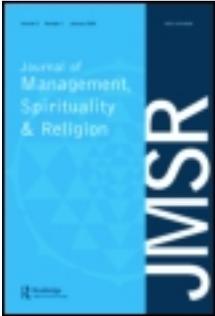


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### Value Authenticity: Unfolding Spirit in The Workplace

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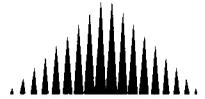
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## Value Authenticity: Unfolding Spirit in The Workplace



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This paper suggests unfolding spirit within organisations begins with acknowledging spirit is within organisational members. Unfolding spirit within people and within the organisation occurs on two levels – below the line where the underlying belief system lies, and above the line, where there is recognition that workplaces are environments where people seek meaning and purpose. When the organisation recognises the importance of spirit at work – *insight* – it may be possible for members to work together – *integration* – to make spirit comfortably visible – *inspired action*.

**Keywords:** *Unfolding Spirituality, Values, Authenticity*

This paper discusses two important aspects of spirituality and the workplace – the promotion of programs and initiatives that foster spirituality at work (the tip or visible part of the iceberg) and the perceptual frame of reference that guides day to day activities (the invisible bulk of the iceberg). Whilst organisations are attempting to create more meaningful work, harmonious workplaces, and work-family life balance, this is not labelled as spirituality, or a spiritual approach to work. Indeed, the closest we have come to acknowledging the work “spirit” in our organisations is to talk about the “spirit of ....” such as cooperation. Much of the experience and expression of spirit at work is therefore below the line or the invisible bulk of the iceberg.

The paper argues that “spiritual” workplaces will become comfortably visible only when the organisation demonstrates sustainable authentic values, and when these organisational values encourage and reflect spirit at work. One without the other will not attract the critical mass of support necessary for the incorporation of spirituality in organisational life. Therefore, the fledgling emergence of spirituality within organisations reflects the lack of critical mass and the current state of spirituality within the workplace.

### **SPIRITUALITY**

Broadly defined, spirituality has several meanings. It can be a belief in a metaphysical dimension such as the divine or connection to a higher power (Freshman, 1999; Neal and Perez, 2000), a range of diverse values (Laabs, 1995) a search for life meaning, or the belief that we are all connected (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). It may be interpreted as the driving force behind a person’s behaviour, a conscious effort to align personal values with spiritual principles. Spirituality can be relative, but not exclusive, to personal orientation (for example past religious influences via family or culture) or life experiences (swimming with dolphins or a near death experience). Spirituality, relating to work orientation or work experience, however, is not as well documented, although the concept of a spiritual dimension to work has been acknowledged. Sixteen years ago Vaill (1989), for example, identified five organisational dimensions – physical, intellectual, emotional, volitional, and spiritual – needed to maximise productivity and effectiveness. Four of these dimensions have been the foci of organisations over the last

few decades. For example, the physical (buildings, equipment, comfort, safety and adequate pay) dimension has been addressed via Occupational health and Safety (OH&S) initiatives and Human Resource Management (HRM) programs. The intellectual dimension (collective intelligence of employees, development, and learning) was accounted for with initiatives and concepts such as Intellectual Property, Intellectual Capital, Training and Development, and Learning Organisation. The emotional aspect (emotional development) has recently been of interest under the headings of Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Labour, and Emotional Quotient. The volitional dimension (the desire or will to change for the better) could be considered addressed by Organisational Change programs and Work-Life Balance initiatives.

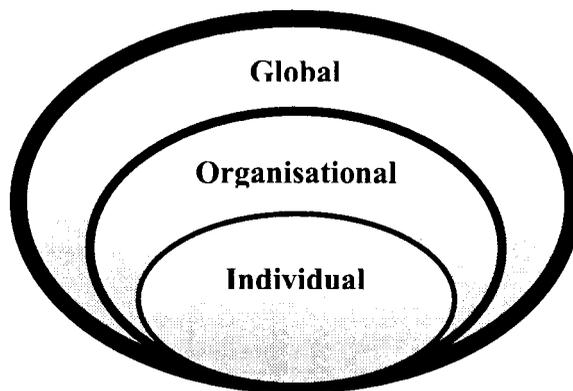
Organisations and researchers have, however, largely ignored the fifth dimension – the spiritual component - until recently. Possibly the hardest dimension to conceptualise, spirituality has commonly been associated with, or centered on organized religion and therefore its contribution to organisational productivity and effectiveness has been considered negligible. The resurgence of values based management however has also led to the recognition that many of the values subscribed to by organisations today reflect values from the world's major religious traditions (Kriger and Hanson, 1999; Laabs, 1995). Examination of organisations' vision and mission statements, codes of conduct or ethics, and tenets of social responsibility can include reference to a number of these "enshrined" values such as balance, trust, harmony, communication, mission, honesty and cooperation. These often resonate with individual values, and can be strengthened through the person-organisation nexus – a convergence of life and work values. Because work and life are so intimately intertwined, Wuthnow (1999) suggests people are moving toward greater integration of the spiritual and material dimensions of life. Anderson (1997) notes, "for better or worse, work has become the principal way most men and women gain satisfaction from doing something more than sustaining their lives." Work may provide the means for livelihood, but it can also provide a context for meaning and purpose. If meaning and purpose are associated with spiritual pursuits, then work may link to some concept of transcendent reality (Wuthnow, 1999). For example, individuals may try to interpret their work practices in sacred terms, such as Neal (2000) suggests in her article, "Work as Service to the Divine, Giving our Gifts

Selflessly and with Joy.” The task is, therefore, to move the experience and expression of spirit at work from the perceptual frame of reference (below the line) to above the line by unfolding spirit in the organisation.

### UNFOLDING SPIRIT

Unfolding spirit in people and organisations begins with the individual (Figure 1) because many individuals bring to the organisation a set of beliefs, values, experiences, and behaviours which can ripple out through the organisation and into the community (Wakhlu, 1999).

**Figure 1: Three levels of unfolding spirit** (Wakhlu, 1999)



Unfolding spirit within the individual is a very personal experience, but often revolves around the process of finding meaning and purpose in our lives as well as living out one’s set of deeply held personal beliefs (Neck and Milliman, 1994). It is about living authentically – recognising our guiding values and living/working in such a way that truly reflects these values. To recognise those guiding values and be committed to them requires reflection on such questions as “Who am I? ,” “What is my purpose in life? ,” “What is important to me” and “How can I make a difference? .” This can lead to the formation of a perceptual frame of reference that can include spiritual aspects such as belief in a higher power, or the connectedness of all people. Wakhlu (1999) gives some ideas as to how individuals may be guided (Table 1).

**Table 1: Unfolding spirit in people** (Wakhlu, 1999)

<b>Process</b> <b>Level</b>	<b>Insight</b>	<b>Integration</b>	<b>Inspired Action</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<p>Understanding my body-mind</p> <p>Listening to my inner calling and seeing my own potential</p> <p>Understanding who I am</p>	<p>Integrity: walking my talk</p> <p>Committing myself to my inner calling and values</p>	<p>Giving the world the best I have</p> <p>Working with passion and responsibility</p> <p>Sharing from my deepest strengths and talents</p>

The first column suggests an individual has spent sufficient time learning about his or her true inner self. Using the tools of inquiry and mindfulness, the individual becomes familiar with this sometimes unknown terrain. It requires constant reappraisal, for each new experience and relationship provides insights into one's self that may only just be illuminated. Once familiar with inner purpose/calling and associated values, individuals need to commit to "who they truly are" in order to integrate the inner self with the outer representations of this self. Guiding values become integrated into one's daily way of life, influencing belief systems, behaviours, values and experiences. From this supportive cradle of authenticity, the individual then explores fulfilment, and self actualisation.

For example, one may understand himself as a spiritual being who is inter-connected with all living things, and part of a higher consciousness. In attempting to live in alignment with spiritual principles this person may select work that is aligned with his understanding of his life purpose, or where he feels he can readily "make a difference." The selection of appropriate organisations to work for will be similarly guided. People may interpret their contribution to workplace spirituality by viewing the services they provide in the context of their work as small, spiritual acts of caring (Wuthnow, 1999). Kaur (2005) provides an illustrative example, in a survey conducted of nurses in Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in an

Australian Hospital: “Fulfilment comes from helping others through bad times, easing pain, and aiding them towards a better life.”

Spirituality, however, is very clearly a state of mind or approach that comes from within. It is a deeply personal quest for spiritual maturity, an ongoing journey unique to each person in its understanding and praxis. Whilst a spiritual approach may be practiced in the workplace, this doesn't necessarily mean the organisation is responsible for unfolding spirit in people because definitions and applications of workplace spirituality are unique to individuals (Freshman, 1999). Managers of organisations, however, need to recognise that the search for meaning does occur within the workplace environment. Marques (2005:149) suggests this is because something is wrong with most of our workplaces and people want change. It is curious that with the ongoing changes to our workplaces, along the lines of Vaill's dimensions (physical, intellectual, emotional, and volitional) more is still needed. The need for feeling connected, finding purpose and meaning appears to be answered by unfolding spirituality in the workplace; however Marques (2005:149) believes this is not happening quickly nor smoothly. Lack of trust is a major issue. Another is our dependency on time, the need to take shortcuts in order to live within our hectic lifestyles. In doing so, we tend to associate with like-minded people based on background and looks, in order to make faster decisions, and spend less time learning about different perspectives (Marques, 2005: 149).

Unfolding spirituality in the workplace may be the answer, but lack of trust and connection to others keeps spirituality below the line of visibility in organisations. People don't want to be ridiculed or have certain beliefs challenged and denigrated. Being open about the importance of spirituality may invite manifestation of workplace barriers (Dean, 2003). For example, the issue of spirituality demands much higher levels of disclosure because it is intimately tied to who we are and how we feel about ourselves (Lips-Wiersma and Mills, 2002). This issue of identity reflects Marques' (2005) observation about like-minded people but raises an interesting point. Living and working authentically is a personal identity and not a social identity. Connection and trust, therefore, are personal issues which mark individual progress on the spiritual journey. Perhaps the real issue is the lack of opportunity to reflect spirit at work rather than a fear of

ridicule or rejection. How can an organisation therefore partner with its employees to unfold spirit in the organisation and make it more visible? Some organisations are responding to their employees' need for deeper meaning in their workplace by offering the services of chaplains or priests (Dale, 2001; Mathieson and Miree (cited in Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003) Steele, 2003) to assist employees with difficult personal issues which may spill over into the workplace. A softer intervention contributing to more harmonious workplaces has been the provision of areas of reflection (meditation rooms, prayer rooms or contemplation gardens) or setting up of discussion groups (around spiritual unfoldment) within the organisation (Burack, 1999; Laabs, 1995; Marcic, 1997; Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Wakhlu (1999) suggests unfolding spirit in organisations occurs through shared vision and values, focus on customers, and innovation and creation (Table 2).

**Table 2: Unfolding spirit in organisations** (Wakhlu, 1999)

<b>Process</b> <b>Level</b>	<b>Insight</b>	<b>Integration</b>	<b>Inspired Action</b>
<b>Organisation</b>	<p>Shared vision and shared values</p> <p>Understanding the needs of our internal and external customers</p> <p>Seeing the power of our collective unique potential</p>	<p>Connecting with other people</p> <p>Connecting with other departments</p> <p>Connecting with customers and suppliers</p> <p>Integrating with the community and industry</p>	<p>Actively caring for and sharing with others</p> <p>Innovation and creation</p> <p>Loving service</p> <p>Unleashing collective power in the service of life</p>

Notice that many of these words are common in today's management lexicon. Organisations consistently work on vision and shared values, and strive to meet the expectations of their customers while building good relationships with suppliers. More often than not the vision and shared values developed provide organisational members with a managerial decision-making framework when competing choices arise. They provide an economic rationale rather than a spiritual guide. Based on Wakhlu's approach however, the words

take on different meanings, For example, under Insight (Table 2) the first part of the process is having the insight into the importance of spirit in people's lives. There is no differentiation between people at work and people in the pursuit of their spiritual ideals. Inherently, a person cannot leave his or her spiritual beliefs at home, because it permeates his or her entire being, sometimes even being their reason for living and/or working. This means identifying spiritual influences and needs, and acknowledging this contribution to individual and organisational effectiveness. The second part of the process is to lose the view of separateness – that the organisation is distinct from its employees, or the notion that spiritual employees are distinct from other employees, or that customers are different from suppliers – and focus on integration or connecting and working together (Wakhlu, 1999). This reflects the spiritual belief that we are all connected to each other and to a higher power. “The goal of many spiritual traditions is for us to come to the knowledge that there is no separation between us and others” (Neal, 2000, 1321)

Finally, when organisations accept they can help their employees find meaning and purpose in the workplace and that everyone is connected, inspired action can occur. This is when people seek to make a difference or to be in service to others as the highest expression of our spiritual ideals. Fox (1994, 5), for example, speaks of work as “an expression of our soul, our inner being” and “an expression of the Spirit at work in the world through us.” Kaur's (2005) research reflects this when one respondent states, “Compassion is the key to my nursing work,” and another says, “I come to work trying to do my best for the people I care for, knowing at times it may not make a difference to the long term outcome; however, if at the end of the day that has been achieved, I am satisfied.”

## **VISIBILITY OF SPIRIT IN THE WORKPLACE**

How is it possible to move from unfolding spirit in individuals to unfolding spirit in organisations? There is acknowledgement, both anecdotal and empirical, that organisations recognise that work is a place where people seek meaning and identity (Kouzes and Posner, 1987; Collins and Porras, 1998, Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Meaning and identity can come from development of the self at, or through, work or remaining true to one's basic values – not compromising self

or values. Wakhlu (1999) identified shared vision and values as one of the fundamental insights for an organisation. Similarly, it is the contention of this paper that “spiritual” workplaces will only begin to become comfortably visible when authentic values are openly shared and practiced in the workplace by both the individual and the organisation. Authentic organisational values are those which the organisation expresses both publicly (espoused) and demonstrates on a day-to-day basis (values-in-use). The congruency of values encourages an atmosphere of shared meaning. Organisational values are widely supported and deeply shared by all members of the organisation, making them an authentic representation of organisational reality. It provides a platform whereby employees can feel connected to the organisation and others within the organisation. Values can be the common denominator between the workplace and spirituality. For example, Purnell-Webb, Glendon and Creed (2000) and Cawley (1997) suggest key characteristics of spirituality are personal beliefs, values, feelings, experiences, behaviours and interaction with self, others and higher beings. The workplace is one environment where these characteristics can be manifested. Workplace spirituality can therefore be defined as

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. (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004, 129).

Several conditions are necessary to establish a sustainable environment that supports spirituality in organisational life. Requisites include a) an agreement between employees and the organisation that the organisation should play a role in spiritual pursuits at work, b) an understanding as to how spiritual pursuits at work might be operationalised, and c) and a recognition that workplace spirituality can comprise both a visible and non-visible influence in the organisation.

When conceptualising spirituality as visible or non-visible phenomena within organisations, three influencing factors are meaning, purpose, and connectedness.

For example in Level One, it is clear (visible) that organisational members are family-oriented and that work provides the means by

which to nurture the family. Job type, role and position are important and generally commensurate with family needs, but beyond a certain level of income and responsibility, family and work life becomes the driver. Organisations may similarly respond by addressing quality of work and work-family life balance. Most organisations also have in place a core value set, a guide to the behaviours important to the organisation. What is not as clear (non- visible) is that some organisational members are spiritually inclined.

**Table 3: Visible and non-visible espousal of spirit**

	<u>Above the Line</u>		<u>Below the Line</u>	
	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Organisational</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Organisational</i>
<b>Level One</b>	Nurturance of family  Quality of work life	Work-family balance  Quality of work life  Articulation of values	Recognition of spiritual influence	Recognition of the need for shared values and the existence of consensual values
<b>Level Two</b>	Pursuit of goals aligned with spirit  Promotion of initiatives reflecting spirit at work	Meditation rooms  Priest/chaplains available for counselling	Seeking meaning at work	Congruency of espoused and actual values in the workplace  Business governed by conscience - ethics, integrity, and honour
<b>Level Three</b>	Contributing to spiritual community in the workplace	Recognition and reward of spirit at work, ie spiritual service	Deepening spiritual fulfilment	Building spiritual community in the workplace

Kaur (2005), for example, found many of the respondents in her survey held spiritual beliefs such as a personal relationship with a higher power, belief in goodness, and having “forgiveness and

acceptance as the key to my spirituality.” This may emanate from cultural or familial upbringing, religious teaching, or life experience (for example near-death, attendance at an ashram, swimming with dolphins) and provide a transcendent quality to everyday reality. These experiences may translate into strong feelings of compassion, forgiveness, connectedness, humility, or truth. Individuals, therefore, may seek out workplaces where these values, beliefs, and behaviours are reflected in the organisation’s core value set in order to make meaning, discover purpose and be connected to others (shared values). If the organisation finds its own core set of values do not promote spirit at work, consensual values could provide an ideal starting place for integrating spirit into the workplace. Consensual values are those values we as a society espouse and seek in our workplaces. For example, the consensual values of unity, integrity, and trustworthiness could be demonstrated at work by values such as respect, dignity, courtesy and consideration.

The literature highlights growing awareness of the visible aspects of level one, and the move by some organisations to level two by employing more visible aspects of spirit at work. Individuals working at Level Two actively pursue goals aligned with their spiritual intention. For example, nurses may seek to work in ICU because they find meaning in caring for those suffering.

“I like to make a positive change to those suffering, and feel that little things often make a difference to clients and staff. [Spirituality gives me] a feeling of wellbeing, I guess by spreading feelings of joy/goodness/hope.”

Promotion of initiatives reflecting spirit at work could include discussion groups around a spiritual topic or playful activities such as construction of a mandala. Individuals may be drawn together because of recognition of unfolding spirit at work, and this provides a “safe” space to explore the nexus between work and spirit. Visible demonstrations by the organisation have included provision of meditation rooms for reflection, yoga classes for de-stressing, and chaplains for conversation. This creates necessary spaces for individuals to re-connect with what’s important, such as their inner world. For example “giving space to breathe and to contemplate and reconnect with the natural world and the inner world of the heart by doing yoga” (Kaur, 2005). The world of reflection and inner

contemplation, however, requires commitment from employees to make use of such workplace facilities. Having meditation rooms and chaplains on hand is not sufficient to sustain longevity of spirit at work. This must come from an infusion of commitment and congruency – commitment to support the visible manifestations of spirit at work and congruency of values – the non-visible aspects underlying practices in the workplace.

At the non-visible level, individuals seek to make sense of their working lives, “Where am I going?,” “What am I doing?,” and “How can I make a difference?.” Beyond a comfort level of income and responsibility, they seek to derive meaning from their work. In the context of nursing in ICU (Kaur, 2005), one person says “Spirituality helps me to reflect on the hardships people suffer and make sense of the unfortunate happenings in life.” Meaning, however, can be found in many different ways (Neal, 2000; Lips-Wiersma and Mills, 2002).

The below-the-line contribution from organisations is to be cognisant that congruency of publicly espoused values and values-in-use is critical. The issue is one of integrity. Without congruency of what is said and what is done, an organisation’s integrity is always in question. Authenticity of values promotes faith and trust in the organization's integrity because there is observed conformity between what the organization says it stands for and what it is perceived as doing. A business that has integrity at its core manages with integrity, is seen to be ethical, and deals with its varied stakeholders with honour. Spirit is seen to be working on both levels – above and below the line – and provides meaning, purpose and connection for its employees. This may resonate with the individual, who is also seeking to live authentically, both personally and with others. By remaining true to who they are, individuals maintain personal integrity. When this approach is also reflected in the organisation’s endeavours, individuals may feel more comfortable in expressing spirit at work.

There are many paths toward spiritual enlightenment and the workplace is an ideal opportunity to find meaning as well as develop the practice of spirit. At the third level of unfolding spirit both in individuals and the organisation, spiritual practice is celebrated across both levels – above and below the line of visibility. Individuals contribute more openly such as suggested by Ferris

(2002, 719) where leaders and managers “gift the organisation” with authorship, love, power, and significance. Others may attempt to live and work with their spiritually grounded values in such ways as being cooperative, or being of service with no expectation of reward. This deepens their commitment to and congruence with their guiding values, and work becomes a way in which this can be demonstrated.

### CONCLUSION

Spirituality in today’s workplace is evident only as the tip of the iceberg. Much of what contributes to workplace spirituality is the individual’s frame of reference. Though hidden from view, one’s frame of reference runs through the whole person, whether that person is at home, school, or work. If one further considers the amount of time spent at the workplace, some aspects of ourselves will be revealed to our work colleagues – in effect we are unfolding spirit at work daily through our personal beliefs, values, and behaviours.

Unfolding spirit in the workplace begins with recognising that spirit at work can make a contribution to organisational productivity and effectiveness much as Vaill suggested it might over 16 years ago. Spirit at work can help an organization to be more competitive because it is recognised as part of the organisation’s service orientation (Neal, 2000). At the same time, it can also provide a deepening sense of spiritual fulfillment for employees (Berry, 1999; Whiteley & Hessian, 1996) because meaning, purpose and connectedness can also be found and fostered at work.

When individuals seek to live authentically and work from the same reference point, they will seek organisations which demonstrate sustainable authentic values. These organisational values also need to encourage and reflect spirit at work, which in turn attracts other likeminded people, a necessary prerequisite for spiritual community to become embedded within the organisation. Wakhlu’s (1999) wisdom allows us to

see the possibility: when the organisation recognizes the importance of spirit at work – insight – it may be possible to work together – integration – to make spirit comfortably visible – inspired action – for a long time.

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