

Spirituality and Management

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American managers show increasing interest in integrating spirituality and management[1] and this integration offers managers a source of enduring meaning in turbulent times[2]. Their interest is important because for many, integrating spirituality and work brings profound meaning to their jobs as managers. It brings their deepest values to bear on their work and so offers a promise of equally deep fulfilment. Managers committed to spirituality share some similar concerns, despite their different religions and spiritual paths; this article examines the values, tasks and problems of managers that emerge as common themes in different spiritual paths.

Spirituality Defined

Definitions of spirituality abound, so the term "spirituality" is defined as it is used here. Clark's definition of religion also serves well to define spirituality:

[It] can be *most characteristically* described as the *inner experience of the individual* when he senses a Beyond, especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience on his behavior when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with the Beyond[3, p. 22].

Although this definition borrows from the concept of religion, religion is not synonymous with spirituality (as most of the literature on spirituality emphasizes). Conger[4], drawing on Roof's[5] research, points out that Roof's interviewees distinguished between religion and spirituality; feeling that religion had:

an institutional connotation. It meant practicing rituals, adhering to dogma, and attending services. Spirituality...had more to do with life's deeper motivations and an emotional connection to God[4, p. 13].

The origin of this distinction goes back at least to the turn of the century and the distinction between personal and institutional religion made in William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*[6].

This article does not focus on the secular side of spirituality. This differs from the vague way in which some writers on spirituality and management use the term "spirituality" – confusing it with "spirit" (as in "team spirit"[7]) or "spirited" (meaning full of energy). Their usage has little to do with an individual's relationship with the sacred. This usage is common in the organization transformation movement (see for example[8,9]).

The Influence of Religion and Spirituality

Preaching by a CEO, printing religious slogans on company order forms, witnessing to customers, turning down a job offer in an industry proscribed by one's religion, striving to be compassionate with one's subordinates, making work a form of service, hiring a New Age management consultant who derives management principles from an Eastern mystic, trying to work in a meditative state of consciousness, studying the *Bible* instead of *Harvard Business Review* in order to learn how to run a business: these are behaviours of managers who want to make their work lives more spiritually meaningful.

Religion and spirituality strongly influence many managers' behaviour at work. Most Americans (57 per cent) believe "that religion can answer all or most of today's problems" and 94 per cent believe in God or a Universal Spirit[10, p. 10]. Such a high percentage of believers must include many managers. Many believing managers[11-15] say their relationship with God influences their work lives more than any other factor.

Despite this, the challenges which managers face as they try to integrate their spirituality with their work remain largely unexamined in the academic literature. Most articles and books about spirituality and management are popular works,

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not theoretical or empirical. Also, most limit themselves to one spiritual or religious tradition. For example, Hawley[14] uses a Hindu approach; Ibrahim *et al.*[16], Cowan[17], Chappell[18], Fox[19] and many others come from the Christian perspective; Boldt[20] and Low[21] discuss a Zen Buddhist approach; and Tauber[22] offers a Jewish perspective.

Unlike the publications cited in the previous paragraph, this article focuses explicitly on the individual manager's relationship with the sacred, and examines some of the values, tasks and problems associated with that relationship that appear in more than one spiritual tradition. The multicultural workplace and global marketplace make these broader themes increasingly relevant. Five such themes are touched on here: compassion, right livelihood, selfless service, meditative work, and the problem of pluralism.

Compassion

The first of these themes is compassion. Compassion is "a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate their suffering"[23, p. 416]. The Buddhist, Jewish and Christian manager all have a relationship with the sacred that asks them to develop compassion. However, this value conflicts with many organizational cultures, which are indifferent to or discourage compassion. Role conflict occurs when spiritual ideals pull managers to feel and express compassion at work but the organizational culture calls for hard-hearted decision making based solely on monetary criteria regardless of how it affects people. Such managers face the challenge of remaining true to their religious ideals, despite the culture they work in.

Right Livelihood

Right livelihood is the Buddhist principle of choosing work that does not cause people or animals to suffer. Although the term "right livelihood" is Buddhist, the concept of choosing one's work based on spiritual considerations applies to many spiritual traditions: managers in most spiritual traditions face the problem of choosing a job, industry, and organization that fits with their concept of the sacred. For example, a manager's spiritual values may support working for an organization (such as the state) in a position supervising food stamp workers but not in the *job* of a warden overseeing executions.

Choosing an organization is a second aspect of finding right livelihood. Take, for example, a deeply religious executive whose religion encourages values such as generosity, compassion, justice, respect for persons, and sensitivity to the common good. Should this person work at a company that is "single-mindedly focused on profit maximization and efficiency" in which "care for people, generosity, justice, concern for pollution, etc. would seem to count little and would be given minimal reinforcement"[24]? Working for such an organization may stunt the development of personal qualities that the manager considers essential to spiritual development.

Working for a particular industry can be a problem for a spiritually committed manager, especially if it involves services or products that the manager's spiritual tradition frowns on (such as manufacturing whisky, butchering animals, or marketing guns). The National Council of Catholic Bishops, for instance, urges American Catholics working in the nuclear weapons industry to examine seriously their consciences about their work. Some theologians have even questioned whether it is "possible to be a success in the business world and still remain a Christian"[24, p. 2].

Selfless Service

Christianity and Hinduism both value selfless service. In fact, a growing movement – servant leadership[25,26] – explicitly discusses spirituality and emphasizes service. According to Hindu beliefs, on the other hand, selfless service through work – the path of karma yoga – leads to union with God. Many Hindu and Christian managers face the challenge of making their work a form of sacred service to others. Future theoretical work in this area could distinguish between selfless service and related pathologies such as co-dependency or workaholism. As one anonymous reviewer of this article wrote "There are many workaholics who think that they are giving 'selfless service' because their sense of self is confused with their job and they are working out of fear and a need to control".

Work as Meditation

Making work a meditative experience concerns many Hindus, Buddhists and Sufis[27]. Hindus practise karma yoga – the yoga of work – to make work a meditative experience that brings them closer to God. Zen Buddhists practise *samu* – work meditation – which aims at the experience

of being absorbed in work, losing any sense of self, and becoming one with the activity[30]. Of course, challenging work is easier to become absorbed in. The spiritual problem facing many Hindu, Buddhist and Sufi managers is maintaining a meditative state regardless of the nature of the work they are doing. There are many different types of meditation[31,32] and so the specific meditative state differs according to the managers' spiritual practice. Zen work meditation differs from the Hindu karma yoga meditation which differs from Sufi meditation and so on.

Problems with Pluralism

Spiritual and religious pluralism can be a problem for managers who work to integrate their spiritual and managerial lives. Creating a community of like-minded spiritual colleagues at work can endanger an employee's right to religious freedom. For example, one chain of sports clubs only hired managers who were born again Christians. The owner who created this policy was convicted of violating the Minnesota Human Rights Act and he sold the business rather than obey the law[33].

Another aspect of the problem of pluralism comes from obscuring the difference between spiritual and managerial authority[34]. Some drug rehabilitation agencies which are steeped in the spiritual Alcoholics Anonymous tradition regard the commitment to a job as a spiritual commitment. This confusion of spiritual commitment with commitment to work serves the agency, but not employees, who must find it difficult to separate spiritual from organizational duties.

A Personal Coda

There are many good reasons to study spirituality and management: the influence which it has on managerial behaviour is one and the prospect of more spiritually meaningful work is another. The approach of looking for common themes among different spiritual traditions is one that is useful in an increasingly spiritually diverse workplace.

There is a more personal reason I chose to write on this topic as well. I care more about the sacred than the secular aspect of spirituality because I assume that if a higher power exists, this higher power probably has some important things to tell us about how to live our lives – including our lives at work. I also assume that the differences among religions and spiritual traditions come from differing cultural interpretations and perceptions of a fundamental,

underlying unity. This is a common perspective in the philosophy of religion[35] and psychology of religion[32], a perspective that underlies the field of transpersonal psychology[36], and a perspective that even characterizes many spiritual traditions (Sufi, Hindu, and Bahai, for example). I look for themes common to many spiritual traditions because I believe that they provide clues as to how to live in harmony with the Divine. That is, the common features among spiritual paths may come from the underlying Unity whereas the differences may come from the culture in which the paths grew.

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