The contemplative organization

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Abstract As part of a qualitative research project to map the use of contemplative practices in secular settings, in-depth interviews were conducted with 79 people who have founded or lead organizations where contemplative practices play a key role. In a number of interviews, contemplative practices were introduced into the workplace not only as ancillary stress-reduction techniques for individuals, but as a core part of the organization’s structure. As interviewees described how their organizations function, a number of characteristics pointed toward “the contemplative organization” as an emerging model of an organization that infuses a contemplative approach into the workplace. Such an organization strives to incorporate contemplative practices into all aspects of work; embody and explore organizational mission and values; move between cycles of action and reflection; balance product with process; and have an organizational structure that reflects a contemplative philosophy. Interviewees also reported the impact of contemplative practice in the workplace, including improved communication and a greater sense of team and community.

Background

Contemplative practices such as meditation and centering prayer have their roots in religious traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and indigenous spirituality. But over the past decade, a new way of bringing the contemplative practices associated with these traditions into society has begun to take form (Tworkov, 2001). In settings as seemingly diverse as corporate boardrooms and prison cells, people with both faith-based and secular backgrounds are finding innovative ways to introduce these age-old practices to a new generation, in the context of working toward a more sustainable world.

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society has been exploring contemplative awareness in secular settings for the past six years. In the fall of 2001, the Center initiated a qualitative research study to document the impact of contemplative practices in these settings and to “map” the use of these practices across a wide range of professional sectors, including business, education, healthcare, law, media, and social change organizations. The primary research questions were:

- Which secular institutions and programs are incorporating contemplative practices into their work?
- What is each organization’s history of integration of practice into their work?
- What is the impact of contemplative practice on each sector?
The first year of the research consisted of in-depth interviews with 79 people who are innovating ways of bringing contemplative practices into their work. Interviewees included executive directors, presidents, and founders of organizations and programs in both the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Organizational development consultants and leadership trainers who worked in corporate and non-profit settings were also interviewed.

Through textual analysis of these interviews, several themes have emerged. This paper focuses on one of these: the idea of the “contemplative organization”, an organization that attempts to infuse a contemplative approach into the workplace.

Literature review
There has been an increasing interest in workplace spirituality and a growing body of literature addressing the issue over the past decade (Briskin, 1999; Burack, 1999; Conlin, 1999; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Neal et al., 1999). However, as Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) note, this proliferation of ideas about workplace spirituality has been accompanied by “no discernible set of rules” for research on the topic.

Mitroff and Denton (1999), in their extensive empirical study on the prevalence of spirituality in the workplace, identified five distinct models as to how spirituality is practiced in the workplace:

1. the religion-based organization;
2. the evolutionary organization;
3. the recovering organization;
4. the socially-responsible organization; and
5. the values-based organization.

Another organizational model, though not framed as relating to spirituality per se, is Peter Senge’s (1990) concept of the learning organization, an organization where “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire . . . where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3). One of the “disciplines” of a learning organization is the ability to work with mental models – deeply ingrained assumptions that influence how we think the world works. Senge notes the importance of looking inward to identify these mental models and increase awareness of how they impact our decisions and behaviors.

Relative to the larger body of literature and studies on spirituality in the workplace, the sub-category of contemplative practice in the workplace has been less frequently explored (Schaefer and Darling, 1997). In general, most research on contemplative practices has focused on the physiological and psychological impact of those practices upon individuals rather than groups and organizations (Benson, 1976; Speca et al., 2000; for comprehensive literature reviews of clinical studies, see Andresen, 2000; Murphy and
These studies have also defined contemplative practices primarily as sitting meditation, often rooted in Asian religious traditions, and transcendental meditation (TM).

Compared to previous research on contemplative practice, the current study surveyed a broad selection of contemplative practices. In fact, one of the study goals was to generate a contemporary definition of contemplative practice. Using an inductive rather than deductive approach, we started by defining broad markers of contemplative awareness and then inquired to find out what practices and techniques people use to cultivate such qualities. Some of the linguistic markers include “contemplative”, “mindful”, “reflective”, “quietness”, and “stillness”.

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994), one of the founders of the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction program now offered in a number of healthcare centers, wrote that “the transformative effects on society of large numbers of people purposefully cultivating a more mindful and contemplative life are potentially as powerful, if not more so, than such technological advances in power and connectivity and the capabilities they give rise to” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 1). He posits that “inner technologies” such as meditation can lead to “a deep familiarity and intimacy with activity and reactivity of one’s own mind, and some competency in navigating through our mind moments and emotions with equanimity, clarity, and commitment” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 2).

The current study was intended to contribute to a greater understanding of contemplative practices, in general, and their application in group and organizational settings, in particular; and to explore the possibility that, as Kabat-Zinn (1994, p. 3) suggests, we are in the midst of “a profound social/cultural revolution” driven by a “strong inward longing in our society for well-being, meaning, and connectedness”.

**Methodology**

A qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this study because the goal was to investigate a cultural phenomenon that involves complexity and change over a long period of time. We operated from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in which the aim is to discover the theories implicit in the data rather than testing an hypothesis. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 92) stressed the importance of continuous comparative analysis to generate formal theory rather than succumbing to “the simple ordering of a mass of data under a logically worked-out set of categories”.

We were also interested in choosing a method that would lend itself to a contemplative approach as we were doing the research. The use of grounded theory supported a reflective inquiry process that was open to surprise rather than inclined to fit information into pre-conceived categories.
From October 2001 through May 2002, interviews were conducted with 78 people across the USA and one person in Canada. Individuals who were known to the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society for their innovative work in this area were the first to be interviewed. A snowball method of sampling was then used; each participant was asked for names of others who were making similar efforts to integrate a contemplative approach into their work.

The majority of the interviews were conducted on the telephone; several were done in person. The semi-structured interview consisted of 47 open-ended questions and lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours. The questions were designed to elicit information about the organization, the individual's personal experience with contemplative practice, and how contemplative awareness informed and impacted the work of their organization. Interviewees were given a copy of the questions to review prior to the interview, if requested (see Appendix 1 for selected interview questions).

Near the beginning of the interview, interviewees were read an operational definition of contemplative practice and asked how their definition was similar or different. The definition, several paragraphs long, began, “A practice designed to quiet the mind in the midst of the stress and distraction of everyday life in order to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight”.

The interview questions also offered participants a chance to reflect on their own journey with contemplative practice. Interviewers invited research participants to have a moment of silence in the middle of the interview (most of them happily accepted the opportunity).

The interviews were transcribed and then the transcripts were checked for accuracy by research staff from the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, who listened to the audiotapes and corrected misspellings or unclear words.

In order to identify important patterns and themes that arose from the data, a coding system utilizing grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was developed. The codebook went through several iterations as subsequent transcripts were coded. Initially, simple actions, conditions, and consequences were coded (such as demographic information, contemplative practices named, descriptive words used by the interviewee). Eventually, we began to code for analytic ideas that emerged, for example, ORGDIFF (“organized differently”) or WORKDIFF (“working differently”). Code “families” evolved as the numerous codes began to cluster thematically (see Appendix 2).

The transcripts were entered into Atlas.ti (Muhr, 1997), computer software which facilitates the analysis of large bodies of textual data, and then coded, using sentences and paragraphs as units of analysis. “Open coding” is an essential ingredient in grounded theory; that is, we used the initial coding structure and then added codes that did not “fit” this structure. Through the concurrent process of coding and comparative analysis, recurring themes and patterns were identified, as well as aberrations of those patterns.
After each interview, research participants were sent a questionnaire to gather supplemental demographic information. A total of 51 people (65 percent) returned the form. Additionally, research participants were asked to send brochures and other material about their organization, which supplemented the data from the interviews.

Findings

Demographics

Of the 69 organizations represented by the interviewees (three interviewees were from the same organization), one (Monsanto) was for-profit, 61 were non-profit, and two had for-profit companies “nested” inside of non-profit foundations (Greyston Bakery and Rainforest Products). Eight of the 79 interviewees were not affiliated with one particular organization but rather worked as consultants, primarily to corporations and for-profit businesses.

Interviewees worked in 17 different professional sectors (see Figure 1), and many worked in multiple sectors. The sector with the highest number of interviewees (11) was leadership (defined as working with organizational leaders in various sectors on leadership training and skills), followed by networking organizations (defined as an organization whose primary mission is to support a network of grassroots activist communities that address multiple social justice issues).

More than half of the 79 interviewees were male (58 percent), while 42 percent were female. The majority of the interviewees (77 percent) worked either in the northeast USA (44 percent) or on the west coast (33 percent).

Of the 51 people who returned the supplemental demographic questionnaire, 22 percent were between the ages of 20-40, 60 percent between the ages of 40-60, and 18 percent were 60 years or older. The majority of the interviewees

![Figure 1. Primary sector (n = 79)](image-url)
were European American (81 percent); 10 percent identified themselves as African American; 5 percent as Asian American; 2 percent as Native American; and 2 percent as “other”. A total of 31 percent of the interviewees named Buddhism as their primary religion; 27 percent called themselves “spiritual but not religious”; 13 percent identified as Protestant; 11 percent as Jewish; and 7 percent as Catholic. The remaining interviewees named their primary religion as Pagan, Quaker, or “other”.

Themes
Several major themes arose from the interviews:

• While the benefits of contemplative practices, specifically meditation for individuals have been well documented (see Murphy and Donovan, 1996), this study revealed a multitude of ways that practice has transformed the way people work and function as a group. A total of 48 percent of the interviewees reported that they had either observed or directly experienced that groups that shared some form of contemplative practice worked toward their goals more effectively and communicated more clearly.

• Research participants faced the challenge of offering contemplative practices in a secular setting by finding language and teaching approaches that made practices accessible to a wide audience. For example, an educator used the phrase “strategies for learning readiness” rather than “meditation”. Others avoided the term “spirituality” and preferred instead to focus on the pragmatic effects of contemplative practices like stress-reduction and increased insight. Interviewees emphasized the importance of adjusting their teaching style to “meet people where they are at” and sometimes offered practices that began with dialogue rather than silence.

• Research participants generally felt that they were part of a broader movement of bringing contemplative practices and spirituality into secular settings, but identified a need for this movement to be better defined and more inclusive, specifically in the areas of race and class.

In analyzing the data, the use of contemplative practices fell into two broad categories (the categories were not mutually exclusive and they frequently overlapped). In the first grouping, these practices were part of “services offered” to clients or constituents of an organization; for example, mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques taught to patients to increase ability to cope with stress, or meditation taught to prison inmates for spiritual and psychological benefit. In the second grouping, these practices were described as an intrinsic part of the work setting itself and were shared among staff/employees. This latter category gave rise to a fourth theme: The contemplative organization, which is the focus of this paper.
The contemplative organization

In the interviews, 38 people spoke of bringing contemplative practices into their workplaces and sharing them with co-workers, with the intent of infusing their work settings with a more reflective tone and transforming the way the organization worked. Through analysis of these interviews, the idea of the contemplative organization began to emerge – an organization that uses contemplative awareness as an organizing principle for the workplace. It is different from a faith-based organization in that it does not explicitly acknowledge or insist that its employees identify with a specific religious tradition. The phrase “secular spirituality” has also been used to describe this phenomenon (Kaplan, 1996), but in a contemplative organization, the term “spirituality” may or may not be used.

Several interviewees explained that they sometimes find the language of spirituality to be constraining. Robert Gass, who works as an organizational consultant to both for-profit and non-profit organizations, said:

I make a great effort to use very everyday, commonsense language, which is why I continually have people at the end of these say, “You know, for ten or twenty years, I’ve been totally turned off to do anything spiritual”. And all of a sudden, I get: “this helps our life so much”. I’m deeply committed to a spiritual path, but I’m not wedded to the words of spirituality. It’s the thing itself … it’s not the words.

Robert explained that the language he uses is “probably more in the world of simply being human beings rather than the world of spirituality”.

Of the organizations profiled in this study, the Greyston Foundation probably best exemplifies a contemplative organization. Greyston, which provides comprehensive social services in Yonkers, NY, was founded in 1982 as an experiment in exploring the connections between Buddhist teachings and social change. Over the years, Greyston has developed into an integrated system of nonprofit and for-profit organizations that offer a wide array of programs and services to more than 1,200 men, women and children annually. One of its enterprises, the Greyston Bakery, is a profitable $4.5 million dollar food production business that provides training to formerly “hard-to-employ” individuals. Its customers include Ben & Jerry’s and a number of upscale New York City restaurants.

Charles Lief, president of Greyston, summarized the key questions and elements that are part of the culture of a contemplative organization:

How does an organization that professes to be built upon core spiritual values or values of engaged social action actually manifest? How is it any different from an organization that doesn’t make that kind of overt statement? … We spend time and we spend money on encouraging personal spiritual exploration. We are an organization that finds it acceptable within the work day for people to explore their own contemplative practice … We do encourage people to figure out ways of integrating their own spiritual practice into the work that they are doing, and are fairly flexible about helping people do that kind of work.
Characteristics of the contemplative organization

Through analysis of these interviews, we identified a constellation of five elements that together form a type of workplace that we call a contemplative organization. The contemplative organization strives to:

- incorporate contemplative practices into all aspects of work;
- embody and explore organizational values;
- move between cycles of action and reflection;
- balance process with product;
- have an organizational structure that reflects a contemplative philosophy.

Incorporates contemplative practices into all aspects of work

Staff retreats are becoming a more common feature of many workplaces. But in the contemplative organization, there are explicit efforts on a regular basis to structure the work day and office environment to offer opportunities for staff to find place of reflection and silence, both alone and together. Some of these include beginning meetings with silence; use of reflective dialogue in meetings; permission to take “contemplative breaks” during the day; creation of a special space in the office for prayer, meditation, and/or quiet; use of contemplative group techniques such as a council circle to conduct strategic planning for the organization. (Council circle is a practice derived from Native American traditions in which an object, often called a “talking stone”, is passed from one person to another. As each person in a circle holds the object, they are encouraged to “speak from the heart” while others listen, without cross-talk.)

These efforts are not segregated from the core of the organization’s work, but rather they are seen as integral to it. In the research interview with Peter Senge, founder of the Society of Organizational Learning, he observed that, “One of the problems we have in business ... is that people want to programatize things ... That itself is a source of a lot of limitation because programs come and go”. Rather, he suggested, organizations could benefit by an ongoing exploration of the question, “What does it mean to create a climate in which people are working where reflection, deep conversation, and becoming more and more open is basically how we work together?”. A number of interviewees gave examples about how they address this question in their workplace.

At the Monsanto Corporation, after an initial retreat led by Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, several measures were implemented to support contemplative practices as part of the work environment. Special meditation rooms were set up in the conference center and science building of the company. The company library stocked meditation books and tapes, and the employee Web site included a learning module on mindfulness practice.

At the Greyston Foundation, Charles Lief explained, “Institutional norms are things like working with the Native American practice of council as a way of
conducting meetings, and having periods of meditation or silence before and after we start events”.

Corinne McLaughlin is the founder of the Center for Visionary Leadership, which helps people in businesses, non-profits, and government to develop the inner resources to be effective leaders. She said the key work of the organization “comes out of our own contemplative practice. We’ll have a meditation to ask for guidance on crucial decisions for our organization. We include some type of meditative inner quiet reflection in just about everything that we do”.

Sue Turley, chaplain at the Institute for Health and Healing at California Pacific Medical Center where contemplative practices are used to help awaken medical staff to a deeper meaning of health, said:

We’re trying to build a community based on what we learn from the practice and let the practices inform our growth ... We often start our meetings with a reading, a meditation, or a ritual that any one of us from the secretaries to the directors will do. We draw upon all different sources. Then we have various events throughout the year that bring us together as a community that are about doing or learning about these practices. It’s very essential to both feed us as practitioners and to keep us a part of the river.

There is often an expectation that all staff take part in these practices, but there is also room for individuals to decide what participation means for them. Charles Lief said that the practices used at Greyston are mandatory, in the sense that everyone is expected to observe silence during the moments of quiet at a meeting’s start – but they are also voluntary in that nobody is told how they should be using those moments. For example, if managers feel that a council circle process is the most productive form for a meeting to deal with “thorny issues”, people are expected to be present for it but they can choose to not speak. Lief said, “They are engaged in the sense that we are paying them to sit in the room, but how they interact is still a very personal [choice]”.

*Embody and explores organizational values*

In the contemplative organization, values and mission statements are not forgotten documents but are engaged through a continuing process of reflection. Group contemplative practices such as council circle are often used in strategic planning processes to help an organization discover or re-connect with its values. Claudia Horwitz, an organizational consultant and founder of the nonprofit organization stone circles, said, “I think it’s contemplative practice when groups of folks who are working for a common cause come together and explicitly consider how to manifest those values on a day to day basis. That can happen through contemplative practice and, in a sense, it’s a form of contemplative practice”.

Horwitz described the use of “reflective practice” with the North Carolina Public Allies, an organization that runs a national apprenticeship program for social activists:
I started by doing very short 15-30 minute reflection sessions at the beginning of their weekly staff meetings, and then developing a set of core values for the organization, for how they would connect and work together as a staff.

From that, we developed a series of practices and rituals that brought those values to life. In particular, we restructured the way they ran their staff meetings as well as the way they looked at their year-long calendar. They have very specific things that happen at very specific times that they weren’t preparing for. They weren’t able to move through those in the way they wanted to in terms of keeping their relationships intact with each other and all of them staying at their best.

... They took over the reflection work at staff meetings ... They used these core values pretty continuously on lots of things. If they had hit a road block in their work, they would go back to that ... I think it really changed the way they operated with each other. It created this level of humanity and positive interaction that wasn’t there before at quite the same level, and it actually enabled them to do more and better work with fewer staff people.

This ongoing engagement with mission and values, supported by contemplative practices, can impel organizations to re-conceptualize their orientation to their mission. Peter Forbes, of the Trust for Public Land (TPL), described how the use of contemplative practice supported shifting TPL from “a technical organization to an organization that creates social change”. He said:

It wasn’t until I entered a contemplative practice that I saw the connection between personal change and social change. And that connection enabled me to see that our work is really not just about buying acres but about trying to build connection between land and people. So I saw through the contemplative practice a different interpretation of why we do our work, and that interpretation has been embraced by lots of people.

*Moves between cycles of action and reflection*

Contemplative organizations place equal emphasis on doing “outer” and “inner” work, of moving back and forth between cycles of action and reflection. Wayne Muller, of the Institute for Engaged Spirituality and Bread for the Journey, spoke of helping people to live in the “membrane” between the inner and the outer world in order to effect transformation. Many other people described a similar concept and spoke of the necessity of viewing action and reflection as going “hand in hand”.

Marianne Williamson, founder of Global Renaissance Alliance (GRA), a citizen-based, international network of spiritual activists, described how the organization has moved through rhythms of action and reflection. In its initial phase, GRA focused on encouraging people to take direct political action and to become educated on social issues. Williamson said, “Over time, [we] softened quite a bit into looking more at how we first build the peace within a circle or within the organization or within our philosophy ... We moved away from the direct political action, not completely ... but we created a circle template that was much more about relationship and education ... There was less heart in the beginning and we started growing the heart piece ... Now we’re coming full circle back to embracing that action philosophy”. Williamson terms their current work “sacred activism”.
Balances product with process

Contemplative organizations tend to place a high value on the process with which they work, with a level of non-attachment to outcome that might be considered quite unusual in other organizations. Interviewees repeatedly told us that the way in which they worked toward their goals was as important as the achievement of the goal.

George Mumford, a consultant who provides personal training and organizational development for athletes, coaches, and administrations, said, “I work with teams that play sports and it’s a much better experience when you win than it is when you lose. But sometimes, there’s less tension and there’s less judgment involved when you don’t focus on winning or losing. You just focus on giving a certain kind of effort, and develop a certain kind of mindfulness and clarity”.

Margaret Wheatley, founder of the Berkana Institute, said that one of the great learnings for her and the Berkana staff has been to live “in that constant state of finding out that things do happen, resources become available, and none of it’s according to our plans or projections”. When Berkana started, she had the sense that they had three years to “turn the world” around and get into as many communities as they could. She said:

I don’t know if we’re going to save the world anymore, but we’ve certainly been tempered to slow down and just work with the people who appear, who present themselves . . . Whether it does all come to pass in time enough to correct this destructive path we’re on as a planet, as a nation, I don’t know any longer. I’m not hopeful, but I’ve given up needing to be hopeful in order to do the work.

Michael Lerner said of his organization:

We see Commonweal not as an institution, but as an instrument of human service, as a platform for some useful work. The difference is that in an institution, everybody is busy trying to pump it up. An instrument . . . is something you use until it is worn out and then you recycle it or put it down and throw it away. So Commonweal is just here for as long as it is useful.

This emphasis on balancing process with product also takes the form of stressing the importance of relationships rather than tasks. Arrington Chambliss of No Ordinary Time (a program that serves urban youth) observed that American culture is “busy, crazy, and seductive”. She said that people need “ways and practices to connect with themselves and with one another and with their community” in order to counteract the forces that “keep us feeling disconnected from our humanity and our goodness”. In her organization, she feels the challenge is:

. . . keeping it real, keeping integrity in our work and not letting the task run the organization but letting the relationships run the organization. I think the contemplative practice clears that away . . . Where I get crazy sometimes is feeling like I have 15 things to do . . . I won’t spend the time to connect with someone that I’m working with, and that’s critical to our success. It [contemplative approach] is changing the way we do business.
Organizational structure reflects contemplative philosophy

As principles of contemplative awareness begin to be integrated into the workplace, the structure of the organization may also reflect these values. Flexibility, spontaneity, and less hierarchy begin to emerge as facets of the infrastructure of a contemplative organization.

Frank Ostaseski told the story of the beginning of the Zen Hospice Project, during the height of the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco in the late 1980s:

> Whenever one of these patients were sick, we would sometimes bring them back to the Zen Center and then we would just take care of them. I would go down to the dining room and find monks and practitioners and say, “Come upstairs. I’m going to teach you how to take care of someone who is dying”. It was a self-organizing group. I think this was the kind of quality of flexibility and receptivity which characterized the early days, and that I think to a large extent still exists.

Even as the Zen Hospice Project became more formalized and incorporated as a nonprofit organization, it still maintained that spontaneous quality. When the organization helped establish a hospice unit at the county hospital, it was given a basement in the back of the hospital. Ostaseski described the atmosphere at the hospital as “very conservative, very traditional”. Hospice workers brought in supplies to make a garden outside the unit and invited nurses, doctors, and attendants to help out. Ostaseski said, “When people have their hands in the dirt, the hierarchy tends to break down, and this was how we started to form a kind of interdisciplinary team”. In the ensuing years, he noted that, “We’ve seen contemplative practice influence this large institutional setting [the hospital] and help it to become a place of compassion”.

The organizational structure of a contemplative organization is sometimes visualized in a circular form rather than as a hierarchy or flowchart. One model mentioned several times by interviewees was that of a mandala, a Sanskrit word meaning “circle” or “whole”. When Buddhist teacher Bernie Glassman founded the Greyston Foundation, he envisioned it as a “circle of life” that would integrate a full range of services to address community and individual challenges. At the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society, based at the University of Massachusetts, Worcester, the organizational mandala “allows us to remember the fluid interconnectedness of the various aspects of our work and to visualize the seamless wholeness of our individual and collective endeavors” (see Figure 2).

This way of thinking about an organization can also alter ideas of ownership. David Cooperrider, a professor at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve, told us how the practice of appreciative inquiry (AI) transformed the way Nutrimental Foods, a Brazilian food service company, worked and organized itself:

> They shut down their factory and brought a thousand people together for four days to reinvent and strategically envision the future together, from every level. [They] also brought in customers. And as they did that, they deepened their awareness of their relationship to...
society, and the next step was to redefine their whole contribution to society. They changed their whole product line away from foods that created obesity and contributed to obesity in Brazil to foods that are based on what they found was their core capability, which was the ability to create health.

As they did that, they then changed their structures from a hierarchy to self-organizing teams, created a consciousness of all the information for everybody so everybody has access to all information and financial data.

Discussion
The 79 in-depth research interviews from the project’s first phase have revealed that a contemplative, reflective culture is emerging in a number of workplaces. “The contemplative organization” is a conceptual model of an organization that infuses a contemplative approach into the workplace. Such an organization strives to incorporate contemplative practices into all aspects of work; embody...
and explore organizational mission and values; move between cycles of action and reflection; balance product with process; and have an organizational structure that reflects a contemplative philosophy. Interviewees reported that the integration of contemplative practices in the workplace often resulted in improved communication and a greater sense of team and community. These research findings were similar to those of Schaefer and Darling (1997), who also identified organizational contemplative practices as a means to greater commitment to organizational mission and values, enhanced relationships, and sense of community.

Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) propose that one of the challenges in researching workplace spirituality is to establish spirituality and religion as separate constructs. They encourage the identification of various dimensions of spirituality in order to operationalize the concept and contribute to the validity of research in the area.

This study offers the possibility of contemplation/reflection as a unique dimension of the spiritual experience and one that is positioned in such a way that it can transcend the “spiritual” label. Although there is a growing acceptance for the integration of spirituality in secular settings, there remain a large number of people, especially in the field of business, who find the language of spirit as inaccessible as the language of religion. Additionally, many who are consciously bringing their spirituality into their work have difficulty finding others with whom to discuss this process (Neal et al., 1999). A contemplative approach doesn’t necessarily need to be spiritual or religious; it can take a distinctly secular tone. An example is the technique of “reflective notetaking”, piloted at Harley Davidson, a process in which a “reflective analyst” offers observations to support organizational learning (Castleberg, n.d.). In other words, the term “contemplative” is inclusive of spirituality, but not constrained by it.

The idea of a contemplative organization is still early in development, and may be most useful as a conceptual model. It should be made clear that the term “contemplative organization” is one that we applied to our interpretation of the patterns that emerged from the data, and not a phrase that any of the interviewees used to describe their organizations. To the extent that these kinds of organizations do exist, they are in different stages of development or “ripeness” – some are dipping their toe in the water by offering employees an occasional meditation class; others have taken the plunge and use contemplative practices in many of their planning processes and other work functions. A similar framework is posited by Ashforth and Pratt (2003), who observed that there is a continuum of approaches to workplace spirituality ranging from organizations that “enable” individuals to explore their own spiritual paths in relation to work to organizations that “direct” spirituality by exerting a high level of control and imposing their “preferred cosmology” on individuals.
Research limitations
This study had several limitations. The snowball method of sampling is useful when attempting to locate members of a group that are otherwise hard to identify but can result in a lack of diversity among the population. In the current study, there was a marked lack of ethnic diversity and a preponderance of Buddhists. In addition, there is the issue of diversity of perspective. The analysis of these interviews was notable for the consistency of themes and patterns across interviews, with little variance. This might also be attributed to the fact that the research sample was comprised primarily of directors and founders of organizations, who generally had positive attitudes toward the use of contemplative practices in the workplace, especially if they had introduced the idea in their organization. A different picture may well emerge through speaking with line staff. An additional limitation was that several professional sectors (business, law, and media) were under-represented in this study and there were relatively few interviewees who worked in or with for-profit corporations. Several supplemental interviews in these sectors have recently been conducted to address these concerns.

Next steps
Future research could benefit by utilizing the dimensions of contemplation and reflection as a way to refine the focus of spirituality in the workplace. The elements of contemplative and reflective practices that have been uncovered through this study need to be further operationalized in order to measure their relationship to various workplace variables, such as productivity, employee well being, etc.

Additionally, the use of qualitative methods can provide rich information about how the contemplative organization actually works on a practical rather than theoretical level. These methods can effectively explore the various components of organizational culture: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying core assumptions (Schein, 1992; Ott, 1989), and identify further themes and issues which can then be researched through quantitative measures.

Ethnography, a methodology from the discipline of cultural anthropology, has been used in organizational settings and has proven effective at uncovering the relationship between espoused values, core beliefs, and the everyday reality of life in the office (Schwartzman, 1993; Kane, 1996). Because there can be a discrepancy between what is described in an interview and what actually happens in the daily life of an organization, the next step in the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s research study is to conduct a series of brief ethnographies in work settings which will more deeply investigate the model of a contemplative organization.

From the qualitative data collected in the current study, the introduction of contemplative practices into the workplace appears to have a positive impact
on the work environment. Because of the small number of interviewees working in for-profit companies, it is not possible to generalize the themes outlined here to the corporate sector. Nonetheless, the degree to which contemplative awareness is being expressed as a valued dimension in the nonprofit workplaces represented in this study may augur future trends in the corporate world. There is already a movement in corporations to offer employee benefits like yoga and meditation (Wolfson, 1999), but there is much room to envision how the “fruits” of these practices may be applied to the administration of organizations and corporations. Mirabai Bush, founder of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, noted that it remains to be seen what it will take for the insights that come from practice, insights grounded in wisdom and compassion, to have a truly transformative effect on the policies and products of an organization (Tworkov, 2001). In the words of another interviewee, Sue Turley, of California Pacific Medical Center’s Institute for Health and Healing, “We’re just explorers, we’re adventurers trying to build a community … It’s all new territory”.

References


**Appendix 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Selected interview questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General questions</td>
<td>Please tell me about your organization/program/the work that you do. What is your mission? What do you value most about your work? Where is your organization/program/work that you do right now in its development? Looking toward the future, what are you and your organization being called to become?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive questions</td>
<td>In the literature we sent you, we included our definition of contemplative practice. Is this close to your definition? In what way does your definition differ? What contemplative practices or activities do you offer in/ have you integrated into the work you do? Can you describe the relationship between the work your of organization/program and contemplative practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/context</td>
<td>How has your organization/program/work changed since its founding? What challenges have you encountered along the way? Has contemplative practice always been a part of what your organization/program offers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective – on practicing</td>
<td>Do you as an organization practice some form of contemplative practice? Is this voluntary, suggested, required? What impact do you feel practicing together has on your organization/program? What obstacles or challenges have you encountered in implementing practice together?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective – on the work they do with others</td>
<td>How were contemplative practices offered to the people who took the training or retreat/or the people with whom you worked? When you teach contemplative techniques, do you teach them along with the religious, cultural, or ethical teachings of the traditions of which they are a part? What were recipients of the training Retreat told about the possible benefits of the practices? What motivated them to participate? What impact has the teaching of contemplative practices had on the individuals and organizations you have worked with? What challenges have you encountered teaching contemplative practice? Personal? Institutional? Societal? Financial?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Networking/the broader</td>
<td>Do you feel that you are part of a broader social movement, a cultural trend, or a paradigm shift as you introduce others to contemplative practice? Who else do you know who is training others in contemplative practice? With whom do you feel a sense of community? Do you have a vision for a network of those involved in reclaiming contemplative practice as a part of contemporary life?</td>
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Table AI.
Interview questions
## Appendix 2

### Code families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code families</th>
<th>Selected codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Descriptors</td>
<td>(1a) Demographics: demographic, contextual difference, sector, activism, place&lt;br&gt;(1b) Organizational descriptors: vision, mission, history, future plans, role, value of work&lt;br&gt;(1c) Coding mechanics codes: juicy quotes, story, lack of, -not, relationship between categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Motivation</td>
<td>(2a) Motivation: internal, external&lt;br&gt;(2b) To be overcome: anger, fear, busyness, crisis of meaning, burnout, other</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Accessibility of practice</td>
<td>(3a) Accessibility: accessible, desirable, credible, manythrad(ition),onetrad(ition)&lt;br&gt;(3b) Teacher/leader: lifestyle choice, own practice(-not), manythrad, onetrad&lt;br&gt;(3c) How teach: implicit, explicit, setting&lt;br&gt;(3d) Program type: create container, within sector, public, change agents, in/out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sacred space (creates sacred space, experiencing sacred space ...)</td>
<td>(4a) Contemplative practice: list practice&lt;br&gt;(4b) Traditions: list tradition&lt;br&gt;(4c) Ethical framework: holy book, pictoral, values, other&lt;br&gt;(4d) Spirituality named, importance of naming&lt;br&gt;(4e) Emotional/psychological aspects + descriptor or importance&lt;br&gt;(4f) Illumination (illumination, breakthrough, revelation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Balance</td>
<td>(5a) States of being + descriptor&lt;br&gt;(5b) Practice in action (service to others, be the change, engaged spirituality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Networking</td>
<td>(6a) Networking/organizing: snowball, catalyst, impulse, info, effective&lt;br&gt;(6b) Nurturing/supporting (supporting, energizing, mentoring ...)&lt;br&gt;(6c) Pioneering (not knowing, scout, leader, catalyst, planting seeds ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Results</td>
<td>(7a) Knowing + inner knowing, inner strength, awareness, access guidance ...&lt;br&gt;(7b) Relating + authenticity, stronger relationships, better communication ...&lt;br&gt;(7c) Being differently + peaceful, positive, depth, non-judge, aligned, open ...&lt;br&gt;(7d) Working differently + energized, joyful, passionate, purposeful ...&lt;br&gt;(7e) Organized differently + collaborative, cohesive, aligned, self-org. ...&lt;br&gt;(7f) Larger shift + paradigm shift, power structure, institutional, org., societal ...&lt;br&gt;(7g) Transcending identities: new identity, becoming a new person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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