

Workplace Spirituality: A Meta-theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

A meta-theory was developed that brought together implicit premises or world views that constantly re-surface in human thought. Although these elements, which are often referred to being the result of differences in human 'temperament', have long been part of the scholarly activity of humankind, a comprehensive synthesis has been lacking so far. In order to redress this shortcoming, an integrated perspective, supported by scholarly evidence, regarding basic characteristics of making sense of life and world was introduced. As a result, four paradigmatic or root intellectual orientations (designated as type I, type II, type III and type IV) have been identified. The theory was found to be applicable across a wide range of scholarly disciplines and cultures. In the present case the workplace spirituality literature is analyzed, using this framework. Four basic paradigms in the workplace spirituality scholarship are identified and briefly described in terms of a survey of a number of examples of each meta-type: the theoretical (type I), empirical (type II), narrative-interpretive (type III), and the pragmatic (type IV).

Keywords: Meta-theory, theoretical, empirical, narrative, pragmatic

1. Introduction

A meta-theory was developed that, in a coordinated manner, brought together axiomatic intellectual distinctions or world views that constantly re-surface in human thought.

The meta-theory was subsequently tested for its conceptual plausibility and evidentiary support across a wide range of scholarly disciplines, thinkers, topics and cultures. (Pietersen, 2011, 2014)

The present paper extends the application of the framework by showing that basic modalities of the mind also manifest themselves in the field of workplace spirituality. Figure 1 shows four orientations in human thought that are the result of a combination of two epistemological and two ontological stances, namely: objectivist-empyrean (type I); objectivist-empiricist (type II); subjectivist-empiricist (type III), and the subjectivist-empyrean (type IV). Figure 2 provides a description of characteristic elements of each of the basic modalities in human thought.

Figure 1: The four orientations in human thought

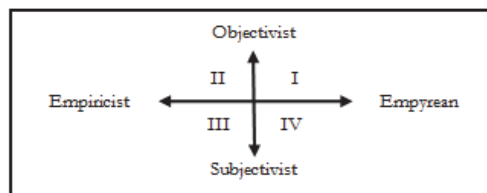
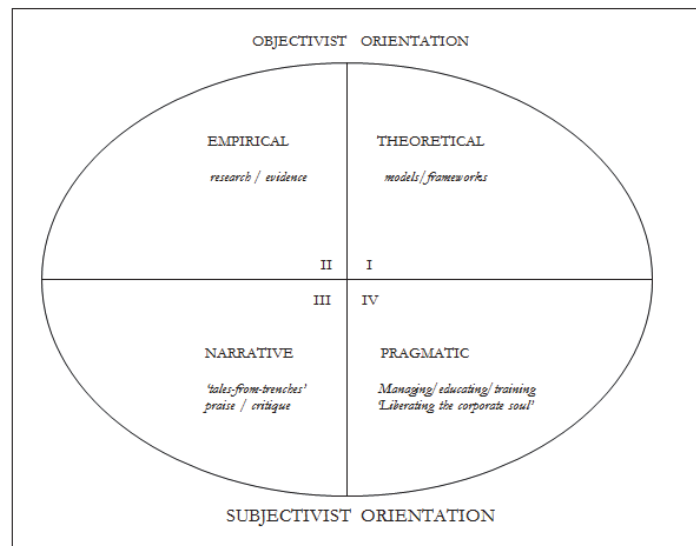


Figure 2: Characteristic elements of each of the basic modalities in human thought.

Objectivist-Empiricist Orientation (type II) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Emphasize reason (rationality) ❖ Impersonal ❖ Systematic-analytic ❖ Microscopic focus ❖ Detailed <i>explanation</i> ❖ Concerned with verifiable ideas ❖ To systematically analyze, order, predict and control life/world 	Objectivist-Empyrean Orientation (type I) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Emphasize reason (rationality) ❖ Impersonal ❖ Theoretical/integrative ❖ Macroscopic focus ❖ Comprehensive <i>understanding</i> ❖ Concerned with possible ideas ❖ To penetrate the deepest essentials and mysteries of life/world.
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Subjectivist-Empiricist Orientation (type III) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Emphasize values (humanism) ❖ Personal-engaged ❖ Experiential ❖ Poetic-particular-critical ❖ 'Feeling with' (solidarity) ❖ Concerned with individuals (the particularized other) ❖ To praise, eulogize, tell inspiring stories or To unmask, debunk, criticize and tell 'sad' stories 	Subjectivist-Empyrean Orientation (type IV) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Emphasize values (humanism) ❖ Communal-engaged ❖ Conceptual ❖ Ideological-universal-reformist ❖ 'Feeling for' (development, becoming) ❖ Concerned with society (the generalized other) ❖ To change, renew and re-engineer life / world / society according to valued ideals
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Figure 3: Four basic orientations in the workplace spirituality field



With the aid of the paradigmatic knowledge framework above, the workplace spirituality literature is examined with a view to contribute to an overall understanding of activities in the field, and to identify areas of further research. The discussion that follows will neither attempt a detailed commentary on publications in purely technical or methodological terms, nor a full-scale review of the workplace spirituality literature, as such. Instead, the focus will be on a broader conceptual analysis of the typical nature of current contributions to the field. Toward this end use will be made of the frameworks in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

2. Workplace Spirituality: A Brief Overview

For various reasons the topic of 'workplace spirituality' has achieved increasing prominence over the past few decades, especially in the popular press and bookstores, in management circles and among what can be referred to as 'corporate soul promoters', of varying persuasions. In view of the ongoing historical concern with human happiness or well-being, this should not come as a surprise. The importance to people of finding deeper meaning in their lives (also their working lives) and the concomitant obligation of management to take cognizance of their employees' needs in this regard, is also highlighted by Poe & Courter (1995)

Several reasons for the rising interest in workplace spirituality are usually given (see (Inglehart, 1999), namely:

- widespread organizational downsizing, reengineering, outsourcing and layoffs;
- a shift toward the workplace as important source of community in lieu of the declining spiritual role of, and more tenuous connections with, external bodies such as the churches, civic and neighborhood groups;
- an interest in Eastern (as well as New Age) philosophies, especially those providing esoteric techniques for discovering one's spiritual center and sense of being a member of a 'universal community';
- the pressures of global economic competition; and, in general, the stresses of a Tofflerian world of constant change; and

- the growing emphasis on having a meaningful life, in many countries, and a redirection (not decline) of spiritual needs, away from purely materialistic concerns.

A distinction is made between spirituality, religion and ethics in the workplace spirituality literature, although a: "...clear definition of the boundaries of spirituality has been elusive. (Garcia-Zamor, 2003: 255). Scholars and management mostly prefer to avoid 'religion' and to focus on ethics and spirituality, with ethics being defined as about the rules and principles of morally acceptable conduct, and spirituality as being about a universal, deeper, aspect of human nature. Definitions abound, but for the sake of brevity the approach of one author is provided here, namely, of spirituality: "...as the journey to find a sustainable, authentic, meaningful, holistic, and profound understanding of the existential self and its relationship/interconnectedness with the sacred and the transcendent. (Karakas, 2010: 91).

Various trends occur in terms of the type of issues and developments that are highlighted in the workplace spirituality movement:

- A decade ago it was estimated that there were about 4000 'corporate chaplains' in, or contracted to, organizations in the USA (Garcia-Zamor, 2003: 258);
- A general aim is: "...to make the area of spirituality at work research more legitimate and mainstream to organizational studies." (Karakas, 2010: 92);
- Problems concerning the incorporation of spirituality into the life of work organizations are, for instance, the dangers of: "...proselytism; of compatibility; of spirituality becoming a fad or a management tool to manipulate employees; and the legitimacy problem the field of spirituality at work faces in theory, research, and practice." (Karakas, 2010: 99);
- Although there is growing interest in, as well as much more empirical research, the field of workplace spirituality: "...is still characterized by a fragile position in organizational behaviour, low paradigmatic development, inadequate measurement scales and incipient empirical research." (Nicolae, 2013: 551);
- Main research issues in the field of workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership include: "...the conceptualization, definition, measurement and operationalization of the 'nebulous' concepts of workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership, as well as the analysis of the causal relation of spirituality with organizational variables such as motivation, stress, earnings, leadership style, setting purposes, the decision making process, productivity, absenteeism, turnover, organizational performance, share prices but also personal variables such as peace, joy..." (Nicolae, 2013: 559);
- A plea is made for management scholars to use: "...non-positivist research methods, such as ethno-methodological and other qualitative techniques." (Nicolae, 2013: 562).
- A common distinction in the field is to distinguish between two levels in studying and writing about workplace spirituality, namely, the personal (or individual) and the organizational. The former is concerned about the spiritual well-being of employees in the work situation, the latter about how spirituality affects the productivity and success of organizations. (Garcia-Zamor, 2003: 360 and 362).

2.1 Workplace spirituality and organizational performance

Reviews and empirical findings indicate that:

- "There has been ample empirical evidence that spirituality in the workplace creates a new organizational culture in which employees feel happier and perform better." (Garcia-Zamor, 2003: 362);
- Based on a review of 140 articles, one author identifies three different perspectives on the benefits of spirituality for both the worker and the organization, described as follows: "(a) Spirituality enhances employee well-being and quality of life; (b) Spirituality provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work; (c) Spirituality provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community." (Karakas, 2010: 89);
- There is also a suggestion that: "...the concept of servant leadership can be enhanced by combining it with spiritual leadership." (Lynch, 2013: 87);
- "Spirituality can positively affect employee and organizational performance [through a] spirituality-based intuition [which] can also facilitate employees to develop a more purposeful and compelling organizational vision, [and] provide opportunities for employees to experience a higher sense of service and greater personal growth and development [as well as] enhance teamwork and employee commitment to the organization..." (Neck, 1994: 10);

3. The *Theoretical* Orientation in the Workplace Spirituality Field (Type I Paradigm)

This section briefly points to some examples of a more purely theoretical (type I) inclination in the workplace spirituality field. Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004: 129, 131) proposes a so-called values framework that may be empirically tested (see Figure 4 below)

Figure 4: A values framework of workplace spirituality

(+)		(-)
Kindness toward others and an orientation to promote the happiness and prosperity of employees and other stakeholders within the work context	Benevolence	Employee feelings have no relevance in the work environment, their happiness and prosperity are their own concern
Long-term focus, showing a concern for the consequences of one's actions into the future; respectful of future generations	Generativity	Concerned with immediate reward without regard for long-term consequences
Practices and policies that assert the essential dignity and worth of each employee; provides an opportunity for personal growth in conjunction with organizational goals	Humanism	Lacking mercy or kindness; cruel; impersonal, cold; unconcerned with the needs of employees as human beings; lacking warmth or geniality
Uncompromising adherence to a code of conduct; sincerity, honesty, candor; exercising unforced power	Integrity	Organizational members can act deceptive, expedient, artificial, shallow, politically manipulative, and are inconsistent in following a code of conduct
Even-handed treatment and judgment of employees; impartial, fair, honest; unbiased assignment of rewards and punishments	Justice	Dishonest, faithless; wrongful or biased in judgments
All employees are interconnected and mutually dependent, each contributes to the final output by working in conjunction with others	Mutuality	Employees are separate and distinct free agents responsible for their own output irrespective of others' efforts, time spent interacting with others is dictated by necessity
Open-minded, flexible thinking, orientation toward calculated risk-taking, rewards creativity	Receptivity	Enforces one right way to do things, discourages questioning and innovation; punishes behavior outside the norm.
Regard and treat employees with esteem and value; showing consideration and concern for others	Respect	Demonstrates disesteem and contempt for employees; uncivil, discourteous to others
Independently follows through on goal attainment irrespective of difficulty or obstacles; concerned with doing what's right rather than the right thing	Responsibility	Shirks work and follows through only insofar as forced to do so; does not exert effort independent of external controls
Being able to confidently depend on the character and truth of the organization and its representatives	Trust	Character, truth, maintenance obligations and promises is at the discretion of individual organizational members as predicated by their personal gain

Marques, Dhiman and King (2005: 88) propose the following elements (and benefits) of a cyclical model for workplace spirituality, namely:

1. It incorporates various internal, integrated and external factors;
2. The individual holds: "...a set of internal values, which are honesty, creativeness, pro-activity, kindness, dependability, confidence and courage. This set of values typifies the worker that performs at his or her highest level of spiritual awareness";
3. Based on the individual's spiritual consciousness and internal values, the worker: "...realizes his or her interconnectedness with the work environment";
4. It is important the workplace environment be aesthetically and motivationally enhanced;
5. "In a workplace that nurtures the spiritual mindset, and where workers realize the value of interconnectedness and an aesthetically motivational environment, team performance and harmony should be practiced";
6. This should allow the organization to: "...perform well, and may become a leader in its industry and community";
7. This will allow the organization to: "...maintain its leadership through performances of fairness, cooperativeness, vision, responsibility, charity, creativeness, high productivity and accomplishment";
8. In turn, the afore-mentioned will help the organization realize and recognize: "...the value and input of its workforce and do everything to maintain this workforce by increasing job satisfaction and self-esteem within the workers";
9. Which, again, should: "...encourage the spiritual mindset within its workers, consisting of values such as honesty, creativeness, pro-activity, kindness, dependability, confidence and courage," thus completing a positive or virtuous cycle.

Miller and Timothy (2010) proposes a so-called The Integration Box (TIB) theory: "...as a means to understand and potentially evaluate how individuals integrate faith and work, as well as a means for organizations to understand, and

respond constructively to the phenomena of religious values in the workplace" (Miller et al, 2010: 49). Figure 5 (adopted from Miller et al, 2010: 54, Table 1) describes elements of what is referred to as the 'Four E's or manifestations' of the TIB theory, namely, Ethics, Expression, Experience and Enrichment.

Figure 5: Description of the manifestations and their corresponding motivations

Manifestation	Description	Motivation
Ethics Type	Places high value on attention to ethical concerns.	One's faith/spirituality: guides one; compels one; and/or inspires one to take ethical actions.
Expression Type	Places high value on the ability to express their faith tradition and worldview to others.	Persuading others to join their faith tradition or worldview, as a response to religious obligation or freedom of expression.
Experience Type	Places high value on how they experience their work, often understanding it as a spiritual calling and having special meaning	A search for meaning in their work; purpose for their work; and value in the work itself.
Enrichment Type	Places high value on drawing strength and comfort from spiritual and/or consciousness practices.	Draws strength and comfort for work; coping with pressures and problems at work; and finding wisdom and personal growth through work.

In answer to the question '...what effects do organizations with a greater spiritual emphasis have upon employee or worker outcomes?' Shinde (2010: 123) provides a conceptual scheme, shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: A comparison of spiritual and secular organization

	Outcomes
	Job involvement
Spiritually committed organization (+)	Job satisfaction
	Commitment
Spiritually neutral organization (-)	Deviance
	Job stress
	Employee spirituality
	Job performance

In turn, Hayden and Barbuto (2011: 143) offer the following model for a 'non-ideological' conception of workplace spirituality (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7: Anchors of conceptual characterizations of spirituality

Prescriptive	Descriptive
Religious	Secular
Exclusive	Inclusive
Limited	Universal
Closed	Open
Spirit	spirit
Ideological	Non-ideological
Exploratory	Consequential
Contextual	Acontextual

Lastly, Phipps (2012: 177) suggests a cognitive framework that describes: "...how the personal spiritual beliefs of a top level leader operate in strategic decision making like a schema to filter and frame information."

4. The *Empirical* Orientation in the Workplace Spirituality Field (Type II Paradigm)

This section offers a few examples of the empirical orientation, namely, of the scientific (hypothesis-testing) approach in the workplace spirituality field, an approach which is common to human sciences research, generally. These are conveniently summarized in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Examples of the empirical (type II) approach in workplace spirituality research

Author (s)	Description
Mitroff and Denton (1999)	A series of questionnaire (n = 2000) and interview studies of senior executives on 'what gave them meaning and purpose in their work and in their lives.'
Moore and Casper (2006)	A study of 228 managers and professionals in 14 different industries, to establish the relationship between workplace spirituality, perceived organizational support, affective organizational commitment and intrinsic job satisfaction.
Kolodinsky, Giacalone & Jurkiewics (2008).	Using 5 samples of workers doing graduate studies to investigate the relationship between workplace spirituality and job involvement, organizational identification, rewards satisfaction, and organizational frustration
Fawcett, Brau, Rhoads, Whitlark, & Fawcett (2008)	A study of a sample of 350 customer service representative 'to explore the relationship between workplace attributes, organizational climate, and personal values. Affirmation, belonging, and competence emerge as critical elements of a people-centered, inspiring organizational culture.'
Petchsawang & Duchon (2009)	A factor-analytic questionnaire study of 250 Thai employees that 'suggests a four-factor model: compassion, meaningful work, mindfulness and transcendence'
Ahiau, 2010	Study of a sample of 235 middle and senior managers in the Nigerian manufacturing industry, examining the relationship between 'altruistic love' as an element in the emerging theme of 'workplace spirituality', and 'workers' commitment.'
Altaf & Awan, 2011	A questionnaire study of a sample of 76 respondents on the 'moderating affects of workplace spirituality on job overload and employee's satisfaction relationship.'
Marschke, Preziosi & Harrington (2011).	A study of 120 sales managers in the USA on job satisfaction and its relationship to spirituality in the workplace.
Mat Desa, & Koh Pin Pin (2011).	A Malaysian study (n = 153 public accountants/auditors) on the influence of four aspects of workplace spirituality (a team's sense of community, alignment between organizational and individual values, sense of contribution to society and enjoyment at work) on affective commitment.
Chen & Yang (2012).	Using a sample of n = 466 (from 28 retail companies), the study investigates the relationship between spiritual leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour.
Nasurdin, Nejati & Mei (2013).	An analysis academic staff in 15 Malaysian institutions of higher education (n = 171) on the effects of workplace spirituality on organization citizenship behavior, with gender as moderating variable.

5. The *Narrative Orientation* in the Workplace Spirituality Field (Type III Paradigm)

This section briefly surveys the approaches of workplace spirituality scholars writing in the narrative-interpretive (qualitative research) tradition (type III meta-orientation). Figure 9 provides a brief overview.

Figure 9: Examples of workplace spirituality contributions in the narrative tradition (Type III)

Author (s)	Description
Driscoll, & McKee (2007).	Discusses the relationship between the literatures of organizational storytelling, spirituality in the workplace, organizational culture, and authentic leadership.
Bell, (2008).	The author discusses spirituality as a force of resistance in relation to management 'through the development of a practice-based morality.'
Brooke, & Parker (2009).	A critical view of the workplace spirituality field 'with a special emphasis on the issues it raises for the researcher.'
Nur, (2009).	Narrates a Christian form of leadership that reflects 'deep spirituality, consistency, fairness, prayerfulness, genuineness, humbleness, and intentionality,' as well as leading by example.
Gross, (2010).	Reports a single organization case study identifying three aspects in which 'workplace spirituality can be misused: to mislead members about the nature of their work, about what an organization can offer to its members and about the societal value of an organization.'

6. The *Pragmatic Orientation* in the Workplace Spirituality Field (Type IV Paradigm)

This section briefly covers ways of promoting, developing and managing spirituality in the workplace. It is about workplace spirituality policies and practices in work organizations, and therefore reflects the pragmatic (type IV) meta-orientation in the field. Figure 10 provide a few examples of this paradigm.

Figure 10: Examples of the pragmatic orientation (type IV) in the workplace spirituality field

Neck, & Millman, (1994).	Proposes though self-leadership (TSL) as an approach to 'assist employees in influencing or leading themselves towards experiencing more spirituality in their organizational life.'
Marques, (2005).	Offers perspectives on spirituality in the workplace, as well as various means in which HR management can create and maintain a spiritual work environment that promotes lasting organizational performance.
McCarthy, (2007).	Discusses various risks associated with as well as strategies to effectively manage prayer in the workplace.
Bygrave, & Macmillan (2008)	Proposes the European (more humane) Dream, as opposed to the American (materialistic) Dream as approach for the workplace spirituality movement.
Fry, & Cohen (2009).	Recommends the paradigm of spiritual leadership for organizational transformation and recovery from the negative aspects of extended work hours cultures, to the benefit of both worker well-being and organizational profitability.
Gross-Schaefer, (2009).	Highlights various tools work organizations can follow, that will increase the awareness of and focus on spirituality in the work environment.
Kim, (2009).	Promotes the doctrines of 'great spiritual teachings' for addressing spirituality in the workplace.
Pawar, (2009).	Proposes a comprehensive model (which includes a leadership, group, as well as organizational focus) for facilitating the development of spirituality in the workplace.

7. Conclusion

A meta-theory that was previously developed brought together implicit premises or world views that constantly re-surface in human thought. Subsequently, four paradigmatic or root intellectual orientations (designated as type I, type II, type III and type IV) have been identified.

The theory was found to be applicable across a wide range of thinkers, scholarly disciplines, and cultures. In the present case the workplace spirituality literature is analyzed using this framework. Four basic paradigms in the workplace spirituality scholarship are identified and briefly described in terms of a survey of various examples of each meta-type: the *theoretical* (type I), the *empirical* (type II), the *narrative-interpretive* (type III), and the *pragmatic* (type IV).

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