

Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance

This article reviews the literature on workplace spirituality, pointing out emergent theories and examining the links between this phenomenon and organizational dynamics. It also examines workplace spirituality in a historical context and compares it to religious beliefs and to established ethical theories and moral principles. The article also looks at organizations in which an emphasis on spiritual values has had an impact on work productivity. While some corporations have institutionalized spirituality, public agencies are reluctant to follow suit for fear of violating the principle of church–state separation. Finally, the article suggests ways that managers and administrators in both the public and the private sector can use workplace spirituality to increase performance and develop ethical organizations.

There is a spiritual awakening in the American workplace. In the 1990s, more than 300 titles on workplace spirituality flooded the bookstores. Many corporations are encouraging the development of this new trend because they believe a humanistic work environment creates a win–win situation for both employees and the organization. If members of an organization are happy, they will be more productive, more creative, and more fulfilled. Personal fulfillment and high morale are closely linked to outstanding performance and, therefore, have a direct impact on an organization's financial success. But a dispirited workplace can manifest itself in low morale, high turnover, burnout, frequent stress-related illness, and rising absenteeism. The events of September 11, 2001, have further contributed to a reexamination of the nature and meaning of work by many Americans and to the emergence of both a more personal and widespread spirituality. Despite the definite link between spirituality, religion, and ethics, they are quite different. A clear definition of the boundaries of spirituality has been elusive. For this reason, public agencies have been reluctant to follow suit for fear of violating the principle of church–state separation.

What Is Spirituality? A Definitional Muss

Spurred by years of downsizing and job insecurity, employees in the United States are at the forefront of a grassroots movement that is quietly creating a spiritual re-

vival in the workplace. Religion and spirituality—normally taboo in corporate America—are suddenly on the agenda as employees search for more meaning at work and as business leaders seek more socially responsible approaches to business and new ways to motivate and inspire workers. The spirituality movement seems to be a reaction to the corporate greed of the 1980s. A religious scholar believes the environment, corporate responsibility, and spiritual movements all got a big boost after the 80s because people were unhappy. They were making money, but their personal values had to be checked at the door. Some left the corporate world; others stayed and said they would bring their values to work. Statistics from the Gallup Organization in New York appear to support such claims. In 1998, when Gallup asked 800 Americans whether their jobs had influenced their spiritual lives, 33 percent credited work with “greatly improving” or “improving” their spirituality, suggesting the nation's interest in matters of faith has transcended church and home and entered the workplace (D. Lewis 2001).

Those who write about spirituality in the workplace do not always agree on what the term means. Many authors

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associate it with religion. Webster's defines spirituality as "of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit; of or relating to sacred matters; ecclesiastical rather than lay or temporal; concern with religious values; of, related to, or joined in spirit." Even the dictionary definition is cryptic—and translating it to the workplace is even trickier. Those who are encircled in the spirit-at-work movement often have trouble defining it (Laabs 1995). According to another definition, spirituality comes from within, beyond the survival instincts of the mind: "It means engaging the world from a foundation of meaning and values. It pertains to our hopes and dreams, our patterns of thought, our emotions, feelings and behaviors. As with love, spirituality is multidimensional, and some of its meaning is inevitably lost when attempts are made to capture it in a few words" (Turner 1999).

Several historians acknowledge spirituality and trace its interconnection with culture. Massam believes that in doing so, they are simply pointing to the mutability and diversity that characterize the relationship of individuals and groups with their god. She argues that within the wide diversity of Catholic spiritualities there are two distinct approaches to the divine: "In broad terms, lay Catholic spirituality in the forty years before the Second Vatican Council was characterized on the one hand by a passive and highly emotive piety centered on personal holiness for the next world and, on the other hand, by an active apostolic spirit which called for an analytical understanding of this world in order that it might be transformed" (1996, 3). These two strands of passive and active spirituality tugged against each other, they were woven together, and their priorities and concerns were threaded through the choices, which ordinary people made about the way they expressed their faith (*ibid.*). Another intellectual historian sees spiritualism as a fundamental doctrine of mainline Protestantism in America (Conkin 1995). Carmody and Carmody study the manifestation of spirituality in many religions from those of oral peoples to Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese and Japanese religion, Judaism, and Islam. They offer a balanced view of world religions by tracing elements in the varied religious traditions: respect for the sacred, love for beauty, and the interaction of the divine in human destiny. They find the key aspects of Christian spirituality reflected in these world religions and equate Christian spirituality with Catholic spirituality, observing that it has two major concerns: prayers and actions to improve the world and to increase social justice (1991, 7, 153). As a companion to a public television series, three other authors edited interviews with 28 spiritual leaders from around the world, who also describe the close link between spirituality and the various world religions (Tobias, Morrison, and Gray 1995).

Cultures may affect the manifestation of spirituality. In one culture, the natural attributes of spirituality may be

enhanced while in another they may be denigrated. North American culture tolerates a great range of diversity, enabling a variety of spiritualities to come into creation. It also values action—quick thinking, fast pace, utilitarianism, achievement, and competition (Finn 1990, 225). American culture has countless examples of diverse manifestations of belief in a higher power that are regularly proclaimed not from church pews, but in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, books, magazine articles, weekend retreats, and hotel seminar rooms (Taylor 1999, 3). A voluminous reader published in 2001 by a university press documents the variety of approaches to spirituality in America. It traces the concepts and presence of spirituality in America's past and explains the strong attraction to spiritual themes in the present, with attention to questions of definition, historical usage, and connection to religion (Albanese 2001). In many developing countries, uneducated peasants are not familiar with the word "spirituality," although quite often their expressions of spirituality abound. A missionary who worked with the indigenous Indians in the Peruvian Amazon illustrates this point in his writing (Laur 1987). The author of this article had the same experience during a lengthy trip throughout numerous small towns and villages in India.

Interestingly, one may encounter different cultural trends within a single location. This is particularly true in the United States, which is in fact a nation made up of a multitude of immigrants, some very anxious to be integrated, others more willing to keep their ties to their origin. African American spirituality, for example, has played a vital role in the formation and practice of black freedom in America. Black Americans have managed to create a unique experience of freedom that embraces black spirituality and black culture as essential elements for building personal identity, consolidating community, and determining their values and destiny. According to a black American scholar, black spirituality affirms, negates, and transcends aspects of Anglo-American culture, creates and sustains African American culture, and establishes psychological and spiritual relocation in response to oppression and various systems of devaluation in American society (Stewart 1999). Along the same line, another black American scholar writes that black religion and black spirituality influenced and informed the framework of social norms and values by which people ordered their lives and their relationships to others (Bridges 2001, 9). Good expressions of black American spirituality can be found in Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a dream" speech (Sterba 2000, 549–51) and in the lengthy letter he wrote to fellow clergymen from a Birmingham jail. He challenged the conventional morality of Anglo-American society: "One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I

submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law” (2001, 354).

Several authors have written about the distinctive ways that men and women express their spirituality. These works are relevant here because both genders are well represented in the workplace. One of these authors, David C. James, believes there is a hunger on the part of men to understand the potential of their masculine spirit and to answer questions of identification, empowerment, connection, development, and relationship. He writes, “the scope of men’s deliberation is not limited to issues related to personal gain, but rather embraces communitarian, familial and societal renovation. In other words, men are interested in appropriate uses of masculine power to contribute to the advancement of humankind” (1996, 5). Another author, Carol Ochs, writes that a woman can bring a unique perspective to spiritual questions based on experiences that are unique to her, such as insights she derives from her capacity to bear and nurture children: “What is required is a consciousness that will reflect on an experience and not let go until its value has been understood. Many experiences undergone only by women can be quite ordinary, yet nonetheless reveal the nature of reality and shed lights upon the questions of meaning and value” (1983, 27–28).

There is a thin line between superstition and spirituality, one that is becoming difficult to negotiate in today’s workplace. Ironically, just as management and workers are being called upon to be more rational and productive, human nature dictates that issues of faith and nonrational ritual will assume a far greater presence in the workplace. For example, feng shui, a design scheme of Chinese origin, is now becoming very popular. It gives an ordinary office an unexpected touch of character by placing a desk in the corner with an odd angle and unusual exposure to natural light. But it is more than just interior design: Many people believe such rearrangement of their physical space helps in their quest for spirituality in the workplace. Regardless, managers will have to spend more time and ingenuity balancing the spirituality that people bring into the workplace and the culture the firm is trying to create.

The theory that personal issues should be left at home is simply not realistic, especially when so many people link their personal self-image with who they are in the professional world. Spirituality seems to be working well where the motivation industry has failed. That multibillion-dollar business, in which top gurus command fees of up to \$65,000 for a speech, has been declining recently. Billions of dollars of rewards were sold to companies—from t-shirts to exotic vacations—to be dangled in front of workers to boost performance. However, there has been

exhaustive academic research trying to find out what motivates workers, and it has turned up almost no evidence that motivational spending makes any difference (Jones 2001). Increasingly, major corporations, retailers, and advertisers are seeking out trend spotters for information that might give them an edge in shaping strategic planning. Professional trend spotters are a growing breed who spend their working days gathering information—through surveys, interviews, and observation. Marian Salzman, a professional trend spotter who has made a career of predicting market trends and how they will influence the economy, observes that “we are living in a very antisocial time. Divorce is keeping people apart. Families are not spending time with each other. And to a large degree, telecommunications has become a barrier for people to interact face to face.” She believes we are becoming a barrier culture, and, as a result, more and more people are seeking out things of a spiritual nature to find solace or to fill some void (Daidone 2000).

Spirituality versus Religion

The spiritual revival in the workplace reflects, in part, a broader religious reawakening in America, which remains one of the world’s most observant nations. Depending on how the question is asked, as many as 95 percent of Americans say they believe in God; in much of Western Europe, the figure is closer to 50 percent. The Princeton Religious Research Index, which has tracked the strength of organized religion in America since World War II, reports a sharp increase in religious beliefs and practices since the mid-1990s (Gunther 2001). When the Gallup Poll asked Americans in 1999 if they felt a need to experience spiritual growth, 78 percent said yes, up from 20 percent in 1994; nearly half said they had had occasion to talk about their faith in the workplace in the past 24 hours. Sales of bibles and prayer books, inspirational volumes, and books about philosophy and eastern religions are growing faster than any other category, with the market expanding from \$1.69 billion in 1995 to \$2.24 billion in 2000, according to the Book Industry Study Group. Literally hundreds of those titles address spirituality at work, from Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, and nondenominational perspectives (ibid.).

Some businesses openly advocate religious practices, such as prayer in the conference room. An increasing number of business owners and chief executive officers are bringing their Christian faith to work. *Business Week*’s November 1, 1999, cover story on religion in the workplace speaks to this growing trend. The article details the increased acceptance of corporate prayer groups and mentions the fact that more than 10,000 groups meet weekly to pray. In Jacksonville, Florida, a monthly luncheon for Christian business professionals that started in 1994 with

12 men was drawing up to 500 people seven years later. But legal experts think that mixing business with religion is walking a fine line. Forcing an employee to join a prayer session or bible study is clearly illegal. But even when employers make it optional, they could be exposing themselves to liability. It could be perceived as a form of favoritism that could easily lead to discrimination. Some companies affiliated with the Atlanta-based Fellowship of Companies for Christ have been sued for discrimination; however, none has lost a case. They have learned to be careful and treat everyone the same. No one is required to participate, and they are sensitive to nonbelievers as well. If morning meetings are to begin with prayer, employers tell those who wish to be excluded to come late (Maraghy 2001). But in a study released in June 2001, the Society for Human Resource Management in Virginia reported that complaints of religious bias have jumped 40 percent since 1992. Moreover, damages associated with such legal claims have increased to \$5.5 million, up from \$1.4 million in 1997 (D. Lewis 2001). The group noted that bias may take many forms, ranging from jokes about a coworker's spirituality or denying a worker break time for prayer to outright firings. Some companies shy away from using the words religion or spirituality to describe their gatherings. Others stress that workplace prayer, religious study, or other meetings do not favor any denomination or belief. And at most companies, proselytizing is prohibited (ibid.).

Many workers in the United States and Canada have access to a full-time corporate chaplain. The Rev. Diana Dale of Houston, who heads the National Institute of Business and Industrial Chaplains, estimates there are about 4,000 corporate chaplains in the United States. Some of them are full-time employees of one organization, others are involved in individual workplaces as outside contractors. Marketplace Ministries, based in Dallas, provides chaplain teams to 148 companies in 35 different states. The company has a resource staff of 1,000 representing Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Buddhist faiths. In addition to these formally trained chaplains, another group of in-house consultants—no one knows how large—see their work as having a specifically spiritual element. Anything that resembles religion in the workplace makes some people nervous. But there is widespread consensus among corporate chaplains that they are there to present spiritually based alternatives, not to push religion (Walker 1998).

Michael Schrage (2000) writes that the expanding quest for corporate meaning recalls Emile Durkheim's landmark work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. At the core of the French sociologist's work almost a century ago was his belief that there is something valuable in fervent religious experiences, even if one does not necessarily believe in the existence of a supreme being. Instead of study-

ing the main religions such as Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, Durkheim looks at primitive religions that used totems. Under totemism, a clan or tribe had a sacred object or totem, usually something found in nature. Durkheim finds that the tribe usually valued the image of the totem more than the totemic item itself. The totem was not sacred because of any intrinsic properties it possessed, but because of its role in the community. It provided a sense of unity—of oneness—among the tribe. The totem was both the symbol of the community and an expression of what it found sacred.

Spirituality and religious belief are compatible, though not identical; they may or may not coexist. In office settings, it is absolutely crucial to understand the difference between the two. A study of spirituality in the workplace published in the *Sloan Management Review* (Mitroff and Denton 1999, 83) describes spirituality as "the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe. If a single word best captures the meaning of spirituality and the vital role that it plays in people's lives, that word is interconnectedness." These authors published a larger study of spirituality, religion, and values in the workplace after conducting surveys and more than 90 interviews with high-level managers and executives. Among their findings: People differentiate strongly between religion and spirituality; religion is viewed as intolerant and divisive; and spirituality is seen as universal and broadly inclusive (Mitroff and Denton 1999a). Another study in the *Academy of Management Executive* (Cash and Gray 2000) clarifies that advocates of spirituality in the work environment often view spirituality and religion as very different concepts; while they generally oppose the promotion of formal religion in the workplace, they openly defend spirituality as a workplace practice. They assert that spirituality looks inward to an awareness of universal values, while formal religion looks outward, using formal rites and scripture. Spirituality is definitely not about religion. "It's not about converting people. It's not about making people believe a belief system or a thought system or a religious system. It's about knowing that we're all spiritual beings having a human experience. It's about knowing that every person has within him or herself a level of truth and integrity, and that we all have our own divine power" (Laabs 1995, 60).

Spirituality versus Ethics

A growing body of literature dealing with spirituality and the workplace has been emerging and has become part of some ethics course syllabi. But spirituality and ethics are quite different, although it is easier for a spiritual person to be ethical. Spirituality encompasses the same topic, which is so important in ethics: character, and the giving

of oneself for the benefit of others. There are many spiritual practices that are practically lifted from prominent ethical theories and moral principles, such as the discipline of “dealing with others as you would have them deal with you”; the discipline of “balancing our work, personal, family, community, and church responsibilities”; the discipline of “working to make the system work”; and the discipline of “engaging in personal and professional development” (Pierce 1999, 24). Behaving ethically is a necessary—but not sufficient—component of integrating faith and work. Ethics, or moral philosophy, aims to explain the nature of good and evil. It is important because the human world is dominated by ideas about right and wrong and good and bad. Most ordinary conversation consists of value judgments (Teichman 1996, 3; Bond 1996, 1).

Ethics is primarily concerned with shedding light on the question of what should count as morally good behavior, what is the good life, and justifying the sorts of rules and principles that help to assure morally good decisions. To this end, it employs arguments and theories to convince others that certain claims are the best ones to hold (Liszka 1999, 4). Thus, ethics is viewed as a way of behaving that can be prescribed and imposed by the work environment. It is often presented as a code of conduct that new employees must accept before they are hired. But candidates for employment are not asked how they will handle ethical dilemmas. It is understood in the workplace that each individual has a basic understanding of what kind of behavior is morally acceptable (and sometimes obligatory) and what is considered morally inadmissible. But within this broad framework are a multitude of variables that often are rooted in the individual's own spirituality. An individual's spirituality will determine his or her understanding and interpretation of ethical behavior. This is why some employers think that ethical commitments are personal. They believe that some employees have it and others don't, and they do not consider ethical behavior a skill to be learned. However, several books have been written to provide a framework that allows for the clear identification and implementation of strategies to improve the ethical climate of the workplace (Costa 1998; Clark and Lattal 1993; C. Lewis 1990; Hitt 1990).

The U.S. federal government requires a yearly ethics refresher for most employees, with more rigorous training for employees involved in contracting. In several county and city governments throughout the United States, “ethics awareness training” has been initiated. In Miami-Dade County, the mayor mandated ethics training for all 30,000 county employees in 1998 after a series of corruption scandals at the seaport and elsewhere rattled county government, prompting outcries from business and civic leaders (Garcia-Zamor 2001, 44–45, 48). Ethics training there included explaining the rules pertaining to communication

with lobbyists, receiving gifts from vendors, conflicts of interest, outside employment, and policies that regulate the procurement and contracting process. The ethics manuals distributed in the training served as a resource guide for employees concerned about possible misconduct by their colleagues. They listed telephone numbers for the state attorney's office, the Miami-Dade Police, and a hotline for the county's Office of the Inspector General.

There is little doubt that it is difficult to change people's character in terms of personality traits. It is not sufficient for employers to point out the benefits of behavioral change. Some employees may not be willing to do the hard work required for ethical change. Their individual greed and flawed characters might dispose them to unethical behavior. But organizational culture may also play a role. In their multimedia course, Robert Mertzman and Peter Madsen (1992, 86) pointed out that “[i]f the opportunity presents itself and the risk of not getting caught is low, if the organization does not foster an ethical climate, then chances are fairly good that corruption will take place. This organizational explanation of governmental mischief, then, sees such conduct as less the function of individual, psychological disposition and more the result of institutional dysfunction.” Therefore, the organization should conduct an “ethics audit” to redesign work settings, create proper incentive systems, and modify patterns of interaction among employees. Such an audit would identify sensitive situations that may tempt an individual to act unethically.

In addition to or in lieu of ethical training, some companies now offer training courses in spirituality in the workplace. In 1997, helicopter manufacturer Sikorsky Aircraft began offering a professional development program designed to boost retention and productivity among women. During the two-day course, participants explored their personal and professional goals, on the premise that success in one area strengthens the other. After the course, many felt renewed and ready to tackle challenges—and retention rates rose accordingly. Some participants felt that after the course, they had a new sense of contributing more in the job, at home, and the community. Values have begun to be part of the workday. The movement has spawned a push for managerial concession and programs that help to redefine life goals. After the demoralizing downsizing of the early 1990s, some businesses are recognizing that cultivating employee fulfillment is important to the bottom line. In addition to Sikorsky, companies such as GE Industrial Systems have said that development courses have helped to raise productivity by increasing job satisfaction (Hua 1999).

The trends in today's Christian spirituality are quite different from the concept of ethics. Like ethics, these trends have evolved over time and are different from the trends expressed in other times. A scholar on Christian spiritual-

ity writes that it is now oriented toward four trends: it responds to life—to its beauty and its injustices—and leads to action; it looks to the universe—the whole world becomes a part of the spiritual person; it is responsive and responsible to the poor and oppressed; and it is socially oriented. Not only the persons (coworkers), but also the society in which a person is living (the organization) are important in a relationship with God (Missinne 1990, 150–51). The relationship between work and the spiritual life is more complex than just good ethical behavior. Seeing work as more than a livelihood—and surely more than a means of amassing wealth—can bring peace to the many who must work at apparently unsatisfying jobs. In this view, their work becomes a part of the vision of the whole of humanity cooperating, one with all the others, in the common pilgrimage through this world. Father Dominic Hoffman (1976, 299–300) warns that many of us waste our lives trying to be something we cannot be and ought not be. “We eat ourselves up with envy and die a thousand deaths of frustration. But from the doctrine of the Mystical Body we see that we all have our place, that we are useful in some way, perhaps mysteriously hidden from us, to the whole of God’s plan.” Thomas and Cynthia Lynch (1998, 127) wrote a book, which demonstrates the common spiritual wisdom messages of the five largest religious traditions, in which they ask, “Once spiritual wisdom is learned, what must we do with it?” Their brief answer: “We must live it with our words through our actions.”

Spirituality in the Workplace and Organizational Performance

A tension between rational goals and spiritual fulfillment now haunts some workplaces around the world. It is not enough that workers feel productive and effective. Survey after management survey affirms that a majority wants to find meaning in their work. For a long time, employers compartmentalized workers, carefully separating business concerns from personal identities. But productivity waned because people’s personal lives affect their work. That’s why companies are adding work-and-family programs and a variety of other benefits aimed at helping employees to achieve balanced lives (Laabs 1995). Lewis Richmond, a former Buddhist monk turned catalog software tycoon and author of *Work as a Spiritual Practice*, points out that the Buddha himself found enlightenment out of a “serious case of job dissatisfaction” as an Indian prince 2,500 years ago (McDonald 1999). Spirituality is about acknowledging that people come to work with more than their bodies and minds; they bring individual talents and unique spirits. For most of the twentieth century, traditionally run companies have ignored that basic fact of human nature. Now they explore spiritual concepts such as trust, harmony, values,

and honesty for their power to help achieve business goals (Leigh 1997). Spiritual needs are fulfilled by a recognition and acceptance of individual responsibility for the common good, by understanding the interconnectedness of all life, and by serving humanity and the planet. Therefore, when one speaks about bringing spirituality into the workplace, he or she is talking about changing organizational culture by transforming leadership and employees so that humanistic practices and policies become an integral part of an organization’s day-to-day function.

The Industrial Age concept of “a day’s pay for a day’s work” is yielding to the postindustrial perception that work itself should be a medium for self-expression and self-discovery. People are entitled, encouraged, and even expected to find meaning in their work (Schrage 2000). Among recent factors that have increased apprehension in the workplace are massive corporate downsizing; mergers that have reduced the workforces of many large corporations; more work moving offshore; and more recently, the September 11 terrorist attacks. Uncertainty in the workplace has been magnified by the fact that some successful companies are laying people off. As Rutte (1996) points out, that’s never happened before: “The understanding used to be that when a company was in fiscal trouble it would lay off people and when the company was successful, it would keep and even hire people. But with re-engineering and new advanced technology, there is a need for less people, so successful companies are downsizing.”

Spirituality in the workplace may manifest itself in several ways, but at two different levels: the personal and the organizational. At the first level, the people involved are spiritual ones who may have had concerns about the adequacy of their workplace for their spiritual life even before accepting employment. John Cowan (1993, 59–60) writes that the Latin word *spiritus* means “breath.” He defines a spiritual person as one who is conscious, who is aware of the special breath of life in all creation (particularly in humans and certainly in oneself), and who acts accordingly. These individuals, according to Cowan, would ask questions such as these when entering the workplace: Is this work worthy of the human spirit? Is this the work that expresses my spirit? Am I respectful of the spirit within my fellow workers? Do I assent to and assist their call? Is this place beautiful enough to be worthy of the presence of the human spirit? Do I make my work a worthy expression of my spirit?

This type of spirituality does not necessarily have to be associated with a specific religion. Some workplaces could be less productive only because people cannot find a way to breathe their spirituality into work. But when spiritual people join a workplace that fits their expectations, they will support their colleagues. They will seek quality. They will do good work. Cowan admits these results can be

achieved without a sense of spirituality. But they are not seeking these results in themselves: They believe in the spirit and see these as ways the spirit expresses itself. In his hierarchy of being, “the spirit does not exist as the servant of the workplace; rather the workplace exists as the playground of the spirit” (ibid).

At the second level, the organization emphasizes spirituality in order to improve productivity. Most workplaces understand that employees bring to the job personal moral core values that are linked to their cultural backgrounds and religions. They try to connect faith and work ethics. A growing literature reveals this practice already exists in the business sector. A recent questionnaire surveying the interests of members of the Council for Ethics in Economics in Columbus, Ohio, asked: “How do you view the role of your personal religious belief and heritage as you make business decisions?” Virtually all of the business people responding circled “very important” (Childs 1995, 5–6). This may explain the proliferation in the 1990s of books on stories and strategies for building self-esteem and reawakening the soul at work (Bracey et al. 1990; Canfield and Miller 1996; Chappell 1993; Walsh 1999; Ulrich, Zenger, and Smallwood 1999; Bennis 2000).

When 2,000 global powerbrokers gathered for the elite World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in the spring of 1999, the agenda included confabs on “spiritual anchors for the new millennium” and “the future of meditation in a networked economy.” Indeed, 30 MBA programs now offer courses on the issue, and it was the focus of a 1999 issue of the *Harvard Business School Bulletin* (McDonald 1999). In the first four months of his presidency, few of George W. Bush’s proposals generated as much controversy as his decision to establish the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Critics complained that this move blurs—if not completely erases—the line between church and state and injects religion into areas where it should remain distinct. Such criticisms ignore the fact that spiritual and religious beliefs are not easily compartmentalized; they shape attitudes toward, and actions in, all aspects and spheres of daily life. The following are some examples of companies that have increased their organizational performance after adopting workplace spirituality:

Don Jensen, owner of Jensen DJ Construction in Portland, Oregon, establishes company policies, both written and informal, that address spirituality, including a policy on meditation. Employees are allowed to meditate 20–30 minutes during the workday. It is a meditation break in addition to the normal breaks that employees receive. It is up to them whether they want to take it or not. Employees are paid for this time (Finlayson 2001).

The retired chief executive officer of Medtronic, Bill George, was convinced by his wife to take instruction in

transcendental meditation some 25 years ago. He got into it. He now sets time aside twice a day for meditation. Often, he found the time after boarding a plane, waiting for takeoff. In 1993, George attacked a column by Tom Peters, the well-known motivational speaker and management consultant. Peters had written there is no room for spirituality in today’s corporations, declaring: “Let’s leave the bible, the Koran and facile talk of spiritual leaders at home” (Beal 2001). George fired back, saying that spiritual leadership in the workplace has nothing to do with religion. Most corporate employees, he wrote, “[a]re motivated not by ‘balloons in the atrium,’ as you often suggest, but rather by making meaningful contribution to others through their work. At Medtronic, we don’t mix religion and business, but we certainly do not shy away from the spiritual side of our work and the deeper meaning of our mission to save lives” (ibid.).

Richard Barrett, a principal urban transport specialist for the World Bank in Washington, DC, started the Spiritual Unfoldment Society there. The handful of participants who showed up for the first meeting has now grown to several hundred employees, as well as people from nearby companies. The society meets once a week at lunchtime to discuss a variety of spiritual topics. In collaboration with the World Bank’s management, the society sponsored an international conference on ethics and spiritual values. Prodded by Barrett, the World Bank recently began an institutional values assessment. Barrett is now working at the bank as a “values coordinator.” Among his initiatives is the creation of a value tool kit—a compendium of instruments that is being used to bring about a shift in culture of the World Bank (Leigh 1997).

A Summing Up

How does spirituality affect the goal of every business, which is to make a profit? A Harvard Business School study examined 10 companies with strong corporate cultures (spirited workplaces) and 10 with weak corporate cultures, drawn from a list of 207 leading corporations. In an 11-year period, the researchers found a dramatic correlation between the strength of an organization’s corporate culture and its profitability. In some cases, the more spirited companies outperformed the others by 400 percent–500 percent in terms of net earnings, return on investment, and shareholder value. A Vanderbilt University Business School study resulted in similar findings, using the *Fortune* listing of “The 100 Best Companies to Work For” (Thompson 2000). Chief executive officers, now and in the future, must realize they need to focus on the individual. Corporations also need to establish themselves as worthy organizations—that is, organizations with a higher sense of business purpose.

There has been ample empirical evidence that spirituality in the workplace creates a new organizational culture in which employees feel happier and perform better. Bringing together the motivation for work and the meaning in work increase retention. Employees also may feel that belonging to a work community, which is an important aspect of spirituality, will help them when things get rough

in the future. Furthermore, a culture of sharing and caring eventually will reach all of the organization's stakeholders: suppliers, customers, and shareholders. In such a humanistic work environment, employees are more creative and have higher morale, two factors that are closely linked to good organizational performance.

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