

# **Corporate Mindfulness: Post-Christian spirituality at work**

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## **Abstract**

Originally dating back to the 1960's, the use of eastern religious themes has again gained popularity within companies as a staff management tool, under the term mindfulness-meditation. Placing mindfulness-meditation in the context of post-Christian spirituality, the paper examines to what extent post-Christian spirituality can be found in and how it functions in contemporary work environments, setting out to answer the following research questions: I) How does post-Christian spirituality function in contemporary corporate environments?; II) What is the ideological context of post-Christian spirituality in work environments? In part contributing to existing scholarship in the sociology of religion, and in part forming a program of critical theory, the study conducted unstructured, in-depth on-camera interviews with four different mindfulness-meditation teachers functioning in corporate environments. In combination with a survey of existing literature in the field of the sociology of religion and approaches of critical theory, the interview material will be used as a case study for understanding the above research questions.

## 1. Introduction and overview

Much of the adoption of eastern religions within western culture can be traced back to the 1960's counter-cultural movement, along with the development of what is often discussed as new age or the spirituality. The theme has again gained popularity in a new, contemporary context. Eastern practices over the past decades have been increasingly discussed within discourses of corporate management. Most of these practices tend to derive their methods most often but not exclusively from Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism<sup>1</sup> in the form of mindfulness-meditation programs along with a variety of different practices taken from these eastern religions and philosophies, as it will be discussed in chapter two and four.

The use of eastern traditions in contemporary western contexts can be argued to be in correspondence with a larger trend of what is typically discussed by sociologists of religion as "spiritual" (Houtman and Aupers, Woodhead), "post-Christian," (Houtman and Tromp), or "New-Age" (Lyon; Luckman, Bovbjerg, Houtman and Aupers). The current study decided to use the term post-Christian spirituality to refer to the phenomenon, motivated and further defined in chapter two.

The 1960's already saw elements of spiritual themes in business environments, with a "A variety of techniques rooted in the New Age philosophy [...] either in order to identify the right employee for the right position through various kinds of testing, or as personal development and teambuilding efforts" (Bovbjerg 116). An early example of the above, is Maslow's humanistic psychology. Much of Maslow's theories are based on Zen Buddhism and Taoism, with a combined emphasis on individual, non-authoritarian experiences and self-realization through the practices of these religions (Bovbjerg 120.) Similarly, Transcendental Meditation (TM) (Bovbjerg 120) as well as Learning Organization (LO) constitute methods of corporate staff management based on Zen Buddhism, and both are based on ideas of individual spiritual experiences through certain elements taken from Zen Buddhism (Bovbjerg 121).

Although headed simply under the term mindfulness-meditation, contemporary mindfulness-meditation programs are often a pastiche of various eastern religious, spiritual and western scientific elements, as it will later be argued in chapter two. The fundamental claims of most of these programs are the cultivation of physical wellbeing, empathy towards participants' surroundings, happiness, the reaching of an inner self and inner balance, as it will later be exemplified in chapter two and in chapter four. Most programs strongly emphasize both their definitive lack of connection with institutionalized religion and religious dogma, while often mentioning the origins of mindfulness meditation in universally all religions, while Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism are often specifically mentioned within these programs similarly exemplified in chapters two and four. Exemplified in chapter two, these programs are increasingly publicized to be implemented within corporate staff management programs, with business articles citing the implementation of mindfulness-meditation in globalized corporations, such as Google, Nike, or GM ("6 Companies"; "How Companies Can"; "Why More Companies").

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<sup>1</sup> These religious references are not exclusive, as it will be seen in chapter two and three.

### **1.1. Research aim and question**

Initially motivated by the abundance of online business discourse surrounding the existence of mindfulness-meditation in corporate environments, the aim of the current research paper is to survey and discuss to what extent post-Christian spirituality can be found in and how it functions in contemporary work environments. Placing mindfulness-meditation in the context of post-Christian spirituality in chapter two, the paper sets out to answer the following two research questions.

- I) How does post-Christian spirituality function in contemporary corporate environments?
- II) What is the ideological context of post-Christian spirituality in work environments?

The study conducted unstructured, in-depth on-camera interviews with four different mindfulness-meditation teachers functioning in corporate environments, detailed in chapter four. In combination with a survey of existing literature in the field of the sociology of religion and approaches of critical theory, discussed in chapter two and chapter three respectively, the interview material will be used as a case study for understanding the above research questions.

In alignment with the philosophical approaches of critical theory discussed in chapter 3 and theories and definitions within the sociology of religion discussed in chapter 2, the current paper can be seen as an interdisciplinary study. In part a program of ideology criticism or critical theory and in part contributing to discussions within the sociology of religion. With this, the paper hopes to survey both the phenomenon of post-Christian spirituality in work environments as well as critically assess its legitimacy in the context of the way that we think about white-collar office work. As most programs of critical theory, the aim of the paper is not to arrive at a few, final, scientific truth claims, but rather to identify a socio-cultural phenomenon and the power mechanisms contributing to its existence. Such a program can be seen as an active inquiry. If it is uncovered that these elements cause normalized power imbalances, it sees identification as a tool of denormalization.

### **1.2. Research structure**

The research questions will be answered according to the following structure:

- I) How does post-Christian spirituality function in contemporary corporate environments?

With regards to answering the above question, the paper will follow the following structure: Chapter two will discuss the definitions and theories within the sociology of religion surrounding notions of spirituality, new age, and post-Christian spirituality, giving an understanding of how post-Christian spirituality can be defined and interpreted, along with a critical assessment of these definitions and theories, discussing both their possibilities and limitations. Additionally, contemporary definitions of mindfulness-meditation will be discussed, along with some of its thought leaders, arguing that mindfulness-meditation can be placed in the context of the post-Christian spirituality discourse. Following this, a brief discussion of online mindfulness-meditation articles will follow. Following a methodological outline in chapter three, chapter four will detail the interview material conducted with mindfulness-meditation teachers working in corporate environments. Chapter five will discuss the material's relationship with theories post-Christian spirituality, mindfulness-meditation discourse, and the relationship between post-Christian spirituality and its workplace applications, through notions of

the inner self, self-help, and experience creation. In addition to the material's relation to theories discussed in chapter two, chapter five will discuss additional findings within the interview material, giving an overview and understanding of how post-Christian spirituality functions in work environments.

II) What is the ideological context of post-Christian spirituality in work environments?

With regards to answering the second research question, the paper will follow the following structure: The second half of chapter two will discuss definitions surrounding the context of workplace spirituality, namely, neoliberalism and managerialism. The methodological outline of the paper in chapter three will discuss the philosophical approaches of critical theory or ideology criticism. This will help in understanding the research philosophy and aim of the second research question. Using the interview material as a case study, chapter five will discuss what the fusion of post-Christian spirituality with a neoliberal and managerial milieu means for our understanding of white-collar work and our role within it.

Finally, chapter six will reflect on how and to what extent research questions I) and II) were answered, along with discussing the limitations and further research possibilities of the current paper. Additionally, the chapter will assess how the current discussion relates and contributes to the sociology of religion, and what conclusion it arrived at, with regards to ideals of work and work value, summing up the current discussion.

## **2. Working definitions and theories**

The following section will discuss the definitions used throughout the paper, helping conceptualize the researched phenomena of mindfulness-meditation at work. First, spirituality, new age, post-Christian spirituality and the post-Christian spirituality scale will be discussed, placing the western adaptation of eastern religions in the context of scholarship within the sociology of religion. After this, a discussion of mindfulness-meditation follows. Through demonstrating the work of specific mindfulness-meditation thought leaders, the paper will interpret this practice as a part of contemporary post-Christian spiritual practices. Following this, the initial impressions of mindfulness-meditation in business discourse will be discussed. Finally, the contextual elements of post-Christian spirituality in corporate environments will be discussed in terms of managerialism and neoliberalism. These definitions and discussions constitute the basis for understanding the subsequent interview material detailed in chapter four and discussed in chapter five.

### **2.1. Spirituality, New Age, and post-Christian Spirituality**

It is interesting to note, that there is no unified term within the examined literature dealing with the topic of spirituality and the adaptation of eastern traditions in the west. The term new age (Lyon<sup>2</sup>; Luckman<sup>3</sup>, Bovbjerg, Houtman and Aupers), spirituality (Houtman and Aupers<sup>4</sup>, Woodhead) or post-Christian spirituality is often brought in parallel with the phenomena (Houtman and Tromp). While the terms post-Christian spirituality and spirituality can be seen as related, as it will be discussed throughout this chapter, new age can be seen as a more nuanced difference in its definition. This difference points to a larger dichotomy on the scholarship of this contemporary phenomenon within the sociology religion. The project will define these various terms and discuss the dichotomies within the scholarship of this field, assessing what definition can be used best in the understanding of mindfulness-meditation. Additionally, the post-Christian spirituality scale will be discussed, argued to be relevant in developing a more nuanced assessment.

The researcher chose to use the working definition of post-Christian spirituality, motivating the choice of this term over others in the sections below. It is important to note, that an exhaustive overview of all definitions relating to the topic would be both impossible within the scope of this paper and missing the aim of it. Rather, the aim is to set up logical working definitions within this paper, while simultaneously critically assessing both their possibilities and limitations.

#### **2.1.1. Spirituality**

Dealing with issues of definition and approaches to spirituality within religious scholarship, and therefore a suitable starting point for the current paper in its aim of systematically assessing

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<sup>2</sup> According to Lyon's discussion, New Age is part of a larger movement of "self-religions", fitting in to the "so called postmodern condition in some significant ways, centering on the self, being undogmatic, involving networking rather than an established institutional base and so on" (21).

<sup>3</sup> According to Lukemann's discussion, New Age "collects abundant psychological, therapeutic, magic, marginally scientific, and older esoteric material, repackages them, and offers them for individual consumption and further private syncretism" (qtd in. Houtman and Aupers).

<sup>4</sup> In their broad overview of the scholarship on the topic, Houtman and Aupers use the term new age and spiritual interchangeably and in combination, coming to the conclusion that "New Age spirituality, in short, taking one's personal feelings and intuitions seriously is conceived as being true to one's spiritual self and bringing life into line with who one 'essentially' or 'at deepest' is" (7).

mindfulness-meditation, Woodhead gives a working definition of spirituality based on field research with Heelas within religious and spiritual communities in Kendal<sup>5</sup> (qtd in Woodhead 32). According to Woodhead, spirituality can be defined as “(a) focus on the authority of inner, subjective life and (b) a commitment to holism.” The latter is discussed as “‘holistic’ concern with (a) body, mind and spirit as a whole and (b) the self in relation to greater wholes, ranging from intimate others to the whole universe. As a result, we came to use the terms ‘subjective-life spirituality’, and ‘holistic spirituality’ as synonyms for ‘spirituality’” (39). She adds that in both her field researches in Kendall and Asheville, “the subjective and holistic emphasis was common, as was a self-distinction from ‘religion’” (39). In the context of the former Kendal study, Woodhead and Heelas identified activities that fit within the realm of the “holistic milieu”, discussing that “(...)the holistic milieu includes, but is not limited to: Yoga; Buddhism; tai chi; aromatherapy; homeopathy; reiki; massage; and circle dancing” (qtd. in Woodhead 39). In this sense, the western adaptation of eastern religious traditions, or mindfulness-meditation, can be seen as potentially fitting into this definition. Woodhead’s research was relevant to the current paper, as it served as a more systematic definition as opposed to the more ambiguous definitions, such as Lukeman’s, cited above, which gave the impression of spirituality or new age as diffuse, confused, and without a specific set of characteristics or framework which the phenomena of mindfulness-meditation could be measured to.

### **2.1.2. New Age**

It is relevant to note, that the discussion surrounding the definition of spirituality point to larger dichotomy within the sociology of religion. Woodhead discusses that while the phenomena of spirituality can be seen as a significant part of the contemporary religious landscape, “exhibiting enough common characteristics to make characterization and research relatively unproblematic” (Woodhead 31), scholarship within the sociology of religion often characterizes “the same phenomenon as diffuse, confused, amorphous, lacking in salience and significance, transitory, and insubstantial” (31). She attributes this to what she discusses as the “inadequacy approach to spirituality” within religious scholarship which frames discussions on spirituality compared to “historically influential forms of church Christianity”, therefore arriving at the above conclusion (31).

Indeed, the term New Age that was similarly found to be associated with the western adaptation of eastern traditions constitutes the latter approach. Based on Bovbjerg’s more concise definition of new age compared to Lyon and Lukeman, New Age can be defined as: “a common denominator for a variety of branches that offer ‘alternative’ explanations of very different phenomena; health, philosophy, management, and personal development among others. In the New Age movement, there is no conversion to a coherent faith as in a large number of traditional religious groups; instead the believer shops around in a loose network of attitudes and interests. The idea of authenticity frames the spiritual experience within the individual’s narrative of its own being, and knowledge of the self is

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<sup>5</sup> “Through head counts in churches and tallies of holistic therapy use in Kendal, a town in the South Lakeland district of Cumbria, England, Heelas and Woodhead documented how a culture of life spirituality has been emerging since the 1970s. They estimated that between .9% and 1.6% of Kendal’s population were active participants in activities, such as yoga, counseling, aromatherapy and so forth, linked with a life-spiritual outlook. Although this is not a large number – only 600 individuals compared to the approximately 2200 involved in congregational activities – it represents a 300% increase in the “holistic milieu” during the 1990s, a time when population growth was only around 11% (Ibid.: 45). Should life spirituality maintain this same level of growth and traditional church attendance continue to decline, Heelas and Woodhead conclude, it would take only 30 years for life spirituality to outpace religious participation” (qtd. in Siobhan 74).

attained through personal emotional experiences” (Bovbjerg 117). Based on this definition, it is within this loose network that eastern traditions, or mindfulness-meditation, can potentially be placed within the new age discussion, where “eastern philosophy” is on par with “Samanism” in terms of what tradition a western new ager draws on (117).

Besides Bovbjerg comparing New Age to institutional religions and predictably arriving at the conclusion that it is incoherent per definition, his discussion and article topic points to a very important element overlooked by definitions of spirituality discussed by Woodhead. Namely, the element of personal development and the secular use-cases of spiritual experience. Bovbjerg examines the interfaces between New Age spirituality and management discourse through examining staff management programs based on new age traditions, such as Maslow’s humanistic psychology, Learning Organization, and Transcendental Meditation, with the former based on Zen Buddhism and Taoism, while the latter two taking elements from Zen Buddhism (118). Focusing on what this means for modern work culture, Bovbjerg comes to the conclusion that what is understood authenticity within new age must be realized within a work context and spirituality must be a tool for untapping resources that can again be used in work environments. This realization is helped through a variety of philosophies or religions one chooses:

Work is increasingly judged according to its ability to create experiences and the aim is no longer to seek to limit the time spent on the job in order to create leisure time; on the contrary, the goal now is to remove the boundary between calling and occupation, job and hobby, work and play. ...Modern employees are supposed to invest their whole selves in their work in the sense that work must be a passion and the self must be a resource in relation to seizing the opportunities for development that the job has to offer... Courses in personal development would make no sense without an unconscious that contains hidden resources and hidden knowledge of the self. The courses communicate an ethic and an idea of the good life that accords with the psycho-religious ideal type of mythical religiosity (Bovbjerg 130).

Bovbjerg’s discussion can be related to Hanegraaff’s earlier, 1996 work, where he conducts a historical analysis of new age traditions, in part coming to the conclusion that “New Age religion (tends) to blur the distinction between religion and psychology to an extent hardly found in other traditions”, attributing this to the idea that “(...) ‘personal growth’ can be understood as the shape ‘religious salvation’ takes in the New Age Movement” (Hanegraaff 183).

The above ideas of the (inner) self or as a resource and the merger of the private psychological and spiritual boundaries with work will motivate the discussion of the interview material in chapter five along with discussions of the post-Christian spirituality scale discussed in the section below. Nevertheless, the definition of new age offers no consistent framework for placing the practice of mindfulness-meditation or the use of eastern traditions within it. Therefore, applying it in the current context of mindfulness-meditation is problematic, due to its loose and all-encompassing nature. Woodhead tried to address this issue by what she discusses as the inadequacy approach to spirituality, both by her definition and discussion of the topic. However, her research does not extend to the secular elements or real-world applications of spirituality. Additionally, neither Woodhead or Bovbjerg deal in depth with the question of what traditions (new age) spirituality draws on or their

systematically detailed relationship to it. Woodhead's holistic milieu and Bovbjerg's "loose network" seem unsystematic and inconsistent with no precise definition, characterization, or categorization.

### **2.1.3. Post-Christian Spirituality**

Given the above and with the aim of trying to fit the initially researched phenomena of eastern traditions in the west and its workplace applications into a larger, structured framework of understanding, the researcher arrived at Houtman and Tromp's definition of post-Christian spirituality and the corresponding post-Christian spirituality scale.

In their discussion of the topic, Houtman and Tromp discuss post-Christian Spirituality as a type of spirituality that "sets itself decidedly apart from traditional Christian understandings of religious authority. this does not mean that it dismisses God, the Bible or the ideas of Christian preachers out of hand as false and flawed. It rather means that the latter are no longer accepted as authoritative in the sense of being understood as superior to sources of religious authority found in other religions (1)." With this, Houtman and Tromp partially address spirituality's relationship to institutionalized religions, decidedly taking a non-comparative approach and avoiding what was discussed by Woodhead as the inadequacy approach discussed above. Further discussing possible interpretations of post-Christian spirituality, they conclude that it can be characterized by:

An individualism that is collectively embraced by those concerned [...] one might say that its characteristic individualism constitutes a sort of dogma of non-conformity that is uncontested in these circles, so that it entails a collectively shared and coherent spiritual worldview that incites those concerned to take their personal feelings seriously and to embark on strictly personal spiritual quests. While this surely encourages practices of bricolage and results in the characteristic diversity and fragmentation of the spiritual milieu, these features do hence not at all prove the absence of a coherent spiritual worldview. In a fashion that is as interesting as it is paradoxical, it is rather the other way around: it is a coherent spiritual worldview that incites, provokes, brings forth, and hence ultimately accounts for bricolage, diversity, and fragmentation (19).

Additionally, they address what Woodhead refers to under the inadequacy approach in a more systematic way. This is done not just in terms of definition, but by setting up the post-Christian spirituality scale. With the aim of setting up a framework for understanding the worldview or coherent ideology of post-Christian spirituality, Houtman and Tromp set up the post Christian spirituality scale. The seven-point, unidimensional scale sets up "seven logically interrelated ideas that are central to the worldview of post-Christian spirituality", and "in effect, assume, validate, and legitimate each other" (13). The seven-point scale consists of the following elements:

1) Perennialism: Religious traditions are hence understood as referring 'deep down' to one single identical and universal spiritual source, even though in some instances the latter has been buried more deeply away than in others. Good examples of the former would be orthodox strains of Protestantism or Islam with their marked emphasis on literal belief in the Bible or the Quran as God's revealed Word. Good examples of the latter are oriental religions like Hinduism or Buddhism, which provide more opportunities for personal spiritual experience (think of meditational practices) (5).

2) Bricolage: Given the above notion of perennialism, one is allowed to freely draw on a variety of religious traditions (5).

3) Immanence of the sacred: The sacred other is not conceived as a person-like transcendent God who has created the world, but rather as a diffuse impersonal spirit, life force or energy that is – and always has been – present in the world and the cosmos rather than residing in a separate realm of its own (5).

4) Aliveness of the cosmos: In contrast to dualism, and in connection with the notion that everything is connected, the universe is seen as alive, and in constant evolution as a quasi-single entity (6).

5) Holism: In opposition to the seeming duality of our lived experiences, the worldview of post-Christian spirituality hence holds that invisible unity exists at a ‘deeper’ level because the omnipresent spirit or life force connects ‘everything’ (6).

6) Self spirituality: There is a “‘natural’ or ‘spiritual’ self that lies hidden, underneath the ‘mundane’ or ‘conventional’ self” (6).

7) Experiential epistemology: Truth and therefore the inner self can only be personally experienced and reached. No higher authority can lead one to themselves, only through personal experience can one reach one’s inner truth (6).

It is relevant to note here, that what is discussed under Bojvberg’s discussion of authenticity under above can be seen as similar to the definition pair of 6) Self spirituality and 7) experiential epistemology, as it will become relevant in chapter five when discussing the interview material.

Houtman and Tromp’s post-Cristian spiritual scale provide a unified and systematic framework for assessment. In the context of the current paper, it allows to discuss and compare mindfulness-meditation within a systematic framework. Additionally, the seven-point scale addresses what the researcher observed, namely the dominance of eastern religions within this milieu under 1) Perennialism. This observation will further be evidenced and discussed when looking at the interview material in chapter five.

Houtman and Tromp’s scholarship can be critically discussed in the sense that it fails to discuss the secular instances of post-Cristian spirituality in the way that Bojvberg does and does not examine the relationship between spirituality and secular environments, which would be relevant for the context of the current study. Additionally, it does not address possible variations within post-Christian spirituality. Finally, due to its novelty (2018), the scale remains strictly theoretical. To the knowledge of the researcher, it has not been used for testing the spiritual world view of live communities, secular or religious.

In the context of the current research, the paper will use post-Christian spirituality as a working definition for referring to the researched phenomena. Additionally, it will use the post-Christian spirituality scale to assess both the phenomena of mindfulness-meditation discussed in the following section and the collected interview material in chapter five.

## **2.2. Mindfulness-meditation: definitions and discourses**

Having arrived at a working definition of post-Christian spirituality, the following section will aim to define the term mindfulness-meditation both in terms of its brief scientific definition and its use in a more abstract milieu, by mindfulness-meditation thought leaders. The discourse surrounding mindfulness-meditation will be framed in the context of post-Christian spirituality by highlighting its post-Christian spiritual elements according to the post-Christian spirituality scale discussed above. With this, the paper aims to place mindfulness-meditation into a post-Christian context. Following this, secondary literature on corporate mindfulness-meditation programs will be briefly discussed, in part, motivating the collection of the interview material and its subsequent analysis.

Based on its more scientifically accepted definitions, mindfulness meditation is described as “non-judgmental attention to experiences in the present moment. This definition [...] describes practices that require both the regulation of attention (in order to maintain the focus on immediate experiences, such as thoughts, emotions, body posture and sensations) and the ability to approach one’s experiences with openness and acceptance” (Tang 3). The scientific attributes of mindfulness-meditation or lack thereof, are less the concern of the current, anthropologically oriented research paper. Rather, it aims to focus on the popular discourse surrounding mindfulness-meditation, its fusion with Post-Christian spirituality and its applications at the workplace.

Popular mindfulness-meditation discourse layers the fundamental scientific claims as mentioned above, with pseudo-scientific and spiritual elements. The fundamental claims of most popular mindfulness literature are: the effects of mindfulness on the cultivation of physical wellbeing, empathy towards their surroundings, happiness, the reaching of an inner self and inner balance as discussed below. Influential thought leaders in the field include Deepak Chopra, Jon Kabat Zinn, and the late Stephen Russell.

### **2.2.1. Deepak Chopra**

Deepak Chopra has published “25 books and produced more than 100 audio, video, and CD- ROM titles” on spirituality and alternative medicine (Baer 233). One of the best-known figures within alternative medicine, Time named him among the “Top 100 Icons and Heroes of the 20th Century” (234). Originally a “biomedically trained physician”, As Baer discusses his biography, Chopra fell disillusioned with medicine, which prompted him to turn to alternative medicine, forming his practice which constitutes “a mix of traditional Indian Ayurveda (‘the science of life’), Indian philosophical ideas, [and] meditation techniques” (Carette 151). Additionally, his practice can be seen as highly eclectic. Besides the eastern traditions that Chopra draws on, he uses rudimentary notions of quantum physics in his practice, creating his specific brand of Quantum healing, that deals with the “‘spiritual’ and ‘holistic’ implications of quantum physics” (151).

When talking about mindfulness-meditation, Chopra discusses it as follows:

As impressive as the health benefits of meditation are—I am not remotely discounting them—the real purpose of meditation is to answer, once and for all, the true nature of the mind. The pursuit of higher consciousness, the process of waking up, the journey to enlightenment—

whatever term you use, meditation solves the problem of the divided mind by opening the door to whole mind (Chopra, "The True Meaning").

Running his own healing center in California since 1996 (Baer 234), the Chopra Center for Well Being states that it is "dedicated to a holistic view of life that sees human beings as networks of energy and information, integrating body, mind and spirit." (Baer 234). The center offers guided meditations and five-day meditation retreats in several locations that are meant to "balance", "restore", "connect", and nourish its participants ("Silent Awakenings"). This includes, according to the Chopra center website, "Chakra toning, and guided meditation", "extended yoga sessions", "small group sessions" meant to foster interpersonal connections between participants, and "Mayan inspired" dietary regimes ("Silent Awakenings"). Additionally, the center offers "massage therapy, facials, meditation, and corporate stress management courses on a daily or weekly basis" ("Silent Awakenings"). The specific program for corporate meditation sessions was not found.

Chopra's practice can be placed within the post-Christian spectrum. Elements of the Post-Christian spirituality scale can be found in terms of self-spirituality, experiential epistemology, and holism in terms of his definition on mindfulness-meditation quoted above. Self-spirituality and experiential epistemology is especially pronounced, as meditation practices are to be experienced individually, often with the aim of reaching an inner, authentic self, also exemplified in the quote below:

[...] With his signature clarity, Chopra guides readers on how to cultivate a clear vision, heal suffering from the mind and body and help recover who you really are (Chopra, "Total Meditation").

His mixed practice drawing on a variety of religions (Indian Ayurveda, Indian philosophical ideas, and meditation techniques) point to perennialism and bricolage. However, he also wrote a book about Buddhism, titled *Buddha*. In an interview, he discusses his approach to religious traditions, which exemplifies well these elements:

It's fair to say that I try to see spirituality in the teachings of great wisdom traditions. I try to find the spirituality and the universal insights in the teachings of great prophets... of those people that we call "enlightened." So, for me there is no difference between the consciousness of, say, Jesus Christ and the consciousness of Buddha. That's why I think spirituality is the biggest threat to religion (Chopra in Kugel, "Deepak Chopra Leads").

Additionally, immanence of the sacred, aliveness of the cosmos can also be argued to be present when he discusses notions of God.

God is the immeasurable potential as consciousness for all forms of knowing and experience in every living organism (Chopra, "Why Did We Create God").

### **2.2.2. Stephen Russel**

Similarly a well known figure within alternative healing and spirituality, is the late Stephen Russell. Prior to his premature death in 2020, Russel published 32 books, as well as CDs and DVDs dealing with

meditation and Thai Chi (“About”). Besides giving meditation workshops, he was a weekly columnist for the observer on alternative health issues, under the pseudonym The Barefoot Doctor (“The Observer: Barefoot Doctor”). When talking about mindfulness-meditation, Russel discusses it as follows:

Meditating does not mean ‘doing meditation’ as in versions of the above, it simply means paying attention. Whatever you’re doing, whether counting your breaths or counting your winnings at the one arm bandit (fruit) machine, that’s where you place your full attention (Russel, Handbook for the Urban Warrior)

His practice is a mix of mindfulness-meditation and Taoism. Additionally, similarly eclectic in nature, he mixes his practice with electronic dance music (“About”). In terms of his meditation workshops, Russel offered courses on health, life, and prospects optimization, Tao meditation, and meditations with electronic dance music (“Welcome to Barefoot Doctor Trainings”).

His brand of post-Christian spirituality infused mindfulness-meditation (among other practices) exemplifies well, the repackaging of eastern religious traditions and what is discussed under perennialism and bricolage.

The kind of healing I do is based on Taoism, which provides the most nifty spiritual guidelines I’ve ever come across. To spice things up I also borrow liberally from Buddhism, Hinduism, Animism, Humanism and any other ism I’ve spent time (and money) studying (Russel, “Complementary Health”).

Notions of holism and aliveness of the cosmos are present, when looking at his discussion of mindfulness-meditation:

If everyone in the entire universe, every woman, man, centipede, ...were simultaneously to drop into an advanced level, hardcore-heavyweight meditation, and all went deep enough inside, we’d all meet up, along with everyone who’s ever lived, ever, in one absurdly mad, huge inner chamber, and to our utter astonishment (feigned of course), we’d, you’d, I’d discover that there’d only been one of us here all the time. (Russel, Handbook for the Urban Warrior)

Additionally, the below quotes place him under self-spirituality, experiential epistemology, and immanence of the sacred:

Pray to whomever, whatever, and whenever you choose. Pray to the mountain, pray to the ancestors, pray to the Earth, pray to the Tao (but it won’t listen!), pray to the Great Mother, pray to Jehovah, Allah, Buddha, Jesus, Lakshmi, Siva, pray to the Great Spirit, it makes no difference. Praying is merely a device for realigning the mind, energy, and passion of your local self with the mind, energy and passion of your universal self. When you pray, you are praying to the god or goddess within you. This has an effect on your energy field, which in turn translates into a positive charge that makes something good happen (Russel, Handbook for the Urban Warrior).

### 2.2.3. Jon Kabat Zinn

While the eclectic mix of religious and other trends (such as quantum healing and electronic dance music) is distinctly present in the above two mindfulness-meditation thought leaders, it is important to note, that the rhetoric surrounding mindfulness-meditation seems to come to an impasse when discussing the work of Jon Kabat Zinn. Here, mindfulness-meditation gains an almost exclusively scientific discourse, with a pronounced detachment from any form of post-Christian spirituality, eclectic, or otherwise. Kabat is the author of two best-selling books on mindfulness-meditation and co-author of numerous books and scientific articles on mindfulness-meditation (Kabat et al., *The clinical use of mindfulness*; Kabat, *Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context*; Kabat, *An outpatient program*)

When discussing mindfulness-meditation, Kabat discusses as:

Although at this time mindfulness meditation is most commonly taught and practiced within the context of Buddhism, its essence is universal. Mindfulness is basically just a particular way of paying attention. It is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding (Full Catastrophe Living 12).

Using Buddhist meditation techniques, to develop his practice, he distinctly aims to "apply mindfulness within a scientific rather than a religious frame" (Some reflections 281). Indeed, he has numerous scientific publications on meditation and its effects of stress and pain relief as cited above. Nevertheless, the practice of Kabat has a strong emphasis on self-spirituality, aliveness of the cosmos, and holism, as seen in the below quote in addition to freely drawing on eastern religious practices (as seen in the above quote), arguably placing him in post-Christian ideology.

[...] was meant to serve as an educational (in the sense of inviting what is already present to come forth) vehicle through which people could assume a degree of responsibility for their own well-being and participate more fully in their own unique movement towards greater levels of health by cultivating and refining our innate capacity for paying attention and for a deep, penetrative seeing/sensing of the interconnectedness of apparently separate aspects of experience, many of which tend to hover beneath our ordinary level of awareness regarding both inner and outer experience. (Some reflections 281)

### 2.2.4. Mindfulness-meditation in online business discourses

The mindfulness discourse in corporate environments is especially notable when looking at popular business and PR articles referencing the phenomena of mindfulness-meditation within contemporary work environments. Upon searching the keywords, *mindfulness meditation at companies*, the first page of results includes business articles as secondary sources on how companies are incorporating mindfulness-meditation into their staff development programs. Headlines include: *6 Companies Using Meditation for a Productive and Happier Workplace*, *How Companies Can Instill Mindfulness*, *Why More Companies Are Cultivating a Culture of Mindfulness*. The companies most often mentioned include in Silicon Valley corporations. Alphabet (the parent company of Google), and representatives

of Apple and Facebook, as well as a host of smaller technology companies publicly engage in mindfulness-meditation programs. The content of these articles include a general, scientifically-toned description of mindfulness-meditation, exemplified well by the following quotes:

How does your company empower a more productive and happier workplace? Many thriving companies are using meditation to empower a community of happy and healthy employees (“6 Companies Using Meditation”).

Research suggests that meditation has many in-office health benefits – both mental and physical. Meditation has the power to reduce blood pressure, while easing the symptoms of anxiety and depression. It reduces stress, improves listening skills, decision-making skills, and even boosts employee engagement (“6 Companies Using Meditation”).

Everyone takes something away from the mindfulness programs,” Elizabeth says. “A lot of people say ‘Yeah, this could really be a benefit to me to help myself be more focused, clear and more aware’ (“Why More Companies”).

However, very little was found in terms of the direct program of these companies, in terms of how these programs function and to what extent and in what manner post-Christian elements could be found, only vague descriptions and unsystematic mentions of elements of the company’s programs.

In Nike’s New York office, you will find rooms dedicated to napping, praying, and of course, meditating (“6 Companies Using Meditation”).

At software company SAP, mindfulness has become a key ingredient of corporate life for employees and executives alike. More than 6,000 employees have taken two-day mindfulness courses that focus on meditations complemented by the practice of self-mastery and compassion (“How Companies Can Instill Mindfulness”).

While the latter quote gives more information on the specifics of a mindfulness program at a specific company, no further information was found. The lack of information on company mindfulness-meditation programs, even after their approach by the researcher as discussed in chapter three, motivated in part, the collection of interview material with mindfulness-meditation teachers working in corporate environments and its subsequent analysis in chapter five.

### **2.3. The context of mindful management: neoliberalism and managerialism**

Having discussed the theoretical foundations and working definitions of post-Christian spirituality and mindfulness-meditation framed within it, definitions of neoliberalism and managerialism will be discussed, as they form a necessary foundation for understanding the ideological context of staff management, and therefore, mindfulness-meditation at work. Having defined these definition pairs, chapter three will conduct a discussion on notions of ideology criticism. Finally, with the interview material as a case study, chapter five will discuss the ideology of work that the fusion of post-Christian spirituality and neoliberal managerialism can potentially entail.

### **2.3.1. Neoliberalism**

Closely tied to the idea of managerialism, or a prerequisite to it, the common consensus among academics is to date neoliberalism to various political events from the end of the 1970s to 1980, including the right-wing governance of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations. (Harlow 536). According to a commonly cited definition, the ideology of neoliberalism is:

[...] the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices[...] There has everywhere been an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s [...] Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world. (Harvey 2-3)

The implementation of neoliberal ideals in a wide variety of sectors is done through managerialism, with a particular focus on “performance” through the ‘one best way’ prescriptions (Harlow 538). This is done not just in private but also a variety of public sectors as seen through the example of the results of managerialism in education, discussed below (Friedamn and Doughney; Branson).

As Carrette discusses, the secularization, individualization, and psychologization of eastern spiritualities can be seen as overlapping with the trend of neoliberalism in the 1980s, forming a type of individualized spirituality that fits its teaching to “the demands of the economy and of individual self-expression to business success” (Carrette 43). As Carrette discusses, this represents “a shift from the earlier phase of ‘consumer-led’ spiritual enquiry, which emphasised the individual’s freedom to choose his or her own pathway in life (the bedrock of modern liberalism), to a ‘corporate-led’ consumerism that subordinates the interests of the individual to consumerist ideology and the demands of the business world (neoliberalism)” (45). In this sense, the individual’s spirituality “becomes subordinated to the demands of corporate business culture and the needs of a flexible and competitive economy.” (46) The question of whether these ideals can be argued as enforced and the extent to which such statements can be made will be discussed in chapter five, using the interview material as a case study.

### **2.3.2. Managerialism**

The implementation of neoliberal ideals in a wide variety of sectors is done through managerialism, with a particular focus on “performance” through the ‘one best way’ prescriptions (Harlow 538). This is done not just in private but also a variety of public sectors as seen through the example of the results of managerialism in education, discussed below (Friedamn and Doughney; Branson).

While originally restricted only to for profit sectors, today, management techniques permeate both the private and the public, leading to the notion of managerialism. Defined as "incorporation of approaches, systems, and techniques commonly found in the private sector, to the management and conduct of the public sector, [involving] a more muscular management style, an emphasis on particular forms of accountability, the development of market-orientation, a focus on securing non-government funding, and increased concern with issues of efficiency and economy [achieved through]

performance management schemes, quality assurance mechanisms, [...] and the implementation of budgetary devolution” (Branson 8). As Emmanuel notes, “experience and skills pertinent to an organization's core business are considered secondary”. (20)

The notion of managerialism was already developed in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Fordism and Taylorism, where simple factory management turned into what was considered the “scientific management” of factories and factory workers. It was perceived that the newly developing assembly line factories needed specialized managerial knowledge to administer it (Kilkauer 1105). As the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century continued to undergo increased professionalization and bureaucratization in white-collar sectors and within a neoliberal context, the new class of managers and middle managers continued to grow, and along with it, work management turned into a discipline or quasi science of its own.

While the idea of market efficiency might seem like a justifying force in the creation of a new work value or the implementation of top-down, neoliberal managerial ideals, feelings of alienation prevail. According to a recent Gallup poll, Western Europe, one of the “world’s most economically developed regions”, only 10% of the sampled employees are “engaged at work” (State of the Global 6). An engaged worker is defined here as: “highly involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace”- as opposed to “psychologically unattached to their work and company or, “disengaged” (State of the Global 6). The statistics for the United States are better, with 31 percent of US adults engaged in their workplaces. The same statistics on a global scale show only 15 percent of the fulltime working population as engaged (State of the Global 10). One inevitably wonders what’s happening to people on the other side of the statistical scale?

Perhaps the issue is in the fact that an increasing number of the global white collar adult working population feels that they are not really contributing to anything, or indeed, not really working. According to a recent The U.S. State of the Work Report, “The amount of time office workers have to spend doing their primary job duties decreased in 2016, from 46% to 39%.” (12) Instead of focusing on their primary job, American workers reported an increased dealing with emails, unproductive meetings, and administrative tasks (The U.S. State of the Work 12). Even when engaging with the designated work itself, some office employees find their work devoid of value. According to 2015 YouGov statistics, “37 % of British workers think their jobs are meaningless” (Dahlgreen).

The most recent and commonly discussed instance of redundant middle management has been in academia, where the “entrepreneurial approach to university management” has made “mission statements, quality, strategies, performance measures, key performance indicators, targets, profiles and market segments” commonplace rhetoric in university spaces (Branson et al 8). Managerialism, or what Bellamy cites as New Public Management sparked a widely held tension within the academic community, while studies show an increased stratum of stress and decreasing levels of job satisfaction among academic staff (qtd. in Pop 2). A study examining the effects of New Public Management or Managerialism between 1993 and 1999 has shown that “mean working hours increased from 47.7 to 49.2 h per week; the proportion of academics able to pursue their academic interests fell from 66 to 53%, and time spent on administration increased from 6.4 to 8.4 h per week.” (qtd. in Friedamn and Doughney 44). Subsequent studies show increasing staff-student rations, and a decline in autonomy over the staff’s academic work, with a loss of “work over management” (qtd. in Friedamn and Doughney 45).

Why is it that so many people feel that their job is not contributing to anything, regardless of whether it is in the private or the public sector? Is it possible that we cannot rationalize work, even in the context of market efficiency?

As Graeber discusses, in a contemporary, post-industrial sphere, work does not have to produce anything of value, and is, in and of itself valuable on its own (145). Here, we see the idea of Marx's labor theory of value replaced by something similar to Weber's protestant work ethic, where "earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency" and "is assumed as an end in itself"(Dickson and McLahlan 82). In a contemporary context, this means the acceptance of unnecessary work within corporate environments, while under the guise of market efficiency, which is seen as an ultimate goal, and under which almost all means can be justified.

Paradoxically, in an attempt to control economic production, the neoliberal ideal gets lost in its own processes: metrics reports, box ticking, and forms that never get evaluated. The top-down, unified approach of managerialism completely lacks consideration or value judgement for what it actually tries to manage. In this way, the rationale of economic progress becomes completely irrational, as it fails to look at the broader implications of its operations, beyond market efficiency. It is in this context that the current paper will examine to what extent the introduction of post-Christian spirituality effects ideas of and existing relations to work, using the interview material as a case study in chapter five.

The current chapter discussed the main working definitions and theories on which the current paper builds on, including post-Christian spirituality, the post-Christian spirituality scale, and mindfulness meditation. Additionally, in discussed the context in which corporate mindfulness-meditation will be discussed, namely, neoliberalism and the corresponding notion of managerialism. With the theoretical background of the paper established, the following chapter will continue to detail the research methodology of the paper.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Having covered the discussions that the research program aims to contribute to, along with discussing the working definitions and theories used through the paper, the following section will detail the methodology and research philosophy of the paper. First, it will discuss, in further detail the research aim and the research questions of the paper. Second, critical theory will be discussed, helping further contextualize, the research philosophy of the paper and laying the foundations for understanding the aim of ideologically assessing the practice of mindfulness-meditation at work. Following a brief discussion of the further structure of the paper, the current chapter will discuss methods used in the collection of the interview material.

#### **3.1. Research aim**

The current research program can be seen as both a contribution to the field of the sociology of religion and simultaneously critical theory. As seen in the previous chapter, the program strongly builds on theories within the sociology of religion, by examining notions of spirituality and the post-Christian spirituality scale. The research aims to interpret the current trend of mindfulness-meditation within work environments in this context, aiming to understand to what extent post-Christian spirituality can be found in these environments and in what manner. As discussed in Chapter 2, while research has been done on what is referred to as new age in work environments and what is somewhat synonymous with post-Christian spirituality, the post-Christian spirituality scale has not been used to assess religious or non-religious groups, while definitions of post-Christian spirituality discussed above have not been used to discuss their potential secular or workplace manifestations. This will be examined it via in-depth interviews conducted with mindfulness meditation teachers working in corporate environments. With this, the paper will arrive at the following research question I): How does post-Christian spirituality function in contemporary corporate environments?

In terms of its critical theory aspect, the research program aims to use the interview material as a case study for understanding how spirituality relates to neoliberal and managerial ideals discussed in chapter two. This section can be seen as forming a critical theory by critically assessing the relationship between contemporary neoliberalism and spirituality and what this means for our ideals of the values of work, or what ideology it contributes to. Additionally, it can be seen as an extension of existing scholarship in the sociology of religion in the sense that the paper extends existing theory on the relationship between work and spirituality discussed in chapter two, by contextualizing the social stratosphere of work management itself, and post-Christian spirituality within it, namely, neoliberalism and managerialism. With this, the paper arrives at research question II): What ideology do post-Christian spiritual practices in work environments contribute to?

#### **3.2. Research philosophy: A note on the program of critical theory**

The current research program can be seen as having an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the examined phenomenon of workplace spirituality and answering the above research questions. In part, it can be seen as contributing to the sociology of religion and within that field, to studies on post-Christian spirituality. However, it can also be seen as forming a program of critical theory, due to the way that it places the above discussion into the context of ideology, critically assessing the way that

the examined phenomena of mindfulness-meditation at work affects the way that we understand part of our shared reality (white-collar work).

The examination of ideology can form various programs, with the terms itself having a variety of uses. It is possible to understand it purely in a descriptive, anthropological sense. In this sense, the term ideology will simply mean the “beliefs the members of the group hold, the concepts they use, the attitudes and psychological dispositions they exhibit, their motives, desires, values, predilections, works of art, religious rituals, gestures, etc.” (Geuss 5). Here, the research program constitutes the descriptive or comparative analysis of these beliefs and concepts. As Geuss discusses, in this “broad and rather unspecific sense of 'ideology', every human group has one- the agents of any group will have some psychological dispositions, use some concepts, and have some beliefs”, and thus, such form of analysis is per definition is non-evaluative (Geuss 5). Such a research program would simply identify and describe post-Christian spirituality, perhaps contextualizing it in relation to other forms of modern religions and workplace cultures.

The need to have systems of meaning around which human groups can develop and organize is fundamental. Therefore, one can try set themselves the task of prescribing one. The research question for ideology in the prescriptive, or positive sense would be: “what kind of socio-cultural system or what world-view would be most appropriate for that group, i.e. what 'ideology' (in some descriptive sense of the term) is most likely to enable the members of the group to satisfy their wants and needs and further their interests.”(Geuss 22). In this sense, ideology is something to be created and constructed. If it were not already in existence, post-Christian spirituality and post-Christian spirituality in the workplace could be constructed in a variety of contexts, based on the belief that it satisfies the hypothetical needs of a group.

The examination of ideology can also form an evaluative, critical program. This program is based on the view that “agents in the society are deluded about themselves, their position, their society, or their interests”, with the aim of uncovering why and demonstrating it to them. Here, the definition of ideology is understood in a negative sense, as “(ideological) delusion” or “(ideologically) false consciousness” (Geuss 23). The research question here is: In “what sense or in virtue of what properties can a form of consciousness be ideologically false, i.e. can it be an ideology in the pejorative sense?” (Geuss 23).

Given that ideology critique forms the core of the current research program, it is important to place it both in a historical and philosophical context. Ideology critique is a fundamental function of critical theory, or the philosophical and sociological movement of the Frankfurt School. While an extensive overview of this very far branching movement would be too intricate for the purposes of the current research, it is perhaps relevant to mention that some of the fundamental preoccupations and philosophical implications of the school are far reaching both to modern and contemporary thought. With an effective start in 1929-30, and spanning multiple generations until the present, some of the key thinkers of critical theory include Horkheimer, Adorno, spanning all the way to Marcuse, and, in postmodern philosophy, Foucault and Derrida. In his 1937 essay, *Traditional and Critical Theory*, Horkheimer outlines one of the key distinctions of critical theory. Namely, the difference between social theories, scientific theories (or, traditional theories) and critical social theories and their relation to knowledge. Traditional theory, based on Cartesian traditions, has seen knowledge as facts, based on self-evident truths, forming universal laws. However, Horkheimer here rejected the idea of

objective truth. Setting the fundamental tenants of critical theory, this line of philosophical thought sees the idea of knowledge is itself a product of history and society, setting up a universe where the establishment of an objective viewpoint, therefore, is impossible.

The above philosophical tenant refashions knowledge and the act of inquiry into active engagement. Through a critical understanding of ideology, the aim of critical theory research program is to uncover the “socio-political determinants” limiting the access of an objective viewpoint and through the tool of ideology criticism, identify prevailing forms of power and deprive them of normative value (The Frankfurt School). From this, it follows that a program of liberation is established, where, yet to come scenarios are imagined in place of normative ideologies in the negative sense. As Corradetti discusses, “The mission of Critical Theory, therefore, is not exhausted by a theoretical understanding of social reality; as a matter of fact, there is a strict interconnection between critical understanding and transformative action: theory and practice are interconnected” (Zucker, “The Frankfurt School”). Therefore, a critical theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human “emancipation from slavery”, acts as a “liberating ... influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (Horkheimer 246). In this sense elements of feminism, race, postcolonial studies, and a number of other disciplines can function under the term. Some of the key issues of critical theory involve “the critique of modernity and capitalist society, the definition of social emancipation, as well as the detection of the pathologies of society” (Zucker, “The Frankfurt School”).

In the context of the current, interdisciplinary study, therefore, the aim of the paper is not to arrive at a few, final scientific truth claims, but rather to identify a socio-cultural phenomenon and the power mechanisms contributing to its existence. If it is uncovered that these elements cause normalized power imbalances, the aim of the program is to identify them, and through identification, de-normalize and set up an alternative framework of understanding our shared reality.

While it can be argued that the paper constitutes an interdisciplinary approach in terms of its contribution to both the sociology of religion and its critical theory approach, these realms can also be seen as constituting a cohesive whole. Much of the thinkers and scholarship of critical theory can be seen as fitting into sociological realms, while the sociology of religion inevitably makes questions of philosophy the object of its study. Research question I) How does post-Christian spirituality function in contemporary corporate environments? and II) What ideology do post-Christian spiritual practices in work environments contribute to?, can be seen as complementing each other. The first, identifying a sociological phenomenon, fitting into the scholarship of the sociology of religion, the second, assessing the ideological or cultural significance of the identified sociological phenomena. The structure in answering these interrelated questions follows below.

### **3.3. Structure of the research program**

Having discussed the theoretical basis and the used working definitions in chapter two, and having discussed the research aim, and philosophy of the paper in sections 3.1. and 3.2., 3.4 will discuss the approaches used in the collection of the interview material. Chapter four will detail the collected interview material conducted with four mindfulness meditation teachers. Following this, chapter five will discuss the material’s relationship with theories post-Christian spirituality, mindfulness-meditation discourse, and the relationship between post-Christian spirituality and its workplace applications, through notions of the inner self, self-help, and experience creation. In addition to the

material's relation to theories discussed in chapter two, chapter five will discuss additional findings within the interview material, giving an overview and understanding of how post-Christian spirituality functions in work environments. Finally, it will discuss the possible ideologies of work that corporate post-Christian spirituality might entail, via the interview material, in combination with definitions of neoliberalism and managerialism discussed in chapter two.

### **3.4. Interview material: Collection methods**

The paper identified the main actors within the discourse of corporate post-Christian spirituality. Namely, mindfulness-meditation teachers, employees and leaders undergoing mindfulness-meditation training, and companies themselves. Initially, the paper aimed to collect and categorize material according to these four outlets. However, it proved to be difficult due to a number of reasons. The project was unable to conduct in-depth interviews with corporate companies, despite approaching a number of them known to conduct mindfulness-meditation within their staff development. Stemming from the lack of access to these companies, individual employees were not found for interviews, or did not respond. Additionally, besides the host of secondary business articles mentioned in chapter two, very little was found in terms of the direct program of these companies, in terms of how these programs function and to what extent post-Christian elements could be found.

In contrast to the above, mindfulness-meditation teachers however, were relatively responsive. Out of the 16 contacted mindfulness-meditation coaches working in corporate staff development programs, six were willing to conduct audio and camera recorded in-depth interviews of about one hour in duration. All mindfulness-meditation trainers work in the Amsterdam business district of Zuidas. Known as the financial center of The Netherlands, Zuidas is home to large multi-national companies, such as Google, Tata Consultancy Services, and Accenture<sup>6</sup>.

Four interviews were conducted and two were unsuccessful, due to cancellations. Three out of six initially willing participants asked for the recorded material, so they could use it for their own marketing purposes. Two participants decided to podcast the interview. It is speculated that given the independent entrepreneurial nature of the trainers (all participants conducted their own mindfulness-meditation business), the proposed video and sound material served as an incentive for them to gain marketing material and therefore participated willingly.

The interviews consisted of experiences communicated by English speaking mindfulness-meditation teachers inhabiting corporate spaces within the Zuidas district in the form of semi-structured interviews. Their practice involves group mindfulness-meditation sessions with corporate staff, individual counselling sessions, similarly based on mindfulness-meditation practices, as well as mindful retreats involving corporate team meditations in suburban or natural surroundings.

After asking participants to introduce themselves in the context of their role as mindfulness-meditation teachers, they were posed loose interview topics, worded differently in each interview, the interviews taking up a conversational tone and leading to a free discussion. While the interview conversations touched on multiple topics, and were conversational in nature, the following themes will be discussed as listed below. The selection and unification of the interview topics in the paper aims to both uncover and contrast the teachers' relationship to the topics discussed in the previous

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<sup>6</sup> <https://zuidasoffices.amsterdam/global-business?page=1>

chapters. The interview questions were motivated by and revolved around the following topics, (List of loose interview questions, worded differently within each interview listed in the Appendix):

**1. Background:**

The interview aimed to identify the previous background of mindfulness-meditation teachers and answer the question of whether their practice originates in post-Christian spirituality, business management, corporate employment, a combination of the above, or neither. Or, worded generally, what led them to pursue this career.

**2. Religion and post-Christian spirituality:**

This question aimed to position subjects in relation to post-Christian spiritual practices, and identify post-Christian elements or lack of it in their practice.

**3. The inner self or authenticity:**

As discussed in chapter two, the notion of authenticity or a true inner self is a prevalent theme within post-Christian spirituality, represented by experiential epistemology and self-spirituality within the post-Christian spirituality scale. The interviews hope to gain insight on the subject's relationship to it.

**4. Quantification and science discourse:**

As discussed in chapter two, in the practice of Jon Kabat Zinn, certain mindfulness-meditation discourse quantifies its practice and aims to elevate it into the realms of scientific discourse. The collected data hopes to shed light on how teachers see their practice in relation to quantification and science.

**5. Organizational focus:**

The interviews hope to shed light of how teachers see the aim of their practice within a corporate organization.

**6. Interplay between actors:**

The interview data hopes to gain insight on how teachers relate their practice to organizations, staff, and leadership, either individually, or through their relationship to each other.

The current chapter discussed the research aim, philosophy, structure, and the material collection methods of the paper, along with the main discussion points of the interview material. Having established its structural background, the following chapter will detail the interview content, based on the above structure and methods.

## **4. Interview Material**

### **Participant 1**

The first participant was a Dutch female, interviewed in two locations, in her home and personal meditation space, in the north-east of Amsterdam and in the downtown Zuidas district. Participant 1 runs her own mindfulness-meditation business that focuses on mindful corporate staff development and team building. She has been working as a full-time mindfulness-meditation teacher in corporate management for about the past 5-7 years. She holds training sessions in corporate spaces where she coaches leaders and employees on meditation, emotional control, and mindful communication. She also holds retreats for company teams in remote, natural surroundings, where members are asked not to engage with technology and have day long meditation sessions and coaching lead by Participant 1. The aim of these retreats is for participants to “reconnect with their inner selves”.

In terms of the interview environment, Participant 1 had her home decorated with Buddha statues, the Buddhist symbol of the three wise monkeys, as well as Hindu elephant statues. Her home included a meditation shed in the back of her garden. The second half on the interview was conducted in the rooftop garden of one of the Zuidas office buildings. Participant 1 often frequents the surrounding offices where she works with various companies on a freelance basis.

#### **1. Background:**

Participant 1 (P1) describes her background in mindfulness according to the following narrative: She worked in corporate environments both as a consultant and in recruitment. However, the birth of her son was the trigger that started her path in the world of mindfulness-meditation, when she was introduced to a book on Buddhism for mothers: “my agenda was always full and I always wanted to plan things, but the baby didn’t collaborate. No one could give me the answer to what the solution to this is”. Buddhism made her “make that switch from control to acceptance”.

Upon reading further, she was inclined to find meaning in other areas of her life: “I also started to realize that the added value of the work I was doing was not that big [...] I wanted to add value to people and do something that was really valuable for me [...] accepting the uncontrollable allowed me to connect with people on a different level and I couldn’t do that in the [corporate] environment where I was before.”

#### **2. Religion and post-Christian spirituality:**

P1 resolutely declines her affiliation with any institutionalized religion. When asked about her Buddhist affiliation she replied that: “Mindfulness is linked to Buddhism but that’s not the main thing. I don’t know what makes you into a Buddhist”. There are noticeable elements of bricolage, experiential epistemology: “I take elements from it [Buddhism] and reflect what it means for me [...]” and self-spirituality: “its feeding me and inspiring only, I don’t like to follow any dogmas or gurus”.

Additionally, her otherwise post-Christian practice seems to focus on results of secular self-help in terms of its direct use in daily life, while representing perennialism: “A lot of values that we are talking of right now have their roots in religion [...] But we need to talk about things that are useful for people in their daily life”.

### **3. The inner self or authenticity:**

P1 emphasizes the notion of the inner self: “I thought that I was my true self when I was working in the business environment, but I found out I could connect with a different layer of myself”.

When asked to elaborate on the notion of the inner self and authenticity P1 responded: “Self is the automatic patterns of reaction, all these reactions are part of the self in interaction. Authenticity is however the real inner part, the self-acting in a responsive way in the environment and not being driven by the automatic impulses. Connecting to what’s pure and fundamental and to the bigger picture.” The idea of the fundamental bigger picture can be seen as fitting into the spiritual notion of holism within post-Christian spirituality while the notion of interconnectedness can be linked to aliveness of the cosmos.

The notion of authenticity was especially pronounced when P1 was discussing her retreat sessions, P1 emphasized the element of helping her clients in retreat reach their authenticity or “reconnect with their inner selves” through being in nature and getting a chance to evaluate their thoughts. P1’s notions on the inner self can be seen as representing self-spirituality and experiential epistemology; the inner self needs to be experienced in her own. The latter is inexplicitly stated. However, she is seen taking an active role in connecting with her inner self, therefore representing experiential epistemology.

### **4. Quantification and science discourse:**

The quantified, negative outcome of employee dissatisfaction was mentioned by P1, when she talked about employee burnout and its consequences: “companies were confronted with more and more people not being able to cope, finding stress levels too much. That was the point when companies thought mindfulness can help people to get back to work.” Otherwise, she did not overly quantify her practice or pronounce its potential scientific elements.

### **5. Focus of practice:**

When reflecting on her work, the focus for P1 was not on the improvement and quantification of employee performance, rather on the pragmatic aim of wellbeing at work as seen above and in the following: “I think the main reason companies engage with mindfulness-meditation is to facilitate their employees’ reintegration at work.”

### **6. Interplay or role of identified actors:**

*Organizations:* P1 emphasized the role of organizations in creating meaning, a sense of belonging, and purpose for employees and leaders.: “Young people are not just interested about being a manager but want to see what life is about. Work has to create a community, meaning and people want to feel affiliated to the company and the company’s world picture”

*Employees:* P1 emphasizes the importance of finding the inner self at work through awareness of one’s own environment. Here, organizational citizenship is emphasized again, rather than direct performance indicators. “Whether its corporate presentations, communicating with colleagues, consciousness through the inner self is very important. Through interaction with other people, you can create things. Be aware of inside out outside in movement, aware of the environment and being aware of your purpose. You can also make your circle bigger and be aware of what’s happening, this can help organizational cultures”

P1 emphasizes the finding of the inner self through work and authentic connection with others: “Within corporate settings, people have the role of colleagues. It’s difficult to take away that layer and be you and talk about yourself. What we do is make people realize the influence of colleagues being present- that’s the first step of being aware of the role and your position. This creates space to connect with yourself and others.”

It is important to note, that employee authenticity comes directly after having discussed the importance of the organizational integration, and this does not seem to strike her as a contradiction. Additionally, through the entire interview and as seen above, the theme of meaning creation through organizational structures is especially emphasized- and creating an identity through work seems to be the main focus of her practice.

*Leadership:* P1 mentions how corporate leaders are able to make more authentic and bold business decisions. This is in line with her emphasis on creating authentic work identities through organizational structures: “[There is] much more fun and energy. People getting the strength to do something different. I remember that a manager was given a new position, he decided to do something different and made different business changes”

In discussing any of the above actors, It is also interesting to note that P1 emphasizes “reworking” corporate structures and “repositioning” the self in them, as opposed to the other way around, namely, changing corporate structures.

## **Participant 2**

Participant 2 is a Ukrainian national expat, actively living and working in The Netherlands. She runs her own independent mindfulness-meditation business and works with corporate clients. Additionally, she holds weekly meditation and mindful sessions in a downtown coworking space, for young urban professionals in a variety of sectors. The interview was conducted in the auditorium of the coworking space, where she otherwise conducts her regular meditation and yoga sessions. The auditorium is devoid of any eastern symbolism and P2’s attire is distinctly business casual. She also

hosts company retreats, for people who are “longing to disconnect”. Among the goals of her retreat, she mentions: “Self-discovery, journey, detox, me-time.”

### **1. Background:**

Similarly to P1, P2 comes from a corporate environment, namely a sales and marketing background. She started using mindfulness meditation and yoga as pragmatic tools to help her in her corporate job, to help herself “manage pressure”. She describes herself becoming an incrementally better employee:

“I got really good with these tools, because I knew when I needed to take breaks and what kind of meditation or energy boost I needed. They made me so effective, that working 5 or 6 years in the company, I was running like 20 projects in parallel, my team would meet the stretch target and my team would be the most successful team and everybody would be loving to work with me because I was so productive effective but yet good to work with.”

She describes making the switch from corporate employee to mindful entrepreneur as: “It was a matter of motivation. I need my why and I needed to believe in my what and the corporate why was not motivating for me enough. I needed my own drivers.” She adds that she also did not want to be in 9 to 5 environments anymore.

### **2. Religion and Post-Christian Spirituality:**

In terms of her attitudes to religion, P2 describes going to India and Nepal to explore the roots of mindfulness-meditation. Here, she distinctly distances herself from religion:

“I must be honest, I did not find a lot of spirituality in these countries, because people are there struggling to survive. A lot of practices are a religion. Yoga for example is really a prayer. So that was not for me. I don’t see that as a religion.”

P2 also shows elements of holism, bricolage, perennialism, and aliveness of the cosmos: “As you explore more religions you realize that they all speak the same. I would call it spirituality or feeling of balance or connection with everybody.” However, besides these quotes, her attitude to mindfulness-meditation is mostly non-spiritual and pragmatic. As seen from the above quote and below, P2 places a strong emphasis on individual self-help within her post-Christian spiritual practice.

### **3. Authenticity:**

P2 describes authenticity as: “Knowing your weaknesses and strengths and having nothing to hide about it. (...) This can help you shine and take you to the next level [of your career]” She describes the “formula” of authentic identity as “knowing yourself” and mindfulness as a tool for “developing the self-awareness”. This can be seen as self-spirituality, and experiential

epistemology, although with a distinctly self-help-like tone in terms of their direct career applications.

**4. Quantification and science discourse:**

As opposed to P1, P2 emphasized in detail the quantifiable aspects of her work, although taking a somewhat explanatory note both in terms of the need to quantify her work, which she seems ambivalent about and in terms of the reliability of measurement:

“We *do* measure the attention span- large companies still want to show in numbers to their managers. Employees do not have to show an improvement. But we do see changes in attention span- it is a safe and very neutral metric to talk about, because we all want to pay longer attention.” She goes on to discuss that “other metrics are based on self-rating”, that result in “increases” in terms of self-described employee wellbeing. She also mentions the scientific validity of mindfulness-meditation practices that are proven through “MRI scans”.

**5. Focus of practice:**

As discussed in section three and also through P2’s personal success story with mindfulness-meditation, P2 emphasizes her practice as a very pragmatic tool for improved performance. This is similar to P1 in its distinctly self-help focus.

**6. Interplay or role of identified actors:**

*Organizations:*

Throughout the discussion, P2 was very organization oriented in the sense that she continually personified organizations and saw them as the key drivers for instilling mindfulness-meditation in employees’ and leaders’ daily lives. Therefore, there was less discussion about employees or leaders at an individual level and more about organizations (companies) themselves:

“There is more and more awareness in companies [...] they are looking to show employees that they are invested in their mental health. The majority of HR and health managers just say: we know it’s a busy work environment, so we just see this as an opportunity for employees to recharge. [On behalf of the companies], there is lot of drive for productivity but behind it is a very good human intention, to give the opportunity to disconnect and build new mental habits. This is a way for companies to say thank you to their employees and they [the employees] appreciate it.”

*Employees, Leaders:*

P2 emphasizes craving out a space for “me time” either in the morning or afternoon. When talking about employees or their leaders, P2 briefly mentions the phrases “honest connection, acceptance”. She goes on to discuss that “Teams report to feel more connected and safe around each other and they know the conversation can go much more in depth than the weather, but actually go into tricky topics like stress. Building a community of people who feel safe around each other to go the next level”. The notion of the “next level” is not elaborated on through the conversation.

### **Participant 3**

Participant three is a Dutch male, who independently runs his own mindfulness-meditation consultancy practice, dealing with one on one employee training sessions. His original occupation was physio therapy.

The interview was conducted in his apartment, which was located in the heart of Zuidas. When interviewing, P3 decided to sit on his rug, cross legged. The apartment was decorated in a minimalist fashion, containing a single Buddha statue and otherwise western furniture. While doing the interview the participant also recorded the conversation on his iPhone for his own podcast.

#### **1. Background:**

Unlike the rest of the participants, P3 does not have a corporate background. However, it was also his work (physiotherapy) that lead him to mindfulness-meditation. He was working as a physio therapist in a charity organization in Nepal, where he “had the option of going on a three-day tracking or doing a mini Buddhist retreat and I chose the second one. And there, you got a little Buddhist teaching, yoga and meditation.”

It is interesting to note, the way P3 quantifies his own meditation in a literal sense: “I started meditating 10 years ago. I did over 4 thousand hours by now, 2.5 hrs a day”

#### **2. Religion and Post-Christian Spirituality:**

Besides the bricolage attitude, to Buddhism, yoga and meditation, P3 emphasizes not being religious since the early age of 8. When asked to reflect on Buddhism, he disclosed that the religious element of Buddhism were irrelevant to him, although he did call himself a Buddhist: “I think Buddhism is not a religion or faith, it’s a way of life”. I’m living as a Buddhist I guess, but I don’t call myself that anymore. But I was a Buddhist for 4 years”

Elements of perennialism are prevalent in the world view of P3, as he discusses that: “the basis message of all religions is beautiful”. Nevertheless, P3’s relationship to the spiritual or post-Christian elements to mindfulness-meditation seem mostly pragmatic, similarly self-help like, such as P1 and P2, although not as result oriented as that of P2

#### **3. Authenticity:**

P3 emphasizes that meditation helps the individual see the processes that “go on inside” themselves, this can be seen as an element of self-spirituality and experiential epistemology. In relation to this, P3 discusses that “People burn out because they are detached from themselves”. The inner self is “mental calm and peace”. The hindrance of reaching the inner self is the issue of an “externally oriented” culture, where people are not focused on their own source of happiness but on others. Arguably, this is a highly individualized form of self-help in terms of the application of his post-Christian practice onto coping strategies against burnout.

#### **4. Quantification and the science discourse:**

P3 emphasizes research and brain scans proving meditation induced happiness. However, he does not try to quantify his practice. There is a staunch emphasis on scientific discourse: "Meditation is the only thing that helps improve mental fitness. Meditation is the only thing that is scientifically proven to make us more fit and balanced and more productive."

#### **5. Focus of Corporate Zen:**

P3 emphasizes his practice as a tool for everyday calm, peace, stress relief. It is interesting to note that P3 discusses mindfulness as "much more" than a mind calming technique. He sees this perceived stress relieving aim of mindfulness as a modified, western version of the original, although he does not see it as a lesser version: "This is the complete package still, it's just a question of emphasis and in the west it is clear where we need our emphasis"

Regardless, a contradictory statement seems to follow:

"If I would advertise differently (instead of mental calm and piece as discussed above) for you feel better within yourself, more balanced, happier- those kinds of things, I don't know if too many people would come." P3 goes on to say that companies are "not looking for happier employees, but profits which makes sense."

#### **6. Interplay or role of identified actors:**

##### *Organizations:*

As an example of the effectiveness of his practice, P3 often mentions Google and Apple as the thought leaders in this field, and as proof for the effective functioning of mindfulness-meditation in organizations: "You see it in Google, you see it in Apple, those companies have meditation trainer employees. And they see the changes. They don't do that to just be nice to the people"

However, P3 emphasizes the negative side of Corporate Zen: "I know about companies hiring meditation teachers just before reorganization. If they calm down they can handle being fired better. I'm not sure if that is the best way to use it"

P3 similarly to P1 emphasizes that "its not only money that companies need to offer". He does not elaborate on what he thinks it is that they are looking for. His general stance on the role of organizations is somewhat ambivalent and contradictory, as seen in the quotes of this and the previous section.

##### *Employees, Leaders:*

P3 sees mindfulness-meditation as a "toolbox to manage it [work related stress]". It is interesting to note, that P3 does not see the cause of employee and leadership burnout/stress as caused by the work environments themselves. For this, he discusses "bigger reasons for people being unable to work", such as "mental problems" and "external factors". When asked about these factors, he cited "social media, money problems, sick parents, those kind of things". Additionally, he cites technological distraction, and the inability to relax.

P3 cites organizational citizenship behavior: “You can only change the culture of a company if the individuals are there and see that vision”

#### **Participant 4**

P4 is similarly a Dutch male, living and working close to the Zuidas district in his own meditation office. The word office is purposefully used here, as the space is devoid of any eastern spiritual symbols and mostly looks like a comfortable personal office, with plants as decorations. The main focus of his work, P4 holds his individual coaching sessions here. His clients seek both life and work coaching. P4 similarly runs a podcast.

##### **1. Background:**

Like most participants, P4 has a corporate background, having worked in business consultancy. He recounts being highly stressed in this environment and being unhappy in a 9-5 work routine. He emphasizes that he did not want to continue participating in “dysfunctional organizational practices” and instead became a life coach and mindfulness trainer.

##### **2. Post-Christian Spirituality:**

P4 represents attitudes of bricolage, although in a different rhetoric than the previous participants. P4 discusses that Jon Kabat Zinn was “the founder of mindfulness”, however, he is aware of eastern religious traditions, as he mentions them briefly at later stages in the conversation. Therefore, it seems that P4’s focus is on the exclusively western interpretations of mindfulness.

P4 is not religious, however, he emphasizes that “In every religion there is a spiritual side”, which is important to him. He discusses all religions as “very universal in a way” This can be understood as perennialism.

##### **3. Authenticity:**

When asked about the topic and the often-corresponding notion of the inner self, P4 gave the following answer:

“Mindfulness does not cut the root of suffering, if you want to do that, you need to inquire your own identity- that’s a much harder question. You are not your thoughts and emotions. The inner self is not about the individual. Awareness of who we are is the inner self. Awareness of everything that happens. Everything goes through us and that’s your inner self, but it’s not my inner self.”

This can be seen as representing elements of self-spirituality and experiential epistemology, as well as holism, and aliveness of the cosmos.

##### **4. Quantification and the science discourse:**

P4 did not try to quantify his practice, however he did briefly elevate it onto a scientific theme, however this turned into more of a post-Christian spiritual comment, reflecting aliveness of

the cosmos or arguably holism: “A lot of science is pointing to...that we are not as separated as we think we all are”.

#### **5. Focus of practice:**

P4 often emphasizes the negative effects of “quick fix mindfulness” and defines his practice in opposition to it: “short term stress management does not work with the long term: how to be okay with fear and stress”. Overall, P4’s focus is less on productivity and organizational aims (as seen in the section below), but on personal and existential questions, arguably a form of existential self-help, in terms of the application of his post-Christian spiritual practice onto everyday mental adjustment strategies.

#### **6. Interplay or role of identified actors:**

##### *Organization:*

P4 had issues with corporate companies trying to “monetize meditation”. He backed out of building a meditation app for a company, because he saw “how big the gap was” between company aims and actual spirituality: “companies see this as only a way to boost productivity or marketing, a quick fix, but divert attention away from the real goal [real goal defined above]”

When discussing both his personal conversion story and his general thoughts on corporate environments, P4 discusses that “enduing more hours and making more profit does not make sense after a certain point”. In essence, P4 sees company practices as “unsustainable”.

##### *Employees/Leadership:*

He discusses, similarly based on personal experience that there is “very little space to breathe in (for corporate employees): “hour hour hour break and then hour hour again. I was the very few who actually went on a walk”

He feels that older employees have a more difficult time dealing with the increased stresses of corporate work environments: “newer generations have to take on more hours- older generations have a difficult time dealing with this”. He adds that: “It just doesn’t make sense anymore to work for organizations only aimed at generating profit and I think people feel that”. Here, P4 also emphasizes that “people are really looking for broader life questions. More and more feel that they need to go a little bit deeper than they used to. People are much more searching on their own [for meaning]”

Having detailed the collected interview material with all four mindfulness-meditation coaches, organized by the unified interview topics discussed in chapter three, the following chapter five will discuss and analyze the material based on the theories and working definitions discussed in chapter two.

## **5. Outcomes**

The following chapter will discuss the collected interview material in chapter 4 and its relation to the themes discussed in chapter 2 along with the researcher's additional findings. Section 5.1. will assess to what extent the material measures up to and deviates from the post-Christian spirituality scale. Additionally, the chapter will discuss variations and additions to post-Christian spiritual practices found in the interview material. Secondly, section 5.2. will discuss the material in relation to non-corporate mindfulness-meditation discourses examined in chapter two. Section 5.3. will examine how post-Christian spirituality relates to a secular, work environment through notions of the inner self, self-help, and experience creation. Building on the conclusions in section 5.1. and section 5.3., section 5.4. will form a synthesis between definitions and discussions of neoliberalism and managerialism in chapter two and the interview material.

### **5.1. Relation to the post-Christian spirituality scale**

The interview material was contrasted to the post-Christian spirituality scale discussed and detailed in chapter 2, in order to assess to what extent and in what manner post-Christian themes are present in corporate environments.

Participants 1-4 identified with post-Christian elements to varying levels. Bricolage was pronounced in all practices, as participants freely drew on a variety of religious elements. Within all four interviews, these elements were already packaged to western audiences (Buddhism for mothers, western yoga, western retreats in Nepal mixing Buddhist and Hindu elements). In all interviews, bricolage was brought up in conversation with perennialism. All admitted openly to drawing on a variety of religious traditions throughout their careers as spiritual trainers and considered all religious tradition as similar in essence, although preferred eastern traditions to Judeo-Christian ones, specifically, Buddhism and Yoga. The latter is in line with Houtman and Tromp's discussion of religious preferences under their definition of perennialism in the post-Christian spiritual scale.

Aliveness of the cosmos and holism was emphasized by three participants (P1,P2,P4) through the interconnectedness and unity of humans and the universe. Immanence of the sacred was not present in the interview material.

Self-spirituality and experiential epistemology were emphasized when discussing notions of the inner self or authenticity.

This outcome leads the researcher to multiple conclusions. Based on assessment via the post-Christian spirituality scale, post-Christian spirituality can be seen as present in secular, and specifically work environments. However, only six elements of the seven-point scale were present, while participants showed variation in representing the elements of the post-Christian spirituality scale, with some only showing certain elements. This indicates that variations of the post-Christian spirituality scale are present. Additionally, as Houtman and Tromp discuss under their definition of perennialism, a preference for eastern traditions as inspiration is a dominant element. However, it is interesting to note, that with the exclusion of P4, all other participants drew on Buddhism or Yoga. Additionally, their knowledge and introduction to these religions were limited to already packaged notions to western audiences (Buddhism for mothers, western yoga, western retreats in Nepal mixing Buddhist and Hindu elements, the personal brand of Jon Kabat Zinn).

## **5.2. Relationship to existing post-Christian mindfulness-meditation discourses**

In contrast to the spiritual thought leaders discussed in chapter two, participants did not represent an overly eclectic attitude. This might be due to their exclusively corporate context, leading the researcher to conclude that eclecticism in the realms of corporate mindfulness-meditation is not present as opposed to mindfulness-meditation practices outside of corporate discourses. Additionally, participants preferred elements of Buddhism and yoga as discussed in section 5.1.1., in contrast to mindfulness-meditation thought leaders, who freely drew on multiple eastern elements. Immanence of the sacred was not present. This is in contrast to the practices of spiritual thought leaders discussed in chapter two.

An element examined was whether participants emphasized a scientific discourse or quantification of their practice. This was motivated by the type of mindfulness-meditation represented by Jon Kabat Zinn as discussed in chapter two. In terms of the scientific discourse and quantification of their practice, participants mostly aimed to elevate their practice into a quasi-scientific discourse. Often, scientific claims were discussed, with no direct references. Some participants quantified their practice or referenced metrics or statistics without direct numbers and statistics. Therefore, the elevation of mindfulness-meditation practice into a scientific context is strongly present, as seen in all participants. However, as opposed to the scientific, evidence-based rhetoric of Jon Kabat Zinn, the vague scientific claims of participants remain pseudoscientific in nature.

This enables the researcher to conclude that mindfulness-meditation in work environments as opposed to outside of it does not, according to the interview material, include the post-Christian spiritual scale element of the immanence of the sacred. In terms of the religious traditions that the former draws on, Yoga and Buddhism is preferred as opposed to the eclectic and diverse range of traditions that non-corporate mindfulness coaches draw on (such as electronic dance music, or quantum healing). In addition, corporate lead mindfulness-meditation emphasizes science and quantification. However, these claims remain anecdotal and unsystematic as opposed to the distinctly scientific discourse of Jon Kabat Zinn discussed in chapter two.

## **5.3. spirituality at the secular workplace: inner-self, self-help, and experience creation**

The notion of the inner self (interchangeably worded as authenticity) was drawn in parallel with elements of self-spirituality and experiential epistemology with regards to the post Christian spirituality scale and seen through the interview material and discussed above. The inner self, also strongly ties in with elements of self-help in participant's practice, forming various program's or goals. Through finding one's inner self, one can have "mental fitness" (P3), be more "productive" (P2), integrate in the work environment (P1), or answer existential anxieties (P4). This element of self-help can be seen as exemplified well in a quote by P1, mentioned in chapter 4:

"A lot of values that we are talking of right now have their roots in religion [...] But we need to talk about things that are useful for people in their daily life".

Common to three participants, and an unexpected outcome to the researcher, is their emphasis on a similar personal self-help narrative, which mixes the spiritual with the corporate. As seen in the background section of the interview material in P1,P2,P4, these three participants emphasize some form of burnout in their work environment, which triggered their search for spirituality, eventually

leading them to mindfulness-meditation, after which they set up their own practice and went to teach mindfulness-meditation in similar corporate environments that originally triggered their burnouts, becoming quasi spiritual entrepreneurs in spaces where they were originally in employee status.

It can be argued that this individualized, secular self-help mixing the spiritual inner self with real-world objectives applied within corporate environments can be linked to Hanegraaff and Bovbjerg's theories on New Age discussed in chapter two. Similar to Hanegraaff's theory, within all participants, personal or psychological growth are interlinked with the spiritual, while similar to Bovbjerg's discussion on New Age in corporate environments, the focus of mindfulness-meditation is to create experiences or meaning in various forms, often closely interlinked with the aforementioned psychological concerns as discussed above. This is either in the form of deep existential issues, as in the case of P4. Or, the psychological management of employees, as seen in all participants. For P2, experience manifests in the form of corporate community building, and mental health management. While for P1, this can be seen in creating abstract meaning, a sense of belonging, and purpose for employees. The need for experience creation also takes on a meta-discussion within the interviews, as mindfulness teachers explicitly reflect on the role of their practice in creating experience or refer to the necessity of meaning creation.

P1 discusses it as:

"A lot of values that we are talking of right now have their roots in religion [...] But we need to talk about things that are useful for people in their daily life"

"Young people are not just interested about being a manager but want to see what life is about. Work has to create a community, meaning and people want to feel affiliated to the company and the company's world picture"

P2 discusses the importance of mental health management that companies have to offer:

"There is more and more awareness in companies [...] they are looking to show employees that they are invested in their mental health.

Additionally, P3 implies the need for experience creation: "its not only money that companies need to offer". For the existential focus of P4, the need for meaning creation is explicitly discussed: "It just doesn't make sense anymore to work for organizations only aimed at generating profit and I think people feel that" [...] "people are really looking for broader life questions. More and more feel that they need to go a little bit deeper than they used to. People are much more searching on their own [for meaning]"

It is interesting to note, that as seen in the above quotes from all participants, the need for experience or creation is implied to be an expectation from the employees' side, as seen in the above quotes, implying an existing need for experience or meaning creation on the side of the worker rather than passively offered by the organization.

This enables the researcher to conclude that the pronounced element of the inner self, discussed under experiential epistemology and self-spirituality under the post-Christian spirituality scale gain a distinctly self-help modality within corporate post-Christian spirituality. Additionally, three out of four participants emphasize their own self-help narrative, including burnout and consequent reintegration within corporate realms through post-Christian spiritual practices. Finally, practices of corporate post-

Christian spirituality show an emphasis in experience or meaning creation at the workplace, although with various focuses, depending on the individual practitioner.

#### **5.4. post-Christian ideologies at work in a neoliberal context**

In terms of understanding the ideologies of work that corporate post-Christian spirituality might entail, the interview material, in combination with definitions of neoliberalism and managerialism discussed in chapter 2 leads to the following conclusions.

It can be argued that post-Christian spirituality in work environments leads to individually internalized ideologies of neoliberalism. With the neoliberal notion that economic and entrepreneurial freedoms constitute the conditions for human wellbeing discussed in chapter two, human management or managerialism is a tool in the untapping of such entrepreneurial freedoms at an organizational level. Individual experiences or meaning arising from such spiritual practices and offered by mindfulness-meditation teachers (as discussed above) become a resource in mindful management for maintaining corporate structures. The inner-self is to be found in a corporate or work context, gaining significance in an exclusively corporate context, maintaining institutional entrepreneurship. This is especially pertinent when looking at the personal narrative of mindfulness-meditation teachers in terms of their burnout and subsequent return to corporate environments.

What can be discussed as the corporate inner-self, exemplifies well, the merger of work structures with the private as discussed by Hanegraaff and Bovbjerg. However, the current paper further argues, that based on the discussion of work seen as an end in itself in chapter two and the large number of employees feeling that their work does not contribute anything of substantial value, the engineering of experience or meaning gains heightened importance. Given the context of a post labor theory of value, and top-down managerialism as discussed in chapter two, new work value has to be engineered: unrelated to work itself, experience and meaning has to be created in corporate environments in order to give meaning to often meaningless work structures.

In the above context, the implementation of post-Christian spirituality gains new dimensions of meaning. Not only are neoliberal ideals internalized, the burden of creating meaning is shifted on to the individual. The mindful worker becomes the entrepreneur of the self, who self-regulates and strives towards efficiency, and even creates meaning for herself where there is none, with mindfulness-meditation teachers helping untap meaning for the individual. Thus, the inner self is seen not simply as a tool for accumulation of capital, rather, as something that has to generate meaning in an organizational context. It can be argued that this leads to a new worker ideal. A form of entrepreneur of the self-image is created in the sense that the responsibility of self-management and meaning creation is fully outsourced onto the individual. Burnout is solved by reaching into the inner self, and meaning in work is manufactured the same way.

Having detailed the conclusions arising from the synthesis between the theories and working definitions discussed in chapter two, and the interview material detailed in chapter four, the current, chapter five established an independent framing of post-Christian spirituality in work environments via the application of the post-Christian spirituality scale, compared the interview material to existing discourses of non-corporate post-Christian, mindfulness-meditation discourses, and examined the

relationship of spirituality and the secular workplace through notions of the inner-self, self-help, and experience creation. Additionally, the chapter arrived at an ideological discussion on what post-Christian spirituality means for our understanding of work. With these discussions in mind, the following chapter will conduct a reflection and discussion on the extent and manner in which the paper's proposed research questions were answered, its theoretical contribution, limitations, and possibilities for further research.

## **6. Reflection and discussion**

Having discussed the outcomes of the interview material and its subsequent analysis in combination with theories discussed in chapter two, the following section will discuss the manner and extent in which the paper's research questions were answered. Additionally, the section will reflect on the theoretical contribution of the paper, as well as its limitations and possibilities for further research.

### **6.1. Research questions and findings**

The paper examined mindfulness-meditation applied within workplace environments. The aim of the paper was to understand the function of mindfulness-meditation in workplace environments from a sociological and ideological standpoint. Placing the practice of mindfulness-meditation in the context of post-Christian spirituality based on scholarship within the sociology of religion, the paper set up the following research questions:

#### **1) How does post-Christian spirituality function in contemporary corporate environments?**

The above research question was answered in the following manner: First, the study conducted in-depth, unstructured interviews with four mindfulness-meditation coaches working in the Zuidas business district of Amsterdam. Second, the interview material was assessed via the post-Christian spirituality scale, to systematically assess, what elements of post-Christian spirituality were present in the material. Following this, the material was contrasted to existing discourses of mindfulness-meditation outside of corporate environments to understand how corporate mindfulness-meditation differs from its non-corporate variations. Finally, the relationship between spirituality and work was discussed in the context of the inner-self, self-help, and experience creation.

Based on assessment via the post-Christian spirituality scale, post-Christian spirituality can be seen as present in secular, and specifically work environments. However, only six elements of the seven-point scale were present, while participants showed variation in representing the elements of the post-Christian spirituality scale. This indicates that variations of the post-Christian spirituality scale are present. Additionally, a preference for eastern traditions as inspiration is a dominant element. However, it is interesting to note, that with the exclusion of P4, all other participants drew on Buddhism or Yoga. Additionally, their knowledge and introduction to these religions were limited to already packaged notions to western audiences (Buddhism for mothers, western yoga, western retreats in Nepal mixing Buddhist and Hindu elements).

Mindfulness-meditation in work environments as opposed to its non-corporate discourse, according to the interview material, do not include the post-Christian spiritual scale element of the immanence of the sacred. In terms of the religious traditions that the former draws on, Yoga and Buddhism is preferred as opposed to the eclectic and diverse range of traditions that non-corporate mindfulness coaches draw on. In addition, corporate lead mindfulness-meditation emphasizes science and quantification. However, these claims remain anecdotal and unsystematic as opposed to the distinctly scientific discourse of Jon Kabat Zinn.

The inner self, discussed under experiential epistemology and self-spirituality under the post-Christian spirituality scale gain a distinctly self-help modality within corporate post-Christian spirituality. Additionally, three out of four participants emphasize their own self-help narrative, including burnout and consequent reintegration within corporate realms through post-Christian spiritual practices.

Finally, practices of corporate post-Christian spirituality shows elements of meaning or experience creation at the workplace, although with various focuses, depending on the individual practitioner.

## **II) What is the ideological context of post-Christian spirituality in work environments?**

In terms of understanding the ideological context of post-Christian spirituality in work environments, the paper placed the practice of workplace mindfulness-meditation in the context of neoliberalism and the corresponding notion of managerialism. Having outlined the research philosophy of critical theory otherwise discussed as ideology criticism, the paper used the interview material as a case study for understanding the ideological context of post-Christian spirituality in the workplace by discussing post-Christian spiritual elements and their relationship to structures of neoliberalism and managerialism.

It can be argued that post-Christian spirituality in work environments leads to internalized ideologies of neoliberalism. With the neoliberal notion of economic and entrepreneurial freedoms constituting the conditions for human wellbeing, human management or managerialism is a tool in the untapping of such entrepreneurial freedoms. Having arrived at the emphasized notions of inner-self and meaning creation within corporate post-Christian discourses, both gain significance in maintaining economic and entrepreneurial freedoms in the form of corporate structures. Individual spiritualities and meaning creation become a resource in mindful management for maintaining these structures and the inner self is to be found in a corporate or work context. This is especially pertinent when looking at the personal narrative of mindfulness-meditation teachers in terms of their burnout and subsequent return to corporate environments. However, besides the crude analysis of understanding corporate mindfulness-meditation in terms of it instilling corporate values, the ideology of mindfulness-meditation can be seen as going one step further, by establishing a new ideal of the white-collar office worker. Given the context of a post labor theory of value, and top-down managerialism as discussed in chapter two, Not only are neoliberal ideals internalized, the burden of creating meaning is shifted on to the individual. The mindful worker becomes the entrepreneur of the self, who self-regulates and strives towards efficiency, and even creates meaning for herself where these is none. Here, the mindfulness-meditation teacher becomes the trainer in helping engineer meaning. Thus, the inner-self is seen not simply as a tool for the indirect accumulation of capital or the maintenance of corporate structures, rather it becomes something that has to generate meaning in an organizational context.

### **6.2.Theoretical contribution**

The above findings can be seen as a contribution to the field of the sociology of religion in multiple respects. To the knowledge of the researcher, the trend of mindfulness-meditation in corporate environments has not been identified and placed within the post-Christian spirituality discourse. Additionally, the post-Christian spirituality scale has not been used to test real-life phenomena, corporate or otherwise. In terms of its ideological discussion, the understanding of mindfulness-meditation as contributing to new ideals of work has not been discussed to the knowledge of the researcher. Finally, the interdisciplinary fusion of workplace post-Christian spirituality and ideology criticism can be seen as an addition to scholarship within social sciences.

### **6.3. Limitations and possibilities for further research**

Limitations in the current research can be seen in the scope of the analyzed material, the theoretical scope of the background material, and the wider examination and understanding of mindfulness-meditation. In terms of the analyzed material, the research was unable to sample all its actors involved, such as representatives of corporations instilling mindfulness-meditation in their programs, or employees undergoing it. As discussed in chapter three, this was due to the unavailability of these two actors. Additionally, possibilities for further research include a detailed content analysis of existing articles on mindfulness-meditation, as well as on scientific articles in the topic, motivated by the scientific brand of mindfulness-meditation discussed under Jon Kabat Zinn in chapter two. Due to the time and scope limitations of the current research project, this was not possible. Additionally, the positive use of post-Christian mindfulness-meditation could also be investigated in more detail. Finally, a further, potentially engaging research option would include analysis on the way that mindfulness-meditation is used for the external branding of companies.

## Appendix

### Loose interview topics posed to all for participants:

- a. Could you please introduce yourself? Who you are and what you do in the context of mindfulness-meditation?
- b. How did you get introduced to mindfulness?
- c. What did you work previously?
- d. (If participant was a corporate employee previously) How did you experience your role previously, as a corporate employee?
- e. What added value did this give to your life?
- f. Do you think there is such a thing as an authentic self? What is it?
- g. Are you religious (or, when discussing Buddhism: Do you affiliate with any branch of Buddhism)?
- h. Why do companies or your clients find you?
- i. How does mindfulness change work? How does mindfulness change employees?
- j. How does mindfulness-meditation help your clients?

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