Global Consciousness and the Power of Virtual Spaces

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Abstract
A new global consciousness movement has been arising in humanity in the past two decades. Much of this emergence is due to the ubiquity of the internet and to the ease of global travel, where we learn that we are more alike than we are different. This global consciousness movement has accelerated in the past few years as humanity shares in the impact of the poly-crisis of climate change, wars, the pandemic, and social injustice. In response, numerous organizations and initiatives have arisen to solve local and global challenges, with most of them using virtual space platforms such as Zoom. After defining key terms, this chapter describes four exemplary initiatives and offers practical suggestions for research and practice in elevating global consciousness in humanity.

Overview of Chapter
After defining global consciousness, this chapter describes the emergence of the global consciousness movement. A major factor in this global consciousness movement is the embrace of meeting in virtual spaces, such as Zoom. Three perspectives on virtual space are offered, and an overview of four online spaces that support oneness in humanity are described. The conclusion includes suggestions for ways the reader can participate more actively in the emerging global consciousness movement through involvement in virtual spaces.

Why Global Consciousness and Why Now?
Since the beginning of time, there are those who looked up at the stars and felt their oneness with the cosmos. They would not have been able to understand that they were standing on a small blue ball in space, a part of the Milky Way galaxy, which is a part of an expanding universe so large that no human mind can hold its vastness. But those moments of merging with the oneness and getting lost in something greater than oneself were natural moments of global consciousness.

Often someone who was graced with this exquisite experience would become a spiritual leader for the clan or the tribe that they were a member of as they surrendered themselves to receiving spiritual wisdom and guidance for the greater good. They became the shamans, the healers, and the priests – those endowed with expanded ways of knowing.

As society developed over time, these spiritual roles became formalized with codified expectations, responsibilities, and privileges. Institutions were built around these roles; for example, the Vatican, Buddhist monasteries high in the mountains, mosques in ancient cities, and sacred mountains and lakes set aside for indigenous ceremony.

In our time, something important is shifting. Instead of a special role where only some individuals are seen as spiritual, religious, or highly conscious, a new view of humanity is emerging where everyone is seen as a spiritual being. Everyone is seen as having the potential for increased capacity for compassion, wisdom, interconnectedness, and love.

This new view of humanity's potential was seeded in me in my twenties when I had a near death experience in childbirth. In that experience, I found myself in the overwhelming bliss of being embraced by God's love and power. And yet, I wanted to return to be with my newborn son. I was granted my wish and sent back. This happened to me before the research on near death experiences, and so I believed that I was the only one who had ever been sent back. I was overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility I had no capacity to fulfill. I knew I had been sent back for a reason but could not fathom what that was or what to do about it.

Several years later, I read a book titled *Life After Life* (Moody, 1975) describing research on near death experiences. I was so relieved to find out that I was not the only one. I had a vision that there was a sacred peaceful army of people around the planet who had all come back with a sense of mission because it was not yet their time. I was so relieved that "saving the world" was not just up to me but that I was a part of a movement of people who cared about the greater good. Later, I came to see that it is not only near-death-experiencers who feel this calling. I came to understand there are many paths and forms of experience that lead people to feel a part of this global consciousness movement.

As humanity, we have evolved from selected individuals who took on formal sacred roles, to a collective movement of individuals and communities finding each other and becoming a network of networks. We have a shared vision for a more loving world and for a new era of well-being. This is important, because the world has become more interdependent and interconnected. It is also important because the challenges facing humanity and our environment are challenges of the collective. Two forces are at work that led to this global consciousness movement. They are (1) the natural evolution of any living system to greater levels of complexity, and (2) the collective response to complex wicked problems that cannot be solved by one individual or one organization.

The time has come to recognize that global consciousness is a real phenomenon. It has been spoken of by the mystics, the near-death-experiencers, religious leaders, and even evolved business leaders. It is becoming recognized as an academic and scientific field of study and practice. By naming it, describing it, and creating sacred spaces for global consciousness, this movement will come into clearer and clearer form. This allows for a collective higher intelligence and wisdom to become available to solve problems and to envision a better world that works for all.

This chapter aims to crystalize concepts, practices, examples and opportunities to further enhance the natural evolution of global consciousness.

Defining Global Consciousness

In 2019, a small group founded the Global Consciousness Institute (GCI). GCI's purpose is to elevate Global Consciousness as the highest point of leverage, to catalyze shared prosperity and wellbeing on a healthy planet. GCI works primarily with business practitioners, educators, and change agents to transform leadership education and business practice, and to provide the strategic and energetic stimulus to catalyze

transformation at the scale of the whole. At its broadest, GCI exists to activate a collective experience of pluralism in oneness, enabling humanity to exist in loving harmony with all life. (GCI, 2024, www.gci.earth)

A literature review found most definitions of global consciousness to be simplistic. In a study of high school teachers with the goal of encouraging a shift from teaching globalization to nurturing global consciousness, global consciousness was defined as "a mindful way of *being* in the world" (Mansilla & Gardner, 2007, p. 48). James and Steger (2016) defined global consciousness as connectivity, meaning the number of personal connections an individual has. A psychological definition offers an ethical perspective: "A knowledge of both the interconnectedness and difference of humankind, and a will to take moral actions in a reflexive manner on its behalf" (Liu & Macdonald, 2016, p. 310).

Drawing on cultural, historical, and philosophical literature, Yagodzinskyi (2016) described global consciousness as a person's ability to identify themselves with all of humanity both in the civilizational and sociocultural dimensions.

The Global Consciousness Project (Nelson, 2019) approaches global consciousness from a scientific measurement lens. GCP hypothesized that consciousness extends beyond the body and the brain and can be a measurable phenomenon on a global level. Their findings from data from a global network of random number generators (RNGs) found correlations between global events such as the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center with anomalous deviations in the RNGs. The researchers concluded their results (by seven standard deviations) are evidence for a coherent global consciousness that interacts with physical systems. "It implies an interconnection which, while subtle and inconstant, has the character of the 'oneness' we hear about from poets and sages" (Nelson, 2019, p. 15).

In the past in business, "global consciousness" or "global mindset" has been framed as cross-cultural sensitivity, which is cognitive and behavioral based. Fry and Egel (2021) took an expanded view of global leadership, which they called being-centered leadership. They argued that a commitment to the spiritual journey is essential for developing the kind of global mindset that recognizes the dignity, commonality of the human experience, and the ability to reconcile and transcend apparent opposites.

These definitions each have some aspects of global consciousness as we define it at GCI. Our definition arises from our focus on leadership development, organizational development, and systems transformation. We see global consciousness as having an inner dimension as well as having dimensions of external expression. We believe that business is the highest leverage point for elevating global consciousness in humanity. Business is truly global, it has huge wealth, and can attract the highest talent, especially when employees are offered meaning and purpose. This was envisioned more than 30 years ago:

> Business, the motor of our society, has the opportunity to be a new creative force on the planet, a force which could contribute to the well-being of many. For that to occur, we must all substantially increase our commitment to integrity and accountability and

courageously make a quantum leap in consciousness: *beyond conventional solutions; beyond opposing forces; beyond hope and fear.* (Harman & Hormann, 1990, p. 11)

While business may be the highest leverage point for elevating global consciousness, the common perception of business is that it is profit-centered and power-centered rather than values-centered. Read any business publication or management ethics textbook, and you will find countless examples of less-than-conscious business behavior. Organizations may go through the motions of appearing to care about social justice, local communities, gender equality, or climate change, but often it is window dressing. These challenges are actually opportunities for organizational transformation. However, organizational transformation approaches are often resisted because of the myth that investing in human values will not be profitable (Neal, 2018). But that is just not true. Research has shown that long-term financial sustainability of an organization is highly correlated with higher purpose and a commitment to the greater good (Laszlo & Brown, 2014; Sisodia et al., 2007).

The rest of this section defines the three domains of global consciousness, which provide the basis for this exploration of global consciousness in virtual spaces. These three domains build upon one another beginning with global consciousness at the individual level, which is the first domain. Individuals are the building blocks of families, groups, teams, communities, and organizations. As individuals become more conscious of themselves as spiritual beings, and as they feel a sense of purpose in their lives, these individuals have an impact on the systems they are a part of. The second domain is global consciousness at the leadership level. Richard Barrett (1998) stated that an organization cannot exceed the level of consciousness of its top leader. As leaders cross the ontological gap of a consciousness of separation to a consciousness of oneness (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019), their organizations become more capable of making ethical decisions, attracting the best talent, and having a positive impact on their stakeholders. The third domain is global consciousness at the collective level. This is the awakening of humanity to our interconnectedness with each other, with living systems, and with the divine or the transcendent.

Global Consciousness at the Individual Level
Global consciousness is an inner dimension of an individual. It is a stage of human development beyond ego-centric and tribal-centric. Through practices of inner work and contemplation, the individual feels a sense of deep connection, interdependence, and oneness with humanity, the planet, and life itself. This individual level of global consciousness is supported as a worldview that has emerged from an integration of cutting-edge science and wisdom traditions (Ivanhoe et al., 2018; Tsao & Laszlo, 2019). The individual views the universe as interconnected energies. Consciousness is primary, that is, consciousness is the source of creation, guidance, and action, according to quantum physicist Schafer (2013). A person at the individual global consciousness level sees themselves as a global citizen. My work on spiritual leadership labels an individual who is globally conscious an "Edgewalker" (Neal, 2006). Edgewalkers fully integrate the spiritual world and the practical world of business.

There are many theories supporting the development of individual levels of consciousness. Common terms for the highest level of consciousness is referred to as global consciousness, oneness consciousness, or non-dual consciousness. In most theories, there is a bifurcation

point—an ontological divide (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019)—where a quantum shift in self-identity occurs. Here are some examples of that point of bifurcation:

- Ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013);
- Me to we (Kaufmann, 2016);
- Consciousness of separation to consciousness of connectedness (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019); and
- Tier 1 to tier 2 (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

Programs and approaches that support the development across this bifurcation point include individual practices such as meditation, time in nature, yoga, shamanic practices, or music immersion (Neal, 2013). Developmental support from other individuals can also come in the form of coaching, spiritual direction, or spiritual teachers. An emergent approach is psychedelic retreats for leaders[1]. More systemic approaches to supporting the individual consciousness development include retreats, cohort programs, university courses, and book study groups. Most of these developmental approaches for increasing individual global consciousness can be implemented in virtual space.

Hari Kiran is an example of someone who is highly committed to his own individual level of global consciousness. He was a successful businessman in India who credited his success to body, mind, spirit yogic practices, and who was and is guided by Indic wisdom in his decisions and his way of life. He sold his business and founded Indica Academy as a way of sharing these practices and wisdom with others in business. While his focus is on Indic wisdom, he sees himself as a global citizen and recognizes that ancient wisdom and traditions from around the world all contribute to the elevation of humanity in harmony with all living things. He also highly values the wisdom that comes from sciences, such as quantum physics, neurobiology, and psychology. Hari's daily practices include conscious eating, yoga asanas, meditation, and self-reflection. One of the things I have noticed in people like Hari Kiran who are deeply committed to self-cultivation and self-development, is that they exude an inner peace, and a joyful sense of playfulness.

Global Consciousness at the Leadership Level
At the global consciousness level, the focus of leadership development widens to connecting the organization to the needs and the full potential of humanity. Leaders who are globally conscious sense an interconnectedness between themselves, the organization's purpose, and the rest of the world (Laloux, 2014). They value collaboration over competition, potential over obstacles, and lifting others up over personal ambition. They have a strong sense of how their personal mission integrates with the organization's mission, and they sense the organization's potential for contributing to the world in a meaningful way. People trust them and are attracted to their vision of the future.

Everything that applies to individuals who are globally conscious also applies to leaders who are globally conscious. Globally conscious leaders have individual contemplative practices that support self-awareness and centeredness amid turbulent times. They have strong guiding values

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[1] Taken from an interview conducted with Natalie Michael on 10/12/23.

or spiritual principles they live and lead by. They also bring group contemplative practices into their teams or organization units.

In global consciousness leadership development, leaders are trained in wisdom practices and the integration of non-dual ways of knowing supported by quantum science knowledge. The goal is to develop a critical mass of leaders who can embrace global oneness while celebrating a diversity of cultures and voices. In an enlightened organization (Neal, 2013) that intentionally supports the development of globally conscious leaders; there are programs, methods, and resources available to support this development.

Leadership development programs, such as Tsao and Laszlo's (2019) Quantum Leadership program, are being developed that provide experiences, wisdom, practices, models, and guidance to help leaders move to higher levels of consciousness in a way that positively impacts their personal and professional lives, their organizations, humanity, and the planet. While many of these programs have an in-person component, most of them have online elements that allow for participants from all over the world to build relationships and engage in mutual learning.

Octave Institute, founded by Fredrick Chavalit Tsao, is a non-profit leadership development organization in Singapore with global reach. Their online Quantum Leadership programs include a number of elements that are designed to help leaders cross the identity bifurcation point described above – the ontological gap. The online components include videos of various wisdom teachers, including Tsao himself. He is the fourth-generation leader of a large family business in Asia who brings practices of mindfulness into the culture. For example, at Octave Institute, all foods that are served are plant-based as a way of supporting individual physical health and consciousness while also being in harmony with the planet and the flourishing of life. Their meeting rooms have names like "serenity," "peace," and "well-being." The Quantum Leadership program also includes peer-to-peer learning elements where small teams of three or four people meet virtually to support each other in their spiritual and holistic practices, in support of their leadership.

Global Consciousness as a Collective Phenomenon
The third perspective of global consciousness is a collective phenomenon whereby humanity perceives itself as whole (one humanity, one human race, oneness with God, or oneness with the Universe) and commits to the greater good to solve global challenges such as climate change, world peace, social justice, and well-being for everyone. At GCI, we believe that if and when there is a shared experience of global consciousness, we will see a collective agreement on the following beliefs and ways of being. We are spirit-infused beings in a world that is alive with meaning. We are cooperative, compassionate, and caring as an essential element of being human. We believe that everyone seeks to flourish and wants others to flourish. And rather than seeing humanity as having dominion over the natural world, we see ourselves as an integral part of nature and we choose to live in harmony with nature rather than a focus on extraction.

Occasionally, we see global consciousness in action. New Year's Eve 2000 is one example. This was a time when the industrialized world was concerned about the negative potential of Y2K on the computer-centric world. For a 24-hour period, television viewers could see the new year roll in, country by country around the world. It was as if, for just a moment, all of humanity was

celebrating the start of a new year, a new century, and a new millennium. Humanity was also celebrating the fact that computers and the internet kept working, and that it was not the "end of the world."

One year later, on September 11, the whole world was shocked by the attacks on the World Trade Center and the U.S. Pentagon. While a small group of terrorists celebrated these attacks, most of humanity was in mourning at these shocking acts of violence. People joined together in prayer, in a commitment to doing work that was more meaningful, and to being more loving. This feeling of connectedness did not last long, but it was remarkable that it existed at all. Recently we have seen similar expressions of solidarity in reaction to horrendous acts of violence in war-torn areas such as Ukraine, Israel, and Gaza.

While those of us who made it through the pandemic are breathing a collective sigh of relief and a desire to live life normally again, many of us are deeply concerned about the planetary climate emergency. Everyone is impacted, and it will take small and large actions from each of us to transform these shared crises.

Several models of global consciousness are emerging that provide non-hierarchical methods of people coming together to address issues that face humanity. Political movements such as the Occupy Movement, Arab Spring, March for Our Lives, School Strikes for Climate, Extinction Rebellion, and many others are all worth studying for their ability to create positive transformation on the individual and collective levels. There are also contemplative groups from around the world using spiritual practices to help raise collective consciousness. Mindfulness training in North America and other parts of the world has spread throughout corporations and universities. The internet has erased boundaries between countries and cultures, especially for young people. These trends and forces provide a positive foundation for a global consciousness movement and a collective elevation of human consciousness.

Defining Virtual Space in the Context of Global Consciousness

This section of the chapter focuses on definitions of virtual space and their relevance for global consciousness. As mentioned earlier, one of the key factors in elevating global consciousness is the recent shift during the pandemic that led to the embrace of meeting virtually. This has been true for global consciousness at all three levels described above: (1) individual, (2) leadership, and (3) collective. Most of the literature about this phenomenon has focused on online applications. This chapter explores the importance of online meetings but also extends the conversation to two other expressions of virtual space. The three views of virtual space offered are: (1) online facilitated meetings and communities, (2) virtual reality, and (3) quantum connections utilizing prayer and intention.

Online Facilitated Meetings and Communities

As has been stated throughout this book (*provide chapter references here*), the pandemic and associated isolation created the foundation for large numbers of individuals and organizations to move online. Offices, universities, and other workplaces were shut down during the early stages of the pandemic, and people began to work and learn from home on a large scale.

Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet became the primary online applications for people to meet with one another, and the convenience soon became clear. The streets were emptied of commuters, and for a time, the levels of air pollution were reduced by as much as 20 percent (Mersman, 2020). While there were many challenges of lifework balance, when pandemic restrictions were lifted, most people did not want to return to offices (Poleg, 2023).

Prior to the pandemic, like many professionals, I used Zoom or other online meeting applications for occasional project work with colleagues. Before COVID, I probably attended two to three online meetings a month. After COVID, I averaged four to five meetings a day! Working in virtual space became a way of life for most of us. The shock of the deadly pandemic and the breakdown of medical, political, and educational systems prompted many of us to come together virtually to explore ways in which these systems could be transformed.

Virtual Reality
In 1971, the astronaut Edgar Mitchell had an epiphany as the Kitty Hawk command module made its way home from a mission to the moon. As he looked through the module's window at Earth, he felt an overwhelming sense of oneness with our fragile planet. He described the experience as ecstatic, and it changed his life. He left NASA and founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences to study consciousness and human potential (Homans, 2016).

Very few people will ever have the experience that Mitchell had, but some scientists are exploring the application of creating what is now called *the overview effect* (Kanas, 2020) using virtual reality headsets. The overview effect is defined as the cognitive shift that results from the experience of viewing the Earth from space and in space (White, 2023). White (1998) saw the "universal insight" (p. 38) that comes from an overview effect experience as the basis for creating a new civilization. Schlitz has been researching the effects of virtual reality overview effects on grief with positive results (Schlitz et al., 2023). Her research approach can be used in leadership development to help leaders become more globally conscious.

TRIPP is a meditation app designed for virtual reality headsets and other platforms. This is a new area of research, but early results are promising. For example, United Kingdom researchers conducted a study of TRIPP's "Calm" and "Focus" programs on the emotional mindset of participants during the lockdown in early 2020. They found a positive increase in mental well-being among participants during a very stressful time in society (Franzoni et al., 2021). Visit the TRIPP website (https://www.tripp.com/research/) for additional applications in the workplace, in post-operative recovery, and palliative care.

A third form of virtual reality is the Metaverse. The Metaverse is a three-dimensional experience using virtual reality headsets where one can interact with avatars of other people. It is primarily used for gaming but may have potential for designing and simulating the new civilizations that White (1998) envisioned. Spiritual applications of the Metaverse for creating global consciousness in sacred space may already exist, but I am not aware of them. Imagine being able to join a global meditation facilitated by an honored spiritual teacher, or a virtual ritual held in a sacred space such as the Sistine Chapel or an ancient temple.

Quantum Connections Utilizing Prayer and Intention

In additional to virtual meeting spaces and virtual reality, a third form of virtual space can be described as connected consciousness through a technological lens such as quantum physics (Schafer, 2013; Sheldrake, 2009) or a wisdom tradition lens such as Indra's net (Kabat-Zinn, 2000), Akashic Records (Laszlo, 2009), or as a global brain (Russell, 1995). In this view of virtual space, global consciousness is becoming more aware of itself through collective practices of prayer and intention.

In order to demonstrate the idea of connected consciousness, I will share two of my own experiences during which I felt connected to a larger whole. I first became aware of this form of virtual space while attending a weeklong Tibetan meditation course in Denmark. During some of our meditations, we were guided to connect energetically to other Tibetan meditation groups around the planet to share intentions of peace and harmony. We visualized bringing our local group energy together with other sanghas in order to amplify the intentions of all the meditation gatherings around the world. The group in Denmark gathered every evening at 6 p.m. to meditate, and members who were not able to be physically present at that time would meditate from wherever they were, joining in the collective energy.

Another experience was inspired by a visit to the Abbey of Sainte-Marie des Deus-Montagnes in Canada. This is a cloistered group of contemplative nuns. A group of workplace spirituality scholars were privileged to meet with the Mother Superior and several of the senior nuns. They shared with us that when they pray, they always connect in prayer to those in prayer in other abbeys and monasteries in their Benedictine tradition. In my own practice, I now visualize lines of golden light connecting me to the Tibetan meditation groups, the Catholic groups in prayer, and all others in prayer around the world.

Religious traditions have engaged spiritual practices of connectedness for millennia. Recently, scientists have begun to study and measure the outcomes of these global practices. Two well-known studies are McTaggart's (2007) intention experiment and the work that grew out of Roger Nelson and Brenda Dunne's (Nelson, 2019) experiments at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) lab.

McTaggart's (2007) intention experiment has produced measurable results in micro-impacts such as making seeds grow faster and more macro-impacts such as lowering violence in war-torn areas or impoverished communities. On McTaggart's website[2], people can sign up to join in collective healing intentions for individuals with serious illnesses or join in experiments for world peace. One of the most powerful effects of group intention is that participants experience a profound sense of oneness.

The most specific approach to influencing and measuring global consciousness through intention is the Global Coherence Initiative, co-sponsored by HeartMath and the Institute of Noetic Sciences. Using global coherence monitoring systems mentioned above based on Nelson and Dunne's (Nelson, 2019) work, these instruments constantly monitor the resonant frequencies of Earth's magnetic field on RNGs. The results can be compared to major global events that have a

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[2] https://lynnemctaggart.com/intention-experiments/the-intention-experiment/

strong emotional component, including collective intention events like global prayer. The evidence is clear that collective prayer and intention make a small but meaningful difference.

Online Initiatives Supporting the Elevation of Global Consciousness

This section describes four organizational efforts to support the elevation of global consciousness in virtual space. These efforts are examples of the above definition of "online meetings and communities" working collaboratively in virtual space. There are countless other organizational efforts that are taking place, but these are the ones most familiar to me. I have been actively involved in each of these initiatives, and not only have been inspired by the organic and emergent nature of each, I have found a sense of hope. From my perspective, these initiatives are fractals of an evolutionary consciousness that is a natural part of humanity's collective development.

The four organizations are (1) Fetzer Institute, (2) Pivot Projects, (3) Edgewalkers, and (4) the Management, Spirituality and Religion (MSR) Division at the Academy of Management. Each of these organizations has similar aims and practices. Each of these initiatives are committed to the creation of virtual meeting space as sacred space. The space is sacred because the collective work done in virtual space is done on behalf of the collective good of humanity. Each initiative has intentional practices to create these online meetings as spaces that nurture individual and collective consciousness and well-being.

There are a growing number of other organizations besides these four that are being highlighted who are intentionally cultivating a virtual presence, and they are supporting others in doing so. GCI sees these organizations as members of the growing global consciousness movement. We have undertaken an initiative to identify and connect these organizations so that they are able to collaborate with each other and to amplify each other's work. For a partial list of globally conscious organizations that meet virtually, see Appendix A. Some examples include the Global Coherence Initiative, the African Consciousness Institute, Indica Academy, and Octave Institute.

Fetzer Institute (www.fetzer.org)

As described in Chapter (…), Fetzer Institute is an organization committed to building a world united in love. They are the sponsors of the project that focused on facilitating sacred space in the virtual environment initiated in the early days of the pandemic and are the sponsors of this book. Before the pandemic, Fetzer Institute was recognized as a global leader in convening gatherings of spiritual scholars, scientists, religious leaders, practitioners, and educators for the purpose of creating a more loving world. Early in the pandemic, like so many others, they recognized the need to convene online meetings instead of conducting in-person gatherings. One innovative initiative was to hold online meetings for conscious facilitators, those who have experience with intentionally creating and holding sacred virtual space, to share best practices. The wisdom and collaborations from those online gatherings have been rippling out to an increasing number of change agents who are facilitating virtual meetings.

Pivot Projects (www.pivotprojects.org)

In April 2020, amid the lockdown in the U.K., several IBM engineers came together because of their concern that so many systems were breaking down at once, particularly the medical and

government systems. Sharing a concern for the climate crisis, they agreed that the pandemic breakdown might provide an opportunity for humanity to come together to solve shared problems. They envisioned that collective collaboration could lay the framework for people to rethink ways of addressing global problems through local action. Given their high-tech backgrounds, these engineers designed Pivot Projects as a global movement that incorporated local task forces in places like Scotland, Africa, the U.K., and the U.S. as well as functional task forces on topics like education, faith, water, politics, culture, and economy. At its height, several hundred people were involved in task forces around the world, with significant involvement of younger people. The founders had a major commitment to faith and spirituality as the foundation for creating more resilient communities and a more flourishing planet. Unfortunately, Pivot Projects does not appear to be active at this time, but it stands as an excellent case study in how to structure a global movement in virtual space. See Hamm (2021) for an in-depth description of the history of Pivot Projects.

Edgewalkers International (www.edgewalkers.org)
I founded Edgewalkers International shortly after the publication of my book titled *Edgewalkers* (Neal, 2006). Edgewalkers are leaders who have a strong spiritual life and who are very effective and grounded in the material world. Edgewalkers exist on the edge of systems, building bridges between the core of an organization and the external environment. This can be a lonely place to stand, so Edgewalkers International was created to bring together change agents, healers, visionaries and thought leaders into community to support each other and to amplify their work. Before the pandemic, community members would hold local Edgewalker Cafes, which were in-person discussion groups held in living rooms or public spaces. The pandemic became an opportunity to go online. Moving online also expanded the community geographically, with people joining the monthly online Edgewalker Cafes from several places around the world. Interestingly, the organization is reinstituting the local in-person Edgewalker Cafes while also expanding the number of online gatherings.

The Management, Spirituality, and Religion (MSR) Division
The Management, Spirituality and Religion (MSR) division of the Academy of Management is 20 years old and reached division status in 2023. This is a group of scholars involved in research and teaching in the management field – typically at business schools – who share an interest in the role of faith, religion, and spirituality in leadership and organizational functioning. Fetzer Institute has been an active supporter of MSR, both through the personal involvement of Senior Program Officer Xiaoan Li, and through their support of the MSR/Fetzer Scholarship program. This scholarship program funded close to 100 scholars from around the world over a five-year period to attend the annual Academy of Management conference. The participation of these scholars greatly diversified and enlivened the culture of the MSR division. For two of the five years, the Academy of Management held their annual conference online only because of the pandemic, and all the MSR annual events moved to virtual space. This included the annual research colloquium as well as the annual spiritual retreat. The growing comfort with meeting in online space inspired monthly virtual meetings of the leadership, of the Fetzer Scholars, and other online offerings such as the Global Consciousness and Social Challenges discussion group co-hosted by Ian Mitroff and me. In addition, the Fetzer Scholars have self-organized regular virtual meetings where they support each other's research, careers, and spiritual development.

There are several factors that are common to these four organizations and to many more like them. The first is that the pandemic required these organizations to go online if they were going to be able to function in a changed world. The second is these organizations saw the benefits of going online, including being able to work from home, reduced pollution from commuting, expansion of international involvement, and a surprising depth of emotional connection to people participants had not met in person (Guenther, 2022). The third is that each of these organizations see virtual space as sacred space. Each organization begins meetings with a contemplative practice. They also hold a shared belief that the individuals in these organizations are connected energetically to each other and to something greater than themselves.

The emphasis on organizational examples in this section has been on non-profit organizations. It is also very important to mention that during the pandemic, religious communities and places of worship found it necessary to go online in order to attend to the spiritual and worship needs of their congregations and community members. Church and religious leaders also needed to go online for the management of the daily life of the church, mosque, or temple. During the pandemic, these religious communities developed a sense of familiarity, comfort and expertise that allowed them to keep people connected during times of shutdown. The changes these religious organizations had to go through were challenging but also came with many benefits. Like for-profit organizations, being online created a smaller carbon footprint for convening without travel. That also included less heating, cooling and electricity for buildings that were not being used. Now these religious organizations usually offer hybrid worship services, which are a boon to the elderly, people with disabilities, and those who may be traveling. Virtual approaches to worship have become an accepted way of life.

Holding Sacred Space

Given that so many new virtual organizations emerged during the pandemic committed to conscious approaches to collective challenges, and given that so many traditional organizations including businesses and religious organizations are now comfortable and experienced at virtual meetings, there is an opportunity to use these online gatherings to raise up global consciousness. That can be done through recognizing that all virtual gatherings have the potential for being sacred space.

This section provides some practical guidelines for holding sacred space in virtual meetings that support the elevation of global consciousness. Many of these suggestions are extrapolated from spiritual approaches for holding sacred space in physical environments. It is surprising that so many of these face-to-face practices apply virtually, but as the quantum physicists and the wisdom traditions teach us, we are all interconnected in oneness (Schafer, 2013; Tsao, 2023).

The Fetzer Institute's (Scheidt & Li, 2023) study on creating the sacred in virtual space mentioned above and in the book's Introduction summarize these five best practices for creating sacred space virtually:

      (1) Connect through physical spaces;
      (2) Bring in the real;
      (3) Attend to details before and after the virtual gathering;
      (4) Hold space; and

(5) Invite creative engagement opportunities. (p. 3)

While the details of their findings are reported elsewhere in this book, it is helpful to reiterate some of the key details that support a safe, respectful, and sacred container online when holding space. According to the Fetzer Institute, (Scheidt & Li, 2023), a sample of the ways conscious facilitators can create and hold sacred space include:

- Offering an opening contemplative, mindful, or spiritual practice;
- Using the power of rituals, music, or silence to create mood and tone in the group; and
- Encouraging conversation in the chat function to promote informal connection among members.

Other approaches to creating sacred space online can be extrapolated from the in-person healing or therapeutic field. For example, Austin (2023) is a coach and healer, and her business is focused on creating the space for transformation. In her teachings on creating sacred space, she focuses on the inner work of the person holding space. She emphasizes that the facilitator must let go of ego and be present for those who are in the virtual space. This allows the facilitator to listen more deeply and with more openness to those in the group. Having a meditation or mindfulness practice is key to being able to be present in a loving, non-judgmental place. She encourages facilitators to trust their inner wisdom and intuition and to support clients and participants to trust their inner wisdom and intuition.

Guenther (2022), in her work with creating online group coherence and group beingness, highlighted the importance of the facilitator engaging in their own path of personal and spiritual development. She stated, "Anyone who wants to lead or facilitate these kinds of experiences should have a committed personal practice, several years of experience participating in and being a part of these types of phenomena and should also be very clear about their intention regarding cultivating we-space" (Guenther, 2022, p. 167).

To summarize, holding space for an online group or virtual event begins with the consciousness and intention of the facilitator(s). Through contemplative practices, the facilitator can move from ego, or "me-consciousness," to the shared sacred space of "we-consciousness" (Kaufmann, 2016). This inner work is the foundation for building space-holding skills such as deep listening, intuition, and sensing the energy of the individuals and the group. Highly skilled facilitators can become a clear channel for receiving intuitive or spiritual guidance in challenging group situations. For those working in the global consciousness domain, it is helpful to have contemplative practices that help to tune into or align with global consciousness. These practices can then be shared with the meeting or event participants.

An example of this kind of practice could be offering a guided meditation that invites the participants to close their eyes and visualize, sense, or feel their connection to others in the group. I like to imagine golden threads of loving energy connecting me to each person in the group. Next, invite the group to visualize, sense, or feel their connection to all the people and groups they know. And finally, participants can be asked to visualize, sense, or feel all these interconnections going around the planet until everyone is interconnected with everyone and everything.

The Buddhist practice of *metta*, or loving kindness, is another group global consciousness practice that can create a collective virtual space[3]. In this form of meditation, one sends loving kindness first to oneself and then step by step to an expanded field of others, which can include all of humanity and all sentient beings.

After a guided metta meditation, a facilitator can invite virtual meeting participants to bring their attention back into the online meeting room. Participants can be invited to bring this sense of interconnectedness and oneness with them as the group does their work in service to this wholeness.

A Spiritual Infrastructure for Global Consciousness

This book is designed to help readers think about a spiritual infrastructure for the 21st century (See the Introduction and the final chapter, The Spiritual Infrastructure of the Future by Wendy Cadge). A spiritual structure that supports a shift in humanity from *me* to *we* to *all* consists of creating interlinking subsystems. Ferguson (1980) referred to this approach as the *Aquarian Conspiracy*. Wheatley and Frieze (2006) describe a method for using emergence to take social innovation to scale. Waddock (2023) offers a spiritual infrastructure she and others term *catalyzing transformation*. The common infrastructure pattern in these approaches is individual organizations linking up with each other to (1) form networks and (2) develop communities of practice, (3) out of which systems of influence emerge (Wheatley & Frieze, 2006). These systems connect, cohere, and amplify each other's work (Waddock, 2023).

There are many leverage points for catalyzing a transformation in global consciousness resulting in increased peace, love, and well-being in the world. Fetzer Institute is a pioneer in this work with their strategic focus on partnering with key organizations to focus on selected ecosystems or leverage points such as science, religion, environment, democracy, and spiritual innovation.

Education is an important leverage point for elevating global consciousness. At the Global Consciousness Institute, our theory of transformation focuses on leadership education within business schools, corporate universities, and organizational development within businesses. Since business is the most powerful institution on the planet, then leadership and organizational development involving current and future business leaders are likely to have the greatest impact on a shift in global consciousness (Harman & Hormann, 1990).

Future Research and Practice

What you pay attention to grows. If we are going to increase the level of global consciousness in humanity, we must first see global consciousness as a field of study and practice within education and business systems. We must also see global consciousness as a literal field of energy – the energy of oneness. Some measurement actions that can be taken are to map the terrain of global consciousness organizations. This requires identifying others who share the same vision of elevating global consciousness and helping to connect them so that there is greater coherence. Doing so will allow for a non-linear emergence of systems of influence.

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[3] See, for example, https://www.mettainstitute.org/mettameditation.html.

There is a need for a simple research project counting the number of these organizations to see if they increase over time. Another more challenging research project would involve partnering with the Global Coherence Project and/or Lynne McTaggart to conduct global consciousness intention experiments using random number generators. Other research possibilities could include conducting qualitative pre- and post-intervention studies using methods such as collaborative auto-ethnography. Global consciousness interventions might be such approaches as (1) utilizing virtual reality headsets with overview effect programming, (2) time in nature as part of leadership development, or (3) mindfulness training for leaders.

As we create global consciousness as a field of study and practice, we need to create relevant business school curricula, develop bibliographies, publish journal articles and books, and create journals. It will also be important to create a university consortium of faculty doing work in this domain.

What Can You Do to be More Involved in the Global Consciousness Movement?
Here are a few actions you can take if you feel called to be more involved in elevating global consciousness.

1) Do your own inner work of global consciousness.
2) Join a virtual group in alignment with your vision for global consciousness (Appendix A).
3) Create your own online community if you cannot find what you are looking for.
4) Participate in virtual practices of connectedness – religious summits or research projects such as intention experiments.
5) If you are already in a group that supports global consciousness, link up to other groups with a similar vision.
6) Identify global consciousness thought leaders and invite them to speak at a virtual global consciousness summit.

Summary
Global consciousness is an emerging movement, and the power of virtual space has made a tremendous difference in the ability for those committed to elevating global consciousness to find and connect with one another. This chapter has defined global consciousness as a phenomenon with three levels of application: (1) individual, (2) leadership, and (3) collective. Three views of virtual space were offered in order to explore how global consciousness is emerging in virtual spaces: (1) online facilitated meetings and communities, (2) virtual reality, and (3) quantum connections utilizing prayer and intention. Four global conscious organizations that connect in virtual space were described. This chapter concluded with practical applications of holding space in a virtual environment, developing a spiritual infrastructure for global consciousness, ideas for future research, and suggestions for personal action.

The *Bible* says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017, John 1:1). I interpret this to mean that words are powerful and that words can create reality. Words are our way of co-creating with God.

Our world is suffering, and if you only pay attention to headlines, humanity appears doomed to self-destruction. But wisdom traditions teach us that our words make a difference in where we put our energy. If we pay attention to the negative and fear-based narratives, we become powerless, apathetic, and vulnerable to strong men autocrats who will make things simpler for us. Alternatively, if we pay attention to this new narrative, this new sacred story that is emerging as an expression of global consciousness, we become aligned with our inner sense of purpose. We become divinely inspired to do great and courageous things that we never thought possible. We feel called to find and collaborate with like-minded people. We become the strange attractors described in quantum physics that draw people and resources to create a positive shift in collective consciousness. The global consciousness movement cannot be measured, but it can be sensed. If you think you are being called to be a part of this emergence, you are.

> In the future, the quantum leap will lift all those who desire to be uplifted. The quantum leap means that the vibrations sent out from like consciousnesses will draw us together on a scale hitherto unknown in order to collectively leap out of our conceptual hypnosis and darkness into a new space, both inner and outer. It is in a state of love that we will make this quantum leap together. (Namgyal, 2010)

<box begins>
Reflective Questions
1. What does global consciousness mean to you?
2. Which level of global consciousness is most relevant to you: individual, leadership, or collective? Why?
3. Describe an experience you have had with global consciousness in virtual space, either in online meetings, virtual reality, or in the quantum field of intention and prayer.
4. Briefly describe one other globally-conscious organization besides the four mentioned in this chapter. What inspires you about this organization if anything?
5. If you were going to conduct research on global consciousness, what would be the most important thing you would want to learn?

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Appendix A: Selected List of Global Consciousness Organizations*

African Consciousness Institute
https://www.africanconsciousnessinstitute.com/index

Bounce Beyond
http://transformationsforum.net/bounce-beyond/

Conscious Leadership Guild
https://www.consciousleadershipguild.org

Edgewalkers
https://www.edgewalkers.org

Ekskaret Foundation
http://ekskaret.se

Evolutionary Leaders
https://www.evolutionaryleaders.net

Fetzer Institute
https://fetzer.org

Global Coherence Initiative (Heartmath and IONS)
https://www.heartmath.org/gci/

Global Consciousness Institute
https://www.gci.earth

Global Oneness Project
www.globalonenessproject.org

Indica Academy
https://indica.in

Inner Development Goals
https://www.innerdevelopmentgoals.org

Institute for Ecological Civilization
https://ecociv.org/

Institute for Global Transformation
https://www.ifgt.net

Institute for Indic Wisdom
https://iiw.org.in

Institute of Noetic Sciences
https://noetic.org

Mindful Business Charter
https://www.mindfulbusinesscharter.com

Presencing Institute
https://www.presencing.org

SP Jain Institute of Management and Research
https://www.spjimr.org

Wellbeing Economy Alliance
https://wellbeingeconomy.org

*For a more complete list, visit www.gci.earth.