

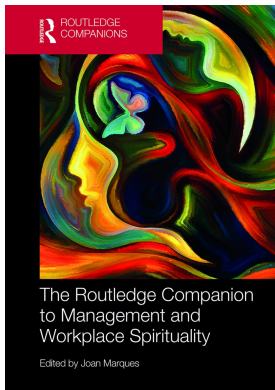
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## **The Routledge Companion to Management and Workplace Spirituality**

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### **Understanding the Ripple Effect of Spiritual Behavior**

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# 1

# UNDERSTANDING THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF SPIRITUAL BEHAVIOR

*Joan Marques*

## **The Spiritual Workplace: Reality or Not?**

A major question that keeps arising when we consider the topic of spirituality in the workplace is how this trend could be possible in a world where the average organizational environment seems to lean more toward toxic than toward healthy. Over the past decades, several authors have dedicated studies and articles to this quandary. For instance, in a 2015 article, Giorgi, Shoss, and Leon-Perez stressed that the combination of high job demands and low job control remain to be the most critical threats to employee wellbeing. Ten years prior to that article, Heard (2005) had arrived at a similar conclusion and placed a price tag on this problem by asserting that *workplace* stress cost American business \$3 billion way back in the 1990s, and that figure has continued to rise. Even earlier, Mor Barak and Levin had warned that a lack of feeling included formed the foundation of many workforce members to become dissatisfied and alienated. “Many workers lack a sense of inclusion, which is a key component in wanting to remain at a place of employment” (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002, p. 133).

On top of the stressful atmosphere that seems to have become more rule than exception in the fast-paced performance arena called “Corporate America,” it also seems that establishing a spiritual workplace could be seen as practically impossible when one is not a member of top management. During the past decades we conducted several business organizational workshops and higher education courses on the topic of spirit at work, and we discovered that the recurring query was, “how can you establish or promote spirituality at work if you are not a member of top management?” This question is therefore one that requires a deeper look into the phenomenon of spirituality in the workplace and what is needed to make it work. Schutte (2016) rightfully remarks that spirituality in the workplace is a much-disputed inquiry field. Since spirituality in the workplace remains a discussion topic among various theorists—some consider it impossible without the involvement of religion, while others strongly reject the incorporation of the “R” word when talking spirituality—a clear reference to what is meant in this particular chapter seems to be necessary. So far, there are a few decent definitions toward this phenomenon we can refer to. Due to its comprehensiveness, and the fact that it results from the author of this chapter’s own research, we will use the following definition for workplace spirituality in this chapter:

Spirituality in the workplace is 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.

(Marques, 2005, p. 283)

To the attentive reader it may become clear that, in the above perception, spirituality is kept separate from the realm of religion. It is perceived as the higher awareness that drives human beings to do well. It entails realizations of being interconnected to all other living beings, showing respect to everyone and everything that currently lives and breathes, or once did, and recognizing that there is more to life than our physical state of existing, or that which is visible to us. Spirituality in the workplace is, therefore, as presented in the above definition, the awareness that interconnectedness, respect, and recognition are not limited to ourselves and our private environment, but are also very much applicable to all those with whom we work on a regular or incidental basis, in such a way that these qualities can lead to more than mere enhanced enjoyable workplace circumstances, but to increased return on investments as well. It is therefore essential that the experience of performing our duties should be one that is rewarding to all involved, hence, providing ourselves and those we deal with in the workplace with feelings of trust, belonging, meaning, and fulfillment in all areas that we consider important toward the quality of our lives.

Nevertheless, the perfect picture painted in the paragraphs above refrains from providing insight into the possible establishment and successful performance of spirituality in the workplace when one is positioned in the middle or lower echelons of the organization. In most literature thus far, spirituality at work has been seen as a tendency that could only be successfully implemented if initiated by the organization's leaders. Williams, Randolph-Seng, Hayek, Haden, and Atinc (2017), for instance, perceive a clear link between workplace spirituality and servant leadership, affirming that servant leaders may have a greater impact on their followers by exhibiting authenticity and sincerity (key attributes of political skill) in their care for their followers' wellbeing. Kubicek (2005) refers to Emotional Intelligence (EQ), and Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) as intrinsic contemporary leadership concepts. In a review of Hicks' book *Religion and the Workplace: Pluralism, Spirituality, Leadership*, Wiles (2005) discussed an enumeration of essential components, such as "(1) tolerance, respect, and acceptance of other religious and spiritual traditions; (2) promoting a pluralistic, non-coercive, and non-degrading working environment; and (3) discussion of religious and spiritual harmony in the workplace" (p. 195) as prominent leadership strategies toward increased spirit at work. Terms such as "spiritual leadership" (Wolf, 2004), "awakened leadership" (Marques, 2010), "moral leadership" (Thompson, 2004), "authentic leadership" (Beagrie, 2005), and "ethical leadership" (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005), are just some of the many ways in which the implementation of a spiritual mindset in the workplace has been proclaimed as being a leadership responsibility. In order to present a possible perspective on how to implement spirit at work regardless of one's position in an organization, it may be prudent to first elaborate on the various aspects involved in spirituality in the workplace, as stated by various authors, and underscored through qualitative research by the author of this chapter: internal, integrated, and external.

### **Internal, Integrated, and External Aspects**

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 (p. 280):

1. “Leadership and the organization: demonstrated concern for employees, respect for others, consistency of actions and demonstrated acumen.”
2. “Employees: conscientious (e.g. quality, cooperation) continuing skill and knowledge advancement, adaptability and high sustained performances.”
3. “External (strategic constituents)—quality, consistency, environmentally aware, and a responsible community member.”
4. “Mutual—trust and shared responsibilities for joint benefits.”

Points 1 and 3 could be considered the external manifestations of a spiritual workplace from a worker’s perspective: although point 1 is actually an internal organizational factor, it is still an external one for the individual at stake. Point 2 explains some of the internal drivers for a spiritual worker, and point 4 refers to the integrated factor: the interrelation between all parties involved.

It was even longer ago that Neck and Milliman (1994) referred to the critical interrelation between internal and external aspects in the work environment by exclaiming that constructive thought patterns can lead to an enhanced perception and greater sense of spirituality in work. These authors asserted that workers who manage to upgrade their internal verbalizations to a level of awareness, transforming their mindset from negative to positive, will be able to enhance the spirituality of their work. Introducing the term Thought Self Leadership (TSL), Neck and Milliman further explained, “with the positive application of TSL, workers will learn to establish a better report with their external reality in the workplace” (p. 9).

Walters and Fenson (2002) called for a skillful balance between workers’ “internal and external world” (para. 6) to avoid conflict with others and within one’s self, which can lead to stress and all of its fall outs.

### ***Internal Aspects***

The importance of the *internal* aspect can also be concluded from statements such as one made by Cash, Gray, and Rood (2000), that spirituality looks inward to an awareness of universal values; by Naimon, Mullins, and Osatuke (2013), who underscored that people with a high internal locus of control find more gratification in their work; by DeCenzo and Robbins (1998), who stated that “an individual’s performance is a function of his or her ability to do his or her job, and his or her willingness to do it” (p. 99); by Goforth (2001), who exclaimed, “everybody has a need for something bigger in life than just making money and going to work” (p. k-2); by Barrett (1999), who asserted, “spiritual needs are met when our work aligns with our passion and has meaning for us or we feel we are able to make a difference through our ideas or by being of service to others” (p. 31); by Covey (1989) who concluded, “the spiritual dimension is your core, your center, your commitment to your value system” (p. 292); and by Terez (1999), who affirmed, “virtually all people have a driving desire to make a difference” (p. 19).

Through these and other citations in the abundance of existing literature, a wide variety of internal qualities that nourish the spiritual mindset in a workplace can be distinguished. Some of these qualities are *ethics* (Ayoun, Rowe, & Yassine, 2015; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Weston, 2002); *truth* (Naidoo, 2014; Covey, 1989; Wheatley, 2002); *belief* (Gunther, 2001; Lerner, 2000; Lewis & Geroy, 2000; McCoy, 2001; Morris, 1997; Neal, 2000; Wheatley, 2002); *respect* (Burack, 1999; Drucker, 1995; Heider, 1985; Kaye, 1996; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Pierce, 2002; Rosner, 2001; Wickens, 2001); and *trust* (Burack, 1999; Green, 2000; Lerner, 2000; Levering, 1988; Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

In order to establish a listing of common themes in a spiritual workplace, along with the establishment of a workable definition for this phenomenon, the author of this chapter conducted two phenomenological studies between 2003 and 2012. The studies entailed in-depth interviews with pre-identified business executives. Criterion sampling was initially applied, followed by snowball sampling after initial participant identification. Answers from all participants were transcribed and horizontalized, after which overlapping was eliminated. Common themes were clustered and verified through the application of interrater reliability, a solidification measurement thus far rarely used in qualitative studies. Interrater reliability was 66.67%. This study produced the following listing of internal acts of a spiritually converted worker: honesty, synthesizing, committed, caring to achieve completely and accurately, seeking the truth, self-motivated, more open, receptive to new ideas from the organization, seeking ways to make additional contributions or improvements the organization would benefit from, devoid of excessive ego, loving to do what he or she is doing, guarding him- or herself from letting time restrict the quality of his or her performance, and more motivated to do things right.

### *Integrated Aspects*

The significance of the *integrated* aspect can be derived from statements such as Pierce's (2002) insight that authentic spirituality of work does two things: (1) "it raises the practitioner's awareness of the presence of the spiritual in the work itself" (p. 37), and (2) "this raised awareness changes the way practitioners of this spirituality work and relate to others in the workplace" (p. 37).

Some phenomena in specialized literature that pertain to the importance of an integrated approach in a spiritual workplace are *understanding* (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Covey, 2002; Freshman, 1999; Lerner, 2000; Turner, 1999; Wheatley, 2002); *openness* (Mitroff & Denton, 1999); *team orientation* (Covey, 1989; Drucker, 1995; Green, 2000; Kaye, 1996; Terez, 1999); *giving* (Green, 2000; Vadermark, 2001); and *acceptance* (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Turner, 1999; Vadermark, 2001; Wheatley, 2002).

In the two phenomenological studies, the following corresponding listing of integrated acts of a spiritually converted worker surfaced: understanding the importance of the work; understanding objectives and their value; drawing on the strengths of colleagues; respecting the environment; and being a good listener.

### *External Aspects*

The relevance of the *external* aspect in spirituality at work can also be extracted from statements such as Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) introduction of the Spirituality Movement in which they argued that "organizations that have long been viewed as rational systems are considering making room for the spiritual dimension, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community" (p. 134), and Burack's (1999) referral to people-centered management, which entailed phenomena such as "recognition of the worth and value of people, desire to create high integrity work climates, and establishing a foundation of trust, faith, justice, respect and love" (p. 280).

The external aspect is further emphasized by multiple other statements such as "work is a spiritual journey for many of us, although we talk about it in different ways" (Kahnweiler & Otte, 1997, p. 171); "there is increasing evidence that a major transformation is occurring in many organizations" (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 138); "some companies are looking to bring a little spirit into the workplace" (Hein, 1999, p. 6); "every organization has a spirituality,

whether it realizes it or not” (Weston, 2002, p. 30); and “the real difference between success and failure in a corporation can be very often traced to the question of how well the organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people” (Barrett, 1999, p. 30).

Some traits mentioned in spirituality at work related literature that underscore the external effects in a spiritual workplace are *creativity* (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Barrett, 1999; Chappel, 1993; Covey, 2002; Dorsey, 1998; Fox, 1995; Heider, 1985; Laabs, 1995; Lerner, 2000; McCoy, 2001; McDonald, 1999; Morris, 1997; Turner, 1999; Vadermark, 2001); *diversity* (DeCenzo & Robbins, 1998; Hicks, 2002); a sense of *peace* (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Wheatley, 2002); and *harmony* (Heider, 1985).

The earlier mentioned phenomenological studies resulted in the following corresponding external acts of a spiritually converted worker: performing as a servant leader, a mentor, and a giver; being kind, motivating, and direct; providing quality; applying fairness; seeking to understand others; hard-working; expecting openness; being aware of the place of his or her contributions toward the success of the organization, and therefore also, getting fulfillment out of giving and helping others to get better in that organization; encouraging creativity; and encouraging other people to reduce the barriers that prevent new things from happening.

### **Transforming the Workplace into a Spiritual One**

Based on the above distinctions, we can conclude that the first step toward a positive transformation of the workplace will have to happen at the internal level: within the individuals involved in the process. It may be a generally accepted fact that such internal changes, and thus, enhanced spiritual awareness, will work out more effectively, rapidly, and profoundly for the entire organization when they happen within individuals in higher positions of the organizational hierarchy. Yet, they can also occur within workers at lower levels, with moderate to high levels of success, depending on these individuals’ personal rapport with co-workers. Before reviewing the effectiveness levels of transforming the workplace as an attempt executed by lower- and mid-level workers in a workplace, a brief review of some possible reasons that predominantly cause a non-spiritual workplace to alter into a spiritual one are appropriate.

Based on the findings of the phenomenological studies, it can be stated that the organizational reasons that could influence the transformation from a workplace that previously did not consciously attempt to nurture spirituality and the human spirit to one that now does, can be classified into two main causes:

1. Organizational-experiential, in which it may occur that unfavorable company developments (deterioration of morale, productivity, efficiency) call for reconsideration of the organizational rules of existence.
2. Leadership-experiential, in which the transformation can be instigated by a change in leadership perspectives, an unforeseen tragic event involving the leader, or the leader’s desire to attract good people (workers and customers) to the business, and thus enhance the quality of life in the work environment.

The personal reasons that could influence the transformation from an employee who does not consciously attempt to nurture spirituality and the human spirit to one that does can be classified into two main causes:

1. Internal, whereby the transformation is mainly a consequence of a personal change (which can cause the employee to become spiritual without working in a spiritual environment).

Table 1.1 Organizational and Leadership Experiential Circumstances That Can Lead to the Application of a More Spiritual Approach in the Workplace

<i>Organizational Circumstances</i>		<i>Personal Circumstances</i>	
<i>Organizational-Experiential:</i>	<i>Leadership-Experiential:</i>	<i>Internal:</i>	<i>External:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfavorable company developments (deterioration of morale, productivity, efficiency) that call for reconsideration of the organizational rules of existence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A change in leadership perspectives.</li> <li>• An unforeseen tragic event.</li> <li>• The will to attract good people (workers and customers) to the business.</li> <li>• The leader's will to change: to enhance the quality of life in the work environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A personal change, which can cause the employee to become spiritual without working in a spiritual environment.</li> <li>• A raised level of consciousness.</li> <li>• Confrontation with a life-changing problem.</li> <li>• Change of habits.</li> <li>• Change of lifestyle (getting married and starting to raise children: wanting to lead by example).</li> <li>• Desire for inner-peace and self-satisfaction</li> <li>• Aversion of a competitive environment.</li> <li>• The will to feel better about one's self, work, colleagues, and society.</li> <li>• Aversion of a heavy-handed hierarchical structure.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a result of a converted company culture.</li> <li>• Through positive influences from others.</li> <li>• The will to be involved in a ground-breaking organization.</li> <li>• Openness to new ideas and a new way of thinking.</li> </ul>

However, the change in that employee can lead to spiritual influence of the work environment. Some of the internal reasons to transform such an employee are: a raised level of consciousness; the confrontation with a life-changing problem; a change of habits; a change of lifestyle (for instance, getting married, starting to raise children, and therefore wanting to lead by example); a general desire for inner-peace and self-satisfaction; a developed aversion of a competitive environment; a newly obtained will to feel better about one's self, work, colleagues, and society; or the aversion of a heavy-handed hierarchical structure.

2. External, whereby the transformation is mainly a consequence of a converted company culture (which can drive the employee to the realization that he or she can only continue to perform well in this setting if he or she adapts to the conversion). Some of the ways that this can happen are: obtaining positive influences from colleagues; the will to be involved in a successful, ground-breaking organization; receptivity to new ideas and a new way of thinking.

Table 1.1 represents the organizational and leadership experiential circumstances that can lead to the application of a more spiritual approach in the workplace.

### **The Ripple Effect**

Although—as mentioned earlier—it is easier accomplished in cases of employees at higher levels in the workplace, the establishment of a spiritual transformation in a workplace could be possible for workers at various levels of the organization. It may take longer and require more perseverance, but, gradually, any worker with the right intentions could gear his or her immediate work environment toward enhanced spiritual performance in the sense as is interpreted in this chapter. An appropriate reminder at this point may be that religion should definitely be kept out of the picture, particularly in environments where representatives from various cultures, backgrounds, and religious convictions are employed.

To initiate the mindset of how one can establish or promote spirituality at work if one is not a member of top management, the following research outcomes may make sense: the author of this chapter conducted an additional study between 2010 and 2015 among working MBA students in university courses, all between the ages of 25 and 55 years, and predominantly employed in midlevel positions in a variety of industries. In this longitudinal research, one of the questions asked was, “How do you think your current work environment could be transformed into a more spiritual one?” From the broad variety of answers given to this question, the following two were selected as good examples to express the essence of this query:

1. “Through daily interaction and making trust building a part of our jobs. And through listening, and then applying, in order to more fully engage the crews.”

The here-above posted statement is a typical illustration of how all layers of the organization can work toward a more spiritual environment. Trust building is not a thing that can be directed by management: it has to grow among workers in their interactions with each other. The latter part of the above statement, “listening and then applying in order to more fully engage the crews” may initially sound like a typical management responsibility, but it can also be executed at the peer level.

2. “By people helping each other out more often.”



This statement, the shortest and most simply worded of all in the study, could be considered the most direct strategy toward establishing a more spiritual workplace without necessarily having to wait for management interference: if workers decide to be more positive and helpful toward one another, the seed of workplace spirituality will be planted, and the nurturing process can begin.

Whatever a worker's reasons may be for an internal transformation into a more spiritual person, his or her acts into the workplace, along with his or her increased awareness of interconnectedness and reciprocity, will lead to a greater level of empathy. Figure 1.1 demonstrates how the ripple effect that enhances quality of life in- and outside the work environment can be established regardless of one's position in the organization. The ripple demonstrates the following:

1. An individual gets confronted with internal reasons for enhanced spiritual performance: a transformation happens, and an increase in willingness to connect is ignited. This is the internal aspect of establishing spirit at work.
2. The now more spiritually attuned worker vigorously, and hopefully ultimately also successfully, connects with colleagues in order to enhance mutuality and reciprocity. This worker does so by demonstrating an enhanced level of empathy, which, in most cases, triggers a similar response in return. Here is where the integrated aspects start coming into play.
3. Due to the spiritual worker's encouraging behavior, co-workers will become positively influenced, reflect on their behaviors as well, and increasingly engage into team performance, which is expressed in increased support, elevated trust, and enhanced understanding. These factors, too, represent integrated aspects of establishing spirit at work.
4. Ultimately, all or most workers within the positively affected department will demonstrate a greater degree of responsibility and ownership, as well as awareness of the bigger picture, and, through their increased team behavior, will generate greater output and, hence, better organizational performance (external aspects), which will, in the right environment and



Figure 1.1 The Ripple Effect

under the right leadership, be translated to the workers in the form of increased job satisfaction. Increased job satisfaction, in turn, will further elevate the internal motives for the individual to remain a spiritual worker.

It is important to note that an individual, who is satisfied with his or her work environment, will generally be less stressed outside the workplace as well. Overall, this person will have a greater sense of wellbeing, and an enhanced desire to make others (at work and outside) share in his or her contentment.

### Final Note

A final essential note should be in place here: some workplaces are just not susceptible yet toward spiritual transformation. The spiritual worker has to realize that. Not all workplaces will be adaptive toward conversion. In such cases, when no amount of effort sorts any positive effect, the spiritual worker should realize that exiting this toxic workplace is not a manifestation of weakness, but rather a demonstration of courage to move on to better spiritual harbors. Work environments are worldwide undergoing tremendous changes and therefore experience great uncertainty in these days. A spiritual worker, although responsible toward dependents, takes appropriate measures toward responsible behavior, yet tries not to lose his or her belief that, ultimately, things will turn out right: for him or her, and all who are involved.

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