Conceptualizing Mindful Leadership in Schools: How the Practice of Mindfulness Informs the Practice of Leading

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This paper advances the conceptual notion of mindfulness for educational leaders. The findings presented acknowledge the current levels of stress that school leaders face and posits that the practice of mindfulness may reduce these stressors while improving the effectiveness of leadership. The author also presents a synthesis of the literature from resonant leadership, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and neuroscience findings, using the constructs of mindfulness as the foundation to develop a conceptual framework for mindful leadership in the schools. The attitudinal foundation of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2009) awareness, being fully present, compassion, equanimity, non-judgment, non-reactivity, letting go, listening, self-compassion, patience, and trust are presented at constructs of mindfulness for educational leaders. These constructs are reviewed for their ability to inform leadership practice for educational leaders.

> *Our world is a new world, and it requires a new kind of leadership.*
> Boyatzis and McKee (2005, p. 1)

Leadership theory has largely been described by the behavioral or trait characteristics of leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Northouse, 2013). These descriptions focus on the activities or the *doing* of the leaders where what often defines leaders is what they *have* or *do* (Fry & Kriger, 2009). Mindfulness departs from those approaches by suggesting a way of *being* as opposed to a way of *doing*.

The dimensions of mindfulness such as being fully present, aware, accepting, and non-judgmental embody this way of being. As opposed to emphasis on an act of *doing*, mindfulness

allows for a sense of spaciousness that enacts patience, listening, and compassion, all qualities important for leaders. Although classic leadership theory defines leaders by traits, (Northouse, 2013) mindful leadership offers a description of presence, a subtlety of describing how leaders enact these traits by *ways of being*.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) called for a different type of leadership, one that they refer to as resonant leadership, where leaders are mindful and emotionally intelligent, inspiring hope and offering compassion for all they serve and lead. By being in touch with the concerns and issues of the workers, the leaders demonstrate empathy and compassion (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

A conceptual framework is helpful for understanding how educational leaders can respond to their current work demands, take care of themselves, and contribute to work environments where empathy, compassion and non-reactivity are present. The construct I am proposing is one of mindful leadership, one that integrates components of mindfulness with those of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and resonant leadership, one that is informed by findings from neuroscience to suggest a different way of practicing leadership. I discuss these components or dimensions of mindfulness and their relationship to mindfulness below.

Four distinct yet related areas informs the conceptualization of mindfulness for educational leaders:

1. The stress levels of educational leaders apparent in the literature;
2. The literature of mindfulness that presents information about stress relief;
3. The development of using 'constructs' of mindfulness reviewed for their applicability to leadership strengths; and
4. Literature taken from emotional intelligence, social intelligence, resonant leadership, and neuroscience findings.

The assertion advanced is that *the practice of mindfulness may relieve stress and improve the practice of leadership.* Constructs of mindfulness as defined in this paper are applicable in advancing the practice of educational leadership The literature from business informs our work as educational leaders and it yields alternatives that describe renewal as an antidote to the continual pressure and burnout reported by those leading schools and school districts; mindfulness is a practice that contributes to a cycle of renewal.

Stress and Educational Leaders

Leaders operate in organizations that present challenges and opportunities, with problems that are complex and without easy answers (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). The challenges for leaders are considerable with stress being a common denominator (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Despite the challenges caused by the stress of leading, leaders can successfully respond, suggesting that a crisis can be an opportunity for learning and growth (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Knowing how to respond to a crisis is a skill that can be cultivated. It is possible to develop emotional intelligence, restore relationships and be effective as a leader after difficult challenges or threats have emerged (McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008).

Educational leaders may benefit from learning methods of stress reduction and responses to crises as they encounter stress related to decreased budgets, and increased scrutiny for student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Wells, 2013a;

2013b). Furthermore, the chief educational administrator also deals with the political realities of interacting with the public, school boards, and responsibility for the entire district (Crippen & Wallin, 2008; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski, 2006; Winter, Rinehart, Keely & Bjork, 2007). Realities of the work of principals reveal dramatically different job realities, with expectations for building management, instructional leadership, and expectations to resolve many of the problems that exist in the communities they serve (Kafka, 2009). As a result of these factors, principals and superintendents often report high levels of stress in their work (Johnson, 2004). Although superintendents feel a high percentage of stress there are few wellness programs to alleviate that stress (Hawk & Martin, 2011).

Building principals report increased levels of responsibilities and resulting stress in their work (Kafka, 2009; Louis et al., 2010). Building principals are engaged in myriad sources of conflict, in particular where demands for providing vision for student success occur amidst diminished revenues in the school (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Often such conditions lead to school principal attrition (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Whitaker, 1996). Concerns for the attrition rate of principals are also impacted by the fact that teachers who are the usual pool of replacements for these roles have expressed little desire for the same (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brady, 2009). With the rate of turnover in the field of principals, principals without experience are entering the field at greater numbers, without plans of sustainability for previous school improvement initiatives (Fink & Brayman, 2006).

School districts may also add to the level of stress for administrators with a culture that perpetuates anxiety and tension. As stated, schools with high expectations for performance and fewer resources contributes to the burnout and frustration that educational leaders feel (Sorenson, 2007). School principals in one Midwestern study reported personal stress as the highest stressor next to diminished resources, revealing high mean scores in "insufficient time to get the job done, constant interruptions, loss of personal time, keeping up with email communications, job expectations of the principal, and work-life balance" (Wells, Maxfield, & Klocko, 2011, p. 34). Finding ways to thrive is important to the emotional well being of a leader; mindfulness is listed as one means for thriving in a leadership capacity (Murphy, 2011).

Mindfulness and Stress Reduction

Mindfulness is a practice of meditation where the focus or attention is on the present moment. Meditators often focus on the breath without trying to analyze or control it; instead, they breathe naturally with a focused attention on the breath as it enters and leaves the body (Smalley & Winston, 2010). Kabat-Zinn (2003) offered, "An operational working definition of mindfulness is: "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (p.145). Boyatzis and McKee (2005) reported, "Mindfulness is the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences *inside the self*- body mind, heart, spirit- and to pay full attention to what is happening *around us*- people, that natural world, our surroundings and events" (p 113). McKee, et al., (2008) added, "People who deliberately practice mindfulness are consciously self-aware and self-monitoring; they are open and attentive to other people and to the world around them" (p. 45).

Mindfulness, through its approach to generating stillness, moment-to-moment awareness, and calm, centered breathing, contributes to decreased anxiety, blood pressure, depression, and

increased immunity, compassion, empathy, and non-reactivity- all symptoms of stress (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Fries, 2009; Garland, 2007; Greeson, 2008; Shapiro, Oman, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). The results of studies show a relationship between how much people practice meditation with how mindful they become, resulting in positive increases in mental and physical health (Greeson). Mindfulness qualities benefit personal and professional lives. It is the benefits that are central to this paper, in particular, how the practice of mindfulness might contribute to the success and effectiveness of the educational leader, while also supporting the leader's personal life.

Mindfulness has roots in Buddhism, with practices that have existed for over 2,500 years; however, the particulars of paying attention on purpose is a universal principle, one that has continued to gain popularity in the west as a secular tradition (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). Mindfulness is widely reported in journals and press articles, with publications from neuroscientists, psychologists, psychiatrists, business analysts, and other professionals (Boyce, 2012; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Davidson & Begley, 2012; Davidson et al., 2012; Davidson & Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Garland & Gaylord, 2009; Greeson, 2008; Hölzel, Lazar, Gard, Schuman-Olivier, Vago, et al., 2011; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006; Teasdale, Segal, & Williams, 2003); over 1,000 research articles about mindfulness have been published in peer-reviewed journals (Ryback, 2006).

Mindfulness has received media attention in the public domain and medical and scientific literature, and moved into mainstream Western culture in the past 30 years (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Mindfulness is being explored for its contributions on a personal and professional level, with large businesses offering training in mindfulness meditation. Businesses are also including mindfulness as part of their training within their organizations; selected corporations include: Target, Google, eBay, General Mills, Ford Motor Company, Facebook, Twitter, and Aetna International (Hunter, 2013). The advocacy in this paper is for educational leaders that would benefit from the training in and support for mindfulness, specific to the concerns that these school leaders experience, as do professionals in other occupations.

Integrating Mindfulness Constructs with Educational Leadership

The conceptualization for mindfulness for educational leaders is drawn from the integration of the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) with emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000); social intelligence (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008); resonant leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005); and neuroscience (Davidson, 2012). The foundation for this conceptualization begins with Kabat-Zinn's attitudinal foundation of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation in which the intention is to focus on the present moment, without judgment, on purpose (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Kabat-Zinn presented attitudinal foundations for mindfulness that include: awareness, being fully present in the moment, compassion, equanimity, non-reactivity (responding), non-judgment, letting go, listening, patience, self-compassion, and trust. The attitudinal foundations relate directly to qualities that are present in descriptions of effective leaders (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, 2000; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). The attitudinal foundations of mindfulness are concepts; Dooley (1995) defined concepts as "abstract aspects of reality… concepts, especially complex inferred ones such as empathy often go by the name of construct" (p. 61). I chose the term *construct* to articulate how the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness were as Dooly reported "mental constructions" (p. 61). These mental constructions describe the

various forms of practice that school leaders engage in as they interact with members of the school community. Dooley further reported, "Concepts, constructs, and theoretical variables all refer to abstract, unmeasured aspect of people, events, or things, which we envision in our mind's eye" (p. 61). Hence, the term construct provided a rich foundation for the conceptualization of mindfulness for educational leaders.

The background for the integration of mindfulness constructs with emotional and social intelligence, and resonant leadership is taken from (a) the research on the stress levels of educational leaders (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2003; Griffith, 1999; Glass & Franceshini, 2007; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Petzko, 2008; Pounder & Merrill, 2001) as reported in this paper; (b) the reports that I have heard from 20 years of teaching educational leadership courses at the university level; (c) the formal and informal discussions of educational leaders at professional gatherings; and (d) my own 15 years of experience as a high school administrator, five as high school assistant principal, and ten as high school principal, one of which I was assigned to two high schools.

I am informed by teaching concepts of mindfulness to the aspiring and practicing leaders, the graduate students in educational leadership courses, and to the doctoral and medical students at the university where I work. The graduate students in my classes often relate the level of change that occurs because of the practice of mindfulness in their personal and professional effectiveness; some of these students are also reporting how the practice of mindfulness is changing their classrooms as they teach some of the concepts to their students.

Conceptualizing mindfulness for educational leaders includes utilizing the various elements of mindfulness practice and applying them in the school or school district. These characteristics are cultivated with the practice of mindfulness meditation, whether in formal sitting practice, or in mindful moments throughout the day as educational leaders take ordinary moments and pushing what is often referred to as a 'pause button' to stop and observe, without analysis or judgment, or in a longer practice, anywhere from a few minutes to longer, sitting meditations of 20, 30 minutes or longer.

The constructs of mindfulness relate to the practice of leadership. These constructs are cultivated through mindfulness practice. As mindfulness constructs are practiced and present in leaders, the emphasis in on a *way of being* or *presence.* This presence is associated with the reduction of stress, important for leaders that are striving to cope or thrive in their leadership roles. Mindfulness may enhance the effectiveness of leaders with the cultivation of important traits associated with social and emotional intelligence. In this sense it is the *practice of mindfulness* that may contribute to the *practice of effective leadership* in substantive ways.

Table 1

Leadership Actions that Relate to Mindfulness Constructs

Leadership Actions	Relation to Mindfulness Constructs
Creating Vision	Awareness, being fully present, patience, listening, trust, equanimity, letting go, non-striving, non-judgment, non-reactivity
Building Culture	Listening, non-judgment, trust, equanimity, awareness, compassion, self-compassion, patience, letting go
Communicating	Listening, awareness, non-judgment, patience, equanimity, compassion, self-compassion, trust, letting go, non-reactivity
Influencing	Awareness, compassion, non-judgment, acceptance, non-reactivity, patience, trust
Getting buy-in	Patience, awareness, non-judgment, listening, trust, equanimity, compassion
Modeling the change	Being fully present, listening, awareness, equanimity, letting go, non-reactivity, self-compassion
Reculturing the organization	Patience, awareness, being fully present, equanimity, trust, non-reactivity, listening
Building collaboration	Being fully present, non-judgment, compassion, trust, listening, letting go
Building capacity within the organization	Compassion, non-judgment, listening, being fully present, patience, acceptance
Developing common goals	Patience, awareness, listening, being fully present, letting go, beginner's mind
Resolving problems, conflict	Patience, listening, being fully present, awareness, compassion, non-judgment, letting go
Evaluating performance	Awareness, patience, trust, listening, compassion, letting go, non-reactivity
Encouraging transformation	Patience, listening, trust, compassion, awareness, equanimity, being fully present
Recognizing others	Awareness, compassion, listening, being fully present, letting go, patience
Inspiring others	Patience, listening, compassion, equanimity, trust, self-compassion, being fully present, non-reactivity
Serving others	Compassion, awareness, trust, self-compassion, listening, non-reactivity, patience, equanimity, letting go

Educational leaders engage in what is referred to as role overload with numerous and competing demands for their time (Catano & Stronge, 2006). Although the actions listed in Table 1 are not indicative of every leadership action involving school leaders, it serves as a compilation of some of the important leadership characteristics and actions represented in leadership references (Bolman & Deal, 2014; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Lynch, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Northouse, 2013; Wagner et al., 2009).

As the constructs of mindfulness are practiced in the workplace, the leaders emulate characteristics that are associated with social and emotional intelligence. These characteristics become part of the experience that people in the workplace witness. The emphasis of experience

may serve to be dramatic to the culture of the organization. Kotter and Cohen (2002) reviewed the importance of the change that occurred as a result of an experience as opposed to persuasion through analysis or logic. In this sense, it is the experience that is important to developing a change in behavior. Leaders may try to influence the behaviors of people in the organization by exercising authority or persuasion, something that would be categorized as a *way of doing*. With mindfulness, the experiential elements of practice may provide a path that leads to a different *way of being* as leaders begin to demonstrate being fully present, listening to hear what is being said as opposed to thinking of a reply, accepting a situation for the reality of it, being non-judgmental, feeling compassion for the other person or self-compassion for one's own errors, being patient, and letting go of thoughts and feelings from the past. In this way, it is the *practice* of mindfulness that can cause subtle and dramatic changes in the way that leaders present with others in the organization.

People who witness these qualities may more readily accept the leader who emulates social and emotional intelligence, as demonstrated in the enactment of mindfulness constructs. As the people in the organization witness this way of being, or presence from the leader, they become part of the experience as well. The mindfulness presence may provide important insights into the change processes that schools are trying to enact with *ways of being* ultimately being more conducive to educational change than other methods that may use mandates or strong persuasion.

Mindfulness has conceptual and experiential elements, both important for understanding how its practice may inform the actual practice of leading. Just as the conceptual and theoretical elements of mindfulness inform the experiential elements of practice, the experiential elements inform the conceptual literature and give us additional insights as to how actual experiences are an application of the literature.

Table 2

Constructs of Mindfulness as Informed by Conceptual and Experiential Factors

Mindful Leadership	
Qualities	**Informed By**
Personal	**Conceptual**
Acceptance, awareness, being fully present, compassion and self-compassion, empathy, letting go, listening, non-judgment, non-reactivity, patience, trust	Research-based, theory, models, literature
Professional	**Experiential**
Acceptance, awareness, being fully present, compassion and self-compassion, empathy, letting go, listening, non-judgment, non-reactivity, patience, trust	Practice; being with; meditating, time in stillness

The concepts depicting mindful leadership are represented in the following Figure 1:

Figure 1 Conceptualization of Mindfulness for Educational Leaders
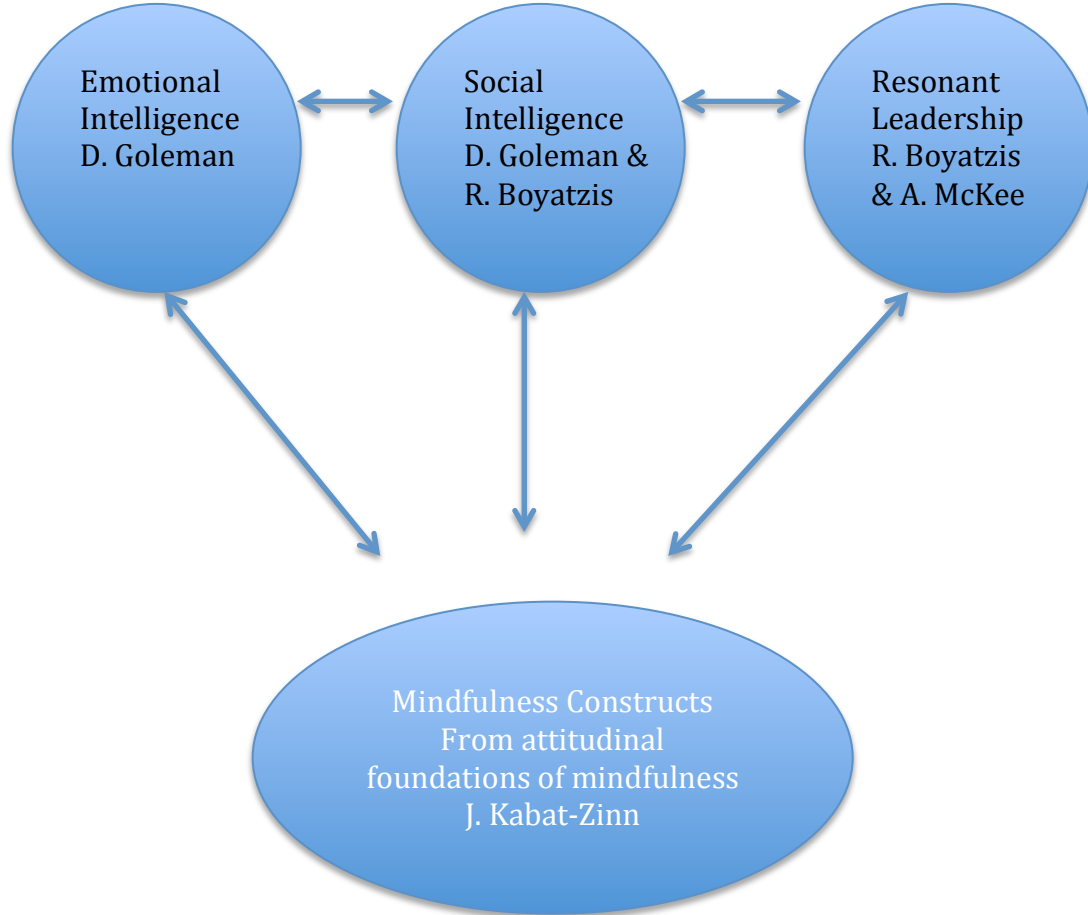
Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence relates to personal, professional, and political arenas of leaders, with personal and social competencies that include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2000). These competencies are qualities that influence an organization by their affiliation with people (Goleman). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) wrote, "One of the distinguishing qualities of successful people who lead in any field is the emphasis they place on personal relationships" (p. 75). Heifetz and Linsky viewed personal relationships as a key variable in the ability to act politically in any organization. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) related that relationship management included "inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, and teamwork and collaboration" as the factors that matter (p.29). Emotional intelligence was found to account for 85 to 90 percent of the difference in the success of superior leaders from that of those reviewed as average, in the compilation of over 500 competence models from companies in the United States and international sites (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). In short, it was emotional intelligence over IQ that mattered in the success of the leader, being increasingly more important as the highest levels of the organization, where the technical skills are diminished. School

administrators often derail on the job because of problems with social connections as opposed to technical competence (Seyfarth, 2005).

Table 3

Competencies of Emotional Intelligence that are Aligned with Mindfulness

Competencies of Emotional Intelligence	Qualities of Mindfulness that serve all competencies of Emotional Intelligence
Self-awareness- Awareness of emotions and their effect on others; self-confidence	Being in present moment for all that arrives at the door
Self-management- Flexibility, emotional self control, optimism, achievement, initiative, transparency, and achievement	Mindful awareness; listen in stillness Observing and listening
Social Awareness- Empathy, service, organizational awareness	Listening without judgment Patience and trust
Relationship Management- Inspiring and developing others; resolving disputes, influencing, creating shared vision and energy, team building, and bolstering change	Compassion and self-compassion Acceptance Non-reactivity

Source: Table created from Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002), *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*

Social Intelligence

The elements of social intelligence are closely related to mindfulness and mindful leadership in a variety of means. Social intelligence underscores and embodies the importance of the soft skills that relate to the human connection, concepts such as empathy and collaboration (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). Table 4 represents the elements inherent in social intelligence that relate to mindfulness.

Table 4
Social Intelligence and its Relation to Mindfulness

Social Intelligence	Relation to Mindful Leadership
Empathy- sensitivity to others and their needs	Empathy is central to mindfulness, where a focus is on compassionate understanding
Attunement- Listening to others with attention and thinking about how they feel	Attunement is aligned with the empathic listening to others
Organizational Awareness- An appreciation of the values and cultures of the organization	Meditation practice involves the observation of the present moment, something invaluable to understanding and being aware of the organization
Influence- The ability to persuade others by including them in important discussions and connecting to their interests	Mindfulness presents an influence for others because of its practice in listening and compassion, traits that can be demonstrated in an organizational setting
Developing others- The coaching and mentoring of others with compassion	Compassion and nonjudgment are central to mindfulness
Inspiration- Articulating a shared vision that builds cohesion and energy	Although not directly emphasized, the traits of mindfulness such as compassion, empathy, and nonjudgment contribute to traits that may inspire others
Teamwork- Engaging input from all people in the organization	Mindfulness practice engages others because of the devotion to listening and nonjudgment while being aware and attentive to the present moment.

Source: Table created from Goleman and Boyatzis, (2008) pp. 78-79.

Resonant Leadership

The new leadership called for by Boyatzis and McKee (2005) is one they refer to as resonant leadership, where leaders are inspirational, creating hope in the organization, being open and compassionate with the workers, and mindful where the leader is acting authentically, in touch with self and others. The resonant leader displays emotional intelligence, able to be self-aware and self-manage (Goleman, 2000). The resonant leader also displays social competence and social awareness that includes empathy, organizational awareness, and service (Boyatzis & McKee).

Problems within the world of work often result in a cascade of issues or challenges. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) referred to some of the challenges that leaders face, describing a form of dissonance known as the sacrifice syndrome to explain what occurs when leaders are deeply impacted by stress and not engaged in a cycle of renewal. In the sacrifice syndrome, leaders are engaged in stress and sacrifice, leading to diminished effectiveness at work. Leaders engaged in turmoil on the job, dealing with constant pressures, with exhaustion or burnout might result in the loss of resonance with the people they are leading. Boyatzis and McKee pointed to

mindfulness, hope, and compassion as solutions for leaders who are dealing with the sacrifice syndrome. Thus, mindfulness is important for its ability to renew as well as focus on the present moment. Renewal is important for leaders to be able to stay the course of leading while learning how to maintain effectiveness as a leader.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) related four concepts that are evident in resonant leaders, to be asked as questions, depicted below in Table 5:

Table 5
Elements of Resonant Leadership and the Relation to Mindfulness Constructs

Does the leader have, or is the leader…	Relation to Mindfulness Constructs
Inspirational	Awareness, letting go, listening, non-reactivity, non-judgment, trust
Positive emotional tone	Patience, non-judgment, non-reactivity, letting go, listening, compassion, patience
Compassion	Compassion, self-compassion, non-judgment, being fully present, listening, equanimity, patience, trust
Mindful- aware of the environment, in tune with self or others	Awareness, being fully present, equanimity, non-reactivity, non-judgment, patience, trust, compassion, self-compassion

Source: Table created from Boyatzis and McKee (2005), *Resonant leadership*, p.22

Educational leaders that deal with continual crises, threats, and problems and adversity may slip into the challenging position of the sacrifice syndrome. By working with mindfulness, and offering hope and compassion, they may find way to renew. It is through renewal that these leaders may experience sources of resiliency where they can thrive as opposed to just coping or enduring what is happening (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Renewal can be learned by practicing the mindfulness constructs; educational leaders can begin by paying close attention to self and others, as opposed to default mechanisms of blaming, denying, or projecting, methods that often make the situations worse (Boyatzis & McKee).

Resonant leadership was chosen as a key element of the conceptualization of mindfulness for educational leaders. Resonant leadership is aligned with the constructs of mindfulness, presents help for these leaders to improve the practice of leading, and offers assistance for them to renew their practice. By renewing practice, the hope is that school leaders will opt to stay in the profession they have chosen and thrive, instead of leaving it or just coping day to day.

Neuroscience

The research reported by neuroscientists provides important evidence in understanding how mindfulness meditation practice is correlated with positive changes in the brain, changes that include deeper awareness, positive outlooks, neuroplasticity, and resilience (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Davidson, Jackson & Kalin, 2000; Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Siegel, 2010). Contemplative practice such as mindfulness is correlated with promoting wellness, paying attention, regulating emotion, and reducing a variety of medical symptoms (Davidson, et al., 2012). The research on mindfulness has recently focused on emotion and how mindfulness contributes to emotional processes (Davidson, 2010). Davidson (2013) reported that it was mindfulness that contributed to resilience because of the continual focus on the present, watching

thoughts and feelings, without getting caught in the trajectory of the storyline or perseveration of adverse thoughts; as this occurs, there is a faster recovery of the emotional state (Paulson, et al.).

References to emotions, or listening, responding, and *being with*, were at one time referred to as soft sciences; these concepts are now gaining traction as evidence points to their effectiveness in the workplace (Goleman, 2013). Goleman (2000) advocated for the "hard case for soft skills" referring to the importance of emotional intelligence in the work environment (p. 30). Reiss (2010), a Harvard physician offered, "The study of empathy is no longer a 'soft science,' but is increasingly grounded in empirical data" (p.1604). Mindfulness includes the development of empathy and compassion while being fully present in the moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2005; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008).

It is these concepts that offer possibilities for educational leaders who may be able to reduce their levels of stress while building the elements of the 'soft skills' that mindfulness promotes. And in doing so, it is important to note that these leaders may also be contributing to resilience, which may result in their interest to remain in the profession as opposed to leaving it.

How Mindful School Leaders Respond While Leading

Leaders are action-oriented and their influence matters a great deal to the effectiveness of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Fullan, 2001; Goleman, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kouzes & Posner, 2010; Lynch, 2012; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Northouse, 2013; Wagner et al., 2009) so it is a valid question to ponder as to how a way *of being* would contribute to the effectiveness of a school leader. If school leaders practice leading mindfully, how do they present themselves differently from ones that would be engaged in a more traditional form of *doing*?

Mindful leadership is cultivated from the practice of mindfulness meditation, with awareness of the moment, without criticism or judgment. Mindful leadership for school leaders includes traits of compassion, empathy, and trust within the school and school district. It is these qualities that relate to providing leadership by responding with *presence* with fully attending and responding to the concerns that surface. The differences of mindful leadership may appear subtle at first, but they provide a powerful mosaic that may influence a school organization, all enhanced by elements of emotional and social intelligence.

Mindful school leaders learn to cultivate awareness by focusing on the present moment and observing the current reality within the organization. As such, mindful school leaders see the landscape of the reality, not just the focus on the most positive information or emotions. These leaders face negative, stressful situations in the school. All encounters in the school provide opportunity for learning and growth. Mindful leadership for school leaders includes a realistic check of all that is happening within the school or school district. Continual observation is key to the success of a leader, in particular with noticing his/her leadership in relation to the organization (Irby, Brown, Duffy, &Trautman, 2001). As such, it means not turning away from negative experience to only be aware of the positive ones. Instead, mindfulness would suggest the opposite: *facing into* the conflict for understanding, insight, and a different type of power-that *of being*. There is power in the dramatic ways that leading with presence and mindfulness yields- the power is in influence as opposed to directing or delegating. Too often, leaders make the problems they are encountering worse, by denying them, ruminating in thoughts of shame or anger, and feeling trapped (Germer, 2009; Murphy, 2011). The results of these emotions can have serious consequences for physical and mental health, with increased blood pressure,

depression, anxiety, or burnout (Bezold, 2006; Davis, Eshelman, & McKay, 2000; Minter, 1991; Murphy; Overholser, & Fisher, 2009; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010; Stanton, Balzar, Smith, Parra, & Ironson, 2001; Sorenson, 2007).

Instead, mindfulness qualities may result in a way *of being* that relieves conflict and angst for school leaders. The mindfulness constructs in this paper are suggested for their applicability to complex, conflict situations in which school administrators often find themselves. The mindful leadership constructs are presented in the context of leading in an organization with examples of how the practice of mindfulness meditation informs leadership practice. As conceptualized in this paper:

Mindfulness for educational leaders serves the leader and the people in the schools through the practice of being fully present, with qualities of emotional and social intelligence such as listening, not judging self or others, while having compassion for self and others in the organization, constructs that are developed in mindfulness meditation.

Figure 2 depicts the attributes of mindful leaders, reflecting the various emphases on empathy and attention. Mindful leaders demonstrate high empathy and attention, resulting in actions that are engaged and interested in people in the organization. In contrast, the opposite would be leaders who demonstrate low empathy and attention, resulting in being disregarding and disengaged. Leaders who demonstrate high empathy and low attention appear caring but preoccupied or distracted. Leaders who demonstrate low empathy and high attention appear observing and detached to the people in the workplace.

Figure 2. Continuum of Attention and Empathy Traits in Leaders

High Empathy /Low Attention   High Empathy/High Attention

	Mindful Leaders
Caring and Preoccupied- Distracted	Engaged and Interested- Mindful Awareness
Disregarding and Disengaged	Observing and Detached

Mindful leadership, in this depiction is both a state and a trait. Smalley and Winston (2010) offered, "… that mindfulness is an inherent trait influenced by genes, biology, and experience" (p. 6). A state would refer to the ability to change one's reaction to events; there are changes in perspective as well as physiological states that may occur with mindfulness practice (Smalley & Winston).

Becoming a Mindful School Leader

Previous descriptions of educational leaders often portrayed them as actively doing and producing; mindfulness constructs result in a different type of spacious presence, where these leaders may present as people who pause, listen, and attentively observe what is happening in the school or school district. As the leaders enact these qualities, this different type of experience may result in a different type of influence, one of presence, listening, observing, and attending by being fully present in the moment, as portrayed in the Table 6:

Table 6
Descriptions of Leadership in Contrast with Mindful Leadership

Previous Descriptions of Leadership	Mindful Leadership
Striving	Letting go- not grasping or 'hanging on' to things that no longer serve you or others; letting go of past judgments
Doing	Being- being fully with what is at hand to understand
Talking	Listening- to hear as opposed to interrupt, or argue one's point of view
Making Things Happen	Accepting reality- for what it is, and then making the decision of what would happen next
Clutter	Spaciousness- of mind as well as material objects
Judging	Compassionate Understanding – of self and others
Telling	Hearing- as the foundation for knowing
Multitasking	Single tasking- giving undivided attention to what is at hand
Distracted thinking about 'to-do' list	Being in the moment- without being preoccupied
Directing	Accepting- for the foundation of responding
Busyness	Stillness- to be able to patiently be quiet to observe, notice, and attend
Distracted Preoccupation	Attentive awareness- using the senses to fully observe

Mindful leadership offers hope for educational leaders, as a source of renewal for the stress in their lives, and as a way of *being* as a resonant leader, one that may offer hope and inspiration for the people in the school system. *It is the practice of mindfulness that informs the practice of leading.* Mindful leadership is the practice of being fully present in the moment for all that comes to the door of the leader. It involves the practice of being still, observing, not judging self or others, and having compassion for self and others. Mindful leadership is more about a way of being as opposed to a way of doing, although it is the way of being that sets up the conditions for effective leadership practice of creating vision, influencing others, building relationships, communicating, building capacity among the people in the organization, reculturing the workplace by modeling behavior, and building a harmonious and productive culture, all important functions of leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman, 2000; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Resonant leaders, by their presence, build the capacity for others to follow (Boyatzis & McKee).

Mindfulness does not equate with the absence of problems; instead, it is the deliberate facing of everything that is brought to the door of human experience. Mindfulness, because of

giving attention to the present moment provides resources for the challenges of observing what is happening in the present moment. It is stillness and quiet that may assist in learning how to observe. Mindfulness may also nurture and add to a sense of inner calm and peace, important principles for educational leaders who may otherwise decide to leave the profession because of unrelenting pressures and stress.

Mindful leadership also contributes a way to deal with the pressures that are seen as threats and dangers. Without a balance of compassion, people can lose control of their ability to focus on improvement and instead be involved with non-productive blaming, avoidance, or withdrawal (Gilbert, 2009). Leaders spend much of their time thinking about their struggles, many trying to avoid or eliminate them (Weinzimmer & McConoughey, 2013). Mindfulness for school leaders offers a different approach, a sense of calm in the middle of the storm.

How Mindfulness Relates to the Cultivation of Leadership Traits

The constructs of mindfulness relate to the practice of leadership. These constructs are cultivated through mindfulness practice. As mindfulness constructs are practiced and present in leaders, the emphasis in on a *way of being* or *presence.* This presence is associated with the reduction of stress, important for leaders that want to thrive in their leadership roles. Table 7 includes each construct and how it is cultivated through mindfulness.

Table 7
Mindfulness Constructs and the Explanation of how Cultivated Through Mindfulness

Construct Defined	How mindfulness cultivates this construct
Being fully present- being fully with people for what is happening as it is happening; paying attention on purpose	Mindfulness prompts are for the continual awareness of what is occurring, with emphasis on observing, being with
Compassion- often referred to as "empathy in action" (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005)	Mindfulness prompts are for non-judgment and non-criticism
Equanimity- the acceptance of what is as opposed to denying what is happening	Mindfulness teaches to focus on the present moment, being alert to all that is present, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant
Letting to- allowing thoughts that interfere with, distract, or cause rumination to be released (Kabat-Zinn, 2009)	Mindfulness teaches to focus on the present moment, watching distracting thoughts instead of developing a storyline about them; as thoughts come and go, the person is an observer, in the practice of letting the thoughts arise and depart
Listening- the practice of hearing what is being said; listening to hear as opposed to interrupt or state another point of view	Mindfulness prompts repeatedly ask to listen and observe, over and over, in stillness; the quiet observation allows for a deeper listening, without analysis
Non-judgment- the practice of choosing to withhold judgment; not being critical of another person or that person's ideas	Mindfulness continually reinforces observing and responding without judgment or criticism
Non-reactivity- the practice of responding to thoughts, ideas, and current reality through observation and attention without reacting to it	Mindfulness reinforces the concept of responding to events and ideas as opposed to reacting to them or judging them
Patience- using a type of wisdom that lets things unfold without trying to hold on to, change, or control them (Kabat-Zinn, 2009)	Mindfulness, through its slow and deliberate sitting in silence reinforces patience in observing and listening
Self-Compassion- using self-kindness instead of	Mindfulness continually reinforces non-judgment

self-reproach, seeing the common human conditions that unite people, and being an observer of one's problems as opposed to overidentifying with them (Germer & Neff, 2013)	and non-criticism of self and others; it also trains people to observe thoughts and actions as opposed to analyzing or developing a storyline to what is being observed
Trust- refers to the trust one may develop in one's own abilities (Kabat-Zinn, 2009)	Mindfulness allows for the non-judgment of one's own errors or problems, deliberately choosing to observe without the harsh self-criticism that may otherwise exist

Mindfulness may enhance the effectiveness of leaders with the cultivation of important traits associated with social and emotional intelligence. In this sense it is the *practice of mindfulness* that may contribute to the *practice of effective leadership* in substantive ways.

Meditation is a practice, one that takes time to cultivate. The good news for busy leaders is that in as little as ten minutes a day for a period of eight weeks can result in changes that can be observed in functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). The practice of mindfulness meditation can be useful in a both a personal and professional sense; the principles that contribute to mindful leadership, such as listening, responding, equanimity, compassion, and self-compassion serve in personal and professional relationships.

The principles of mindful leadership are interrelated. Listening is foundational to the cultivation of compassion (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Leaders, who listen to hear what is being conveyed, instead of thinking of their own response, or listen without being distracted or judgmental, are able to take the time that is needed to respond, as opposed to reacting. Leaders who accept what is currently in front of them without denying the reality or blaming are better able to respond to the situation at hand. And, when leaders develop self-compassion, they are able to project compassion and act upon it for others furthering the development of relationships (Gilbert, 2009).

Mindfulness provides opportunities for educational leaders to grow in resilience, emotional regulation, and gaining accurate perspectives (Hölzel, et al., 2011). Mindful leadership includes a sense of attention, intention to be present, with hope and compassion, (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005) all areas that contribute to the effectiveness of school leaders. When stressful situations occur, superintendents and building principals can observe, listen, attend to, and respond with compassion. And when the educational leaders misstep, miscalculate, misspeak, falter, fail, derail, or plunge into despair, self-compassion allows for a nourishing reflection with hope for clarity and a practice of mindful difference. The non-judgmental reflection after a problem may provide a strong foundation for effective leadership, growth, change, and resilience. Table 8 presents the qualities of mindful leadership.

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Table 8
Qualities of Mindful Leadership

	MINDFUL LEADERSHIP IS:	
Instead of	**Mindful Leadership Approaches**	**Instead of acting**
Refusing to accept reality	← Acceptance →	Blaming others
Preoccupied or distracted	← Awareness →	Observing with intention
Regretting the past	← Being Fully Present →	Worrying about tomorrow
Not caring or listening to someone in need	← Compassion →	Judging + criticism
Not caring enough to be interested	← Letting Go →	Holding on
Disregarding	← Listening →	Thinking of your reaction + what you will reply
Not observing or being aware of a situation not on the 'radar screen'	← Patience →	Interrupting
Denying; avoiding	← Responding →	Angry outburst; reacting
Disbelief; disregard	← Trust →	Believing in self; Caring for others

As educational leaders consider paths that may increase their effectiveness while reducing the stress they feel, mindfulness may offer a practice that offers both. Ultimately it is a passionate commitment to stress reduction and leadership effectiveness that fuels the advancement of mindfulness for educational leaders. It is with this belief that I teach mindful leadership to the graduate students in educational leadership classes. School principals, superintendents, and teacher leaders provide inspiration and hope for their colleagues and students. Mindfulness offers possibilities to renew optimism, trust in oneself to complete the job of leading, and a compassionate view of education that encourages solutions for the challenges that are present in schools across the nation. Mindfulness also offers a sense of renewal for school leaders. And, it is just possible that while reducing stress and improving leadership, mindfulness may help school leaders stay in the profession rather than become part of the statistic of health leaves, early retirements, burnout, or requests for job changes.

Physicians Ronald Epstein and Michael Krasner (2013) have developed comprehensive programs for their colleagues by teaching a curriculum of mindfulness, designed to help physicians stay the course with regard to developing resilience, or the ability to 'bounce back' after setbacks, problems, or burnout. Programs in mindfulness for physicians have demonstrated reductions in stress, increases in resilience, and the quality of patient care (Epstein & Krasner; Krasner, et al., 2009). The advocacy in this paper is one for effective programs in mindfulness for educational leaders to assist them in learning how to control stress, learn effective qualities of presence to effectively deal with issues in the schools, influence a culture of emotional and social intelligence, and to learn resilience to bounce back after challenging or distressing issues. Mindfulness offers these possibilities for educational leaders.

Students in my educational leadership classes report that mindful practice is reducing their stress load and increasing effectiveness at work. Some report that they are presenting the practice of mindfulness to their students who ask for more stillness in their classrooms. I look forward to the next level of research to review how mindful leadership will continue to evolve as a practice; be received in the culture of the school; taught in educational leadership programs; and measured for its efficacy in stress reduction, resilience, and leadership effectiveness. I look forward to the perceptions of superintendents, principals, teachers, and students who practice mindfulness within the school district, schools, and classrooms.

There is a metaphor about sailing that applies to the work of educational leaders. It has been said that there is only one condition that is impossible for sailing and that is to have no wind at all; sailors sail in extremes of weather, adjusting the sails to accommodate rough seas. And so it is for educational leaders that adjust their sails in white water conditions. What I have learned from the work of mindfulness, my own experience and that of others is this: **_There will be storms. Storms are OK- they give you a chance to use your anchor._** Hopefully, the positions advanced in this paper, that elements of mindfulness, emotional and social intelligence, supported and strengthened by resonant leadership are the anchors that support and sustain educational leaders. Life unfolds in the schools as it does in life, moment by moment. May we be fully present to witness and know it.

Special Note from the author:

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