Chapter 4
Leaders With Spirit:
Implications for Contemporary Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

With the dawn of a new century, there is an emerging and exponentially accelerating force for global, societal, and organizational change. The socio-cultural and economic turbulence, the fast-paced technological developments are leading people towards a search for meaning especially at work. An average individual spends most of their adult life working and therefore seeks meaning via their work. This implies that our workplaces are one of the most important determinants of our well-being. Spiritual approaches to work are on the rise among today's working population. People search for solutions to be more grounded and not to get lost between the tensions created by their external world. Krieger underlines that there is clearly a deep crisis in human affairs at all levels from the individual to the organizational and to the societal. In this respect, this chapter aims to highlight the importance of spirituality in the workplace and discuss the role of spiritual leadership in the search for meaning both in the individual and the organizational realm.

WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY AS AN EMERGING FIELD OF STUDY

Spirituality, historically, has been rooted in religion. However, its current use in business and in the workplace is most often not associated with any specific religious tradition (Kakabadse et. al., 2002). Spirituality is conceived elusively as "an awareness within individuals of a sense of connectedness that exists between inner selves and the world" (Stamp, 1991, p. 80). The increased pressures of society, technological developments, increasing population, degradation of the environment and food pressures all pose increasing attention to living more consciously. Since the late 1990s popular publications such as Wall Street Journal, BusinessWeek, Fortune and others have reported a growing desire among employees for meaning and purpose at work, for a spiritual dimension to organizational life (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). The interest in workplace spirituality has led to the assertion that workplaces that are spiritually healthy (White, 2003), most likely perform better (Elm, 2003; Garcia-Zamor, 2003) and are, in part, a

function of the attitudes, practices and behaviors of workplace leaders (Fry, 2003; Pfeffer, 2003; Strack, Fottler, Wheatley, & Sodomka, 2002). There is also evidence that workplace spirituality programs lead to beneficial personal outcomes such as increased joy, peace, serenity, job satisfaction and commitment and also deliver improved productivity and reduce absenteeism and turnover (Fry, 2003).

Management scholars critiqued the newly emerging field of workplace spirituality because of inconsistencies in definitions and in assessments (Dent et al. 2005; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Gibbons, 2000). Forniciari and colleagues (2007) analyzed empirical articles within the workplace spirituality domain and found that the scale development practices in the field were inconsistent (Neal, 2013). It was because of these inconsistencies that Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004) decided to more rigorously define and operationalize "spirit at work." Based on interviews with expert researchers and practitioners in the field, the following six-dimensional definition emerged:

Spirit at work is a distinct state that is characterized by physical, affective, cognitive, interpersonal, spiritual, and mystical dimensions. Most individuals describe the experience as including: a physical sensation characterized by a positive state of arousal or energy; positive affect characterized by a profound feeling of well-being and joy; cognitive features involving a sense of being authentic, an awareness of alignment between one's values and beliefs and one's work, and a belief that one is engaged in meaningful work that has a higher purpose; an interpersonal dimension characterized by a sense of connection to others and common purpose; a spiritual presence characterized by a sense of connection to something larger than self; and a mystical dimension characterized by a sense of perfection, transcendence, living in the moment, and experiences that were awe-inspiring, mysterious, or sacred (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004: 37).

Marscke, et al. (2009) contextualizes spirituality in the workplace as people perceiving themselves as spirited beings, whose spirits desire and need to be energized through work. Spirituality at work is about experiencing real purpose and meaning at work beyond paychecks and performance reviews. It is about people sharing and experiencing some common attachment, attraction, and togetherness with each other within their work unit and the organization as a whole (Harrington, 2004). It involves a continuing search for meaning and purpose in life; an appreciation for the depth of life, the expanse of the universe, and natural forces, which operate it; and, it is a personal belief system (Myers, 1990).

Building on previous work, Marques (2005, p. 283) summarizes spirituality in the workplace as an experience of interconnectedness and trust among those involved in a work process, engendered by individual goodwill; leading to the collective creation of a motivational organizational culture, epitomized by reciprocity and solidarity; and resulting in enhanced overall performance, which is ultimately translated in lasting organizational excellence.

Among the various definitions of workplace spirituality, the operationalization of Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004) have probably had the most research impact moving the research ahead (see Neal, 2018). Their seminal work developed the Spirit at Work Scale (SAWS), which has been used in numerous scholarly research, and the reliability and validity of the instrument hold up quite well.

A few decades ago, Burack (1999) identified three main pillars for the spiritual workplace; internal, external, and integrated—which he divided into four different but highly interrelated outcomes:

1. "Leadership and the organization: demonstrated concern for employees, respect for others, and consistency of actions and demonstrated acumen."

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