



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong  
Research Online

---

Faculty of Commerce - Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Business

---

2008

# The place of self-actualisation in workplace spirituality: evidence from Sri Lanka

Mario Fernando

*University of Wollongong*, [mariof@uow.edu.au](mailto:mariof@uow.edu.au)

V. Nilakant

*University of Canterbury*

---

## Publication Details

This article was originally published as The place of self-actualisation in workplace spirituality: evidence from Sri Lanka, *Culture and Religion*, 9(3), November 2008, 233–249.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library:  
[research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

# The place of self-actualisation in workplace spirituality: evidence from Sri Lanka

## **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to develop a self-actualizing spirituality model. It examines the place of self-actualization in the experience of workplace spirituality of Sri Lankan business leaders. The primary method of data collection was in-depth and face-to-face interviews with 13 Sri Lankan business leaders. Within the qualitative tradition and case study method, grounded theory and data triangulation were used to analyze the data. The findings suggest that when the business leaders experience workplace spirituality, they commonly project a need to grow, become and evolve towards the ideal (ought) self. This need is primarily driven by a desire to relate or connect to one's self. Findings suggest that self-actualizing work arrangements offer a way to implement inclusive workplace spirituality, devoid of the challenges usually associated with the practice of religion-based workplace spirituality. Despite the geographical, cultural and social differences that exist between Sri Lanka and other cultures, this paper provides research implications for spiritual leadership and ethical decision-making in other cultural settings.

## **Keywords**

self-actualizing spirituality, self-actualization, workplace spirituality, Abraham Maslow, Sri Lanka

## **Disciplines**

Business | Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | Organizational Behavior and Theory | Social and Behavioral Sciences

## **Publication Details**

This article was originally published as The place of self-actualisation in workplace spirituality: evidence from Sri Lanka, *Culture and Religion*, 9(3), November 2008, 233–249.

**The Place of Self-actualization in Workplace Spirituality:  
Evidence from Sri Lanka**

*Dr Mario Fernando, School of Management and Marketing, University of Wollongong,  
Australia; Dr Venkat Nilakant, Department of Management, College of Business and  
Economics, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand*

**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to develop a self-actualizing spirituality model. It examines the place of self-actualization in the experience of workplace spirituality of Sri Lankan business leaders. The primary method of data collection was in-depth and face-to-face interviews with 13 Sri Lankan business leaders. Within the qualitative tradition and case study method, grounded theory and data triangulation were used to analyze the data. The findings suggest that when the business leaders experience workplace spirituality, they commonly project a need to grow, become and evolve towards the ideal (*ought*) self. This need is primarily driven by a desire to relate or connect to one's self. Findings suggest that self-actualizing work arrangements offer a way to implement inclusive workplace spirituality, devoid of the challenges usually associated with the practice of religion-based workplace spirituality. Despite the geographical, cultural and social differences that exist between Sri Lanka and other cultures, this paper provides research implications for spiritual leadership and ethical decision-making in other cultural settings.

**Keywords:** self-actualizing spirituality, self-actualization, workplace spirituality, Abraham Maslow, Sri Lanka

## **Introduction**

The growing field of workplace spirituality challenges business enterprises' overriding goal to maximise profits. Its main influences are psychology and religious studies (Fry 2005; Giacalone, Jurkiewicz and Fry 2005; Snyder and Lopez 2001).

Spirituality is an inherent characteristic of all humans, which encompasses the sacredness of everything, is nondenominational, broadly inclusive and embracing everyone, and involves experiencing or achieving a godlike self through connection (Fernando, 2007a; Smith and Rayment 2007; Dent, Higgins and Wharff 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003; Mitroff and Denton 1999). Some identify workplace spirituality with religion (Fernando and Jackson 2006; Kriger and Seng 2005) while others view spirituality as being unconnected to religion, but personal growth based.

The literature emphasizing personal growth (Dent, Higgins and Wharff 2005), highlight the role of self in conceptualising spirituality—an internal process involving the evolution of self. For example, the spirit is a distinct state, with cognitive and mystical dimensions (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004). Maslow's peak experiences partner with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) psychological optimal experiences (flow), making transcendence an achievable goal (Primeaux and Vega 2002). The flow experience is associated with internalising spirituality as a form of intrinsic motivation (Dehler and Welsh 1994, citing Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Some of these writers identify spirituality as a continuous development process that emphasizes meditation, introspection and therapy (Howard 2002; Delbecq 2000). Other writers focus on a series of discontinuous awakening experiences (Mitroff and Denton 1999; Neal, Lichtenstein and Banner 1999).

This paper sees workplace spirituality as a process of development of the self towards higher consciousness, and reports a study of workplace spirituality in a non-Western setting, using Maslow's concept of self-actualization. Employing a qualitative, case study approach, we investigate conceptions of spirituality in 13 Sri Lankan organizations. Our model involves the stages of growing, becoming and evolving towards an ideal self through self-reflection (or contemplation), a process driven by the need to relate or connect to an internal self, which leads to activities broadly categorised as accommodating others and practising values.

We first review the literature on workplace spirituality using a self-actualization perspective, and examine cross-cultural perspectives on workplace spirituality. We then discuss the methodology of data collection and analysis, report findings and present our model. The paper concludes with the implications of our findings to the theory and practice of workplace spirituality and ethical decision-making.

### **Self-actualization and spirituality**

Maslow's writings have significant implications for spirituality in the workplace (Quatro 2002). He claimed that a spiritual life is a defining characteristic of human nature:

*...from what we know of developments within individuals and within societies, a certain amount of spirituality is the extremely probable consequence of a satisfied materialism (Maslow 1971, 136).*

A spiritual life is well within the jurisdiction of human endeavour, attainable by their efforts:

*A search for the actualization of this our fundamental identity with the cosmos, human motivation, at its highest and deepest, is a reaching out for the ultimates of truth, beauty, goodness, justice, and the like. Such Being-values are said to form the heart of true religion: the human being is naturally religious. Maslow's "naturalism" is thus an invitation to savor the splendor of all things, to bear witness to the extraordinary in the ordinary (unitive consciousness), including in this mortal flesh of ours. Maslow's psychology, addressing the ultimately spiritual or cosmic character of human life, is a courageous and bold undertaking (Fuller 1994, 179).*

The highest human values are associated with self-actualization. Self-actualizers: (a) accept and express the inner core or self; (b) have minimal ill-health, neurosis, psychosis and loss (or diminution) of basic human and personal capacities; and (c) are motivated by values they strive for and are loyal to (Maslow 1971, 1968, 1954). This involves striving for health, searching for identity and autonomy and yearning for excellence. It concerns the development of the essential human nature — a unified personality, identity and full individuality (Maslow 1970), and the attainment of full humanness (Maslow 1971).

Employment allows people to become self-actualized (Maslow 1998). When businesses apply the hierarchy of needs model under conditions such as trustworthiness, responsibility and accountability, the undamaged human being naturally strives to become self-actualized (Maslow 1965). Maslow's 'eupsychian management', an enlightened management theory, identified human's understanding:

*...more and more of the world, moving toward the ultimate of mysticism, a fusion with the world, or peak experience, cosmic consciousness etc. a yearning for truth, beauty, justice, perfection and so on (Maslow 1998, 42).*

Eupsychian management improves people's health and wellbeing, and benefits an organization's finances, and the whole society's success (Payne 2000). Several barriers to self-actualization in the workplace exist (Maslow 1998), including loss of freedom, self-esteem, status, respect, love objects, being loved, belonging, safety, physiological needs, value systems, truth and beauty. According to Maslow, businesses need a '*truly growth fostering, and truly better personality producing*' management policy (1998, 107), to produce managers who: '*become more philanthropic in their communities, more ready to help, more unselfish and altruistic, more indignant at injustice, more ready to fight for what they thought to be true and good etc.*' (Maslow, 1998).

### **Similarities between Workplace Spirituality and Maslow's work**

The workplace spirituality literature shares some common themes with Maslow's writings. Although several writers from non-management fields (Lerner 2000; White 2000, Fox 1991), and an increasing number of workplace spirituality researchers (Fernando, 2007a; Barrett 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003; Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Kakabadse 2002; Burack 1999) acknowledge these similarities, our electronic database searches found no prior published empirical work directly assessing the link between self-actualization and workplace spirituality.

Spirituality is not an esoteric concept (in both the workplace spirituality literature and for Maslow), but an inherent characteristic of all humans — the intangible essence or the deepest part of ourselves (for example, Joseph 2002; Mitroff and Denton 1999). Spirituality is basic to our biology, the most essential aspect of our humanity, and a

defining characteristic of human nature (Maslow 1971). Every individual is capable of spiritual or higher animality, which is not an end state, but a process.

Maslow's ideas on psychopathology are also associated with spirituality (1970). Two forces test the individual: pressures towards health and self-actualization, and regressive pressure backwards to weaknesses and sickness. The absence of spiritual life leads to neurosis, a 'spiritual disorder' — the loss of meaning and hope, the awareness that one's life is wasted and the impossibility of joy or love (Maslow 1971). These failures to measure up to full humanness (self-actualization) lead to psychopathology.

Both schools contend that spirituality is commonplace, and everyday, mundane life is actually imbued with sacredness, with the literature describing this as the sacredness of everything, the ordinariness of everyday life (Mitroff and Denton 1999); ability to see the sacred in the ordinary, to feel the poignancy in life, to know the passion of existence (Elkins 1999). Maslow finds the sacred in the ordinary too, in people and their backyard (Maslow 1970), and argues people can discover the sacred everywhere.

Both schools argue that spirituality transcends all religions. In the literature, spirituality is nondenominational, broadly inclusive and embraces everyone (Fry 2003; Mitroff and Denton 1999). For Maslow, religious or spiritual values are not exclusive to one religion or group (Maslow 1970), and all religions originated from experiences. 'God' means pure cosmic beauty, truth and goodness, a being or entity to awe, identify with and serve. God '*is getting reborn, redefined*', and the transcendent, transhuman or godlike self is alive '*within human beings*' (Lowry 1979, 524).

Alongside several researchers, Maslow views spirituality's purpose as achieving or experiencing a godlike self through connection or connectedness. The literature



associates spirituality with interconnectedness (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004; Joseph 2002) and faith relationships with the transcendent (Beazley 1998). Interfaith studies of spirituality in diverse cultures and in different fields such as health care (Burkhart 2001), neurotheology (Newberg et al. 2001), theology (Rose 2001) and psychology (Piedmont 2007) also find connection a central idea in the conceptualisation of spirituality.

### **A Cross-cultural Perspective**

Increasingly, management researchers are using Eastern thoughts and practices in their theory and model development. For example, Weick and Putnam (2006) observe that an enriched view of mindfulness, jointly informed by Eastern and Western thinking, suggests that attentional processes in organizing have been underspecified. Similarly, little research exists on workplace spirituality in non-Christian and non-Western settings. The major models were developed in the United States, and most studies were conducted on American organizations. Maslow claims that *'So far, I have been studying self-actualization via autonomy, as if it were the only path. But this is quite Western, and even American'* (in Hoffman 1988, 243). Maslow (1971) was concerned that the theory of self-actualization might not apply to relatively poorer countries such as Mexico, where few people find self-fulfilment through their livelihood. He also considered Czarist Russia, Batista's Cuba and Duvalier's Haiti, and concluded that people there only partially express their highest qualities by transcending the existing social order (Maslow 1971, 315).

Asian studies (Rangaswami 1994; Chang and Page 1991) support Rogers' and Maslow's theories of self-actualization, indicating universality in human experience. Comparing the Chinese Taoist and Zen Buddhist view of the development of human potential with Rogers' and Maslow's shows that a cross-cultural comparison of views on developing human potential offer a perspective broader than isolated considerations of either Western or Eastern perspectives.

## **Methodology**

### ***Cross-cultural challenges***

This paper adopts a country-based definition of culture. The research was conducted in Sri Lanka, where *Theravada* Buddhism, 'the doctrine of the elders' is widely practised. This doctrine credits Buddha as achieving enlightenment and fosters monks as accomplished followers. Sri Lanka's 19 million people comprises mainly Sinhalese (74 per cent), Tamils (17 per cent) and Muslims (eight per cent). The connection between religion, culture, language and education and their combined influence on national identity are pervasive forces for the majority Sinhalese Buddhists (Tambiah 1986). Buddhism appeals directly to the masses, leading to the growth of a collective Sinhalese cultural consciousness (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). Buddhism in Sri Lanka is a syncretic fusion of various religious elements into a unique cultural system — a key reason for situating this study in Sri Lanka.

The first author interviewed four chairpersons, six managing directors (one retired) and three directors heading organizations in the consumer, industrial and service sectors, with a total of 14,315 employees. Seven leaders were Buddhists, two Hindu, three Christian (two Roman Catholic and one Anglican) and one a Muslim. Each had either started or owned a business venture, or been a board director for at least fifteen years. The participants were all born, raised and (mostly) educated in Sri Lanka, and their primary business, family and social networks were in Sri Lanka. All 13 publicly acknowledged spiritual motivations in their business approaches, and were identified as such by others.

### ***Data collection***

The primary method of data collection was through in-depth face-to-face interviews. Participants were interviewed face-to-face for approximately 90 minutes. A grounded theory approach was used to identify emergent themes through early data analysis and discover basic social processes within the data (Charmaz 2002), by identifying the role of spiritual practices in the daily lives of participants. Participants were requested to relate their daily routine to examine how and when their spiritual practices take place. We generated themes and theories based on the inductive construction of categories that explained and synthesized these processes, then integrated these categories into a theoretical framework that specified causes, conditions and consequences of enacting workplace spirituality (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The method of participant selection was purposive: to learn about workplace spirituality from typical business leaders known to practise workplace spirituality (Patton 2002). We linked three levels of understanding: (a) the meanings and interpretations of the participants; (b) the interviewer's interpretation of those meanings; and (c) confirmatory theory-connected operations (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Triangulation was a key tactic used to ensure data quality — triangulation (diverse sources) and methodological triangulation, using multiple collection methods (Seale 2000). Secondary sources were used to compare individual case studies. Additional information was sought via relevant company documents (annual reports, photographs, newspaper cuttings, certificates and websites) and public documents (media reports since 1970 of participants and their organizations).

## **Findings**

After grouping the responses, 81 statements were collected and labeled under a statement file, coded, then further condensed. The major representative statements were identified and grouped into themes, including: source of guidance, self-reflection, saving animals, right conduct, prayer, meaningful charity, connecting to others/things, living values, inner wellbeing, developing the mind, spirituality in regulations and satisfaction of doing. These were numbered and the data was further reduced systematically, using selective or focused coding (Charmaz 2002).

Using grounded theory framework, each theme was raised to a category and subsequently to a concept level. For example, if several participants mentioned 'helping

the poor' as a way of enacting workplace spirituality, a theme was derived, categorized under 'altruism' and raised to a concept level, 'accommodating others'.

### ***Meaning of spirituality***

Most participants defined their spirituality under religious faith:

*For me, [spirituality] is the inner wellbeing. In my case, the Catholic religion, my feeling for the Buddhist philosophy and both those combined is my interpretation of spiritual wellbeing.*

*An action based on your convictions — whatever right is to be accepted and I don't think spirituality comes only from my religion. I think spirituality comes from everybody else who does the right thing with any religious practice or whatever it is... There is sacredness — and spirituality to me is God fearing.*

*[Spirituality] is a source of guidance to my conduct. I seem to identify spirituality built by a concept of Buddhist faith.*

Others defined workplace spirituality in non-religious terms:

*Spirituality, to me, is basically a guide system — the ethics. Dos and don'ts to rule your life and family, and whatever you are in charge of. The value principles, which are held near and dear to me.*

*Relying on my own values, my own self.*

Although spirituality had elements in common, there was no universal definition of the concept amongst participants. Responses reveal they believed spirituality was possible without believing in or affirming a higher power or god. However, most participants explicitly included a higher power in their definition of spirituality. Some participants spoke of a world devoid of purpose:

*The total sum of life is zero — we come with nothing, we take nothing.*

*Everything that happens in between is an illusion.*

### **Connection**

All participants referred to a connection with a transcendent reality, god or truth, an object or source variously described as god, the divine, deity, reality, truth or entity (we use the term ‘ultimate’ to cover all these). When participants connected with the ultimate, they reported feelings of inspiration, solace, protection and guidance. By experiencing this connection, they could make meaning of the uncertainty and mystery of life and identify their lives with a higher purpose.

An external connection with the ultimate meant it resided outside the individual; an internal connection meant it resided within. Participants identified the ultimate as powerful and good, and connecting gave them increased wellbeing. Some respondents needed the help of a religion, astrology, or other belief systems to connect with their selves; others connected without the help of these structures. To them, religion, astrology and other beliefs guides them towards a connection — either internally or externally.

This paper focuses on participants who made a connection internally — within themselves — to experience workplace spirituality. One participant mentioned ‘important’ self-reflection, which he demonstrated by closing his eyes and remaining perfectly still. After a minute he claimed:

*Now, what you saw was a very silent man. When the body is quiet, the mind also goes quite. Then there are no thoughts of sex, money, vehicles and employees. In a spiritual way, I become I.*

Participants who made a connection internally rejected any role for religion in the management of their organizations. They claimed that business people are not competent to deal with religious issues in the workplace, and emphasized the difficulty of catering to religious diversity. If an organization's leader promoted religion-based spirituality in the workplace, '*it is loss making*' and '*a foolish thing*':

*Religion and spirituality is a fine line, sometimes it is not clear. And often spirituality could be perceived to be the religion of the person who is driving it. But a set of values, a set of principles that portrays culture, values and spirituality can be a means of enacting spirituality.*

Another respondent enacted a non-religious workplace spirituality that fostered employees' realization of their full potential at work. He discussed the link between full potential and enacting spirituality:

*A lot of us are regimental in following a set pattern. Then you're never going to develop into your full potential — it stifles creativity for all time, probably. They almost become a cog in the machine.*

Promoting his 3,000 employees full potential was an important business goal, and he wished them to break out from set patterns and '*blossom*'.

All participants, whether they practised connection externally or internally, engaged in certain common behaviour. Broadly, these behaviours emerged as practising values and accommodating others.

### ***Practising values***

To experience the connection with the ultimate, participants practised value-based activities from several sources, many from a religious faith. Participants who experienced a connection with an internal source (such as self), practised values that originated from non-religious sources, such as teachers and family, for example:

*My spirituality has grown out of the values, ethics and family environment which I grew up in and my education... Obviously, when we were young, we did all the wrong things. The way it was handled was how the value system came in. We were told this is wrong, corrected and encouraged to say what we had done. I was also told why it was not right and why I shouldn't do it again and that sort of thing. So, we have cut our lives on that.*

This heavily influenced how this participant's family-owned organization operated. Management was based on a set of values, and all employees were expected to follow these.

### ***Accommodating others***

Seeking a connection with the ultimate generated activities concerning the welfare of others, and religious beliefs helped determine the type of activity. The Buddhists conducted alms-giving ceremonies at work to reduce negative *karma*. Organizations commonly uplifted employees' spiritual characters through voluntary, daily reflection sessions. A head of the Sri Lankan operation of a multinational organization actively pursued this through group self-reflection sessions at work:

*I summoned them [the senior management team] and said, from next Monday, I am going to make arrangements to close the gate [to the factory complex] at five to*



*8.00 am. Everybody must meditate for five minutes and a board should be up saying the factory is closed for meditation.*

Many employees, including the drug-addicted, benefited from his programs. He also used his business expertise and contacts to improve the economic conditions of the underprivileged.

### ***Self-actualization***

Self-actualizing individuals portray ‘*a relative lack of overriding guilt, of crippling shame and of extreme or severe anxiety*’ (Maslow 1954, 206). We asked participants: ‘If you had your life over again, would you do anything differently?’ Several participants referred to a lack of relative guilt, for example:

*I have made mistakes like anybody else, but I won't change my life. I have not done any harm to anyone, I have come through hard times and I have no regrets.*

Except the two youngest participants, all indicated that they would not change anything:

*I don't think I can improve on my life. This is the business which I have created, and I have spent about 16–18 hours a day working. I am 72 years of age and I think I have energy and vision and very exceptional capabilities. I have used them very well.*

Buddhist participants mentioned that they did not want to change anything because they had had a wealth of experience:

*I think a person with many experiences will not want to change it.*

*I think really, I wouldn't want to change my life because it has been a wealth of experience for me.*

*I would do exactly the same things as long as my life is projected at helping the marginalised in society.*

Self-actualizing individuals:

*...are without one single exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin, in some thing outside of themselves. They are devoted, working at something, something very precious to them — some calling or vocation in the old sense, the priestly sense (Maslow 1971, 42).*

We asked participants: ‘If you were told that you are dedicated to a cause outside and bigger than yourself — a larger ambition in life — a devotion or calling, what would that be?’ Participants’ demonstrated their great desire to engage in philanthropy.

Beneficiaries from charitable activities included both present and future generations, the socially marginalised and deprived, such as orphans, destitutes and helping those without access to essential resources to engage in activities necessary to reach their true potential.

Older participants’ responses resonated more with Maslow’s idea of working towards a cause outside ‘their own skin’:

*My devotion and calling is to spread a message of simple living, which will result in environmental safety, which I think, is spirituality.*

The youngest participant said:

*[On] the day that I am called from this business environment to another environment, I guess I will consider those options, but I never had a calling yet.*

However, all participants indicated a very strong desire for reaching their true potential:

*As a man who didn’t go to university and started [this business] with paltry capital, I am going to show my vision to the world.*

## Discussion

### *Self-actualizing spirituality*

Self-reflection was important to participants who made a connection internally — within themselves — to experience workplace spirituality. Some described spiritual experiences as: *'I become I'* — referring to a union with self; a becoming of self. Maslow (1971, xviii) described this union as a process of merging the *is* and the *ought*, of the subject and an object, involving no loss of subjectivity, instead, its infinite extension. After such merging, the individual is in harmony with their inner self, in touch with the *ought*, and experiences oneness. From a humanistic perspective, the need to connect or relate to something greater (the *oughtness*) originates from a single source, the self. When individuals are in harmony with this *oughtness*, the subject of self becomes the object — the world (Berdyayev 1939) — Maslow's (1954) self-actualization process. Self-actualization and spirituality share the *is* and *ought* duality, and both to arise from the process of connecting.

We propose a self-actualizing spirituality model (Figure 1), where the primary activity involved in growing, becoming and evolving towards the ideal self is self-reflection (or contemplation), driven by the need to relate or connect to one's self. This process can lead to activities broadly categorised as accommodating others and practising values.

**Insert Figure 1**

These activities give the individual a sense of evolvment and becoming, from doing *right* — awareness that an action takes them closer to the ideal, experiencing the ultimate, key to Maslow's (1954) self-actualization process. The workplace spirituality discourse describes this as feeling one with the universe, a deep feeling of interconnectedness, oneness and aligning with god's will, which leads to the realisation of the self (I become I) — a perfect harmony with one's self (in touch with the *ought*). '[O]ur subjects are simultaneously very spiritual and very pagan and sensual' (Maslow 1954, 233). The literature describes the subject meeting the object as awe-inspiring, peak experience, finding sacred in the ordinary, wonder, joy, inner wellbeing and inner peace.

The *process* of getting there by *right* action is distinguished from the *outcome* of getting there. Maslow (1971, 1968, 1954) described this as analogous to the difference between *travelling* and *arriving*. Self-actualizing spirituality is a highly subjective process, whereby a certain state is attained, which generates awareness of the *is* and the *ought*, of the gap between them and the need to engage in *right* action to reduce this gap.

To illustrate the use of the self-actualization model in business organizations, let us now consider the enaction of the model in corporate social responsibility. Recently, the moral intent in corporate philanthropy has caught the attention of researchers (Fernando, 2007a; Bright 2006; Godfrey 2005). The attempt here is to examine the '*perception that an organization's philanthropic activities are well intentioned and not merely for instrumental gains*' (Bright 2006, 752). The idea of genuineness is particularly relevant to corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities because consistent CSR activities could generate moral capital by promoting corporate reputation (Bright,

Cameron and Caza 2006; Cameron, Bright and Caza 2004). Moral capital can act as a social license, a form of insurance against unforeseen risks to corporate image, reputation or profits (Godfrey 2006).

In this context, the need for publicity can become a contentious topic to organizations engaged in CSR initiatives connected with disasters such as hurricane Katrina and the Asian tsunami. In the face of human tragedy and colossal damage to property, many business leaders would want to do the *right* thing. *Right* in terms of providing what is appropriate to the affected people and right according to their conscience. In light of the publicity and corporate image opportunities associated with the CSR initiatives connected with these types of disaster relief efforts, business leaders would struggle to do the *right* thing according to their conscience while at the same time upholding corporate profitability goals.

In this scenario, the proposed self-actualizing spirituality model can be useful to the business leader. The leader could evaluate the merits and demerits of the *is* need of enhancing the corporate image through the disaster related CSR efforts and the *oughtness* need of doing the *right* thing. Thus when the leader becomes aware of the gap between the two, the available choices will invariably lead to an ethical dilemma. The self-actualizing workplace spirituality model offers the leader a way to resolve this dilemma by guiding to the *right* option that upholds practising values and accommodating others. When this process is complete, the leader will experience a higher sense of well-being; a realization of self.

## **Implications**

This research was limited geographically and culturally to a few highly influential business leaders in Sri Lanka. Significant cultural and political differences between Sri Lanka and Western nations remain, and the generalisability of this paper's findings to other cultural and political settings is uncertain. However, the Sri Lankan management style adopts a predominantly Western based concepts. Also, this paper does not account for differences arising from the race heterogeneity of the participants. Despite these limitations, this study has several implications for the theory and practice of workplace spirituality in particular, and management in general.

First, the proposed self-actualizing spirituality model improves our understanding of spiritual leadership. According to Fry, spiritual leadership is '*the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership*' (2003, 694-695). He says that the purpose of spiritual leadership is to '*create vision and value congruence across the strategic, empowered team, and individual levels and, ultimately, to foster higher levels of organizational commitment and productivity*' (Fry 2003, 693). Fry's theory of spiritual leadership is developed within an intrinsic motivation model. The framework proposed in this paper is also based on intrinsic motivation and facilitates the practise of spiritual leadership. A leader practising workplace spirituality will also go through the stages enumerated in the self-actualizing spirituality process. We believe that Fry's (2003) qualities of spiritual leadership such as hope, faith and altruism are represented in the behavioural elements of our model as well.

Second, by its inclusive nature, the proposed model may appeal to various types of workplace spirituality practitioners who would otherwise be marginalised— particularly with the enactment of a religion-based workplace spirituality. While a member of a religious faith could find meaning in the framework proposed, so too would the religiously non-affiliated. However, self-actualizing workplace spirituality could be identified as pseudo-spirituality by traditional religion-based proponents (Kriger and Seng 2005), who argue that non-religious workplace spirituality is simply another tool or aspect of best practice, and merely enhances employee performance — potentially exploitatively. However, unlike those pseudo spiritualities, ‘transcendence’ or ‘becoming’ through practising values and accommodating others is a necessary step in the proposed self-actualizing workplace spirituality process.

Third, the proposed model can act as a guide for ethical decision-making. Some argue that improved ethical decision-making depends upon the effective enforcement of codes of ethics (Weeks and Nantel 1992). Well enforced consequences for misconduct such as rewarding ethical conduct and punishing unethical conduct are likely to make employees consider the morality of their actions. However, the usefulness of ethics codes to promote and demand ethical behavior from organizational members has been questioned. Those who believe that right action must be internally motivated question the value of codes of ethics to increase the ethicality of organizational members (Ladd 1991). The proposed self-actualizing spirituality model generates *right* action of employees via intrinsic motivation and is a far more effective process than an externally formulated set of rules. At a collective level, the practice of the self-actualizing model in organizations would enhance corporate ethical values (Fernando, Dharmage and Almeida 2008, in

press). Corporate ethical values is defined by Hunt, Wood and Chonko (1989) as a composite of the individual ethical values of managers and both the formal and informal policies on ethics of the organization. It has been shown to influence the standards that delineate the 'right' things to do and the things 'worth doing' (Jansen and Von Glinow 1985); organizational success (Hunt, Wood and Chonko 1989); superior job performance (Weeks and Nantel 1992).

Fourth, accommodating diverse religion-based spiritualities in the workplace has potential for conflict in American organizations. It is viewed as intolerant, closed-minded, and excluding all those who do not believe in a particular point of view (Mitroff 2003, 375). This can lead to privileging one faith as better, morally superior, or more worthy. Religion in workplace spirituality can foster zealotry at the expense of organizational goals, offend stakeholders and decrease morale and employee wellbeing (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003). The self-actualizing workplace spirituality model that allows members to practise values and accommodate others helps avoid contentious legal issues that are associated with this type of workplace spirituality.

Lastly, when self-actualizing workplace spirituality is fully embraced by employees and management, every employee has an opportunity to fully realize his or her true potential. The workplace, in other words, becomes a place to 'become'. It helps organizational members to eliminate the gap between the *is* and the *ought*. Work environments and job tasks facilitating this process thus become vehicles that truly foster growth and produce '*better personalities*' (Maslow 1998, 107). It directly helps to improve employee creativity, well-being and attentional processes (Weick and Putnam 2006). Practising self-actualizing workplace spirituality should reduce the prevalence of



dark phenomena in organizations such as corruption, conflict, organizational deviance, silence and hypocrisy. The practise of the proposed model presents better opportunities for effectively realising organizational virtuousness and genuineness (Bright 2006). For example, one attribute of organizational virtuousness is unconditionality of social benefits, which according to Bright (2006) is the '*intention to create goods of first intent and to prudently use goods of second intent to instrumentally bring benefit to society*' (753).

The key task of assessing the genuineness of company expectations seems to rest on whether an organization's activities are intended to create goods of first intent (a virtuous pursuit) or to create goods of second intent (an instrumental pursuit) (Bright 2006, 752). Using Aristotelian explanation on ethics, Bright (2006) elaborates that '*goods of first intent*'; a chief good which is in itself is worthy of pursuit, such as concern for others and common good, refer to virtuousness (752). On the other hand, the pursuit of goods of second intent refers to those that are good for the '*sake of obtaining something else such as profit, prestige and power*' (Bright, 2006, 752), and is amoral. We propose that an organizational member experiencing self-actualizing workplace spirituality will be aware of the *is* and *ought* needs, and the gap between the two, and will accordingly be able to arrive at 'right' or 'virtuous' decisions with concern for others and common good.

## **Recommendations**

The aim of this paper was to develop a self-actualizing spirituality model. It examined the place of self-actualization in the experience of workplace spirituality of Sri

Lankan business leaders. The proposed self-actualizing workplace spirituality model could be empirically tested in a within culture or cross-cultural setting. Already validated measures and instruments of self-actualization (e.g. Shostrom 1964), spirituality (e.g. Piedmont 2007), religiosity (see Hill and Hood 1999) and moral reasoning (e.g. Kohlberg 1981) could be used. While we examined business leaders' perspectives, future research could extend to other perspectives and other participant and industry profiles — non-executive employees, shareholders, customers and suppliers, non-managerial staff, and organizations from public and not-for profit sector.

Other studies could also empirically validate the usefulness of the self-actualizing workplace spirituality model as a way to practise spiritual leadership. In particular, the extent of fit between Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership model and the proposed self-actualizing workplace spirituality model, and its implications could be examined. Also, researchers could explore how the proposed model could influence ethical decision-making models (e.g. Trevino 1986). Lastly, the model is temporally specific, so longitudinal research of participant behaviour, could highlight participants' lived experiences and reveal how self-actualizing workplace spirituality differs situationally.

*\* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Academy of Management Conference, Hawaii, 2005, and some interview quotes have appeared before in *Spiritual Leadership in the Entrepreneurial Business: A Multifaith Study* (authored by M. Fernando, Edward Elgar, 2007).*

Fernando

## Bibliography

- Barrett, R. 2003. Culture and consciousness: measuring spirituality in the workplace by mapping values. In *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organisational performance*, edited by R.A. Giacalone and C.L. Jurkiewicz. New York: M.E. Sharp, 345–66.
- Beazley, H. 1998. Meaning and measurement of spirituality in organizational settings: development of a spirituality assessment scale (honesty, humility, service to others). Ph.D. thesis submitted to George Washington University.
- Berdyayev, N. 1939. *Spirit and reality*. London: Centenary Press.
- Bright, D. 2006. Dialogue, virtuousness is necessary for genuineness in corporate philanthropy. *Academy of Management Review* 31 (3): 752-4.
- Bright, D., K. Cameron and A. Caza. 2006. The amplifying and buffering effects of virtuousness in downsized organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics* 64 (3): 249-69.
- Burack, E. 1999. Spirituality in the workplace. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12 (4): 280–91.
- Burkhart, L. 2001. Spirituality and religiousness: differentiating the diagnoses through a review of the nursing literature. *Nursing Diagnosis* 2 (2): 45–54.
- Cameron, K., D. Bright and A. Caza. 2004. Exploring the relationships between organizational virtuousness and performance. *American Behavioural Scientist* 47 (6): 766-90.
- Chang, R. and R. Page. 1991. Characteristics of the self-actualised person: visions from the East and West. *Counseling and Values* 36 (1): 2–10.

- Charmaz, K. 2002. Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In *Handbook of interview research*, edited by J. Gubrium and J. Holstein. London: Sage.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1990. *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dent, E., E. Higgins and D. Wharff. 2005. Spirituality and leadership: an empirical review of definitions, distinctions, and embedded assumptions. *Leadership Quarterly* 16 (5): 625–53.
- Dehler, G. and M. Welsh. 1994. Spirituality and organisational transformation: implications for the new management paradigm. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 19 (6): 17–26.
- Delbecq, A. 2000. Spirituality for business leadership: reporting on a pilot course for MBAs and CEOs. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 9 (2):117–28.
- Elkins, D. 1999. Spirituality. *Psychology Today* 32 (5): 44–50.
- Fernando, M., S. Dharmage and S. Almeida (2008, in press). Ethical ideologies of senior Australian managers: an empirical study *Journal of Business Ethics*.
- Fernando, M. 2007a. *Spiritual leadership in the entrepreneurial business: a multifaith study*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Fernando, M. 2007b. Corporate social responsibility in the wake of the Asian tsunami: a comparative case study of two Sri Lankan companies. *European Management Journal* 25(1): 1-10.
- Fernando, M. and B. Jackson 2006. The influence of religion-based workplace spirituality on business leaders' decision-making: an inter-faith study. *The Journal of Management and Organization* 12(1): 23-39.

- Fry, L. 2003. Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *Leadership Quarterly* 14 (6): 693–727.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2005. Toward a theory of ethical and spiritual wellbeing, and corporate social responsibility through spiritual leadership. In *Positive psychology in business ethics and corporate responsibility*, edited by R.A. Giacalone, C.L. Jurkiewicz and C. Dunn. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.
- Fox, M. 1991. *Creation spirituality: liberating gifts for the peoples of the earth*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
- Fuller, A.R. 1994. *Psychology and religion: eight points of view*. USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Giacalone, R.A. and C.L. Jurkiewicz. 2003. *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organisational performance*. New York: M.E. Sharp.
- Giacalone, R., C. Jurkiewicz and L. Fry. 2005. From advocacy to science: The next steps in workplace spirituality research. In *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*, edited by R. Paloutzian and C. Park. New York: Guilford Press.
- Godfrey, P. 2005. The relationship between corporate philanthropy and shareholder wealth: a risk management perspective. *Academy of Management Review* 30 (4): 777-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2006. Dialogue, a reply to Bright: virtuousness and the virtues of the market. *Academy of Management Review* 31(3): 754-56.
- Gombrich, R. and G. Obeyesekere. 1988. *Buddhism transformed: religious change in Sri Lanka*. USA: Princeton University Press.

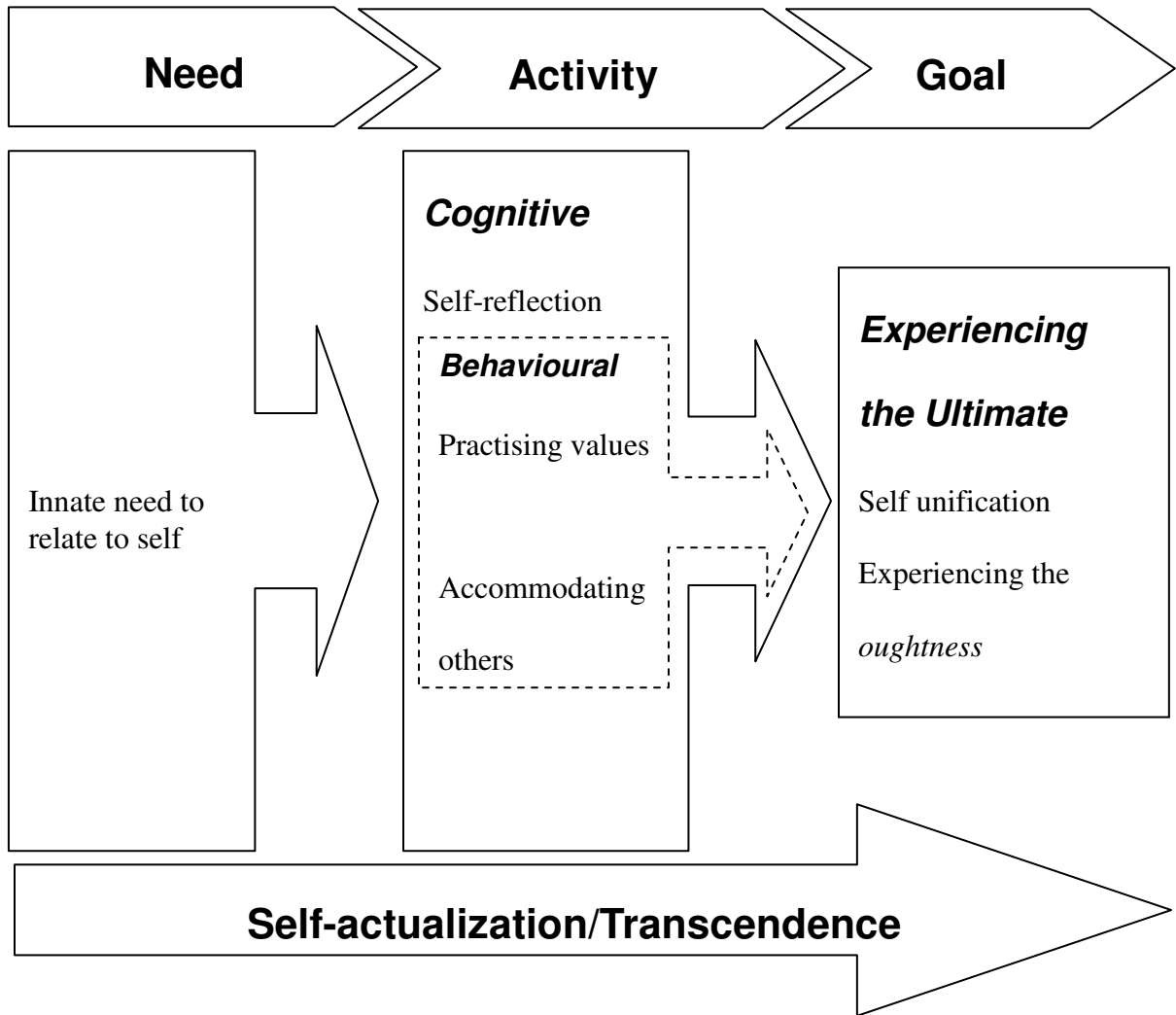
- Hill, P.C. and R. Hood (eds.). 1999. *Measures of religiosity*. USA: Religious Education Press.
- Hoffman, E. 1988. *The right to be human: A biography of Abraham Maslow*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Howard, S. 2002. A spiritual perspective on learning in the workplace. *Journal of Management Psychology* 17 (3): 230–42.
- Hunt, S.D., V.R.Wood and L.B.Chonko. 1989. Corporate ethical values and organizational commitment in marketing. *Journal of Marketing* 53: 79-90.
- Jansen, E. and M.A. Vin Glinow. 1985. Ethical ambience and organizational reward systems. *Academy of Management Review* 10 (4): 814-22.
- Joseph, M. 2002. Leaders and spirituality: a case study, Ph.D. thesis submitted to University of Surrey.
- Kinjerski, V. M. and B. J. Skrypnek. 2004. Defining spirit at work: finding common ground. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 17: 26-42
- Korac-Kakabadse, N., A. Kouzmin and A. Kakabadse. 2002. Spirituality and leadership praxis. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 17 (3): 165–82.
- Kruger M. and Y. Seng. 2005. Leadership with inner meaning: a contingency theory of leadership based on the worldviews of five religions. *Leadership Quarterly* 16 (5): 771–806.
- Ladd, J. 1991. The quest for a code of professional ethics: An intellectual and moral confusion. In *Ethical issues in engineering*, edited by Deborah Johnson, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

- Lerner, M. 2000. *Spirit matters: global healing and the wisdom of the soul*. VA: Hampton Roads.
- Lowry, R.J. 1979. *The journals of A.H. Maslow*. California: Brooks/Cole.
- Maslow, A. 1954. *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper and Row.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1965. *Eupsychian management: a journal*. Illinois: Homewood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1968. *Toward a psychology of being*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1970. *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper and Row.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1971. *The farther reaches of human nature*. New York: Viking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1998. *Maslow on management*. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Miles, M. and M. Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.
- Mitroff, I. and E. Denton. 1999. A study of spirituality in the workplace. *Sloan Management Review* 40 (4): 83–92.
- Mitroff, I. 2003. Do not promote religion under the guise of spirituality. *Organization* 10 (2): 375–82.
- Neal, J., B. Lichtenstein and D. Banner. 1999. Spiritual perspectives on individual, organisation and societal transformation. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12 (3): 175–87.
- Newberg, A., E. D 'Aquili and V. Rause. 2001. *Why God won 't go away*. New York, Ballantine.
- Patton, M. 2002. *Qualitative evaluation methods*. California: Sage.
- Payne, R. 2000. Eupsychian management and the millennium. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 15 (3): 219–26.

- Piedmont, R. 2007. Cross-cultural generalizability of the Spiritual Transcendence Scale to the Philippines: spirituality as a human universal. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10 (2): 89–107.
- Primeaux, P. and G. Vega. 2002. Operationalising Maslow: religion and flow as business partners. *Journal of Business Ethics* 38(1/2): 97–109.
- Quatro, S. 2002. Organisational spiritual normativity as an influence on organisational culture and performance in Fortune 500 firms. Ph.D. thesis submitted to Iowa State University.
- Rangaswami, K. 1994. Self-actualisation and beyond: union with universal self, the highest motive from Indian perspective. *Indian Journal of Clinical Psychology* 21 (2): 45–50.
- Rose, S. 2001. Is the term ‘spirituality’ a word that everyone uses, but nobody knows what anyone means by it?. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16 (2): 193–208.
- Seale, C. 2000. *The quality of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Smith, J.A. and J.J. Rayment. 2007. The global SMP Fitness framework: a guide for leaders exploring the relevance of spirituality in the workplace. *Management Decision* 45 (2): 217-34.
- Snyder, C.R. and J. Lopez. 2001. *Handbook of positive psychology*. New York: Oxford.
- Strauss, A. and J. Corbin. 1990. *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London: Sage.
- Tambiah, S.J. 1986. *Sri Lanka: ethnic fratricide and the dismantling of democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



- Trevino, L.K.1986. Ethical decision making in organizations: a person-situation interactionist model. *Academy of Management Review* 11 (3): 601-17.
- Weeks, W.A., and J. Nantel. 1992. Corporate codes of ethics and sales force behavior: a case study. *Journal of Business Ethics* 11(10): 753-60.
- Weick, K. and T. Putnam. 2006. Organizing for mindfulness: Eastern wisdom and Western knowledge. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15 (3): 275-87.
- White, D. 2000. *Tantra in Practice*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.



**Figure 1: The self-actualizing spirituality model**