

MOBTC 2021

**Learning with Real Leaders:
Lessons from Real-time Leadership Case Studies**

Jack McCarthy, Babson College, USA
jmccarthy3@babson.edu

Sujeev Shakya, Beed Global Consulting, Nepal
sujeev.shakya@beed.com.np

Mina Girgis, The Nile Project, Egypt
mina@nileproject.org

Eliza Lay Ryan, Supermindful, USA
eliza.r.ryan@gmail.com

Shubhalaxmi Vaylure, LadyBird Environmental Consulting, India
vshubhalaxmi@gmail.com

Abstract

How can we as management educators be productive and valued during these turbulent and disrupted times of pandemic, chaos and loss? We bring real live leaders directly into the learning conversation in a real-time mode to not only illuminate critical lessons for our students, but also to crystallize effective leadership practices and behaviors for the leaders themselves. The rapid development of creative case studies generates reflective two-way learning that is a powerful energizer for our students – and for the leader-protagonists we are studying. This will be a compelling and provocative interactive session with world-class leaders who are world-class learners.

Introduction

In addition to the massive human and economic toll, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to reexamine and reconstruct our priorities, goals and work routines. As management educators, we seek innovative and meaningful ways to impact our learners and accelerate their understanding and development. This has been an extraordinary challenge during these turbulent, painful and disrupted times. To this end, this session brings real live leaders into the learning conversation in a real-time mode as a way to not only illuminate critical lessons for our students, but also to help crystallize effective leadership practices and behaviors for the leaders themselves. Through the rapid development of innovative “real-time” case studies, we have found the reflective element of this two-way learning to be a powerful energizer for our students as well as for the leader-protagonists we are studying. This session will explain our process and will include the leaders themselves sharing their own lessons and experiences in this creative and dynamic learning environment.

As a way to help understand the extraordinary leadership challenges of our pre- and post-pandemic world, we have rapidly developed a series of case studies on leadership, working with leaders across diverse domains, examining their current leadership challenges as well as their career trajectories that brought them to these moments. These are interview-based case studies, including primary and secondary sources, which are developed and written very quickly and published in the form of relatively short teaching cases (typically 2-4 pages each), but including access to significant digital content to encourage and enable student-driven discovery.

Importantly, each of the cases is also developed with the explicit understanding that the case protagonist will also visit our class session (virtually via a WebEx or Zoom platform) when the case is being taught in class, ideally as a surprise entrant to join the class discussion and analysis

of the case. These visits, even if short duration, often become among the most memorable and valuable highlights of the semester, with many key lessons for our students – as well as for the leaders themselves. We are especially pleased that four of these leaders have similarly agreed to participate and share their learning experiences and perspectives during this proposed Symposium session at MOBTC 2021.

We have found that this process connects with and engages our students more directly in their own discovery and growth, while exploring lessons from real leaders facing real problems. In addition, the leaders themselves experienced increased self-awareness and accelerated leadership development themselves through this work, as the case writing and development process engenders substantial internal reflection, dialogue and assessment of their own leadership practices and behaviors. This learning is then further illuminated and enhanced by the class visits, where the leaders respond to real-time discussion and analysis of their leadership and decision-making, as guided by the case content. This is truly a current day example of classic “double-loop” learning (Argyris, 2008) in action, which in some ways has been accelerated by the constraints and realities of the pandemic, where we have been forced to practice social distancing and leverage technology more frequently across all of our occupational and personal lives. In this situation, necessity was indeed the mother of invention, as we sought ways to be more effective in our online and hybrid teaching, which caused us to strive to develop new content and learning approaches, at the same time when global leaders were finding themselves more isolated and in positions to possibly be more reflective and self-aware.

In particular, we wrote four new teaching cases during 2020 as a specific quick-build strategy to respond to the pandemic by working with creative and interesting diverse global entrepreneurial leaders and to engage them more directly into our curriculum and class sessions.

The protagonists of these new cases were all leaders struggling with substantial, existential challenges for their organizations, including the CEO of a global management consulting firm based in Nepal (Sujeev Shakya), the co-founder and CEO of The Nile Project, an Egypt-based musical collective of the 11 countries of the Nile River basin (Mini Girgis), the founder and leader of a mindfulness-based learning and development platform (Eliza Ryan), and the founder and head of several Mumbai-based environmental conservation and engagement companies (Dr. Shubhalaxmi Vaylure). Summary excerpts from each of these cases are provided in Appendices 1-4. Full access to all cases and accompanying materials will be provided at MOBTC 2021.

Each case outlines the career and leadership challenges of each leader, which stimulates and engenders active class discussion and dialogue. The leaders themselves also consistently reported being extremely engaged in the process and highly energized during the class visits, as the process forced them to reflect deeply on their values and beliefs that drove their decision-making through the trials and successes that were described in their respective case studies. As a result of this very positive and energizing experience, all four of the leaders profiled in these cases are planning to participate as active members during this session at MOBTC 2021 as a continued element of their learning and leadership development. In all these ways, this work would fit especially well with the conference's theme of "Innovate and Collaborate."

Genesis of the Project

Making the abrupt COVID-related shift to online learning mid-semester during March 2020 was indeed a difficult and unsettling challenge. One perspective here is that too many people across academia were scrambling in many directions to find new and different ways to use the technology and to leverage the online mode of learning, rather investing more time in focusing on the core learning goals and what is most important: maintaining effective two-way

communication and active engagement with our students in actual problem-solving. Doing this proved to be very effective for our students throughout the pandemic.

As one element of this approach, we took full advantage of an excellent opportunity during the Spring 2020 term, at the request of our college's Development Office, to have Jamie Siminoff, founder and former CEO of Ring (which was sold to Amazon in 2018 for \$1.2 billion), join our undergraduate management class sessions on WebEx as a surprise guest speaker in back to back class sessions due to a late opening on his calendar. Mr. Siminoff was an outstanding and generous guest, talking very informally with our undergraduate students in authentic and helpful ways about his experiences as an entrepreneur and business leader. He also spoke warmly about his own remembrances as a struggling undergraduate business student himself, which resonated powerfully with our students. These were outstanding, relatively unscripted class sessions. Following this remarkable learning experience, it became clear how effective it can be to leverage informal guest speakers in an online mode if/when students are accustomed to virtual learning modes themselves. In the past, the arrival of a remote, online visitor as a guest speaker in a face-to-face class setting would typically lack the dynamism and presence of an in-person visit. However, being consistently online (in the current Hybrid or online class teaching/delivery modes), we find that the "playing field is leveled" in the classroom in ways that increase students' openness to learning and ability to engage with online guests and external participants much more effectively than ever before. In this way, being forced into an online/hybrid learning mode because of the pandemic served as a stimulus to opportunistically seek out guest speakers and collaborators from around the world who can contribute to class discussions in profound and engaging ways.

This experience served as an impetus for us to rapidly create and launch new teaching

cases during 2020 throughout the pandemic that featured these entrepreneurial leaders who then visited our class sessions as surprise online guests during the case discussion and debrief, which was incredibly successful. In some situations, investing a modest amount of time and effort to update and enhance a speaker's bio page into more of a third-person case-style format, after one or two short interview conversations to flush out some details, proved to be more than sufficient in getting a workable, rapid first draft of a case study to issue to students. We were able to create valuable, dynamic, timely new content extremely quickly. In addition, all of the leaders who visited our class sessions for these "real-time" case discussions remarked privately afterward on how moving and inspirational the experience was for them in being the protagonist of an active and engaging class discussion with our students; in fact, the experience of being involved in writing the case study and in making a class visit had clearly also served as powerful opportunities for their own reflection and personal leadership development. These are incredibly important and powerful lessons from this experience, driven from the pain and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, which we will clarify and discuss in detail at MOBTC 2021.

Theoretical Foundation

Managers and leaders in all organizations face a climate of change, volatility and disruption across all sectors, especially in the aftermath of a devastating global pandemic with over 100 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and a death toll of over 2 million thus far. Management educators are tasked with helping managers become competent, effective, ethical leaders in this increasingly difficult world. Traditional methods such as training programs, readings, lectures and theoretical discussions are not effective ways to engage learners to develop their social and emotional competencies (Boyatzis & Saatchioglu, 2008).

It is understood that developing leaders who can perform under such pressures requires

both structured and unstructured learning through experiences where the leaders are frequently in unfamiliar and uncomfortable situations to help improve self-awareness and decision-making under uncertainty (McCall, 2002; Goldsmith, 2003). In this sense, the essential leadership meta-competencies are personal identity awareness and adaptability, where leaders are *both* highly self-aware and adaptable, being reflexive and open to learn about themselves and actively willing to adapt and push themselves into uncomfortable learning situations (Hall, 1986; McCarthy, O'Connell & Hall, 2005; Karaevli & Hall, 2006). Examining real leaders as protagonists facing difficult decisions, and reflecting on one's career and crucible events through a real-time case study leverages these capabilities, providing inspirational role models and positive social learning opportunities (Baden & Parkes, 2013). Given the heightened pace of change in all organizations today and the need for innovative and resilient leaders (Hill et al., 2014), we seek to implement learning initiatives that exercise and strengthen both of these key meta-competencies.

Our work here is also driven principally by an engagement model of learning, following, of course, the classic Kolb (1984) experiential learning model. As is well known in the learning and development field, experiential learning occurs through a cycle of four stages described by Kolb (1984; 2005) as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, each of which we actively explore here. Leadership development initiatives must take into account cultural and organizational context, leverage diverse values and mindsets across varying career stages and hierarchical levels, and provide clear opportunities for reflective personal learning (Gurdjian et al., 2014). Our approaches here leverage these concepts in creating valuable learning environments for our students as well as for the protagonists of the cases we are examining.

Symposium Overview

We are very pleased that all four of the CEOs profiled in these real-time case studies will be able to participate in this Symposium session at MOBTC 2021. As outlined on Exhibit 1, we will curate a fast-moving, meaningful conversation that allows for one-on-one interaction with these global leaders, through the use of breakout groups, as well as large group discussions where lessons can be distilled more broadly. Each of the leaders is quite capable of describing how this real-time case development process can be used to enliven class sessions for students as well as enriching their own personal learning and development as managers and leaders. During this session, we will also describe our quick-build case development methodology and share our lessons in rapidly designing, crafting and executing these case studies. We will seek to expand our knowledge in collectively developing enhancements and new best practices through leveraging the talent and expertise at MOBTC 2021.

Our goal is to share a dynamic, interactive and spirited discussion of our approach and innovations in teaching leadership – and in learning from real leaders – to spark valuable conversations with MOBTS participants on how we can accelerate our own development as teachers while helping current and future leaders perform more effectively in our hectic and turbulent global context.

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Exhibit I
Session Outline

Time <i>(mins.)</i>	Topic	Description
10	Introduction & Overview	Brief description and description of the case development and teaching process will be provided, including key learnings, obstacles and success factors for successful delivery
20	Case/Leader Profiles	Each leader-protagonist will provide a summary of their learning experience as well as some of their key leadership lessons through the case development and class visit processes
15	Breakout Groups	Participants will have time to visit a breakout room with each of the leader-protagonists and the session facilitator to discuss personal challenges and individual follow-up issues
10	Large Group Debrief	Interactive session where overall lessons and ideas are shared for how these processes can be leveraged in varied locations and settings
5	Lessons & Next Steps	Distillation of key lessons and discussion of recommendations for improvement, collaboration and generalization

Appendix 1

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Sujeev Shakya** case (pp1-2)

**Sujeev Shakya, CEO – Chief Eternal Optimist for Nepal:
An Agent for Positive Transformation**



When Sujeev Shakya was appointed in 2005 at age 38 as Group President of Tara Management Group, one of Nepal's largest business groups, he started to think of building a big business empire for the firm where he had worked since the day he stepped out of college from India with an undergraduate business degree. He had built his early career in becoming a Chartered Accountant and developing keen analytical skills while cutting his teeth managing many complex projects and leading large teams for [Tara](#) (formerly Saoltee Group). He saw the immense opportunity of the Group President as being able to lead a global business based in Nepal while also pursuing causes that were dear to him, like economic development, social justice, human capital and global leadership – and continuous conversation. Unfortunately, when the firm's owner went through a health crisis, the company decided to shun growth and moved to harvest the existing businesses, which closed the door to Sujeev's dream of running the large company. At the same time, Sujeev was also attracted to the development sector of multilateral and bilateral agencies. And he also had choices and offers to join companies outside Nepal to lead similar business groups. But he decided instead to take a leap of faith in 2008 to start his own management consulting company. He also wanted to develop a complementary not-for-profit that served as a think tank on economic research.

Sujeev embarked on the journey of launching and leading a company that worked internationally but was based out of Kathmandu, high in the majestic Himalayas of his beautiful home country of Nepal. As he built the firm's successful consulting practice, hiring key managers from India and Nepal, he successfully made forays into Africa in Rwanda, an amazing place that soon became his favorite country after his own. His firm, named 'beed' (which means 'expert' in Sanskrit), grew quickly and expanded into in Cambodia, Myanmar, India and Bhutan. His clients comprised of government, international for-profit and nonprofit organizations alike, and larger corporate firms too. [Beed](#) pioneered many strategic and financial concepts in the Nepal marketplace, including leveraged buy-outs, private equity funds, conducting white paper research, and many studies, projects and programs. As [beed's](#) expertise and reputation grew beyond Nepal, Sujeev managed to gain the contract to represent a large US-based global advisory firm that worked with US Fortune 100 companies, a large and important coup for [beed](#) and for Sujeev.

Sujeev also forged a unique model at [beed](#), where he ensured that people who worked in the firm also volunteered for the nonprofit [Nepal Economic Forum \(NEF\)](#) for 20% of their time at his firm. Over the decade, NEF has become a respected think tank in Nepal, named in the respected *Global Go To Think Tank* list and the preferred partner organization for regional and international partners. This relationship to help build and strengthen NEF is one of Sujeev's proudest achievements, as it now serves as a centerpiece and economic voice for the people and industry of Nepal. Through this work, and his sunny personality, some see Sujeev as being Nepal's CEO – Chief Eternal Optimist!

This case was written as the basis for class discussion. © 2020.

Appendix 1

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: Sujeev Shakya case (pp1-2)

The Himalayas have become Sujeev’s home and the anchor of his personal and professional identity. He uses it as a new lens to view geopolitics, economy and the discourse around climate change. Being involved with nonprofits that work in nature conservation, he decided to link these to the world in which he walks. He has served as Secretary General of the [Himalayan Consensus](#), a platform of alternative development paradigms, and hosted four successful Development Summits in Kathmandu, to the point that now this summit is being adopted by the Nepali government as a dialogue platform that strives to make Kathmandu become the “Davos of the east.” He has been recently called the ‘Himalayan Renaissance Man,’ someone who is trying to connect the dots to help improve our world. His chapter, “Himalayan Citizen,” anchored the 2018 book, *Himalayan Arc*, which posed the view of the importance of the Himalayan Region as a critical economic and social crossroad into the 21st century global economy, and introduced him to a wide audience of people who have deep interest in the Himalayas. He is keen to expand his view of the platform of the Himalayas.

Sujeev is now looking back on [his career](#) over the past decade and wondering what could have been different. Should he have just focused on running the operations and strategy of his company, growing and scaling his business, and exchanged his time spent in hobbies and personal interests with investing in real businesses? His varied interests have grown tremendously in trying to see how to connect all his multiple concerns and experiences, but it’s not clear how this will progress or fit. But Sujeev knows that his interest around the Himalayas and Buddhism will keep growing. There will be more opportunities to leverage his experience in actually leading funds and businesses by possibly becoming a co-founder in one entity, and surely other business prospects will come his way. However, he also sees an opportunity to now take his interest in writing seriously and becoming more engaged as professional speaker. He could also leave Nepal for a few years to take up a challenging position in Rwanda, his “second” home, or move to a position in UK or US to take heed to be a truly international enterprise. He is also thinking of how to build the next global platform for young people to take on the world that none of us knows how it will shape, with artificial intelligence and machine learning growing, communication and technology platforms proliferating, and hyper-connectivity and vast complexity and interconnectedness. All of these ideas and dreams are swirling around him. But one thing Sujeev knows for sure is that he wants to be involved in developing the next world order. Somehow. Some way. He is thinking of the best next steps to take on his journey.



Sujeev Shakya’s website: <https://sujeevshakya.com/>

Beed’s website: <https://beed.global/>

Nepal Economic Forum’s website: <https://nepaleconomicforum.org/>



Appendix 2

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Mini Girgis** case (pp1-2)



Mina Girgis and The Nile Project

Case Summary

The Nile Project was founded in 2011 by an Egyptian ethnomusicologist and an Ethiopian-American singer as a music collective comprised of diverse musicians from the eleven countries of the Nile River basin to serve as a vehicle for cross cultural collaboration and social change. In addition to successful tours of Africa, Europe and the US, along with the commercial release of three albums, The Nile Project provides participatory workshops and leadership development programs to enhance dialogue and conversation around water rights, power and social justice across the Nile River ecosystem and around the world. The Nile Project produces vibrant and energizing music while opening pathways and building relationships for social change. The Nile Project and its co-founder and CEO, Mina Girgis, provide a unique case study of transformational leadership and dynamic teamwork to mobilize collective action through an innovative and powerful performing arts organization.

[The Nile Project Overview video](#)

<http://nileproject.org/about/>

Appendix 2

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Mini Girgis** case (pp1-2)**Mina Girgis and The Nile Project**

The Nile Project was founded in 2011 by Egyptian ethnomusicologist Mina Girgis and Ethiopian-American singer Meklit Hadero as a collective of musicians from the eleven countries of the Nile River basin, the world's longest river (see Figure 1). The Nile Project's stated mission is to "educate, inspire, and empower the citizens of the Nile basin to foster the sustainability of the Nile River's ecosystem." The Nile Project was formed as a collective to foster constructive dialogue around water politics and cultural conflict through musical collaboration.

Inspired by hearing Ethiopian funk music for the first time in 2011 at a concert in the US, Girgis was bothered that he had never heard this music before, despite growing up in Egypt, and wondered if music could be a way to bridge some of the cultural and political barriers and conflicts that have existed for centuries among the countries sharing the Nile River. These obstacles have even greater potential to escalate and explode today, as countries not only along the Nile but around the world are becoming alarmingly concerned about the source, use and control of water. Conflict in the Nile basin is particularly entrenched, deep and complex, as:

"The history of claims and counterclaims over the Nile stem from the river system's peculiar physical and political geography. Unlike other great rivers such as the Amazon, the Yangtze, and the Mississippi/Missouri system, which flow mostly or even completely through just one country, the Nile watershed covers parts of 11 countries. That in itself is likely to create conflict."

Girgis and Hadero embarked on a project to find talented musicians from each of the countries of the Nile River ecosystem to create a diverse musical collective that would share and combine elements from their music and cultures with each other to create new forms of innovative music together. They recruited and gathered eighteen musicians from the eleven Nile countries, many of which are engaged in direct conflict with each other, to meet in Aswan, Egypt for a creative gathering to craft and forge new music.



After a year and a half of planning, recruiting, selection and preparation, and three intense weeks of work together in a music production "Nile Project gathering" retreat in Aswan, the collective's first album, aptly entitled [Aswan](#), was released in 2013 to considerable critical acclaim and commercial success. (*Aswan* was named as one of the "5 Must-hear International Albums of the Year" by National Public Radio). As Hadero later described the project's founding,

"Why don't we create a project that brings the musicians across the river together? Wouldn't that be amazing? We can be a kind of a role model for the world that we want to see and in the Nile basin that we'd like to see... Is it a music project? Is it an environment project? Is it a dialogue project? In reality, it's all those things." (Caine, 2014).

Appendix 3

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Eliza Lay Ryan** case (pp1-2)

Eliza Lay Ryan: A Supermindful Journey

Eliza Lay Ryan is a professional actor, dancer and choreographer who has been called “one of Boston’s most natural actresses.” While acting and choreographing in Washington DC, Boston, and New York, Eliza was also teaching acting and served as the Head of Acting for the New York Film Academy at Harvard University. She has also helped start and manage several theater companies throughout her professional career. While Eliza loves being on stage, she spends most of her time today as a writer, speaker and coach in business and academic settings.



As Eliza thinks about this, she is actually quite surprised nowadays that she sees herself bringing the practices actors use into the workplace through her work as an executive coach helping people experience more, understand more and express more, in their work as well as in their personal lives. She recalls that it was not long ago that she used acting as a way of hiding from experiencing life at all. In fact, she feels that she spent the first half of her life trying to avoid being present, trying to control everything, and seemingly avoiding experiencing as much of life as much as possible by retreating deep into her characters. Perhaps all actors do this at some level, but Eliza finds both irony and comfort in thinking about this now as she reflects on her current career as an executive coach, author and speaker on being present and using mindfulness as a process for personal and leadership development.

From age 23 to 29, Eliza acted in 24 [different productions](#), with 24 very different characters, an incredibly energizing – and hectic – time in her life. It was only through the subsequent decade of [teaching acting](#) when Eliza realized that the very tools that she loved to explore so much with her acting and theater students to help them experience and understand themselves as actors, needing to be present in the moment on stage, could be used in real life to help herself and anyone else do the same off the stage. Eliza became much more interested in how the practices that actors learn to ground themselves in the present moment and see through the eyes of characters (to access new perspectives while still living fully in their own), could be adapted and leveraged to help anyone do the same thing in real life, even in business and corporate settings.



Eliza had seen first-hand in acting classes and in rehearsals that people were easily able to take different perspectives and were able to playfully and joyfully learn from them. In fact, the more [different](#) a character was from them, the more enriched people were. She noticed they were able to be with each other. Really be with each other. Listening and being fully present. She also noticed that they were able to be with themselves. Really be with themselves. She saw that this ability to be deeply connected to their whole selves while being wide open to new experiences allowed each person to think and feel (and create and innovate) in ways they never had before. She was driven to bring these experiences and the practices that these frameworks allowed to happen out into life. Eliza admits privately that her ultimate goal is to make curiosity and creativity (rather than fear and defensiveness) the default setting for all humans. Not a small goal indeed!

With the question in her mind of how acting techniques can help *anyone* live life better (i.e., more authentically, connectedly, empathically, innovatively), Eliza threw herself into its inquiry. She has spent the past decade immersed in the literature of psychology, social science, philosophy, and wisdom traditions, building from a foundation she had begun much earlier in her life, exploring how we may be

This case was written as the basis for class discussion. © 2020.

Appendix 3

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Eliza Lay Ryan** case (pp1-2)

able to make the process of expanding our perspective effortlessly fun. Her interdisciplinary collaborations and research in this domain have included working with neuroscientists, educators, and business leaders, while also earning her MFA in Theater Education as well as Yoga Teacher certifications. This is all exists in dialogue with her own 20+ year personal meditation practice in various disciplines. It is invigorating for Eliza to see her personal and professional passions coming together to intersect in these creative and powerful ways.



Through her ongoing research, collaborations and teaching, Eliza created and launched her framework of [Presence and Possibilities](#). These are eyes-open, real-time, anywhere practices that help people more easily experience and learn from what is, as well as to expand to imagine what else could be. Extending from her life in theater, these mindfulness-based practices help people explore and expand their identity awareness to ground themselves in themselves, and enhance their adaptability to embrace change at the same time. Eliza now partners with leaders in business, education and the arts and blends her own backgrounds in the arts, yoga, teaching, and research to offer practical practices that help people spark creativity and empathy, increase vitality, connection, and innovation, enhancing self-awareness, and accelerating leadership capabilities in her students, learners and clients. And she also chases her toddler around at home too!

Eliza's book, [Supermindful: How to Tap into Your Creativity](#) (Panoma Press, 2020), has recently been published and is now being licensed beyond the US and UK to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives. Her company, [Supermindful LLC](#), which she founded in 2019, serves as the media and content platform that houses her consulting work and tools that people can use to cultivate curiosity, empathy and creativity. She is currently developing a series of video-based applications to make the practices that she shares in her workshops and book even more accessible to anyone anywhere. It is an amazing and exciting time of creation, connection, growth and discovery, despite the world being in chaos in a global pandemic.

And now she is curious about the next chapters of her [career](#). How will performing or directing or devising fold into her future? She knows it must, because it is very important to her and because it is the lifeblood of her company as well as for her work with business leaders and educators. But how? Where does she spend her time? How will she choose which paths on this journey will be most fruitful and most exciting? She has a terminal degree. She could become an educator at a college or university, maybe even in an interdisciplinary role connecting across several academic departments. Or, she could focus solely on her entrepreneurial path of [Supermindful LLC](#). Being an author and running her business are great, but she thrives on collaboration and, more importantly, believes strongly that thinks her business and clients will benefit from it, so how will her company evolve to include all that in a much more robust and integrative way? She doesn't know! But she is excited to find out! The adventure continues.

"The human being knows himself only insofar as he knows the world; he perceives the world only in himself, and himself only in the world. Every new object, well contemplated and clearly seen, opens up a new organ within us." Goethe

Eliza Lay Ryan's websites: [Supermindful](#) | [TEDx](#) | Book: [Supermindful](#)

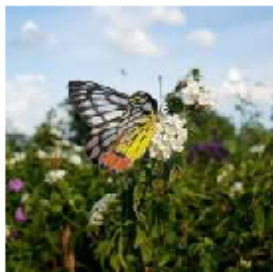
Appendix 4

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Dr. Shubhalaxmi Vaylure** case (pp1-2, 11)



Dr. Shubhalaxmi Vaylure:
Environmental Conservationist and Ecopreneur

Dr. Shubhalaxmi Vaylure, Deputy Director of the prestigious Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), reflected in 2014 on her long and successful 22-year career in advancing the Society's mission to preserve



and protect the beautiful natural habitats in and around her home city of Mumbai, India. Dr. Shubhalaxmi, known by friends and colleagues as "Shubha," knew that this was such an important cause to help support and promote the amazingly diverse ecosystem that exists within one of the most densely populated urban areas in the world. And, as the highest ranking woman on the BNHS management team – and the first female Deputy Director in the Society's long and distinguished history since its founding in 1883 – Shubha also knew that she herself was in a very visible and important position as a role model for women in leadership positions. As she strolled the grounds of the BNHS Conservation Education Center in Mumbai surrounded by the sweet and uplifting songs of birds and the joyful dance of thousands of butterflies, Shubha thought about the flight pattern of her own career and the remarkable journey that had brought her to this beautiful place.

Shubha was always driven by her keen interest in science and a deep respect for the natural world around us. After graduating from G.N. Khalsa College in Mumbai in 1990 with an undergraduate degree in Zoology, she was initially unsuccessful in gaining a job in the science field. However, she worked a number of odds jobs while she recalls "keeping the flame of science alive inside her" by becoming a member of BNHS and volunteering at the BNHS library. These efforts paid off two years later when there was a job vacancy at BNHS. She wasn't qualified for the technical position, which required a Master's degree, so she applied for a lower level Administrative Assistant position to gain formal entry into BNHS. Interviewers saw her passion and were willing to take chance with a science student for a commerce related job, in addition to recognizing her track record as a volunteer at BNHS. Shubha was more than excited to land inside her dream organization, despite her initial work having nothing to do with science or research. Yet she was quite satisfied being there, as her work involved assisting the technical team to set up BNHS's new Conservation Education Centre (CEC).

Shubha accepted the challenge of learning accounting and office administration, as she badly needed to excel in her job so that she could pursue her vision of becoming a scientist. She also knew that BNHS was affiliated with Mumbai University for Masters and Doctoral degree programs; soon she enrolled in their Master's degree program in Entomology, the branch of zoology concerned with the study of insects. She worked full time at BNHS during weekdays while completing her graduate-level fieldwork on the weekends. She adored studying and working in the natural world, and felt like this was her true calling.

This case was written as the basis for class discussion. © 2020

Appendix 4

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Dr. Shubhalaxmi Vaylure** case (pp1-2, 11)

Three years later, as Shubha neared completion of her Master's studies, she realized that her time had come to take the plunge into the technical field. Her former boss encouraged her to apply for an Education Officer post at CEC. To Shubha's surprise, she was selected for this! The teaching role as an Education Officer at the Society's Conservation Education Center in Mumbai was a perfect fit for her curious mind and her outgoing, warm, generous and engaging personality. It was invigorating for Shubha to be able to see her course concepts and research interests being applied in real life every day as she attended to the interplay of plants, insects, animals and people at her daily job at the Center.



Shubha also became increasingly invested as a graduate student, where she excelled in her academic work and research projects. She decided to push on at the university for a PhD, which she completed in 2003, while continuing to serve as an Education Officer at BNHS. Her research interests were dedicated to the study of moths, where she documented the species diversity of Emperor Moths and Hawkmoths inside Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Mumbai. In fact, Shubha became India's first woman entomologist to study moths, and she learned the ways of a successful pioneer in a male dominated field through her dedication, tenacity and talent, accompanied by her thoughtful demeanor and strong interpersonal skills. Fully engaged with the BNHS mission, she continued her work at the Center after receiving her PhD. Shubha was also recognized beyond India for her achievements early in her career and was awarded a prized Fulbright Fellowship in 2003 for her work in advancing environmental education. She spent her fellowship months at the University of Montana in the US. It was an exciting time in her career. As Shubha remembered,

"It was my first trip to any country outside India, and United States was like a candy store for me. I learned different ways of nature education, interacted with US practitioners and picked up several innovative ideas, which I brought to India and adapted them for Indian audience. For example, 'Breakfast with Butterflies' became the hallmark for all ideas that I implemented in India. These new ideas gave me instant recognition within BNHS members and across the organization too."

A dedicated and tireless teacher who was constantly learning and trying new approaches to help advance the educational practices at the Center to promote and enrich nature conservation and environmental protection, Shubha soon came to be recognized as a creative and talented nature educator. Her events, camps, courses and educational materials prepared were highly appreciated by the educational institutions and general public. As she progressed at BNHS, Shubha explained,

"It was in 2006 when I got into a leadership when my senior had to go on a sabbatical leave. By default, I was the only experienced person in the department, so I was promoted as Senior Education Officer. During this time, I really experienced hands-on leadership abilities, which was primarily related to people management, decision making and risk taking abilities."

Within six months, Shubha thrived in her role as an In-charge, which led to another promotion to become Center Manager. In this larger role, she continued to develop numerous teaching and learning innovations to strengthen the Center's practice and enhance its reputation. She led key programs and initiatives that defined this period in Shubha's career. These included volunteering training program that she picked up

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Appendix 4

Excerpts from Real-Time Case Studies: **Dr. Shubhalaxmi Vaylure** case (pp1-2, 11)

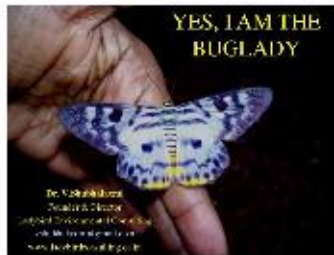
As Shubha reflected back upon her [career](#) as award winning entomologist, educationist, environmental steward and entrepreneur, she felt great pride in her determination, evolution and success across all her fields of expertise. Her own personal metamorphosis from a moth researcher and administrative assistant in 1993 at BNHS, becoming an environmental educator in 1997, rising all the way to the Deputy Director's chair in 2012, and eventually achieving her dream and transforming into a highly acclaimed ecopreneur in 2014, and even becoming an author and publisher in 2018, is a remarkable story of perseverance and resilience. It has been an amazing journey. As energized and invigorated by her work as ever, she still wonders what will be the next steps on her career trek? Where will she go from here? How will she continue to fulfill her own passion as well as the missions of her three companies? What does she need to do to prepare for the future? How will her companies evolve and rebound from the devastating impact of COVID-19 and the global pandemic? As Shubha looked up from her seat on a bench at the beautiful nature preserve in Mumbai, she saw a butterfly delicately weaving its way through the intricate overhanging branches of interwoven trees toward the sunlight peeking through. She was once again reminded that it is the nature of life to adapt, to grow, to persevere, to make our way through the obstacles and joys along the route as best as we can. Shubha knew that's what she would continue to do. She squinted through the warm rays of the sun and wondered how. The journey continues.



<https://inaturewatch.org>



<https://ladybirdconsulting.co.in/>



Readings and References

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