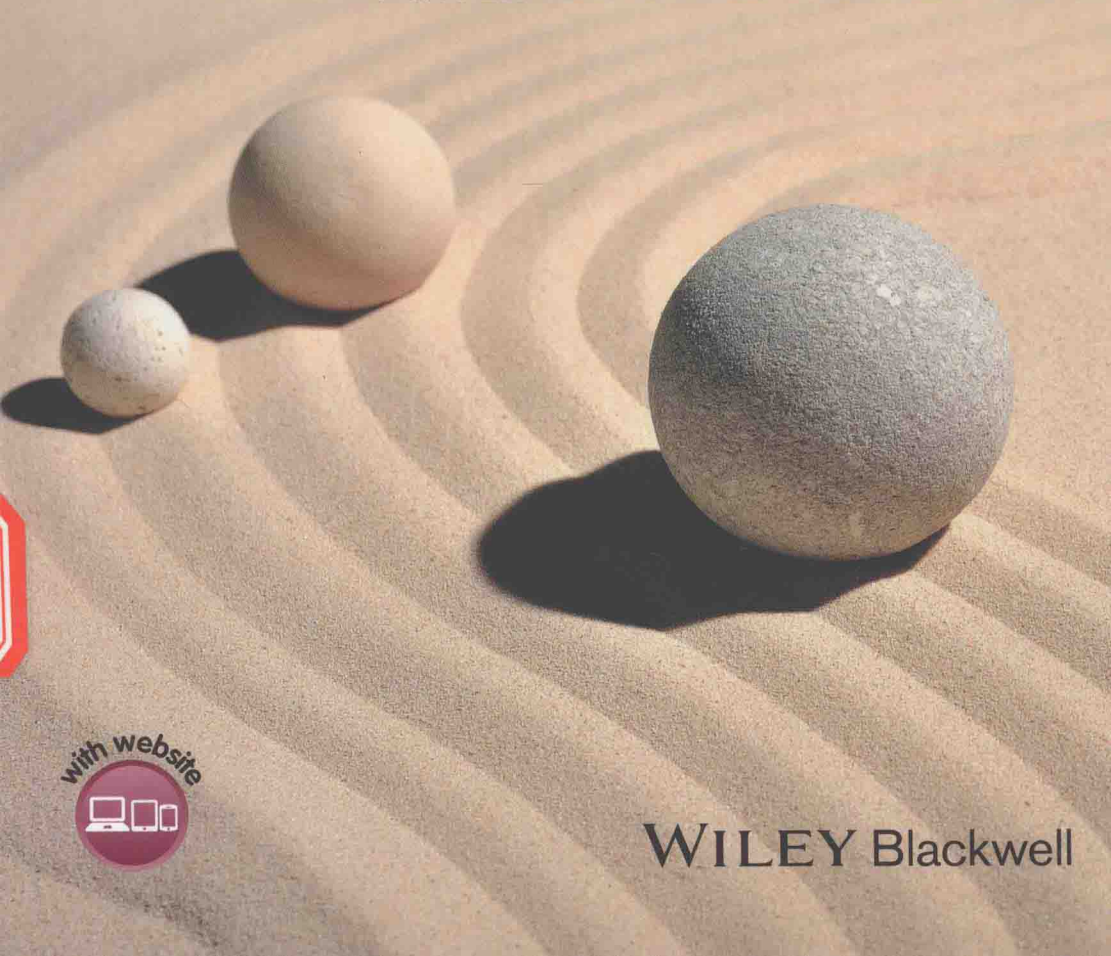


JUAN HUMBERTO YOUNG

MINDFULNESS-BASED
STRATEGIC
AWARENESS TRAINING

A COMPLETE PROGRAM
FOR LEADERS AND INDIVIDUALS



WILEY Blackwell

Mindfulness-Based Strategic Awareness Training

*A Complete Program for Leaders
and Individuals*

Juan Humberto Young

WILEY Blackwell

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Preface

The idea of writing a book originates from people I appreciate and admire. One of the first was my doctoral thesis advisor, Professor John Aram. At the time we were jointly teaching a master level course on leadership at Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. John thought I had a gift for simplifying complex theories and integrating diverse disciplines in a coherent, easy to understand, way. Over the years collaborators at work, students, and clients have confirmed John's view and exhorted me to put my reflections down in writing.

At the University of Saint Gallen, Switzerland, my classes on strategies to improve people's and leaders' decision skills leading to happiness stirred keen interest from the students and were always overbooked. Based on this experience I designed a one-year Executive Master program for positive leadership and strategy with positive psychology and mindfulness as the foundations of the curriculum. It is currently running in its fourth year at IE University, Madrid, one of the world's top business schools. The consistent application of positive psychology and mindfulness throughout the program makes it a unique training opportunity for professionals from a wide array of fields and industries. It is taught within a faculty that is composed of the best specialists in their respective fields, all pioneers in implementing positive and mindful approaches.

During studies at Oxford University for a Master's degree in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy it occurred to me that there was a need for shorter training formats like the well-recognized 8-week training protocols common to most mindfulness training courses. Maybe it was time to contemplate writing a book and make the material that I had accumulated over many years into a series of personal journals accessible to people outside academia—not a book about personal exploits, much less an autobiography, but a practical book enriched with human-centered, anecdotal data and with authentic stories that could illustrate abstract concepts and give them a human face. The drive to overcome my doubts and reservations and start writing comes from what I see occurring in the world around me, and I'm not alone in my observations.

In a recent article MIT professors E. Brynjolfsson and A. McAfee, together with M. Spence of NYU, a Nobel laureate in economics, suggest that one of the key

challenges in the future will be assuring an acceptable standard of living for the mass of people being squeezed out of the labor market by the forces of technology. Researchers at Oxford University estimate that in the future 45% of US jobs will be computerized, drastically reducing the workforce. Scientists such as Stephen Hawking also warn about the possible negative effects on social life that will result from a trend towards robots in the workplace that will threaten jobs on a massive scale. While writing these lines the Anglo-American mining company announced its intention to shed 85,000 jobs. At the same time huge numbers of immigrants pour into the more industrialized economies in search of better lives, although these countries are already under strain both socially and economically.

There are other troubles emerging, too. We watch in consternation the developments at FIFA, the Football Association, with its new costly head office in Zurich only minutes away from my home, as reports of corrupt behavior and arrests make news. We learn also how companies engage in deceptive policies such as VW with its diesel emissions scandal. Daily we witness, and hear about, the effect of climate change and its devastating consequences for the ecology of the planet.

These and other problems are already weighing on people's well-being and are likely to impact it even more in the future. An inevitable challenge for us all will be how we can confront these issues and work towards solutions. Some people may place their faith in institutions (government and business organizations) hoping that they will come up with appropriate solutions. My personal optimism is not with institutional solutions given the numerous conflicts of interest and the highly polarized context in which they operate. They rarely seem to get things implemented. My preference is for a personal, entrepreneurial approach, one that places responsibility for well-being directly on the individual. No-one can take the need for a person's happiness and well-being more seriously than the person themselves. Individuals and leaders will be required to develop inner abilities to help them to navigate through these demanding times that are increasingly being defined as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). This is the central thrust of this book.

I see a great need for individuals to cultivate mental, emotional, and behavioral qualities that allow them to make clear decisions during these turbulent times while maintaining a decent level of personal well-being for themselves and their families. For leaders there is the need to cultivate an awareness that allows them to create real value for many: not only shareholder value but also value for clients with good and healthy products and services; value for their employees so that their jobs are protected and new jobs created; value for society by making the appropriate fiscal decisions and contributions. This is a very big call but it is one that is required from post-modern leaders. Individuals able to attain these goals will be sought after and they will be worth the enormous payouts that accompany these positions. Especially in light of the poor record of managers and leaders investigated by Candido and Santos (2015, p. 237) "one of the most challenging and unresolved problems in this area (business strategy) is the apparently high

percentage of organizational strategies that fail, with some authors estimating a rate of failure between 50 to 90%. By failure we mean either a new strategy was formulated but not implemented or it was implemented with poor results.”

Today there are too many overpaid mediocre leaders with a flawed view of value who are only capable of reducing the workforce to boost profits or making short-cuts compromising the quality of their products and services in order to save costs when what is really needed is job creation and genuine products. In short they manage the profit and loss (P&L) statements of their business mostly from the short-term cost side instead of generating long-term sustainable, organic growth based on a strategy of revenue generation.

The ability to generate genuine value for multiple stakeholders requires a panoramic awareness that I call “strategic awareness”. It implies an open awareness infused with clarity of the mind, positive emotionality, friendliness, practical wisdom (in the sense of finding the right way to do the right things), and skillful responses to our socially constructed reality. It is the kind of awareness that allows for decisions that foster personal and social well-being while avoiding two of the most common errors in decision making:

- Errors in forecasting future personal outcomes of decisions taken today (for example, after being overjoyed with the promotion to country manager in Panama feeling unhappy with the suffocating heat and heavy traffic of Panama City).
- Lack of foresight regarding side effects or unintended consequences of their decisions (for example VW’s decisions that led to the emission scandal now affecting many other parties including the second-generation VW representative who lives next to me and his employees who are suffering a dramatic collapse in sales).

Mindfulness-based strategic awareness training (MBSAT) is designed to cultivate an open, panoramic awareness using mindfulness and positive psychology as its foundation and behavioral economics, cognitive therapy, finance, risk management, and system dynamics as supporting disciplines. Mindfulness, a millennium old technology of human development, has recently been receiving much attention as one possible way to help individuals cope with the challenges of postmodernity.

J. Sachs, the acclaimed Columbia University professor, speaks of eight dimensions in people’s lives that require mindfulness: mindfulness of self, mindfulness of work, mindfulness of knowledge, mindfulness of others, mindfulness of nature, mindfulness of the future, mindfulness of politics, and mindfulness of the world.

Positive psychology, the second pillar of MBSAT, is an already well-established applied science of well-being. It has developed proven interventions for assisting individuals to increase their levels of subjective well-being. In combination with the other disciplines mentioned above MBSAT forms a robust, comprehensive 8-week program that, if followed by the participants, can significantly improve the quality of their lives.

Considerable effort and care has been made to design MBSAT so that it delivers what it intends to do and doesn't become one more program of what critics call "mindfulness McDonaldization" interventions, simplified approaches with promises of fast results, a kind of fast food for the soul.

The author of this book, besides having several years of mindfulness practice, spent two years learning how to design and teach mindfulness interventions at Oxford University and worked for more than a decade with applied positive psychology approaches to human development in various industries. Together with my many years of experience in organizational settings—as employee, leader, business owner, consultant, and teacher at business schools—this gives me a wide background that has helped me to design MBSAT. The course is the result of solid research findings and relevant practical experience. Likewise the book is written for a wide audience: for leaders and individuals alike and can be used as a guide for teachers as well as a manual for individual learning.

The result is a program built on the principles of scholarly design thinking. It provides innovative prescriptive forms of applied science with a vision of a mindful positive individual that can contribute to his or her personal well-being and that of others.

Instead of taking a theoretical approach and seeking to uncover how things are, it proposes an experiential learning approach with practices and exercises. At this point in the history of human sciences including mindfulness and positive psychology there are no reliable answers to the question of how things are anyway. What can be said for sure, however, is that the practices of mindfulness and positive psychology, when done regularly, are highly beneficial to the practitioner. They are not difficult, the challenge is to maintain continuity in doing them and that is hard as there are no shortcuts around this. As a sage once said: "Start by doing what is necessary; then do the possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

For those who practice regularly, MBSAT has the potential to generate positive, transformative outcomes for themselves and the world in which they live.

About the Companion Website

This book is accompanied by a companion website:

www.wiley.com/go/humbertoyoung/mbsat

The website includes Handout and Audio files.

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Part 1

Foundations for Mindful, Positive Leadership and a Constructive Way of Life