

A Synopsis of Spiritual Paradigms from the Twenty-First Work Environment: A Perspective from the United States

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An evolving American culture and an unreliable business climate are driving the revitalization of the workplace through an infusion of spirituality. The need for a spiritual connection to carry over into the workplace is important to many partly because of an ongoing upheaval in organizational structure, which often results in feelings of insecurity regarding one's place in the system (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Marschke and Dastoor, 2007). It is also important for people who perceive themselves as spirited beings to lead congruent lives by enacting their values in all areas of their lives. Thus, their sense of spirituality and commitment lead to their being energized through work. Spirituality in the workplace is about experiencing one's real purpose and meaning at work beyond paychecks and performance reviews. It involves people sharing and experiencing some common attachment, attraction, and togetherness with each other within their work unit and the organization as a whole (Harrington, 2004). It is a continuing search for meaning and purpose in life; an appreciation for the depth of life, the expanse of the universe, and natural forces which operate it; and, it is a personal belief system (Myers, 1990).

Spirituality and the American Workplace

As the recognition of the spirit-to-work link is still in the early stages, articles on the topic have been mostly theory-based, addressing the changing work paradigm, the value of workplace spirituality to effective leadership and to organizational transformation. The importance of the workaday world has grown to the point where it has now become the central activity of our lives, with people either deriving great satisfaction from their jobs, or, conversely, wondering what is the value of what they are doing—"Why am I here?" Therefore, connecting personal spiritual values to work values has become a way to integrate your work with other aspects of your life (Marschke and Dastoor, 2007).

The term spirituality means different things to different people. Webster's Dictionary defines spirituality as: of, relating to, consisting of or affecting the spirit; of relating to sacred matters; concerned with religious values; of, related to, or joint in spirit. The term "spirituality" comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, meaning vapor, breath, air or wind. Mitroff and Denton (1999) defined spirituality as the desire to find ultimate purpose in life, and to live accordingly. Still, there is no clearly agreed-upon definition of the term "spirituality" among those who are conducting research in this field.

The varying perceptions and definitions of spirituality in the workplace make this phenomenon as interesting as it is. In his article entitled "*An Exploratory Analysis of Definitions and Applications of Spirituality in the Workplace*," Freshmen (1999) analyzed definitions and applications of spirituality in the workplace and found that:

1. Not any one, two or even three things can be said about spirituality in the workplace that would include the universe of explanations.
2. There is no one answer to the question, "What is spirituality in the workplace?"
3. Definitions and applications of spirituality in the workplace are unique to individuals. One must be careful not to presuppose, otherwise. Therefore when planning any group or organizational intervention around the topic, again the suggestion is to derive definitions and goals from the participants themselves.
4. There are many possible ways to understand such a complex and diverse area as spirituality in the workplace (p. 318).

Recent scholars have moved towards defining spirituality in terms of purpose and meaning, community and an element of interconnectedness (Allegretti, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Marschke and Dastoor, 2007; Mujtaba, 2007).

Allegretti defines spirituality as a kind of shorthand for the deepest urgings and impulses of the human self: that which gives meaning and depth to everyday life. The concept encompasses one's need for creativity, one's desire for self-expression, and a hunger for love and service. A spirituality of work refers to making work a part of one's spiritual life, finding opportunities for self-expression, bringing moral values into the workplace, standing up for what one believes, and developing a sense that all of life is sacred (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). One view of spirituality is the idea that individuals hold sets of moral beliefs (distinct from religious beliefs) that inform their sense of right and wrong in the workplace. These beliefs and values generally center on a desire by the individual to be his or her best, to help others be their best, and to feel a sense of connectedness with one's work and coworkers. By acting upon these beliefs, individuals achieve a sense of sacredness in their actions and in the world (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). For a variety of perspective and more information, see a series of definitions for spirituality in Table 1.

Table 1 - Definition of Spirituality (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003)

Definition of Spirituality and Source
The personal expression of ultimate concern. Emmons (2000)
That which involves ultimate and personal truths. Wong (1998), p. 364
How the individual lives meaningfully with ultimacy in his or her response to the deepest truths of the universe. Bregman and Thierman (1995), p. 149
Our response to a deep and mysterious human yearning for self-transcendence and surrender, a yearning to find our place. Benner (1989), p. 20
A way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, life and whatever one considers to be the ultimate. Elkins et al. (1988), p. 10
A transcendent dimension within human experience . . . discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context. Shafranske and Gorsuch (1984), p. 231
A subject experience of the sacred. Vaughn (1991), p. 105
A personal life principle which animates a transcendent quality of relationship with God. Emblen (1992), p. 45
That vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with life, with compassion, with purpose. Tart (1975), p. 4
That human striving for the transforming power present in life; it is that attraction and movement of the human person toward the divine. Dale (1991), p. 5
Pertaining to the innate capacity to, and tendency to seek to, transcend one's current locus of centrality, which with transcendence involves increased knowledge and love. Chandler and Holden (1992)
The animating force that inspires one toward purposes that are beyond one's self and that provide one's life meaning and direction. McKnight (1984), p. 142

There are at least three aspects of spirituality in the workplace, including: first, the spirituality movement of the twenty first century; second, spirituality's impact on the corporate

bottom line; and third, a model: the interaction of the spiritual component with the corporate body.

There is increasing evidence that a major transformation is occurring in many organizations (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). In the so-called Spirituality Movement, organizations that have long been viewed as rational systems are considering making room for the spiritual dimension, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community (Ashmos & Duchon).

Some corporate policies embrace spirituality and the value it can contribute to the company by enhancing organizational commitment and job satisfaction and by producing more effective leaders and managers. The surge of interest in spirituality in the workplace is evident from the many recent books and many articles from journals such as *The Journal of American Academy of Business*, *The Journal of Organization Change Management*, *Public Administration Review*, and *Journal of Business Ethics*.

A Google search of spirituality in the workplace returned in excess of 1,690,000 related subjects, and a search of spirituality in ethics produced in excess of 4,790,000. A search in Proquest provided 147 journal articles and 23 doctoral dissertations on the subject of spirituality, including psychology journals containing information about spirituality as it relates to constructs, methods, and measures for researching spirituality in organizations. Two foundational books, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America* by Mitroff and Denton (1999), and *The Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance* by Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) demonstrate current interest in the topic.

Spirituality Movement in the Work Environment

Ashmos and Duchon (2000) recognize that the world of corporate work is changing. Where Americans work, how they work, particularly since the advent of computer technology allowing telecommuting, bringing about the isolation and impersonal sense of detachment of those who work and communicate solely through computers—all of these factors contribute to a workplace ripe for embracing a connection, whether it be through spirituality or some other source. These changes are drastic, even revolutionary, and will affect every working American. According to Ashmos and Duchon (2000) and others, there are at least five reasons for corporate America's growing interest in spirituality at work, and they are:

1. The downsizing, reengineering, and layoffs of the past decade have turned the American workplace into an environment where workers are demoralized.
2. The workplace is being seen more often as a primary source of community for many people because of the decline of neighborhoods, churches, civic groups, and extended families as principal places for feeling connected.
3. Curiosity about Pacific Rim cultures and Eastern philosophies. Philosophies such as Zen Buddhism and Confucianism, which encourage meditation and stress values such as loyalty to one's groups and finding one's spiritual center in any activity, are finding acceptance.
4. As aging Baby Boomers move closer to life's greatest uncertainty—death—there is a growing interest in contemplating life's meaning.
5. The pressure of global competition has led organizational leaders to recognize that employee creativity needs a fuller expression at work (p. 134).

A 1999 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* reveals that in the past decade, more than 300 titles on workplace spirituality, from *Jesus CEO*, to *The Tao of Leadership*, have flooded bookstores. Indeed, at least thirty MBA programs now offer courses on this subject. It is also the focus of a recent issue of the Harvard School Bulletin. Signs of this sudden concern for the corporate soul are showing up everywhere: from boardrooms to company lunchrooms; from

business conferences to management newsletters, from management consulting firms to business schools (Marques, 2005).

When spirituality made the front cover of *NewsWeek Magazine* in September 2005, the world took notice. *NewsWeek's* Special Report: *Spirituality 2005: In Search of the Spiritual*, cites significant facts and charts that can be a good source for researchers. A poll by *NewsWeek* and *Beliefnet* found that more Americans, especially those younger than 60, described themselves as “spiritual” rather than “religious.” Almost two thirds of Americans say they pray everyday, and nearly a third meditate (Alder, 2005). Americans today are looking for personal, ecstatic experiences with God, and according to these statistics, they don't much care what Republicans or Democrats are doing about that. On matters of faith, the United States is still one nation, under God. In early August 2005, *Newsweek* and *Beliefnet* asked 1004 Americans how they worship and what they believe. For example, the study found that 55% of the respondents see themselves as “religious and spiritual” and 57% said they spirituality is very important in their daily lives. About 64% said they engage in religious and spiritual activities on a daily basis through prayers and 29% said they do this through meditation. Furthermore, 39% said that they practice religion to forge a personal relationship with God, about 30% do it to be and become a better person, and 17% do it to find peace and happiness. Others get involved in religious activities to connect with something larger than themselves (10%) and to give their lives meaning and structure (8%).

Dr. Judy Neal, founder and president of the Association for Spirit at Work, reports that managers often confuse spirituality with religion (Brandt, 1996). A person in corporate America can have a deepening meaning of spiritual experience at work without having people become upset with someone trying to convince them of a particular religious point of view. This phenomenon concerns employees who understand themselves as spiritual beings whose souls need nourishment at work; about experiencing a sense of purpose and meaning in their work, and experiencing a sense of connectedness to one another and to their workplace community.

According to Kroll (2003) in an article in *Forbes Magazine*, the Spirituality Movement of the twenty first Century must include America's mega-churches—defined as non-Catholic churches with at least 2000 members. Sometimes having a larger operating budget than companies in corporate America, mega-churches are corporations in themselves, where pastors often act as chief executives and use business tactics to grow their congregations. This entrepreneurial approach has contributed to the explosive growth of mega-churches with the purpose of spreading their faith to as many people as they can. Thus, particularly in the evangelical community, this growth has an impact on spirituality in the workplace. Those who come together view their faith as a lifestyle that has an impact on a corporation's integrity, values, and workplace culture (Marschke and Dastoor, 2007; Mujtaba, 2007).

Some believe that the spiritual movement of the twenty first century may be related to the way government is conducted in the White House. In his book, *The Faith of George W. Bush*, Steven Mansfield discusses the spirituality of the chief office in the United States. Mansfield describes the Bush brand of management as one distinguished by White House employees encouraged to bring their faith to work with them. Since 1997, federal regulations have allowed religious activities in government workplaces so long as the nonreligious were not harassed or pressured. Bible studies and prayer meeting in federal buildings have become commonplace, and nowhere more than in the White House itself (Mansfield, 2004).

Spirituality's Impact on the Work Environment

How does spirituality in the workplace relate to the bottom line of a business? Some recent studies have focused on the relationship between workplace spirituality and organizational performance (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Marschke and Dastoor, 2007). Earlier studies showed a strong correlation between corporate culture/core values and profitability. A Harvard Business School study examined 10 companies with strong corporate cultures and 10 with weak

corporate cultures, drawn from a list of 200 leading companies. It found a dramatic correlation between an organization's spirited culture and its profitability and also that, in some cases, the more spirited companies outperformed the others by 400 to 500 percent in terms of net earnings, return on investment, and shareholder value (Marques & Dhiman, 2005).

University of Southern California's Marshall Graduate School of Business Professor Ian Mitroff indicates that organizations which identify themselves with spirituality have employees who: 1) Are less fearful of their organizations; 2) Are less likely to compromise their basic beliefs and values in the workplace; 3) Perceive their organizations as being significantly more profitable; and, 4) Report that they can bring significantly more of their complete selves to work, especially their creativity and intelligence. Many studies have indicated that what gives individuals the most meaning and purpose in their job is the ability to realize their full potential as a person (McCoy, 2001, p. 47.).

Companies that excel at engaging the hearts and heads of their people not only have values, they live them through their habits, thereby providing an element of spirituality in the everyday working environment. These spirituality elements expressed are core values — fun, fairness, integrity and social responsibility. Companies that focus on processes that include the spiritual element, such as bringing together employees for motivation at work and encouraging employees to find meaning in work, increase retention which has a decided impact on profitability.

McLaughlin (1998) emphasizes the relationship between spirituality and profitability by asserting, "A growing movement across the country is promoting spiritual values in the workplace and pointing to many examples of increased productivity and profitability" (p.11). According to McLaughlin, organizations that want to survive in the twenty first Century will have to offer a greater sense of meaning and purpose to people in the workforce. The author stresses, "In today's highly competitive environment, the best talent seeks out organizations that reflect their inner values and provide opportunities for personal development and community service, not just bigger salaries" (p. 11). McLaughlin further explains that the use of spiritual values as guiding principles has many positive financial effects on business. *Business Week* reported that 95% of Americans reject the idea that a corporation's only purpose is to make money. A study in *Management Accounting* found that companies committed to ethical business practices do better financially and have significantly greater representation among the top 100 financial performers than companies that don't make ethics a key management component. Furthermore, 39% of U.S. investors say they always or frequently check on business practices, values and ethics before investing. The *Trends Report of 1997* reported that three out of four consumers polled are likely to switch to brands associated with a good cause if price and quality are equal (McLaughlin, 1998, p. 11).

A credible way of demonstrating the correlation between a spiritual approach and corporate profitability is through case studies of companies. Thus, Milliman, Ferguson, Tricket and Condemi (1999) selected Southwest Airlines, justifying their choice for this company as follows:

We selected Southwest Airlines (SWA) for our case study because it appears to have a strong sense of spiritual-based values guiding its organizational goals and practices. In addition, the company has an established track record of excellent organizational performance as well as high employee and customer satisfaction. In profiling SWA we certainly do not want to imply that it is a perfect example of living spiritual values; it has its problems and limitations like other firms. Despite this, there seems to be a genuine sense of spirit and affection in both SWA employees and customers (p. 221).

They identified the ways spirituality is manifested within SWA and assessed the impact of spirituality on SWA employees, customers, and organizational performance. One desirable

outcome was that because of high employee satisfaction, SWA employees have one of the lowest turnover rates (6%) in the airline industry.

Spirituality is reflected through values such as making a contribution to humankind, considering the individual, and is expressed through human resources and other corporate employees in how they relate to corporate profitability and increased job satisfaction. In other words, it finds its expression through the interaction of the spiritual being with the corporate body.

Another researched case of profitability in a spiritually-led company is the Herman Miller Furniture Company. Max DePree, CEO of the Herman Miller Furniture Company, is recognized among the successful business leaders who demonstrate a spirituality that inspires good moral habits. According to the book, *Business as Unusual*, this company is described as problem-solving, risk-taking, committed to change, dedicated to quality, and the pursuit of excellence. It fosters an open climate of freedom in which people have the right and responsibility to contribute, to be involved, and to influence the design and manufacture of office and health care furniture. One of the ways to measure Herman Miller's successful performance is through the frequency in which this company is mentioned by a wide variety of authors on the topic of management excellence and outstanding organizational behavior.

The Interaction of the Spiritual Being in the Work Environment

Marques and Dhiman (2005) studied spirituality in the workplace by interviewing six business executives in a qualitative study and developed a list of vital themes for spirituality in the workplace. The list of 19 themes that apply to a spiritual workplace are:

Ethics	Trust
Truth	Kindness (bonding, compassion)
Belief in God or a Higher Power	Team Orientation
Respect	Few organizational barriers
Understanding	A sense of peace and harmony
Openness	Aesthetically pleasing workplace
Honesty	Interconnectedness
Being self motivated	Encouraging diversity
Encouraging creativity	Acceptance
Giving to others	

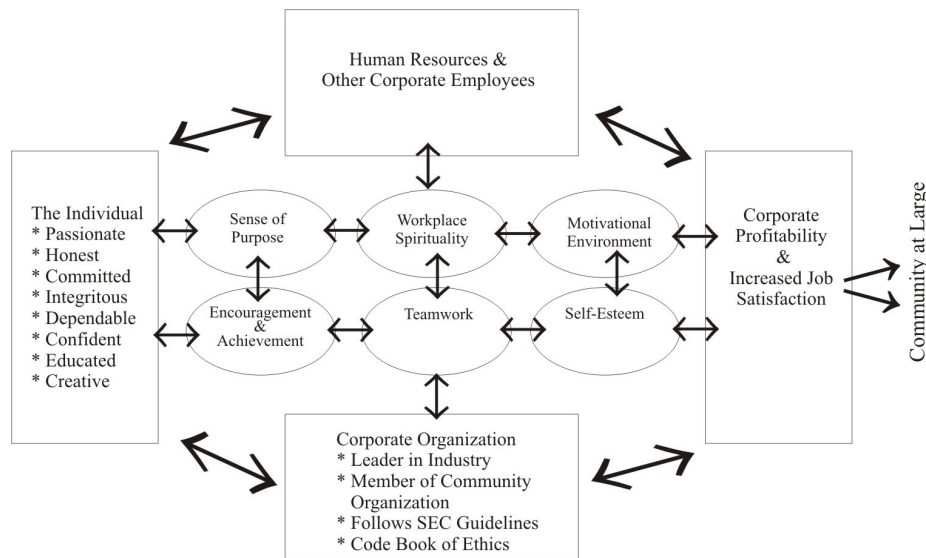
The list of spiritual themes are all components a human being brings to the workplace and, when given the proper nurturing environment by management, allowing these traits to flourish has a decided impact on the profitability of a successful corporation. Based on the distinction of all these factors, Marques developed a model to display the process of the interaction of the spiritual person with the corporate body as presented in Figure 1.

The model, provided by Marques, is a visual representation of the spiritual values a person holds as they interact with the corporate body, with the desired outcome that these spiritual values are a positive catalyst for the corporation to achieve leadership status in profitability, ethics, world citizenship, and philanthropy.

1. The model encompasses the individual, the human resources function, the corporate organization, and corporate profitability.
2. The human resource function, by nurturing applications of spirituality in the workplace, fosters a motivational environment supported by encouragement and recognition of achievement.

3. The individual's spiritual values lead him or her to be passionate, honest, committed, integritous, dependable, confident, educated, and creative. This, in turn, creates a dedicated, purpose-directed, member of the corporate organization, who possesses high self-esteem.
4. When workers are purpose-driven and dedicated, and when the human resource function recognizes achievement, working as a team to attain common goals will be productive and satisfying.
5. A corporate body composed of passionate, honest, dedicated, self-directed, achievement-oriented individuals with high job satisfaction will be accountable to its overseers, both corporate and governmental, and will attain increased profitability and productivity. It will use its resources, including its employees, to promote good citizenship to the larger community.
6. This organization will, in turn, continue to place value on nurturing spirituality among its workforce (Marques & Dhiman, 2005).

Figure 1 - The Interaction of the Spiritual Being with the Corporate Body (Marques & Dhiman, 2005)



Summary

The interest in spirituality in the workplace is here to stay, as reflected by the rising number of publications on the topic, and the many reasons for this call on a global level. There is still a broad divergence in interpretations for the word spirituality as well as for the phenomenon “spirituality in the workplace.” The reviewed literature demonstrates that applying the spiritual mindset in a workplace will encourage the creativity and innovativeness of employees, which, in turn, enhances their productivity, leading to better overall performance for and by the organization as it relates to job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Spirituality exists in corporations, simply because all employees are spiritual beings. However, there are many difficulties to address if a company wishes to acknowledge officially what already exists, and to erect a framework by which the individual's spirituality will have a positive, work-enhancing expression. Spirituality in the workplace should be given greater attention by management researchers as organizational members report for work everyday and the

need for increasingly awareness of their wholeness and spirituality as it relates to job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

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