Contemplative Scientific Collaboration

Collaboration is indispensable in nature, human culture, and scientific research. Yet in today’s academic environments many researchers struggle with overdrive competition for scarce resources such as funding, expertise and visibility, and lack of genuine support structures. Chronic publication and career pressure can lead to researchers' burnout and reduced quality of research (e.g. replication crisis [1]). This undermines public trust in science and research, and yields potentially harmful consequences for humans and our planet. When researchers see themselves forced to abandon their once beloved profession, science loses invaluable protagonists on the urgent quest to solve our societal, humanitarian and ecological issues.

Scientists are calling for a transformation of academic and research culture [2-4]. However, demanding systems change will not suffice – we need to start changing ourselves first. Transformation occurs when „bottom-up“ individual and group-level change meets „top-down“ organizational and systemic change. [5-6]

In the Contemplative Scientific Collaboration (CSC) project we aim to co-create a novel, cooperative, mindful academic community and culture. Our intention is to open new pathways for researchers to find and express value, purpose and meaning in their professional vocation. Drawing inspiration from physics research communities at CERN, as well as from the growing body of research in the field of Contemplative Science [7-8], we propose a CSC being firmly grounded in five key elements that foster collaboration:

1. shared values and intentions,
2. dedicated contemplative practice,
3. rigorous scientific research,
4. collaborative „coopetition“,
5. skillful community-building.

We seek to establish a holistic support system in which researchers can embody these principles as whole human beings, build inclusive „contemplative scientific communities“, and join ranks to meet the challenges that humanity faces today. We believe that the convergence of modern science and ancient wisdom traditions can support sciences and humanities to fulfill their constructive role in society and inspire collaboration beyond confines of academia.

We invite researchers and other interested parties to join us to co-create a novel CSC-based community and culture. In particular, we intend to create spaces [13] to support the development of shared values; train methods to cultivate these values and strengthen cooperation, creativity, participation, mindfulness [9-12]; help contemplative practices become part of the work culture; embody principles of open science and open data to optimize dissemination; and build connections with diverse stakeholders such as funding agencies and academic institutes that are working on organizational development and leadership [14].

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Methods: Contemplative practices (e.g. mindfulness and compassion meditation) and participative processes (e.g. Systemic Konsensing, Bohm Dialogue, Council, NVC, Art of Hosting [9-13]) can enhance skills and capabilities to engage in collaborative research environments. This includes a gradual familiarization with a perspective of wholeness and interdependence that counters prevailing cultural narratives of scarcity and separation. Such a perspective shift facilitates inter- and trans-disciplinary research, as such collaborations can be challenging without skillful means of engaging with one's own and others' lived experience.

Expected results: Participants experience increased cooperative skills, co-creativity, resiliency, mindfulness, conflict transformation, participation, sense of purpose and meaning, leading to better quality of life in the workplace. Collaboration frees up resources, time and energy for effective inter- and transdisciplinary research [15]. Higher quality of results strengthens public trust. Innovative ideas can flourish and generate holistic solutions for today’s wicked problems.

Next steps: (1) develop a social enterprise to carry the CSC forward; (2) start pilot projects with interested groups of researchers, consisting of participative workshops to introduce the proposed methodology, train and practice specific methods, and support integrating them into the work culture, with accompanying studies.

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References: