self (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Ryan, 1995). Through this, we may become more intentional and agentic towards the experience of being human while cultivating peace of mind (Xu, Rodriguez, Zhang, & Liu, 2015).

In a micromoment, simply staying with an alert awareness or practicing accepting what is there rather than avoiding or seeking to alter it is, in fact, a choice. The intent is to stay with present awareness, preserving a particular kind of *relationship* with our experience rather than attempting to ‘do something’ with it (Holas & Jankowski, 2013). Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale (2002), cofounders of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, define acceptance as the active process of deliberately and non-judgmentally engaging with negative emotions. Acceptance via engagement leads to emotional understanding and is clinically and experimentally shown to produce lower negative affect by quickly diffusing negative states (summarized in Shallcross, Ford, Floerke, & Mauss, 2013).

During moments of complete overwhelm and for problems out of our influence, we can focus our energy on recognizing and accepting reality: the facts of our distress, acknowledgment of what is in and out of our control, and our emotional responses. Acceptance does not mean giving up or burying our heads in the sand, but instead being realistic and using our limited resources (e.g., our time, energy, self-regulation) wisely (Carver, Sheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). Whereas denial refuses to accept reality and clings to the way things used to be, acceptance involves restructuring our view of the situation in order to function within these new constraints (Carver et al., 2010). For many of us today, we may need to re-realize the changed shape of our world over and over so we may find our best way forward, moment by moment.

Micromoments provide us with opportunities to experiment with self-acceptance and self-compassion as we practice accepting what we feel, think, and desire. Carson and Langer (2006) define self-acceptance as the ability to hold positive regard toward oneself and one's present experience. Ryff and Keyes (1995) found that self-acceptance is a primary component of psychological well-being across the lifespan. Self-acceptance has been directly and indirectly correlated with emotional well-being, including lower anxiety, lower negative affect, higher levels of positive emotions like hope and interest, and general affective balance (cited in Xu et al., 2015). In a study of 514 non-clinical university undergraduates, for instance, Jimenez, Niles, and Park (2010) found that regulation of emotion, mood, and self mediates the relationship between dispositional mindfulness and depressive symptoms. Self-acceptance was measured as a marker of self-regulation (Jimenez et al., 2010). Results showed that mindfulness had a strong positive correlation with self-acceptance, which was, in turn, associated with higher levels of positive emotions and fewer depressive symptoms (Jimenez et al., 2010).

In a micromoment, we can turn the same mindful lens of curiosity and non-judgment, or kindness, toward ourselves. When we do, we realize both that *we* are not our changing thoughts and emotions, and also that our experience of those passing thoughts and emotions are the same conditions shared by all humans (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). We begin to increase our sense of compassion for others and ourselves (Bellin, 2015).

### **Agency and Connection**

The micromoments mindset promotes zooming in on small, discrete moments in order to get in touch with the vivid, dynamic, changeable features of life as it unfolds. Through the mechanisms of mindfulness, we perceive these features and gain a more objective stance toward inner and outer reality. These include perceiving thoughts and sensations as passing phenomena



rather than as our identity, an attitude of openness, curiosity, and acceptance, and ability to pause impulsive reactions to question or reevaluate their truthfulness and usefulness (e.g., Hayes et al., 2006; Langer, 2014). Freedom from habits and judgments that distort our understanding, combined with a more experimental stance toward ourselves and increased psychological flexibility, broadens the field of possibilities for how we shape our lives (Kashdan, 2010; Langer, 2014). We can more readily perceive subtle phenomena that we may ordinarily miss, discount, or avoid, including messages from our bodies (Caplan et al., 2013; Siegel, 2009). As we allow ourselves to encounter and integrate the range of human experiences, we move toward a more complex yet synthesized self (Lomas, 2016; Maslow, 1962; Siegel, 2020).

### **Meaningful choice.**

In both Western and Eastern worlds, being mindful about ourselves and the world we live in leads to meaningful choice. The opportunity for choice, no matter how small, stimulates our alertness for possibilities, increases our motivation, and builds a sense of autonomy (Langer, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A sense of autonomy comes from internal regulation of our states as well as overt behavior (Brown & Ryan, 2015; Frankl, 1984). We feel autonomous when we are not controlled by habit or impulse and so are free to move forward volitionally, and when we are inspired to grow and connect (Maslow, 1962; Pervin, 1991; Ryan, 1995).

Bellin (2015) highlights a fundamental principle of mindfulness practice, which is to notice when our attention has wandered away from the present moment and continually bring it back. Bellin (2015) portrays this small, repeated act as a choice that exists even in the midst of chaotic experience. It cultivates the same strength of human spirit that Viktor Frankl (1984) saw in a person's ability to choose their attitude toward their suffering, even when suffering is inevitable (Bellin, 2015). Through these types of choices, which are always available, we can

construct meaning in our lives, another critical component of well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Seligman, 2011).

The linkages we have made between mindfulness, acceptance, and choice illustrate why we believe that a micromoments mindset is a powerful tool for making wise choices and cultivating well-being. One way of viewing a micromoment is as a little window that we can open in the perpetual flow of life. Just as leaning out of a window to catch a breeze or to deeply inhale some fresh air can revive and refresh us, so, too, can leaning through the window of a micromoment provide a brief occasion of pause and freshness. Stephen Covey (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1994) beautifully observes: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom” (p. 59). By adopting a micromoments mindset, we create this space for ourselves and discover the opportunities for choice that will lead us toward growth, freedom, and self-actualization.

#### **Tuning in to reach out: connection and prosociality.**

While the micromoments mindset involves much self-oriented reflection and observation, it also has deep interpersonal implications. Research shows that mindfulness practices often result in increased empathy and other person-centered behaviors (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). A recent meta-analysis reviewed 31 mindfulness studies (N = 17,241), some of which examined mindfulness interventions and others that looked at mindfulness as a personality variable (Donald et al., 2019). The review found that both forms of mindfulness positively correlated with prosocial behavior, voluntary behavior meant to help another person (Donald et al., 2019). Interestingly, interventions aimed at cultivating prosocial emotions did not have a more significant effect on prosocial behavior, compared with

interventions that focused solely on developing mindful awareness. These results suggest that a mindful state alone produces helping behavior (Donald et al., 2019).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) refers to the practice of mindfulness as an “inward gesture” (p.147). The value of deliberately developing this inner wisdom through practice is that we can craft a space that nurtures the best in ourselves. Going inward helps us to see the world with fresh eyes and to reach outward with greater skill and intimacy (Ben-Shahar, 2007). Batchelor (2020) describes the fruits of this inner work as a deep truth and personal resource which supports integrity. We develop a sense of sovereignty where we know who we are and are not dependent on the opinions and judgments of others (Batchelor, 2020). When we are not looking for approval or definition from others, we leave space for both ourselves and others to show up exactly as they are. From the micromoments mindset, we learn that we do not have to act based on our fears or outdated beliefs, and this non-reactivity becomes a foundation for our relationships.

Micromoments provide a particularly rich opportunity for connection with others, beginning at the very micro level of emotional attunement. Positivity resonance, brief episodes of interpersonal connection that share positive affect, mutual care, and biological synchrony, is significantly associated with improved mental health, lower levels of depression and loneliness, and fewer illness symptoms (Fredrickson, 2013; Major, Le Nguyen, Lundberg, & Fredrickson, 2018). When we experience positivity resonance, we light up our whole system to be more open, creative, and connected (Fredrickson, 2013). We enhance our relationships and create a resource bank that we can draw upon during hard times (Fredrickson, 2009). Contrast this with the idea of love as a giant, monolithic state that either is or isn't there. We can find much greater

agency in recognizing a definition of love, or positivity resonance, that happens in brief but frequent spurts, rather than relegating it to a mystical, ineffable status.

Shared moments with other people, even fleeting micro-encounters, open the door for positivity resonance and high-quality connections (Fredrickson, 2013; Dutton, 2013). Research into high-quality connections by Jane Dutton (2013) shows that when we connect with others, even strangers and acquaintances, with positive regard and mutual engagement, we feel more energized. Choosing to prioritize and bring our full attention to our interactions, however brief, builds the high-quality connections that help us to feel more seen, trusted, and connected. These micromoments of connection add up to the feeling of love.

### **Micromoments in Practice: The PEACE Framework**

The concept of the micromoment is useful because it zooms in our focus so that we view our life through the perspective of a different time scale. The mindset primes us to see those moments and serves as an entryway into mindful engagement. *Every* moment of the day, however mundane, is in fact the contents of our life (Stern, 2004). One of the main aims of a micromoments mindset is purely to become aware of this fact.

The following PEACE framework provides a toolkit for how we can first notice and then engage more intentionally in micromoments to connect with ourselves, our community, and our environment. The components of the framework are Pause, Explore, Accept, Choose, and Enter the next moment (PEACE). The PEACE components build out a suite of actions that we can practice to support our awareness, and may be used in two different ways: a) as in-the-micromoment techniques that move through each element of the PEACE progression, and b) as individual capacities we can purposefully train, over time, in order to build the foundation for a micromoments mindset.

PEACE as in-the-micromoment techniques consists of practices and levels of awareness, like appraising changes in our physiology and consciously allowing emotions to exist or observing our thoughts or environments. Both of these forms of *doing* rest on a foundation of *being* open, curious, and non-judgmental toward what is occurring (i.e., mindful). For example, in a micromoment, we can pause to remember that we are in a micromoment; explore phenomena happening internally and externally; accept what we are experiencing without judgment; consciously choose a behavior in response to the previously gained data; and retain awareness of the passing of the moment. These elements of PEACE may unfold sequentially and/or spontaneously co-occur.

As a framework for cultivating a mindset, the individual elements of PEACE are specific attitudes and practices we can focus on at a more macro level to build the micromoments mindset. This will help us better attend to micromoments as they occur. For example, we may decide to practice building pauses into our life by utilizing techniques such as mindfulness meditation, movement breaks throughout the workday, counting to ten before responding in anger, and so on. Such pauses can help our life become more spacious with opportunities for deliberate response or increased comfort with slowing down.

We must be purposeful at first to cultivate a micromoments mindset, but in time it may become more natural to periodically shift into this mode of being. Below, we outline the elements of the PEACE framework and highlight ways we can operate within a micromoment to extract richness and possibility from each snippet of life as it unfolds—that is, with a micromoments mindset. These are summarized in a one-sheet guide in Appendix A. In Appendix B, we present a sample practice for each element that can help shift your mindset toward awareness of micromoments in the longer term. We also offer a journaling tool for

assessing your progress so you may gain another level of awareness and integrate these concepts and practices in a way that is meaningful and practical for your circumstances (Appendix C).

### **Pause**

Pausing serves as the opening salvo to a micromoment: it is the act of recognizing and then entering into a micromoment. It begins with cognitive awareness. Thinking the word “micromoment” or “now” is a linguistic tool that orients us towards tiny, parsable moments during which we become acutely aware of *what is*, and not *what if*, the latter of which is often a cause for anxiety and mind-wandering (Kelly, 2015). Pausing isn’t only to activate a cognitive break, but also an active check to notice the sensory experience of any situation we are in. If we are out in nature, we might pause and tune into the sensations of our fingers and our toes, feel the ground beneath us, or note the temperature of the air on our skin. It may include a physical pause to register the details of our movement or a pause in our activities. With a loved one, we might collect our scattered attention to *see* the person before us and consider: *How do I want this micromoment to be? How do I want to connect with this person?*

External circumstances are ever-changing and our minds are in constant motion, scanning for threats and gathering information so that we may plan for the future (Hanson, 2013). The mind is frequently—30-50% of the time—in a state of imagination or mind-wandering, detracting our attention from any sensory input or task at hand (Stawarczyk et al., 2012). Because the human mind is so often remembering, planning, or imagining, generating the ability to pause can help us gain more awareness and agency over our experience of what’s in front of us. It places the possibility of well-being back in our hands, rather than somewhere or *sometime* else. We regard pausing as a critical step in the transformation from impulsive reactivity or

automatic functioning to consciously expanding into the space of the micromoment, giving us immense power to shape our experience.

### **Explore**

Once we've paused and gathered our awareness, there are two primary levels of exploration to help attune to the micromoment: a) internal and external features of the present moment, which relate to the state of mindfulness, and b) foundational habits of thought, which form a mental filter that colors our perceptions about our experiences and which show themselves over the course of micromoments. In a micromoment, this looks like tuning into external and internal stimuli. Stimuli in our environment affect us, whether we know it or not. We receive messages from the world around us: the people we are with; the conditions of temperature, sound, light, motion, etc. Most of these messages are rapidly picked up and assessed without our conscious awareness because we are built to assess our own safety constantly (Porges, 2007). Observing our experience in the outer world is a process that shapes our inner world, one that helps us to notice patterns of reactions, emotions, values, and beliefs about ourselves and who we really are. Tuning into external as well as internal phenomena can help us make connections between how the environment affects us and vice versa. A student who feels that they don't like school may one day notice that every time they enter a classroom with fluorescent lights, they get a low-grade headache, which drains their energy and makes them feel ornery and distracted. Observing the lights and the headache can help make sense of their experience, remove the weight of self-judgment, and suggest possible remedies to the problem. A micromoments mindset orients us towards noticing more of those details (i.e., exploring our inner and outer worlds) so that we have more information about our lives.

When we explore the dimensions of our inner world, we can notice our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. We may investigate the signals the body is sending to us via the depth and pattern of breathing, tension or ease in various muscles, or the urge to freeze or move in a certain way. Bringing awareness to what is happening in our body, mind, and energy levels may help us understand what we truly care about and behave more purposefully in the moments that matter to us (Hays, 2012). Over the course of tuning in to ourselves through many micromoments, we may be able to see underlying patterns to our thoughts, emotions, impulses, and behaviors. As mentioned before, this is valuable information that introduces us to ourselves and is the first step to deeper self-compassion along with the power to make meaningful changes.

### **Accept**

Acceptance flows from and with exploration. It is the ability to perceive our experiences and reality as they are, rejecting none of the information that we gather as we explore. Together, this open awareness/exploration combined with non-judgment/acceptance comprise the mindful state, as previously described (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In this state, which allows for greater stillness and recognition between thought and action, impulse and reaction, we can operate with fewer cognitive filters and deeper clarity. In doing so, we may learn to distance ourselves from our reactions in a healthy way without adding judgment, fear, or anxiety to what we are experiencing. We find a protected space in which we nurture compassion and non-judgment toward ourselves and toward others with whom we may be interacting. In the knowledge that this too shall pass, we can loosen the grip of control and evaluation for just a (micro)moment to see what happens (Langer, 2014). Through acceptance we make ourselves more open and available to possibility.



Going inward to watch the depth of our experiences and developing a micromoments mindset are valuable tools for honing our capacity for acceptance. For example, we pause and recognize that we are in a micromoment and open our awareness to explore the presence of different stimuli. Then we register and gently accept that *we have* emotional, physiological, and cognitive reactions, and desires or aversions *toward* what we find. We accept that not everything is in our control and so we do not need to feel as though we ought to control everything. We also gain a more realistic yet positive perception of ourselves, which sets us up for successful action. Killam and Kim (2014) assert that we must allow an accurate view of our current abilities and shortcomings to inform our actions in order to find success and fulfillment. Their research proposes that positive, realistic self-perception is a requisite starting place from which we can embark on courses of action toward flourishing and growth (Killam & Kim, 2014).

Engaging in this cyclical self-informing process before consciously choosing a behavior and entering into the next moment grants space and permission to be in our full experience. It helps us gain an extra dose of mindfulness for how we choose to flow through our lives.

### **Choose**

Given the conditions of a particular micromoment, what would you like to do? In circumstances of extreme uncertainty like the Covid-19 pandemic (and in life in general), many of our stressors are beyond our control. As we become more adept at remaining open to a wide range of states and experiences, including those that we may reflexively flinch away from, we can focus on taking purposeful action where available, even in small ways (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Choice may come in various forms: through manipulation of our physiology, how we direct our thoughts and actions, and how we reach out to connect with other people or the environment around us. Tal Ben-Shahar (2014) signifies the importance of choosing to choose,

suggesting that through this mindset, we may open our capacity to see new possibilities and find the paths that could shift our lives.

One level of choice exists in our bodies. Somatic intelligence gives us the ability to learn what our body does and make choices that influence our short and long term health and well-being (Kaparo, 2012). We may register our physiology, a resource that is almost always available to us, or shift our mental appraisal of what we are feeling. An embodied pause—calling upon the breath, senses, and physiology—first helps us to enter fully into the moment (Hanson, 2013). Yoga and somatic psychology teach that by noticing our physiological state, we gain information about our psychological state (Caplan et al., 2013). For example, if we take a moment to pause and notice our body during moments of high stress, we may observe that our breath is short, our palms sweaty, and our mind frenetic. We may view these symptoms of the stress response as something threatening, or we can reappraise them (regard them differently). By understanding that our body is reacting to something important to us and giving us fuel for the task at hand, we can be better equipped to choose how we respond (Hanson, 2013; Jamieson, Mendes, & Nock, 2013). We might let go of physical tension in our jaw, shoulders, or the grip of our stomach. We can take five diaphragmatic breaths to calm our minds and recover from the sympathetic nervous system arousal (i.e., stress response; Zaccaro et al., 2018). We could further shift our nervous system through movement by taking a walk.

Cognitive practices like ATC, mentioned above, give us more tools for taking action, for example to cultivate or amplify positive emotions. When we actively remember that we have the power to direct our attention on purpose, to notice when it has wandered away from us and bring it back to the micromoment in front of us, we can shift our experience of how we receive and respond to the world. As an anchor question, we might ask ourselves, “Is what I’m thinking

right now helping or harming me?” (Beck, 1979). We might opt to stay as an observer to our thoughts, or we might choose to cognitively reframe our thinking.

We can select actions that will connect us with someone or something outside of ourselves. Sometimes being drawn out of our own minds or being reminded of our kinship and interconnectedness with the wider world is what we really need (Keltner, 2009). Learning to be happy must include learning to accept, and even be amazed by, the limits of our knowing. Awe can help us do this. Awe is an emotion characterized by the perception of vastness and the necessity of integrating new information into our worldview. Imagine what astronauts felt when viewing Earth from space for the first time (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019). Awe isn't just for divine experiences; it can also come from everyday experiences that transcend our understanding. We can feel awe when we gain new insight from great literature, art, an epic meal, or a startling revelation about ourselves in therapy (Keltner, 2009). At the center of awe is a recognition of the limitations of the self (Keltner, 2009). It can lead to compassion, optimism, and a sense of connectedness and is associated with increased prosocial behavior, greater humility, and improved ability to process new information (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019). We can open ourselves up to awe by spending time in nature; learning about or witnessing amazing acts of human creativity, ingenuity, or humanity; or gazing upon a fiery sunset.

Truly, the possibilities for choice are vast and by bringing conscious awareness to all of the PEACE elements of a micromoment, we discover we have more options than we realized.

### **Enter the Next Moment**

The nature of a micromoment is that it is just that—momentary; it only lasts a moment, then is over. Entering into the next moment is a transition that involves letting go of the previous moment and bringing some intention forward. This PEACE element highlights the quality of

impermanence and dynamic change that we are always living with, and in doing so, creates the consciousness of action that fosters agency and connection. It helps us understand that it is a time to seize—and come back to—the people and purposes that are most meaningful to our lives, and to live the lives we want to lead.

Each moment leaves its mark on future moments and by honoring the fleeting nature of reality, we find permission to let go of the previous moment and enter the next fully, with awareness, choice, and grace. For example, when listening to a piece of music, we might feel flashes of emotion: micromoments of complexity, such as joy blended with bittersweet loss, that come with memories and associations. Thoughts and judgments toward these feelings and toward others whom we are remembering will arise. Or we may bask in the contentment that comes with the simplicity of a beautiful final note. Consciousness of impermanence reminds us we may appreciate the realness of the experience and then allow it to have *been*. We can let it go and keep moving forward with the openness to receive what comes next. We can appreciate the memories and emotions the song evokes in the present without wishing we were back in that time again. As we have shown, our tendency can be to collect and carry forward what we have experienced via the patterns and beliefs we have picked up (Langer, 2014). Therefore, entering into the next moment is not a passive process, but rather one in which we actively let go, choose to take what we want from that experience, and move forward with openness. This is the process of integration and growth.

Even though it seems impossible that we would ever be fully conscious of every moment (nor would we want to only think in this way!), a micromoments mindset calls us back to our awareness more often. Rather than responding to the impermanence of our lives by clinging fast

to what is here right now, whether we desire it or not, we can simply give extra consideration to the moment in front of us.

### **Future Directions**

As a scientific field, positive psychology relies on measurement to validate constructs and indicate plausible interventions. Having presented the theory of the micromoments mindset here, future research will help to identify whether it is in fact an effective entryway into mindfulness and related benefits, and answer: Is this a mindset that people can and will adopt, and does it have the outcomes we hope for? How do individual differences in mindfulness and brain physiology, among other traits, affect the micromoments mindset? How does the applicability of the micromoment mindsets differ across contexts?

We also hope to develop a Micromoments Mindset (MM) Scale in order to gauge if and how it impacts well-being (see Appendix D for a preliminary draft of the MM Scale). The MM Scale would help to answer: Does the PEACE framework work? By what specific mechanisms does it work? How can the micromoments mindset affect outcomes in life? What impacts the micromoments mindset? How can we teach more PEACE, and can that impact our relationships with ourselves and with each other? We would develop a methodology to determine whether PEACE and the micromoments mindset do indeed predict more well-being, psychological flexibility, acceptance, or mindfulness by implementing interventions and testing how it correlates to validated scales such as Ryff's Psychological Well-Being scales (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995), psychological flexibility as measured by the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire II (AAQ-II; Bond et al., 2011), or the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

In this paper, we have focused on the foundational concept of perceiving internal and external reality more accurately in a micromoment in order to foster agency and connection, both with ourselves and with others. We can conceive of many more specific ways in which the micromoments mindset can contribute to individual well-being, for example, by harnessing the power of positive emotions to build resilience and navigate challenging circumstances. We've gathered our first thoughts on this in Appendix E. The PEACE framework may be able to be used in therapy, positive psychology practices, family and relationship counseling, well-being in the workplace, social justice reform, and more.

The question of how much choice and agency we have in a given moment is contingent on much more than simply our own state of awareness. As we continue to develop our skills in this arena, we will find that external circumstances constrain us, as well. Community psychologist Isaac Prilleltensky (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006) focuses on well-being as a web of interacting forces at the personal, organizational, and community levels. Prilleltensky (2016) elucidates the relationship between two spheres of action and change which interact to impact our level of well-being: *fit*, in which the environment (context) around us is responsive to our needs and matches well with who we are, and *fitness*, which refers to the skills we need and can develop to improve our fit with our environment. *Fairness*, meaning justice, is also necessary to ensure a fit between person and environment; there is no wellness without fairness (Prilleltensky, 2016). Ultimately, we must work on ourselves but must also zoom out and take a more macroscopic view of what systems and structures around us need to be changed to ensure wellness for ourselves and for all.

To build further practical applications of the micromoments mindset, we would aim to design PEACE interventions to cultivate a micromoments mindset and leverage well-being

within micromoments across a variety of scenarios: for relationships with others and families; in sports and the arts; and in communities such as schools, workplaces, or other groups. One area to incorporate the micromoments mindset is in the workplace. Appendix F provides examples of ways that the micromoments mindset could be leveraged to support mattering and meaning in corporate and organizational settings.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have introduced the idea of the micromoments mindset. By combining scientific findings from the field of positive psychology with wisdom from timeless spiritual traditions like yoga and Buddhism, we have created a theory of micromoments and a framework for cultivating a micromoments mindset. A micromoments mindset is both the entryway into mindfulness, and the experience of being more mindful within a brief moment of awareness (a micromoment). It provides a way to orient our perspectives so that we may zoom in on the minute openings in front of us and pause our habitual manner of being, explore reality with awareness, accept limitations and see opportunities, choose our course of action, and enter into the next moment. This series of actions are put together in a PEACE framework that suggests a practical way of interacting with micromoments.

Mindfulness is paying attention to what is happening on purpose and can be cultivated by paying extra attention to things we normally wouldn't otherwise notice (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). This includes reexamining our beliefs about ourselves so that from this mindful stance, we may loosen our mental grip on unhelpful, outdated, or erroneous beliefs that we have gathered (Chanowitz & Langer, 1981; Langer, 2009). As these solidified perceptions, judgments, and decisions soften, are questioned, and perhaps fall away, we are able to perceive reality as it is more clearly. This clarity of seeing, openness to change and new information, and release of

blind adherence to prior beliefs, including fears, builds a healthy sense of perspective and broadens the field of possibility (Langer, 2009). Through repeated, conscious engagement with micromoments, we discover the freedom, motivation, and possibilities that exist for us to make wise choices that will shape our future. If we can begin to view life in a series of micromoments in which we may be present with ourselves, we can begin to affect the root of what connects us with ourselves, with what we do, and with each other. When we realize that we are not only journeying forward from the summation of all the moments in our past and moving toward our future, but we are also actually *in our life right now*, then we feel called to be more involved with life as it is happening. As leading Buddhist teacher Tara Brach (2017) asks, “What is it that allows us to open our hearts to every moment of our life? It’s the remembrance that it’s passing and it’s precious.”



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## Appendix A: PEACE in Micromoments At a Glance

PEACE is a tool for orienting toward and then engaging more fully in micromoments:

- Pause to recognize that you are in a micromoment
- Explore internal and external phenomena with openness and curiosity
- Accept the reality of these conditions and your experience, just as they are
- Choose how you want to respond
- Enter into the next moment with agency and awareness, allowing this moment to end

You can explore PEACE as a stand-alone mindful awareness practice or move through the steps whenever you find yourself amidst uncertainty, have a sense of “not being there,” or when you want to register the significance of the moment you are in.

### **P—Pause to recognize that you are in a micromoment**

Pausing means interrupting the automatic flow of life to consciously recognize, in any given moment, that you are *in* a micromoment. This recognition is an opening whereby you can participate in your life right as it is happening. A simple mental whisper of “micromoment” can remind you of your ability to gather your attention and bring your awareness to the now.

### **E—Explore internal and external phenomena with openness and curiosity**

Tune into the conditions and phenomena of the micromoment. Open your senses and notice what is happening in the external world, with the people around you, and their impact on you. Explore what is happening in your inner world: what thoughts, emotions, sensations, energy level, urges, and so on, are present *right now*? How are the inner and outer worlds interacting? You may also start to notice foundational patterns and habits of thought that frequently appear in your self-talk. Recognize if this moment holds any special meaning for you.

### **A—Accept the reality of your experience, just as it is**

Acceptance is our ability to perceive our experiences and reality as they are, without adding the weight of judgment or seeking to fix, avoid, or control anything. By taking in mindfully what is available to you in this moment and watching your own reactions with compassion, you hold impulsive reactions at bay and allow space for a deeper truth and new possibilities to appear.

Notice the shape of reality right now, its limitations and options, and the emotional landscape within you. Rather than conceptualizing how you want to be or wish for things to change, or dwelling on the past or future, allow a sense of curiosity and openness to remind you that events and conditions simply *are* and do not carry good/bad evaluations of their own, only what we supply.

**C—Choose how you want to respond**

Given the conditions of the micromoment, how would you like to respond? Having taken a moment to simply explore with openness and curiosity, you are better able to respond in a way that feels authentic, helpful, and intentional. Many levels of choice exist in a micromoment: in your body (physiology and emotions); your thoughts and how you appraise and respond to them; actions you wish to take in the external world; or reaching out to connect with other people or the world around you. And choice does not have to mean making changes; choosing to stay with a difficult or an enriching micromoment and experience it fully is a choice.

**E—Enter into the next moment**

Entering the next moment is a transition that involves letting go of the previous moment and the thoughts, feelings, and so on, that arose within it, and bringing some intention forward. It highlights the qualities of impermanence and dynamic change that we are ever immersed in, which can serve to increase our consciousness of what we truly care about. It is not a passive process: you actively let go, choose what to carry forward from that experience, and move forward with openness. This is the process of integration and growth.

## **Appendix B: Practices for PEACE**

The components of the PEACE framework can suggest different areas of skill or attitude that we can focus on in order to increase our capacity and comfort: pause, explore, accept, choose, enter the next moment. As we build our ability to pause in the hustle and bustle of our day, or to mindfully explore, or to accept uncomfortable situations, and so on, we strengthen the foundational elements of the micromoments mindset. It becomes easier to notice and engage within micromoments. Here we provide just one example of a practice for each category of PEACE to give you an idea of what this could look like. Each of these time tested practices, which come from yoga, mindfulness, or positive psychology interventions, contribute benefits of their own.

### **Building a Pause into Daily Life: Complete Breaths**

This practice is a variation of a yogic technique, dirga pranayama, the three-part or complete breath. Take three minutes to tune into your breathing, first noticing the breath as it is, and then gently shaping it to enhance its nourishing and cleansing qualities, inhaling and exhaling more completely. While your body is reenergized by deeper, more optimal air exchange and the conscious release of muscle tension, your mind can rest its awareness on a single focus. Then resume your day with a greater sense of calm awareness. This practice can be used to interrupt a relentless work day, reset from moments of high stress, or to call your attention back to fully take in a significant moment.

Sit or stand comfortably with your back straight, shoulders back and relaxed, and back of the neck long. Close your eyes or allow your gaze to soften and drop toward an unmoving point in front of you. If you'd like to, bring one hand to rest over your stomach and one hand over

your heart. Begin by bringing your awareness to the steadiness of the ground beneath your feet and the support beneath you, if you are seated. Let yourself be supported. Then become aware of your breathing, noticing its flow just as it is and seeing where in the body you most easily connect to your breath. Release any unnecessary tension in the shoulders, ribcage, and abdomen, and you may feel your breath expand through the lower ribs and abdomen as you inhale, then soften and collect inward as you exhale.

Inhale and draw the breath downward into the space of your abdomen, behind the lower hand; simply relax to exhale. Your belly will move more than your shoulders. Take a few breaths like this. On the next inhalation, draw it toward the abdomen, then continue inhaling to fill the space around the heart, behind the upper hand, all the way up to the space beneath the collar bones. As you exhale, exhale first from the heart, then from the belly, now drawing the abdominal muscles in more firmly to press out the complete exhalation. Relax the abdominal muscles to begin the next inhalation.

Continue to breathe like this for a few more repetitions: inhale and fill the abdomen, then the chest... exhale and empty from the chest, then the belly, gently squeezing at the end. You might imagine your lungs filling from the bottom up, emptying from the top down. The movement is like a wave, up and down. Each breath cycle fills you completely with fresh air, energy, and nourishment, and empties you of all that is used and unneeded.

End by allowing the breath to return to its own effortless flow, whatever that is. Be aware of your whole body and the space it occupies, and then continue with your day.

### Re-encountering the Familiar: Five Senses Exploration

You can think of your capacity for being awake, aware, and noticing the details of life as a skill that you can hone or a muscle that you can strengthen. Give yourself a workout by choosing a mundane, everyday activity and moving through it with full awareness: brushing your teeth, eating an apple, or walking down your street.

- *Use all five senses* to connect to the experience in as many ways as possible. Are there particular colors that dominate the scene? What is the light like and does it change? What do you hear as you move through this experience? If you change your behavior, do the sound effects shift? What is the temperature or texture against your skin? Notice the pressures against your feet, body, or muscles working. What changes if you move more quickly or more slowly? Are there smells or tastes to this activity? Even on a walk, what do you taste? What do you feel inside that is a reaction to what's happening outside your body?
  - Take a sense away and see what happens. If you close your eyes, what other senses and details come forward?
- *Search for novelty*: Challenge yourself to notice five new things you hadn't detected before. You can do this with each sense, one by one. Pretend you've never, ever done this before; imagine you are an alien eating this fruit or walking in gravity for the first time.
- *Play with distance*: Stretch your sense of hearing as far away as you can and collect all of the far away sounds. Bring them slightly closer and hear the sounds that are coming to you from out of sight, but a layer closer. Hear all of the sounds closer yet. Hear the

sounds in the space within the room or close proximity around you. Hear the sounds coming from your own body.

- *Play with time:* Connecting to a sound, how does it change over time? Mindfully tasting, how do the flavors transform from beginning, middle, and end? What emotions accompany this mindful activity, from beginning, middle, and end?
- *Notice transitions:* Even small moments include transitions; how many can you detect? Transitions themselves are moments. How much richness and detail is contained in the shift from now... to now?
- *Notice others:* Are other people nearby? Were they recently here? What is it like to go through this activity with someone else? How does their presence impact your personal experience; are they distracting? embarrassing? enhancing? sharing the experience? Are they an integral part of this everyday experience?

As you do this, notice any resistance that arises. You may feel frustrated, annoyed, or anxious to be through this small process and on to the other side. Can you also fully experience these kinds of internal feelings? Maybe you notice something that feels really good. Can you sink even deeper into that sensation—that pleasing color, that delicious scent, that perfect stretch?

How does going through this process very mindfully and sensorially one time impact how you go through it the next time?

### **Accepting Difficult Emotions: RAIN Meditation**

Buddhist teacher Tara Brach (2016) uses a reflection framework based on the acronym RAIN to help guide students through a process of being with difficult situations and emotions and cultivating self-compassion. Begin by finding a comfortable seat or reclined posture in a



safe and quiet space. Connect to your breathing and then bring to mind a current situation that feels difficult: one that conjures feelings of shame, fear, anger, helplessness, hopelessness or stuckness.

*R: Recognize what is happening.* Note your internal reactions as you think about this situation: what sensations, emotions, thoughts are there?

*A: Allow life to be just as it is.* See if you can be with all of these sensations, emotions, and thoughts without pushing them away or adding judgments. They exist.

*I: Investigate with gentle attention.* Look a little more closely, and be curious about what is coming up. Kindly ponder what seems to be asking for your attention, what needs acceptance, what feels hardest, what you believe about your experience. Allow yourself to hear any answers that emerge. Looking at the place of greatest difficulty, ask it *What do you need?* as you would ask a friend or a child who is struggling through pain.

*N: Nurture.* What can you provide to this most difficult, vulnerable part? Offer a kind message to yourself, like *I'm here with you.*

In this 30 minute audio track (with pdf guide), Tara takes practitioners through a gentle guided meditation: <https://www.tarabrach.com/reflection-rain-difficulty/>

### **Choosing to Connect: Active Constructive Responding**

Active constructive responding is a positive psychology technique for communication that invests in our relationships and moves us closer to someone we care about. A landmark study titled “Will you be there for me when things go right?” (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006) looked at what happens when romantic couples share positive news with each other. A couple’s typical response style was related to their current satisfaction and commitment, and

their eventual break-up or success two months later. Importantly, it turns out that being there for someone in times of distress is not the same as supporting them in times of happiness, and the latter is more strongly related to relationship health! We would expect to see similar results in other types of close relationships, like among family members or close friends or coworkers.

There are four types of response to positive event sharing

Ex: A friend says, “I just found out I was promoted at work!”

<b>Conversation Killer</b> (passive constructive)	<b>Conversation Hijacker</b> (passive destructive)	<b>Joy Thief</b> (active destructive)	<b>Joy Magnifier</b> (active constructive)
-Brief, understated acknowledgement -Distracted -Disengaged	-Ignoring -Changing the topic -One-upping	-Focus on the negatives: drawbacks, costs, risks, and worries -Demeans the event	-Enthusiastic -Engaged: asks questions, helps sharer ‘stay’ in the positive emotion, imagines good results
“That’s nice.” <i>Goes back to looking at their phone.</i>	“Well, listen to what happened to <i>me</i> today.”	“That will be so demanding! How are you going to balance that with home life? You’re going to be exhausted...”	“That’s amazing! You’ve worked so hard for the last few years. When did you find out? What was that like? When do you start?”

Only one of these types of responses (active constructive aka joy magnifier) was found to improve the relationship, while the other three caused harm to the relationship. Actively supportive responses to positive event-sharing magnify the joy and:

- Highlight and play up the sharer’s strengths
- Confirm the importance of the event, no matter how small; show that you understand its value to the sharer; and demonstrate your care for the sharer’s feelings

- Over time, lead to increased feelings of closeness, commitment, and trust with each other, and greater satisfaction in the relationship.

Think of an important relationship in your life. Consider how you typically respond when that person shares good news with you. What prevents you from responding in an active constructive style *all* of the time? Have an uninterrupted chat with this person this week. During the conversation, ask yourself, “Am I listening and responding in the way I would like to?”

### **Enter the Next Moment: Ephemeral Nature Art**

Impermanence is a quality that is honored in the spiritual art of many Eastern traditions, such as the intricately detailed sand mandalas made by Tibetan monks that are dispersed immediately upon completion or paintings depicting the four seasons in Zen temples. Nature provides an endless palette of changing and transforming conditions in which we can find inspiration, beauty, wonder, and interest. It is a good teacher.

Choose a location anywhere outside; it may be in an urban setting. First take a mindful (tech-free) walk, feeling the motion of your body, and opening your senses to take in your surroundings. Then retrace your steps, collecting objects that drew your attention (e.g., pebbles, leaves, petals, sticks, etc.). Find a flat surface and arrange your materials in an artful way. Take your time with this, observing the relationship between the shapes, textures, and colors of the materials and their connection with the surface beneath. Allow yourself to move slowly and comfortably as you do this, and do not be afraid to add, subtract, and change elements. One shape you may use is the mandala, a symmetrical, round design that radiates out from center.



When you've finished, observe your work... and then leave it. Or, depending on the materials, simply watch it and see how it changes as the wind blows or shadows play over its surface. Notice whether there is any urge within you to 'keep' your creation, by taking a photo, carrying it home, or otherwise protecting it. If you've built your work in a public space, other people may alter or damage it. How do you feel about this? Can you be with the process of creation, release your claim to it, and allow a natural process of destruction or transformation to occur? You may repeat this project in the same or different locations, at different times.

### Appendix C: Progress Journal

Building a micromoments mindset takes time and effort. Use this journal to thoughtfully set goals for yourself, targeting specific skills and behaviors through concrete and incremental actions (such as those presented in Appendix B). Commit to each practice or exercise for at least a full week, if not longer, and do not feel that you must do everything at once. Then reflect on your experience. Notice what has gone well, what felt natural, what felt like a stretch, and whether your actions actually contributed toward the dimension of a micromoments mindset that you were intending to grow. Were there any unexpected outcomes?

#### Identifying a Target Area for Growth

One area I'd like to develop is: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Examples: building conscious pauses into my day; being more attuned to nature; being okay with what I'm feeling; making choices that will benefit me in the long term, not just right now; letting go and moving on from a valued situation that has ended)*

On a scale of 1 (not at all skilled or comfortable in this area) to 7 (very skillful/comfortable), I am currently a: \_\_\_\_\_

My hope for myself is *(describe your ideal self or outcome in as great detail with as many specific adjectives and examples as possible)*: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This is important to me because: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Realistically, at the end of this time, I would like to rate myself as (1-7): \_\_\_\_\_

#### My Action Plan

To grow in this area, I will *(choose one or two small practices or actions)*: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*(Examples: take a ten minute walk outside on my lunch break without my phone; practice active constructive responding with a family member or coworker; do a ten-minute guided relaxation)*

When: \_\_\_\_\_

*(Examples: at a particular time; when in a particular scenario; with a particular person)*

How often: \_\_\_\_\_

For what length of time: \_\_\_\_\_

How? *(Describe exactly how you can make this happen. What or who can support you to achieve it?):* \_\_\_\_\_

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I will remember to do this because *(How can you reliably remind yourself of your intention?):*

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Something that might get in the way of fulfilling my intention is: \_\_\_\_\_

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If *(an indicator that the obstacle above may happen):* \_\_\_\_\_

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Then I will *(envision a way that you can overcome or avoid that obstacle):* \_\_\_\_\_

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*(Example: **If** I think I am too busy for a 20-minute relaxation today, **then** I will tell myself that I regularly waste 20 minutes on social media, and that these 20 minutes will leave me feeling stronger and more energized.)*

As you carry out your plan, consider keeping notes or a daily journal of how things are going. Pay attention to: at what moments or in what conditions you are able to fulfill your intention; what gets in the way; the state of your emotions, energy level, physical health, worries, and so on, before, during, and after the activity; if your relationships with close others have changed; any insights, big or small, that occur to you.

Remember that any effort is a step along the path, and no effort is wasted. There is no penalization for missing a day or discovering that what you thought would work did not. Indeed, self-compassionate and conscious discovery that leads to connection with yourself and/or with others is the ultimate goal!

**Reflection**

Describe your general experience (what you did, how often, how it seemed to go): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Describe any outcomes of this practice: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In my target area of growth, on a scale of 1 (not at all skilled or comfortable in this area) to 7 (very skillful/comfortable), I am currently a: \_\_\_\_\_

Take a micromoment and move through the PEACE framework with your awareness of this number, which represents where you see yourself in this particular area: *Pause... Explore* inner and outer sensations and states... *Accept* what you are feeling and what the current reality seems to be... *Choose* what you would like to do with this suite of information... *Enter the next moment*, realizing that this is simply where you are, but you haven't always been here and you won't always be here.

If this is close to your target number, describe what has changed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If this is not close to your target number, reflect on what the barrier(s) was: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Something I learned is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

An unexpected outcome is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If I focus on this area again, or practice this particular skill or behavior again I will (*things to change, things to keep the same*): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

No matter what your particular experience has been, you have prioritized getting to know yourself better and worked toward a fuller and more integrated way of being and connecting with yourself and/or others. We applaud you!

### Appendix D: Micromoments Mindset (MM) Scale

Using a 6-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 6 = strongly disagree), respondents are invited to show how much they agree with the following statements about whether their persistent efforts may cultivate a micromoments mindset through PEACE. The Micromoments Mindset (MM) Scale is a 25-item (1-6 Likert scale) questionnaire designed to measure an individual's capacity to tap into different behaviors and attitudes that contribute to a micromoments mindset. The measurements from the MM scale are intended to tap into unique qualities related to mindfulness, autonomy, relationships, and various areas of well-being.

**Instructions:** Using the 1–6 scale below, please indicate how frequently you experience each item by indicating that response for each statement. Please reflect upon your actual day-to-day experience, rather than your ideal experience.

- 6 - Very frequently
- 5 - Frequently
- 4 - A little frequently
- 3 - A little infrequently
- 2 - Infrequently
- 1 - Very infrequently

- \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to pause and notice my thoughts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I notice when I am in flow.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am in tune with my emotions and thoughts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can tune in to my body's physiological responses.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to experience emotions without judgment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can distance myself from my thoughts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel I have agency over how I speak, act, and react.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can choose to be in the moment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to enjoy time with family and friends when I'm with them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel I have a choice in how I respond.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to be "totally in it."
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have some amount of calm, and I can do practices to affect it.



- \_\_\_\_\_ My anxiety is something about me that I can change.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can focus my attention if I want to, when I want to.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can do things to shift my thoughts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When I feel I'm on edge, I am able to notice it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to observe my own reactions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have moments of feeling grounded.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to notice my own discomfort.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I experience awe sometimes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Taking deep breaths helps to ground me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel centered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When my mind is mindlessly planning for the future, I can orient it to the present.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I'm aware of the tastes, textures, and smells of the food that I eat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I savor moments with loved ones.

Scoring: Add the responses, varying from 1 to 6, for all 25 items. The possible range of scores is from 25 (lowest possible) to 150 (highest possible). A high score represents a person with higher frequencies of the MM disposition.

In addition to the above, the following qualitative question may be added for research purposes:

What prevents you from being able to tune in to the micromoment? Please list one to three barriers. (If there are no barriers, please write N/A) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix E: Micromoments for Resilience through Positive Emotion**

Resilience is our ability to overcome obstacles, navigate struggle, and bounce back (and even ‘bounce forward’) from failures (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). According to Reivich and Shatté (2002), resilience is comprised of seven basic abilities, including emotional regulation, impulse control, optimism, explanatory style (how we explain good and bad events that happen to us; Peterson et al., 1982), self-efficacy (our belief in our own abilities to meet our goals; Bandura, 1992), and empathy and reaching out to others. Resilient people know that failures are not the end—that there are lessons in the failure that can lead to meaning and growth (Reivich & Shatté, 2002), even if resilience in the moment looks like nothing more than slogging through and getting by. Resilience also builds the foundation for our ability to enhance the good things in life by taking positive risks, expanding our comfort zone, and reaching out to others (Reivich & Shatté, 2002).

One way that micromoments can contribute to resilience is by harnessing positive emotions in the midst of negative situations. Primary positive emotions include joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love (Fredrickson, 2009). Researcher Barbara Fredrickson’s (2001) *Broaden-and-Build Theory* describes positive emotions as an evolutionary adaptation that has allowed humanity to flourish. Positive emotions benefit us in the short-term, as uplifting emotions indicate that it is safe for us to explore or to sit quietly without threat of danger, which temporarily broadens our perceptions and increases receptivity to novelty (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions also benefit us in the long-term, as we capitalize on moments of openness to little-by-little build enduring resources for survival, such as social bonds, new skills, or make new discoveries (Fredrickson, 2001). “Broadening our perceptions” is literally true: our peripheral vision and attentional field expand in positive states, and our

capacities for decision making, creativity, and mental flexibility increase (Tugade, Devlin, & Fredrickson, 2014). On the other hand, fear, sadness, and negative emotions function in a different capacity, evolutionarily speaking, by linking particular emotions to specific actions meant to keep us alive in a moment of acute danger (e.g., fear urges us to escape, anger provokes us to attack); negative emotions narrow our options in order to funnel resources toward the best chance of survival (Tugade et al., 2014). When safe and appropriate, deliberately cultivating a positive state can help us counteract this narrowing of thought and action, keep our minds and options open, and help us build bridges with others rather than lashing out in defense or shutting them out.

In a micromoment, we can make a choice: taking a deep breath to reach for tranquility when we are feeling anxious; employing ‘dark humor’ by cracking jokes in a dire situation, like a cancer diagnosis; seeking out a friendly face when we feel sad; or sharing a smile with a stranger. We can spare a minute in our walk from here to there to take interest in the beauty of a blossoming spring tree or the playfulness of someone’s sartorial choices. We can allow ourselves to dwell in a moment of pride when we realize how much we have been through or what we have accomplished.

Positive emotions can be both deliberately cultivated and automatically elicited, often through sensory “bottom-up” activation (e.g., the sound of ocean waves may be relaxing, or the warmth of sunshine conjures a sense of inner lightness) (Tugade et al., 2014). A micromoments mindset may prime us to nonconsciously respond to such stimuli in a positive way, with no effort required. Paying attention in our daily lives to what kinds of things automatically spark positive states can help us know, consciously or instinctively, what we might do or where we might turn in order to find relief during painful moments.

Positive emotions have also been found to “undo” the effects of negative states (i.e., the sympathetic arousal that readies the body for fight or flight, including increased heart rate and blood pressure, alertness, increased blood glucose, and slowed digestion; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Feeling amused, joyful, or content, for example, shortly after a state of negative emotional arousal helps the body to disengage from the sympathetic state and return to the more mid-range physiologic levels present before the stressor (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Through both the broaden-and-build and the undoing mechanisms, positive emotions can help us find “the momentary pause necessary to restore lost resources after experiencing stress” (Tugade et al., 2014, p. 29).

Lab studies have found that people who score higher on measures of resilience tend to use positive emotions as a coping mechanism in the face of stress (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004, cited in Tugade et al., 2014). This applies even in the face of major tragedies, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; resilient people reported a higher frequency of positive emotions (e.g., gratitude, love) in the aftermath, which in turn led to the building of beneficial psychological resources like optimism, forming an upward cycle of recovery (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003, cited in Tugade et al., 2014). These people felt grief and fear just as the less-resilient people did, but found ways to periodically experience positive emotions *alongside* the difficult, thereby alleviating the prolonged negative state. Having a repertoire of different emotions to call upon seemed to contribute to their ability to find these moments of relief and increased resiliency (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Humor, in particular, which involves taking pleasure in things that are incongruent with your expectations, is correlated with positive coping, in part because it helps us to see things in a new light and give us a different perspective, often while bonding with others (Tugade et al., 2014). Humor does not require a

lengthy set up for a corny joke, but often occurs spontaneously in a moment. We can make ourselves more open to spotting opportunities for making good natured fun and we can choose to try it out. In this way, we can purposefully build positivity into our lives, not only to navigate or recover from difficult times, but also to cultivate enduring resources that buffer against stressors' impact in the first place, and to actively establish the good things in life.

### **Appendix F: Meaning & Mattering at Work through a Micromoment Mindset**

Why is the micromoments mindset important in the corporate context and how does it apply? In the workplace, employees are already reporting more burnout, stress, and a sense of “not [being] good enough” (Bradford, 2018). A Gallup poll reported 66% of American workers feel disengaged (Harter, 2018). Many question the contribution they are making toward the betterment of the world and feel that they are not doing enough (Streitfeld, 2017). Bowles (2017) uncovered increasing anxiety, hopelessness, and a lack of fulfillment in Silicon Valley workers, for example, due to global trends like climate change (Bradford, 2018). At the core of this is a sense of unfairness in the world, leading to a sense of helplessness, disempowerment of voice, loneliness, and disconnection with community (Bowles, 2017). Furthermore, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization named COVID-19 a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020), exacerbating the anxiety, stress, and isolation from unprecedented uncertainty. At one company, the CEO emphasized repeated messages to avoid burnout: “This is an especially important time to take care of yourself, both physically and emotionally...seek support when needed” (Anonymous, personal communications, March, 2020). Leaders around the world are articulating similar messages.

Positive psychology is the scientific study of what constitutes well-being for individuals and organizations, and healthy communities are all about making you feel like you matter. Mattering, to feel valued and add value, is at the heart of individual, organizational, and communal motivation (Prilleltensky, 2016). Mattering leads to purpose and meaning and, when incorporated with pleasure, leads to well-being (Prilleltensky, 2016). At scale, one study showed that medical costs decrease by approximately \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs and that absenteeism costs decrease by approximately \$2.73 for every dollar spent (Baicker &

Song, 2010). At British Telecom, call center sales representatives made 13% more calls and closed sales during weeks where they reported being happy compared to weeks when they were unhappy (Bellet, De Neve, & Ward, 2019). Not only the individual benefits, but the ripple effect can bring more positivity, well-being, and thriving across the company as a whole.

As a frame of reference, leaders can look to the PEACE framework and a micromoments mindset to increase autonomy and well-being across individuals and the organization, particularly in the context of an unprecedented pandemic with unscripted rules. The micromoments mindset, as defined above, is the orientation towards the momentary state and dispositional prioritization towards engaging our awareness fully to the present for increasing autonomy and well-being. As an entryway into mindfulness, it offers a mechanism for bolstering attention towards the current task, and autonomy to make more intentional choices about how we want to prioritize our workday, our relationships, and tasks, from the mundane to the impactful. Furthermore, as we have shown above, a micromoments mindset makes a difference in how we respond and react. Thus it is no longer about just managing employees' time; developing the skills to manage one's attention and energy actually rewires the brain and boosts performance, productivity, and well-being for individuals and companies alike (Hölzel et al., 2011; McLaughlin et al., n.d.). Below is a framework to train employees to gain access to the tools to feel more present, autonomous, and well.

#### **Weekly Programming: Individualized Components of PEACE**

- **Pause Mondays:** Integrating a pause throughout your day trains the ability to cultivate a micromoments mindset on a regular basis. This may look like putting a physical block on your calendar for a thirty minute pause. It may be an active pause at the beginning of a task, an email response, or a project to actively notice before choosing what to focus on. You may set up your screensaver or set up a timer with the word "pause" as a reminder. It may mean starting meetings with a collective moment of

quiet or guided breathing. You could use a Pomodoro timer throughout the day to remind you to simply register your emotions, thoughts, or physical body.

- **Explore Tuesdays:** Take this day to explore your internal and external stimuli; your strengths; your reactions; your thoughts; your emotions. What is it that brings joy or purpose to your work? What are areas of comfort and discomfort? How can you feel a sense of alignment, as well as accomplishment, with what you do? What are your interactions like with colleagues? What comes up for you, and what are some barriers that distract you from being more fully engaged, connected, and flourishing? What does it feel like to be you, doing what you do?
- **Accept Wednesdays:** Consider this as a “yes” day, without judgment. Suppose you have a task you don’t like to do or a colleague that presses your buttons, and your instinct is to procrastinate or to resist. Accept the fact that you have to do this task, or to collaborate with this coworker. Accept that you have feelings, reactions, stories, and thoughts. Accept that there is a lot going on around you. When you say yes to the reality of what is in front of you, without putting additional judgment or pressure, how does that shift your perspective?
- **Choose Thursdays:** We’ve all experienced the 4 PM slump. Circadian rhythms and the natural rhythm from a high-functioning work day lead to the routine many know well. Fatigue makes us snack on unhealthy foods (Ratey and Manning, 2014). We get up, go to the bathroom, scour the kitchen for an often unnecessary snack, and check social media. Rather than follow these whims, choose. Make choice a choice. Choose to take a break. Choose to connect with someone. Choose to focus on something or do something that energizes you and lights you up, like taking a walk, stepping outside, or spending time on an exciting project. Choose to keep the Zoom fatigue in check. Make it your priority to know that your day is a series of micromoments, and thereby a series of choices that you can make to stay grounded, connected, and well.
- **Enter into Fridays:** Being intentional about how you want to enter into the next micromoment, again and again, may bring about individual moments of awareness that ripple out to affect others. Let go of a distracted and uncertain mind, and cultivate a mode of openness, curiosity, non-judgment, and integration. Register the effects of how this affects you, your sense of agency, and how you connect with others as you move through the day.

### Quick Tips Throughout the Week to Cultivate a Micromoments Mindset

- Use a Pomodoro timer to remind yourself to check-in to the present moment
- At the beginning of a meeting, offer an intentional way to connect by asking a meaningful question or sharing one good thing
- Take a walk, take 10 breaths, or savor a coffee or meal
- Reach out to someone to connect and ask meaningful questions
- Look away from your screen to view something beautiful or listen to some music
- Remind yourself that this is a micromoment, and go through the steps of PEACE



### **Conclusion**

The modern world and demands of the job condition us to be “anything but mindful” (Smalley & Winston, 2010). For companies, it is imperative to facilitate ways to improve cognition, performance, and energy to boost productivity and the bottom line, but moreover, autonomy, connection, and well-being for their employees. As the findings show, it is no longer just about managing our time; it is about gaining the tools to manage attention and energy. If employees are focused, alert, and well, their brains and nervous systems will be rewired for more productivity, engagement, and job satisfaction. Well-being is about balancing pleasure with purpose (Prilleltensky 2016); by orienting individuals towards a micromoments mindset and utilizing the PEACE framework as a community, the autonomy and connection produced can generate a virtuous cycle where people own their vision, see themselves in the new vision of the organization, and want to engage others to do the same (Prilleltensky 2020).