Spirituality Management: A Contemporary Discourse in Management Thought and Philosophy

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Abstract
The notion of spirituality at work has been an increasing focus of attention in the academic literature over the last 10 years or so, with several special editions of journals being dedicated to the topic. Spirituality is seen in the majority of mainstream literature as a way to find meaning in their work, a meaning that extends further than economic gain. The majority of mainstream literature shows a plethora of definitions varying in ambiguity as to what may be defined as spiritual activity/behavior within an organization. Applied organizational spirituality accommodates the physical, emotional, rational and spiritual aspects of the individual. The construct organizational spirituality over the last couple of years has received substantial attention from scholars, business consultants and ethics practitioners. It has been endeavoured to relate the construct to organizational activity. The potential for spirituality theory in the management disciplines has generated a large volume of primarily theoretical literature. At the threshold of this newly formed discipline stand the sentinels of field research methodologies. It is within the gap between the excitement of a new field in management theory generating an abundance of theoretical discourse, and a sparse availability of empirical studies characterized by scientific rigor that the present study is conducted. The purpose of this paper is to present spirituality management as an emerging construct and recognized phenomenon within organizational theory.

Keywords: Spirituality Management, Management thought/Philosophy

Introduction

The historical evolution of management thought and philosophy have recently been influenced by a powerful force, such that if properly directed, seems to have the potential to result in a most profound contribution, not only to the aforementioned professional field, but to humanity as a whole (Neal, Bergmann-Lichtenstein, & Banner, 1999). This force, extensively discussed in the popular literature (Mitroff, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997) and for decades deemed inappropriate in the business world (Conger, 1994), has already served as a very serious research topic across many academic domains (O'Connell, 1999). Only recently has the effect of this force on the management disciplines been so defined that authors like Wagner-Marsh

and Conley (1999) have characterized it as a major development in business management discourse.

Despite a climate of reluctance (McGee, 2000), prejudice (Martin, 2000) and skepticism (Godz, 2000), the preliminary results and possibilities this force offers have prompted academics, consultants and theoreticians alike to seek initiatives leading to a more comprehensive understanding of this force's capabilities (Butts, 1999). The intensity of these research initiatives have resulted in the conception of a new field in management research, recognized by management professional organizations such as the Academy of Management (2001) and the International Academy of Business Disciplines (2001). The force responsible for this new field in management theory and practice is *spirituality*.

In their work "A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America", Mitroff and Denton (1999) recognize the management of spirituality as one of the most important acts of management, and place the relevance of spirituality into perspective: "We believe that the choice confronting humanity at this critical joint is not *whether* organizations should become more spiritual but rather *how* they can. If organizations are to survive, let alone prosper, then frankly, we see no alternative to their becoming spiritual" (Mitroff & Denton, 1999:168). Yet at the threshold of this newly formed discipline initiated by a popular interest (McCormick, 1994; Nadesan, 1999) stand the sentinels of field research methodologies in the forms of research questions, sampling of respondents, construction and validation of measures, data collection methods, and the objective presentation of research findings (Cook & Cambell, 1979).

Historically, scientific rigor and spirituality matters in many fields of study have collided (Appleyard, 1994; Slife, Hope & Nebeker, 1999), a situation also true in the management disciplines (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). It is within the gap between the excitement of a new field in management theory generating an abundance of theoretical discourse, and the sparse availability of empirical studies characterized by scientific rigor that the present paper is undertaken.

The potential for spirituality theory in the management disciplines has generated a large volume of primarily theoretical literature, suggesting benefits for the workplace environment, organization performance, leadership styles and management functions. Regarding the workplace, DeValk (1996) posits that organizations are increasingly becoming the place where employees operationalize their search for meaning. Similarly, Neal (1999) observes that the workplace itself has a significant role in fulfilling the needs of wholeness and integration. In agreeing with the above observations, Bainbridge (1998) concludes that workplace is where most people find their sense of meaning and notes that corporations seemed to have drifted from a strictly profit, to a profit and worker well-being goal. With respect to the organizational impact of spirituality, Kahnweiler and Otte (1997) contend that if organizational vision and values are shared, spiritual experiences can be organized and directed. Neck and Milliman (1994) state that spirituality is related to organizational performance. Primeaux and Mullen (1999) present a case for spirituality as a means of fostering interdependency and transformation in business. Storm (1991) notes that personal spiritual development in the workplace also leads to positive corporate development. Walsh (1998) argues that there is a relationship between spirituality and organizational resilience to adversity. Mirvis (1997) evaluates spirituality and team performance, stating that work is regarded as a source of spiritual growth and connectedness with others in the organization. Finally, leadership styles

and management are also topics influenced by spirituality opportunities. For instance, McCormick (1994) claims that spirituality is related to the manager's behavior at work. West-Burnham (1997) states that since leadership consists of translating beliefs into action, it is therefore spiritually grounded. Patton (1999) found that spirituality can be a source of coping with difficult work conditions. Conger (1994) sees a complementary relationship between spirituality and leadership practices, while Potts (1998) finds a positive relationship between spiritual maturity and better mental health. These are just some examples of the professed benefits of spirituality for the workplace, organization performance, leadership styles and management functions.

Yet the keen observer may conclude that a steady stream of empirical research on the subject is in fact quite sparse among the literature (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). As a consequence, the literature on spirituality and management seems to point to an impending chasm, where there is more breadth than depth of subject (Sass, 1999). Some of this scarcity has been attributed to, among other causes, the compulsion to quantify research (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), a lack of clear and consistent definitions and constructs (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1997), and a perpetual philosophical disagreement between science and spirit (Appleyard, 1994). Therefore, within these constraints characterized by the infancy of the spirituality discipline within management, a brief overview of the evolution and current state of the field is offered as a background prior to defining the problem statement.

The interest of spirituality in business management is also evident from the literature (Burak, 1999; Tischler, 1999). Evolving areas of recent research within management theory include spirituality as an explicatory organizational development phenomena (Brandt, 1996), as a potential source of competitive business advantage (Gozdz, 2000), and as a factor of organizational development and transformation (Brandt, 1996; Buchman, 2000; Konz & Ryan, 1999; Neal, Bergman-Lichtenstein & Banner, 1999; Wilson, Hacker & Johnston, 1999). Other areas of research within the management disciplines include the impact of spirituality in organization life (Craigie, 1999; King & Nicol, 1999; Neck & Milliman, 1994), career development (Bloch & Richmond, 1997; Hansen, 1993), leadership (Cacioppe, 2000a; Cacioppe, 2000b; Conger, 1994) and workplace issues (Butts, 1999; Freshman, 1999; Klein & Izzo, 1999; Neal, 1999).

There are recent published findings relating spirituality to specific areas of management theory. For instance Strack (2001), using a confirmatory factor analysis, found a moderate to strong relationship between spirituality and self-perceived effective leadership practices among healthcare managers. In another study, Acker (2000) found that individual spiritual transformation can influence organizational transformation. In another publication, McGeachy (2001) posits that spirituality at work is fueled by the finding that personal fulfillment and high morale are strongly related to outstanding performance, and therefore, to an organization's financial success. Finally, in an empirical study on 141 employees from a public healthcare organization, Frew (2000) found that many of them integrated spirituality into their day to day work practices and that they also showed a significant negative relationship with respect to work strain. These studies serve to illustrate the seriousness and practical value of spirituality as a research topic in management theory.

The Concept of Spirituality in Management

Spirituality in the Workplace is about individuals and organizations seeing work as a spiritual path, as an opportunity to contribute to society in a meaningful way (Smith and Rayment, 2007).It can be most characteristically described as the inner experience of the individual when he senses a 'beyond', especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience on his behaviour when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with the 'beyond'" (Clark 1958).The majority of mainstream literature shows a plethora of definitions varying in ambiguity as to what may be defined as spiritual activity/behaviour within organization. As seen above, Smith and Rayment (2007) apply a definition that should be embedded within organization and management: a "spirituality" that should be included within an individual's work-life and working environment. Clark (1958) was cited in a paper by McCormick (1994), as a definition of what "spirituality" might be. However, this definition was originally intended for a description of what one might mean when considering the term 'religion'. This demonstrates the ambiguity and, indeed, the variety of spirituality definitions, leading to a concern of a lack of clarity within the field.

Brown (2003) criticizes the use of the term "Organizational Spirituality" as being 'opaque' due to the multitudinous definitions in the literature. Additionally, within this discussion of terms and language, the definition of "spirituality" as an organizational concept might be substituted by, for example; religion, (i.e. the reverse of how Clark's definition has been used above), morality or ethics? However, the issue of multiple definitions, addressed and criticized by Brown (2003), should not necessarily be seen as a negative point within the field, as variety does not necessarily mean a lack of progress, a point which we shall discuss in more detail later on.

Spirituality in the workplace is about the employee or the employer acknowledging their work in a spiritual perspective. People in the work force see work as an opportunity to personally grow - add value to themselves, and meaningfully contribute to their organization and society. It is concerned with learning to be more compassionate with fellow employees, with bosses, with customers and subordinates. The concept entails integrity, being true to oneself, and telling the truth to others. Workplace spirituality refers to the desire of an individual to fully live out his / her values at the workplace. The way organizations structure themselves to support the growth and commitment of their employees can also be referred to as workplace spirituality; Judith (2003). Attempting to understand the theoretical meaning of spirituality by employees, what is needed as opined by Butt (1999) is sufficient clarity and theoretical understanding of the meaning of spirituality and how it can apply to work especially in terms of personal satisfaction, peak performance, and overall business success that can also enrich communities, cultures, and the earth itself.

The term spirit at work, spirituality at work, workplace spirituality, and spirituality in workplace seem to be used interchangeably to capture similar notions. Numerous scholars have provided definition or identified components of workplace spirituality, and while there are differences in emphasis, there is also considerable overlap. Sheep (2004) argues that a conceptual convergence occurs in a self-workplace integration, meaning in work; transcendence of self; and personal growth/development of one's inner self at work. Owing to that, workplace spirituality can be viewed as the recognition that employees have an inner life which nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work taking place in the context of community; Ashmas & Duchon (2000). As such, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) suggested

a different definition, arguing that workplace spirituality is a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promote employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy.

Mitroff, (1998) defined the concept as the desire to find ultimate purpose in life and to live accordingly. The concept of workplace spirituality has posed difficulty to academics and professionals. As such there is no universally accepted definition for the term spirituality. Judith (2003). In other to contribute to the better understanding of what transpires in an organizations and why people behave indifferently and exhibit unfriendly attitudes, researchers must rid of intellectual bias, Mohamed *et al.,* (2004) and not reject studying a topic just because it is difficult to define or test empirically. It holds then that, individuals portray a distinct pattern or way to express their spirituality, which systematically opens an overwhelming benefit within the circle of employees to produce an enormous benefit within the workplace.

The word spirit is derived from the Latin word spirare which means "breathe". Spirit therefore is the essence of our living and breathing, it is the life force. Spirituality is therefore the vital principle or the animating force within the living being which constitutes one's unseen intangible being. Spirituality has been described as "the subjective feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred" where the term "search refers to "attempts" to identify, articulate, maintain, or transform" and the term "sacred" is defined broadly as referring to "a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual" (Hill, *et al*, 2000). More recently, Ho (2007) from the review of literatures, concluded that, spirituality and religiosity are overlapping constructs; accordingly, it is possible for a person to be religious, be both, or be neither. The possibility for considerable overlap exists and attempting to define spirituality as a separate construct from religion is difficult as well as unlikely to establish the definitions of both constructs. In the psychology of religion field, the term spirituality has no universally accepted definition

Historical Development of Spirituality in Management Thought
The literature on the evolution of both management and spirituality discourse in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century remained on mutually exclusive tracks despite isolated attempts by some authors (Weber, 1930). In the early 1900s, management became recognized as a formal subject of study with landmark events such as the first publication of a systematic set of management principles and the establishment of the first business school (Kennedy, 1999). From these simple beginnings emerged the scientific management theory of Frederick Taylor, which became a dominant management philosophy throughout the early decades of the century until the 1950's, when management theory would shift to a decision theory orientation (Kennedy 1999). This mid-century evolution of management theory is then followed by a systems orientation in the 1960s, change and contingency management in the 1970s, new approaches to human relations and production quality in the 1980s, and paradigm management in the 1990s (Holt, 1999).

Conversely, the evolution of spirituality in the United States remained a personal and private matter up to the 1950s, moving towards a more "public" moral discipline during the 1980s (Wuthnow, 1994). Most religious or spiritual interventions in management affairs were limited to carefully crafted personal practices performed mostly "behind the scenes" of evolving management practices until about the mid-1980s (Laabs, 1995). Interestingly enough, it is also

during the 1980's that personal spirituality styles began shifting from institutionally oriented quests towards an individualized orientation (LaNoue, 1999), creating a demand for management training and development products that many times went beyond just workplace issues. By the late 1980s, a 30 billion dollar market for corporate-sponsored "inner-renewal" programs based on self-actualization, job performance, and organizational profitability had emerged (Jorstad, 1990). During the 1990s, the evolution of spirituality and management theories converge and awaken a bold interest in formulating spirituality-based theories and research within the academic management domain, resulting in the formation of a new discipline. Specifically, three trends illustrate this convergence, and are illustrated in the hereunder.

Recent Trends in Spirituality Discourse and its Alignment to Management
After a brief historical account of the development of spirituality and management theory, this next part reviews three recent converging trends in spirituality discourse that substantiate the value of spirituality as a formal research topic. The first trend is based on a noticeable increase in the volume of published articles over the last decade showing a merge of the spirituality and management subjects. The second trend is the simultaneous surge of research endeavors across many academic disciplines. The last trend is a sample of specific management research initiatives contributing to the formalization of spirituality as a discipline within management discourse.

As stated earlier, the first converging trend to validate spirituality as an emerging research topic, beyond religious boundaries, is based on a simple, cursory review of the popular and academic literature over a timeframe of ten years using an interdisciplinary database search. The results of a Boolean search using EBSCO's Academic Search Elite® with keywords "management and spirituality" from 1990 to 1999. These results show that 251 articles are published in 1999, compared to only 34 published in 1990, or an increase in volume of over seven times, with a noticeable surge occurring in the mid-1990s. Comparable results during the same time frame are obtained using ProQuest®. It is evident from this data that "spirituality and management" has become an increasingly popular subject in the literature. There are some researchers that view this increasing interest in spirituality beyond the religious domain, as a paradigm shift in Western philosophical discourse and empirical interests (Taylor, 1994).

The second converging trend to substantiate spirituality as a serious research topic is the emerging, genuine interest being observed across many academic disciplines. Some examples of this convergence include spirituality research in the psychological sciences (Duvall, 1998; Hamilton & Jackson, 1998; Slife, Hope & Nebecker, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999), psychotherapy (Boadella, 1998; Elkins, 1995, 1999; Karasu, 1999; Mack, 1994; Nino, 1997), substance abuse recovery (Bristow-Braitman, 1995; Goldfarb & Galanter, 1996; Jarusiewicz, 1999; Johnsen, 1993; Miller, 1998), family therapy (Prest & Keller, 1993), stress management (Quick, Quick, Nelson &Hurrell,1997), and leadership (Strack, 2001).

In the healthcare field, Mahoney and Graci (1999) observe that over the last 20 years there has also been an increasing interest in spirituality research. Other professional career fields conducting spirituality research projects include clinical nursing (Meraviglia, 1999), counseling (Benjamin & Looby, 1998; Garrett & Wilbur, 1999; Porter, 1995; Parker, Horton & Shelton, 1997; Westgate, 1996), social work education (Okundaye & Gray, 1999), occupational therapy (Howard & Howard, 1997), adult education (Zinn, 1997), political and

social science (Roof, 1998), curriculum development (Iannone & Obernauf, 1999) and even sports (Dillion & Tait, 2000). In essence, there seems to be a wide-scale professional interest in recognizing spirituality as an important dimension across many disciplines (Teasdale, 1997).

The third and last trend intended to demonstrate the increased interest in formal spirituality research beyond the religious domain comes from academic sources pertaining to the management disciplines. Although preliminary attempts at applying spirituality in the workplace have been met with reluctance (McGee, 2000), prejudice (Martin, 2000) and skepticism (Godz, 2000), the literature offers an increasing number of empirical studies on the subject of spirituality applied to the business management disciplines. For example, recent developments in management and organizational theory highlight the value of spirituality as an explicatory organizational development phenomena (Brandt, 1996) and as a potential source of competitive business advantage (Gozdz, 2000). Other examples include spirituality in business and management theories (Cavanaugh, 1999; Laabs, 1995; McCormick, 1994; McMichael, 1997; Neal, 1997 Tischler, 1999), in organizational development and transformation (Brandt, 1996; Buchman, 2000).

Other areas purporting spirituality as a contributor to management and organizational development discourse include its relationship to organizational values (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), organizational mission and vision (DeValk, 1996), health and well-being in the workplace (Danna & Griffin, 1999), stress management (Quick, Quick, Nelson & Hurrell, 1997), and spiritual "personal calling" or vocation (Allegreti, 2000; Neal 2000). This convergence is so well defined that Wagner-Marsh and Conley (1999) have characterized it as a major development in business management discourse.

There are already published findings relating spirituality to various areas of management theory that exemplify its potential merits. For instance Strack (2001), using a confirmatory factor analysis, found a moderate to strong relationship between spirituality and self-perceived effective leadership practices among healthcare managers. In another study, Acker (2000) found that individual spiritual transformation can influence organizational transformation. In another publication, McGeachy (2001) posits that spirituality at work is fueled by the finding that personal fulfillment and high morale are strongly related to outstanding performance, and therefore, to an organization's financial success. Finally, in an empirical study on 141 employees from a public healthcare organization, Frew (2000) found that employees that integrated spirituality into their day to day work practices showed a significant negative relationship with job strain. These studies are just a few that illustrate the practical value of spirituality in management theory.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrated sufficient evidence that spirituality can be construed within a management theory context and measured as a distinct concept independent of ideological or denominational connotations. In summary, it is thought that the demonstration of the construct of spirituality may accentuate its relevance to management theory development, and stimulate further research, while remaining palatable to the objections and biases of management theoreticians and practitioners. The potential for spirituality theory in the management disciplines has generated a large volume of primarily theoretical literature, purporting many benefits for the workplace such as an increase in organization performance, insights into different leadership styles (transformational leadership). Yet at the threshold of this newly

formed discipline initiated by popular interest stand the sentinels of field research methodologies in the forms of research questions, sampling of respondents, construction and validation of measures, data collection methods, and the objective presentation of research findings. It is in the gap between the excitement of a new field of management theory and the sparse availability of empirical studies that the present study is offered.

Recommendations

As Boyle and Healy (2003) have suggested, future research in this area needs to be cautious of adopting theoretical approaches that restrict the way in which spirituality is both conceptualized and practiced within organizational contexts. The true challenge in offering recommendations for further research on a management discipline considered still in its infancy is to highlight research priorities rather than offer a list of opportunities available. Virtually infinite opportunities become available by just reviewing the abundance of theoretical literature on spirituality or by reconsidering the effects of spirituality on proven management concepts. However, this researcher intuits that too much energy in theoretical discourse and unfocused empirical effort would increase the risk of perpetuating a condition within the discipline where there is already more breadth than depth of subject (Sass, 1999).

It is therefore recommended that for a focused empirical investigation as a high priority for this new discipline of spirituality in management. A continued flow of carefully crafted empirical research projects is imperative if the gap between the abundance of theoretical publications and the sparse existence of rigorous, empirical studies is to be bridged. Otherwise, this study believes that the potential of spirituality in management theory can slowly drift into superficial faddishness, rather than assert itself as a valuable discipline.

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