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Self-actualising workplace spirituality: an empirical study

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Self-actualising workplace spirituality: an empirical study

Abstract

Over the past twenty years, in the pursuit of achieving higher but socially responsible economic performance and productivity, many business organisations in the West had begun to take notice of a phenomenon collectively called as 'workplace spirituality'. Western workplace spirituality is associated with various types of spirituality and self-growth based spirituality forms a significant component of this phenomenon. Few researchers in the spirituality at work discourse identify an important overlap between self-growth based workplace spirituality and Abraham Maslow's self-actualisation. However, to the best of my knowledge, no empirical studies in the management field have examined this significant overlap. In this paper, I report the findings of a study conducted in Sri Lanka on the extent to which Abraham Maslow's self-actualisation informs the area of entrepreneur workplace spirituality. To examine the significance of the findings, this paper compares and contrasts the enactment of workplace spirituality of entrepreneur participants with each other, and with the Western management literature. I use both emic and etic approaches to discover fresh insights into how predominantly Western-based phenomena are applicable in the East. The findings confirm the conceptual views of the overlap between self-growth based workplace spirituality and Abraham Maslow's self-actualisation. The proposed self-actualising spirituality model suggests that, the need to connect—a critical and established construct in workplace spirituality and self-actualisation—can be used to overcome the contentious issues faced when accommodating religion-based workplace spirituality.

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SELF-ACTUALISING WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY:

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

INTRODUCTION

A spirituality emphasising a 'personal' God within human beings plays a central and important role in the descriptions of spirituality in the mostly Western workplace spirituality (Gibbons, 2000a). Several writers within the current spirituality at work literature have highlighted the role of the self in the conceptualisation of spirituality. According to this view, the individual does not rely on an external reality or power to enact his or her spirituality. For example, Schneiders (1989) describes spirituality as the experience of consciously striving to integrate one's life in terms of self and Pellebon and Anderson (1999) describe spirituality in terms of a set of personal beliefs stemming from the individual's perception of self. Dehler and Welsh (1994) cite Csikszentmihalyi's research (1990) on self-development. They claim that the flow experience is associated with internalising spirituality as a form of intrinsic motivation. Tischler (1999) claims a sense of personal achievement as a reason for the movement towards spirituality.

The literature that projects spirituality from an internal, self-growth viewpoint consist of many key debates. One is on whether spirituality is a continuous development or a series of identifiable experiences. In this literature, meditation, self-retrospection and therapy occupy a major place (Delbecq, 2000; Howard, 2002; Khanna and Srinivas, 2000). In each of these cases, the researchers explicitly or implicitly project spiritual development as a continuous process and one in which spirituality can develop steadily. In sharp contrast, other writers focus on the spiritual development that arises through a series of 'discontinuous

awakening experiences' (Delbecq, 2000; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Neal, Lichtenstein and Banner, 1999).

Abraham Maslow, along with Mary Parker Follet and Robert Greenleaf, have been singled out as perhaps the most influential historical thinkers with regard to the idea and ideal of spirituality in the workplace (Quatro, 2002). On Maslow's contribution for example, Barret (1998, 2003) suggests that each level of Maslow's (1954, 1968) hierarchy of needs can be thought of as a level of consciousness, and that self-actualisation (the highest state) can be expanded to include four distinct stages in the development of spiritual awareness – transformation, cohesion, inclusion and unity. Barret's (1998, 2003) model assumes that leaders who are able to operate from the full spectrum of consciousness and have a high degree of value alignment with their employees would out perform the market in customer/client satisfaction and shareholder value. His research shows that highly aligned, full spectrum organisations give emphasis to employee fulfilment and customer satisfaction, and are highly profitable.

According to Maslow (1954), the highest human values are said to be associated with self-actualisation. He admits that self-actualisation can be defined in various ways but essentially, self-actualisers (a) accept and express the inner core or self (b) imply minimal presence of ill health, neurosis, psychosis, of loss or diminution of the basic human and personal capacities and (c) are motivated by some values which they grope for, and to which they are loyal (Maslow, 1968:197; Maslow, 1971:291). It is, according to Maslow, the striving for health, the search for identity and autonomy, and the yearning for excellence. It is the need for the development of the essential human nature; a pressure toward a unified personality, toward identity and full individuality (Maslow, 1970a); the need for the attainment of full humanness (Maslow, 1971).

Like self-actualisation, 'spirituality' in the workplace spirituality literature has also been described in many ways. Maslow's expressions on spiritual life, spiritual technologies, transcenders, self-actualisers, sacred in the ordinary, cosmic consciousness and peak experiences are concepts and expressions that have also found their way to a substantial extent into the characterisation of this 'spirituality' in the contemporary spirituality at work literature (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Maslow claims that spiritual life is a defining characteristic of human nature. He notes, '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' (1971:316). The spiritual life is well within the jurisdiction of human thought. It is attainable in principle by the individual's own efforts. Therefore, in common with the self-growth view of spirituality, Maslow's understanding of human nature is one of potentialities. His contribution is summed up by Fuller:

> The empirical fact, according to Maslow, is that human life is beyond itself to the cosmos. Except in sickness, no opposition, gap, or difference is found to exist between ego and world (1979, p. 117). 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.
>
> (1994:179)

Although a handful of workplace spirituality researchers have commented on the striking similarities between the experiences of workplace spirituality and self-actualisation (Barret, 2003 and 1998; Korac-Kakabadse et al., 2002; Fornaciari and Dean, 2002; Burack,

1999), to the best of my knowledge, none comment on the central and common theme of the human need to connect in both Maslow's work and workplace spirituality literature. Describing the effect of self-actualisation in terms of 'Nirvana', Maslow (1968) notes that the achievement of self-actualisation makes the transcendence of self more possible. He identifies unity and wholeness as a metaneed of human beings. Failure to achieve this need will lead to a metapathologoy—disintegration (1971). Thus in Maslow's psychology, it is easier for a person to 'merge himself as a part in a larger whole than himself' which he calls 'union downward from union upward' (1971:212). This merging or connecting one's self with a larger more powerful and ultimate source of power is a central concept in the extant workplace spirituality literature as well (refer to Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Interfaith studies of spirituality that have been conducted in diverse cultures, on various participants and in different fields – such as health care (e.g. Burkhart, 2001), neurotheology (e.g. Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause (2001), theology (e.g. Rose, 2001) and psychology (e.g. Piedmont and Leach, 2002) – have also found that connection is a common and central concept in the conceptualisation of spirituality.

Thus researchers could conduct studies to gain a fresh understanding on workplace spirituality by exploring the extent to which Maslow's self-actualisation informs the area of workplace spirituality. To the best of my knowledge, theoretical and empirical examination of this overlap by workplace spirituality researchers is yet to be undertaken. However, few researchers from the field of psychology have studied the connection between self-actualisation and spirituality. The most noteworthy account suggesting a relationship between self-actualisation and spirituality is Benjamin and Looby's (1998) study on counselling. These researchers define the nature of spirituality in the context of Carl Rogers and Maslow's

theories. They claim that it is not difficult to conclude that a spiritually transformed individual bears the stamp of self-actualisation.

However, Dehoff's (1998) psychological study found that models for psychological growth could not be superimposed onto spiritual growth because of some significant differences in the way in which self-awareness, spirit and self-transcendence are defined and used by psychology and theology. She concludes that psychotherapy and spiritual direction make unique contributions to human growth and need not be perceived as being either synonymous or competitive. However, according to her, there is a point at which psyche and spirit, psychotherapy and spiritual direction actually meet. Namely, the place of healing. Another study from psychology surveyed 30 Hindu subjects to explore the concept of an ultimate aim in life (Rangaswami, 1994). He found that self-actualisation and transcendence are considered the highest level in the hierarchy of motives among his Indian subjects. Beyond self-actualisation and transcendence, Rangaswami (1994) argued that spiritual pursuit and union with the universal Self are considered the ultimate aims of life.

Based on the central and common human need to connect during experiences of workplace spirituality and self-actualisation, in this paper, I propose a Self-actualising Spirituality Model, and examine its implications on the theory and practice of workplace spirituality.

THE NEED FOR A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE AND ITS CHALLENGES

Despite the phenomenal growth of workplace spirituality within the management discipline, and claims that greater pluralism is a feature of the postmodern spirituality (Gibbons, 2000a, 2000b), the practice of workplace spirituality in the non-Christian and non-Western settings remains unaddressed. All major workplace spirituality models have been developed in the U.S.A. and most of the few empirical studies testing these theories have also

been conducted in the U.S.A., essentially on American organisations (Joseph, 2002). A common problem faced by international researchers is the need to apply theories developed in one country in other countries (Singhapakdi et al., 2000). It is possible that available workplace spirituality theories therefore, could be too oriented toward the American business context. Not focusing more on the workplace spirituality processes of managers from non-U.S.A. cultures may result in an incomplete understanding of workplace spirituality. This highlights a lack of cultural pluralism in the field. By adopting a cross-cultural research design, this study attempts to throw light on the experience of workplace spirituality. The selected non-Western research setting is Sri Lanka. The participants of this study were some of the most influential Sri Lankan entrepreneurs.

For the purposes of this study, I defined an entrepreneur as being someone who had either started or owned a business venture or had been a board director for at least fifteen years in a Sri Lankan business organisation (refer to Table 3). Due to Maslow's own observations on the cross-cultural applications of his theory and recent Asian studies supporting Maslow's self-actualisation findings (Rangaswami, 1994; Chang and Page, 1991), it is likely that self-actualisation is relevant in the Sri Lankan context as well.

In an unpublished paper, Maslow notes 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' (cited in Hoffman, 1988: 243). He was concerned that the theory of self-actualisation might not apply to relatively poorer countries like Mexico, where only few people can find self-fulfilment through their livelihood. He also considered countries like Czarist Russia, Batista's Cuba and Duvalier's Haiti and concluded that people in these social systems could in the least, partially express one's highest qualities by transcending the existing social order. Maslow claims:

> The value-life (spiritual, religious, philosophical, axiological, etc.) is an aspect of human biology and is on the same continuum with the 'lower' animal life (rather than being in separated, dichotomised, or mutually exclusive realms). It is probably therefore species-wide, supracultural even though it must be actualized by culture in order to exist.
>
> (1971:315)

More recently, Chang and Page (1991) claim that theories of self-actualisation of Rogers and Maslow indicate universality in human experience. They compare the Chinese Taoist and Zen Buddhist view of the development of human potential with that of Rogers and Maslow's. They conclude that a cross-cultural comparison of views on developing human potential may provide a broader perspective than an isolated consideration of either Western or Eastern disciplines. It can also be argued that although Maslow's theories originated in the Western world, it is nurtured by Eastern psychology such, as the notion of 'Nirvana'. Kao and Sinha (1997) even claim that most Western theories have roots set in Eastern philosophy.

For reasons of convenience, I have adopted a country-based definition of culture (Lenartowicz and Roth, 1999:781). In this study, the thirteen participants characterise several key attributes. First, they represent Sri Lanka as an Eastern culture. They were born, raised and mostly educated in Sri Lanka and their primary business, family and social networks are in Sri Lanka. Second, they are selected from the four major religions practised in Sri Lanka; Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Except for one, all of the participants were born into their religions. Finally, all thirteen participants were selected on the basis that they are spiritually motivated, i.e. they have publicly acknowledged their spiritually motivated approach to heading business organisations and were identified as such by others in their community.

The implications and challenges of cross-cultural studies are well documented (Hofstede, 1998; Morris, Leung, Ames and Lickel, 1999; White, 2002; Schaffer and Riordan, 2000; Niles, 1999; Kao and Sinha, 1997). In the study of organisations, Morris et al. (1999)

observe that the emic and etic are long-standing approaches to understanding the role of culture. Whilst the emic approach is related to the inside perspective of ethnographers who strive to describe a particular culture on its own terms, the outside perspective of comparativist researchers – the etic approach – attempts to describe differences across cultures in terms of a general, external standard.

Hofstede has suggested that 'Emic-etic approaches are complementary' (1998:19). He notes that the first without the second is stuck in case studies that cannot be generalised and the second, without the first, in abstractions that cannot be related to real life. Therefore, in practice, 'the discipline is caught in a Catch 22 situation' (Fontaine and Richardson, 2003:76). To overcome this situation, Hofstede (1998) suggests that the method chosen should reflect the problem investigated.

In this study, I use both emic and etic approaches. Since I am explaining a phenomenon at the individual level, the former is used at the fieldwork level, where I assign importance for understanding the participant's viewpoints, meaning and interpretations concerning the enactment of workplace spirituality. This is exemplified by the approach I took to select the 'spiritual' entrepreneur participants based on the natives' perceptions. The bulk of emic research on interpreting action involves qualitative data from ethnographic observation and study of texts.

The strength of this emic approach was in the wealth of detail conveyed in thick description (Geertz, 1983). The researcher aims to understand the culture on its own terms, rather than through imposition of prior theories. As cautioned by Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike (1973), I endeavoured not to lose the emic or the meaning of the indigenous culture as practised and understood by their members by imposing an etic or outsider's view. For example, before ascertaining how participants enacted their spirituality at work, I asked

the question 'What do you mean by Spirituality?' – allowing for the meanings held by the

indigenous culture to emerge. This enabled the discovery of novel features unique to the Sri

Lankan culture.

At collective levels of analysis, my approach became increasingly etic-based. For

example, when I compare and contrast the outsider Western view with the findings of this

study. Therefore, based on the stage of the research, I changed the approach from the emic to

the etic. By adopting such a complementary framework, I avoided limitations inherent in

purely etic or emic approaches, and attempted to incorporate insights from both traditions.

My analysis did not stop at identifying similarities and differences. As pointed out by White:

> The bulk of the comparative research in Asian contexts – at all levels of analysis
> – also reveals a fundamental weakness related to explanation. Comparisons
> have been largely limited…. Nearly all of the research questions are subsumed
> under "*What* are the differences in antecedents, manifestations and/or
> performance among these actors?" Few studies have compared the processes
> given rise to or linking antecedents, manifestations or performance; i.e., "*How*
> did these differences arise?" or "*How* do antecedents give rise to manifestations,
> or manifestations to performance?" [Emphasis in original] (2002:291)

Accordingly, after comparing the findings with the Western spirituality at work

literature and identifying similarities and differences, I also examine the likely reasons for

these.

METHODS

Influenced by the grounded theory framework, individual case studies of entrepreneur

leaders were used as the primary means of gathering and analysis of data. I also used

secondary sources to compare and contrast individual case studies. It was envisaged that this

individual and cross-case analysis and the subsequent triangulation process should generate a

more reliable understanding of self-actualisation and spirituality at work. The primary

method of data collection was through in-depth face-to-face interviews. The method of

participant selection was purposive because I wanted to learn about spirituality at work from typical cases: entrepreneur leaders who were known to practice spirituality at work (Patton, 1980:107). Several tactics were available to ensure the quality of data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994:263), the key here is to link the three levels of understanding of the meanings and interpretations of the participants, my interpretation of those meanings and the confirmatory theory-connected operations. Triangulation was a key tactic used to ensure the quality of the data. To ensure the accuracy of data, I used diverse sources of data (data triangulation), and multiple methods (methodological triangulation) (Seale, 2000).

In terms of data triangulation, to strengthen and verify the use of the interview data, additional information was sought through the review of relevant company and public documents. Organisational documents included annual reports, photographs, newspaper cuttings, certificates, and web sites. Public documents included media reports (since 1970) of participants and their organisations held in the archives of leading Sri Lankan media organisations. These reports played a critical role in substantiating the accuracy of data.

To ensure a good level of data quality, the participants' moods, hesitancies, and expressions were also observed and recorded. Given the nature of the topic, it was felt these could help to assess the sincerity of their accounts.

FINDINGS

During the interviews, all the participants in a central and important way, referred to a 'connection' with a transcendent Reality, God or Truth (refer to Figure 1). The terms 'external' and 'internal' denote a perception of location of the object or source with which the connection is made. This object or source was variously described as God, the divine, deity, reality, truth or entity. For convenience, I use 'the Ultimate' to represent all these sources or objects.

Insert Figure 1 about here

An 'external connection' means a connection with an Ultimate perceived to reside outside the boundaries of the individual organism and the 'internal connection' means a connection with an Ultimate perceived to reside within the individual. This Ultimate source was identified as more powerful, better and good. Through this connection with the Ultimate, participants searched for inspiration, solace, protection and guidance. The experience of connecting with the Ultimate gave them an increased sense of inner well-being. Religious practices appeared the most commonly used mode to experience this connection. While a few of the participants turned inwards to connect with their self to experience inspiration, solace, protection, and guidance, the majority of the participants connected with an external source.

Identifying the perceived location of the Ultimate power seems critical to determining why participants describe connection either with an internal and/or external source. While some individuals in the study needed the help of a religion, astrology and other forms of belief systems to connect with their selves, others can connect without the help of these. To them, religion, astrology and other beliefs are media that guide the individual towards making this connection either internally or externally.

Practising Values

To experience the connection with a source that is more powerful, better and good – the Ultimate, participants practised certain value-based activities. By 'values', what I mean here are the principles or standards of a person or the personal judgement of what is valuable and important in life. I am of the view that these values can be based on several major sources. One could be values instilled by religious faith. A majority of the participants experienced this connection by practising values that originated from their religious faith.

Participants who experienced a connection with an internal source such as self, practised values originating from non-religious sources, such as teachers and family.

Accommodating Others

Enacting spirituality at work through a connection with the Ultimate generated certain common activities concerning others' welfare. Various religious beliefs played a major role in determining the type of activity. For example, the Buddhists believed in conducting alms giving ceremonies at work to reduce the negative effects of their *kamma*. Charity and philanthropical work was common among participants from all faiths.

When participants fulfilled the need to connect with the Ultimate, they related the feeling in terms of a sense of inspiration, solace, protection and guidance. By experiencing this connection, participants were able to make meaning of the uncertainty and mystery of life. They were, in other words, able to identify their life with a purpose – a higher purpose.

In this paper, my focus is on those participants who made a connection internally – with one's self – to experience workplace spirituality. They rejected any role for religion in the management of their organisations and instead enacted workplace spirituality through the realisation of self. Self-reflection was important to these participants. Many of these participants echoed one participant's explanation of the outcome of experiencing spirituality. He said: 'I become I', meaning a union with self, and becoming of self.

DISCUSSION

Maslow described this union as a process of merging. According to him, the merging of the 'is' and the 'ought' is a merging of the subject and an object, involving no loss of subjectivity but what seems its infinite extension (1971:xviii). After merging, the individual is in perfect harmony with one's inner-self, in touch with 'the ought' and experiences oneness. From a humanistic perspective, the need to connect or relate to 'something bigger

and better' (the 'oughtness') appears to originate from a single source, the self. When we are in perfect harmony with this 'oughtness', the subject of self becomes the object – the world (Berdyaev, 1939). Maslow (1954) labelled this stage as the self-actualisation process. Therefore, spirituality and self-actualisation both describe a process. A process that leads to an increased inner well-being. Both processes make a connection with something bigger and better. The similarities between self-actualisation and spirituality seem to arise from the common notion of this duality and the process of connecting.

When examining this notion of merging of the 'is' and the 'ought', the philosophy literature dealing with the concept of self is both relevant and illuminating. In particular, most influential to this analysis is the self described by Chardin, Kierkegaard, Hegel, James and Jung. When spirituality is viewed from a realist perspective, philosophers such as Teilhard de Chardin (1965) recognise spirituality as a characteristic of being human (Burkhart, 2001). Realism is a belief that there are real entities in the world, and the basis of the truth of those entities lies within the entities themselves. Reminiscent of Chardin (1965), Maslow (1971) also views spirituality as a defining characteristic – or essence – of being human. For example, humans can contemplate and discuss what is the meaning of life by asking, 'Why am I here?' 'What purposes do life or my actions serve?' This ability to search for meaning and purpose in life is one view of spirituality: the realist perspective – where humans are viewed as physical beings having a spiritual characteristic.

The experience of spirituality could also be viewed from an existential perspective. It has its philosophical foundations in the work of René Descartes and Søren Kierkegaard (Levin, 1992). Since for many workplace spirituality researchers, spirituality is a unifying, transcending and a connecting experience, it implies at least two entities to experience a connectedness and an element/process which connects the two. Descartes introduced the

notion of a mind – body dualism that humans consist of two coexisting substances: a thinking

substance housed within a physical body. Kierkegaard expanded on this view, but further

differentiated the mind into a psyche and spirit. The psyche includes psychological

manifestations that affect behaviour (Levin, 1992). Kierkegaard held that there is another

dimension called the spirit that relates the mind to the body. The fact that humans can self-

reflect implies there is something that is doing the reflecting (the thinking mind) and

something that is being reflected on (the physical world). There is an 'inbetweenness'

between the two which is the spirit (Burkhart, 2001). According to this view, one

characteristic of the spirit is that it is a relation between the mind and body. Thus spirituality

could be the process of connecting the mind with the body by the medium of spirit.

Based on the discussion so far on the internal based experience of spirituality with the

self, I propose a self-actualising spirituality model (refer to Figure 2). The primary activity

involved in growing, becoming and evolving towards this ideal self, is driven by the need to

relate to self which is self-reflecting or contemplating. This process of connection with the

internal self can result in activities which can be broadly categorised as accommodating

others and practising values.

Insert Figure 2 about here

 Performing these activities should give the individual a sense of evolvement and

becoming. This sense is a result of doing the 'right' thing – right in relation to an awareness

that one's action will take him or her closer to the ideal, experiencing the Ultimate. Maslow

(1954), identified this sense of evolvement and becoming as a key component of the self-

actualisation process and has been variously termed in the workplace spirituality discourse as

feeling one with the universe, a deep feeling of interconnectedness, oneness and aligning with

a God's will. The outcome of this experience is where the self is realised (I become I), a

perfect harmony with one's self (in touch with 'the ought') is experienced. As Maslow aptly notes, 'our subjects are simultaneously very spiritual and very pagan and sensual' (Maslow, 1954: 233). At this moment of subject meeting the object, the outcome felt is described in the contemporary spirituality at work literature as awe-inspiring, peak experience, sacred in the ordinary, wonder, joy, a sense of inner well-being, inner peace and many of the expressions describing outcomes of spirituality. The experience of the former, the awareness of the process of getting there by 'right' action, should be distinguished from the latter, the outcome of getting there. Maslow (1954, 1968, 1971) distinguishes these through an analogy: the difference in a traveller's awareness during the process of travelling to reach the destination, and the experience of satisfaction and sense of achievement of reaching the destination.

This type of a self-actualising spirituality can be therefore identified as a highly subjective process but also as a state to be attained. A process, in that it generates an awareness of the existence of the 'is' and the 'ought', the gap between the two and the need to engage in right action to reduce this gap. This process ensures individuals to be in touch with their self. Self-actualising spirituality can then be defined *as a quality that generates an awareness ('is'), which drives individuals to certain right actions that lead them towards reaching their ideal self, the Ultimate ('oughtness').*

CROSS-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

This study was guided by the empirically unexplored overlap between Maslow's self-actualisation and the contemporary meaning of experiencing workplace spirituality. The findings confirm the conceptual views of this overlap. These suggest that when experience spirituality, the need to connect – a critical and established construct in workplace spirituality and self-actualisation – can be used to understand and practise workplace spirituality in

organisations through a self-actualising perspective. Of what significance and relevance are these findings to Western management theory, research, and practice?

The differences between Eastern and Western worldviews have been well documented (Morden, 1999; Hofstede, 1980; Fukuyama, 1995; Chen, 1995). The Sri Lankan business culture represents some unique characteristics that distinguish it from the highly individualistic North American culture (Carson, 1996; Wijewardene and Wimalasiri, 1996). Carson (1996) hints at a touch of individualism within the Sri Lankan business community, but also noted a strong sense of group and family loyalty. Sri Lanka has been identified as a collectivist culture (ibid). These cultures indicate the relative closeness of the relationship between one person and others (Morden, 1999; Triandis and Suh, 2002). This raises fundamental issues about individual motivation (and the management thereof) within organisations and society as a whole.

Many participants in the present study searched for a sense of inspiration, security, solace, and guidance through religious expression at work. The Sri Lankan collectivist culture portrays a high need for affiliation (Carter, 1979; Ranasinghe, 1996). This need, coupled with the high level of religiosity in the country, is in keeping with the fact that the majority of the participants in the present study were found to search for a source for inspiration, solace, and guidance. Wijewardene and Wimalasiri (1996) have argued that it took a long time for Asian managers to learn the meaning of such Western concepts as 'ambition', 'aggression', 'achievement', 'profit-maximisation', 'competition', 'risk-taking', and 'forcefulness'. Asian businesspeople were more comfortable with such values as 'loyalty', 'trust', 'co-operation', 'compassion', 'tolerance', 'morality', and 'empathy'. Wijewardene and Wimalasiri (1996) claimed that, during the initial stages of management development in Asia, managers faced a difficult task in balancing the 'hard' values of the West with the 'soft' values of the East.

However, more recently, Western influence on the Sri Lankan management style has been significant (Wijewardene and Wimalasiri, 1996). According to these researchers, about forty years ago, universities, colleges, and other organisations started offering management courses based on Western textbooks, techniques, and concepts. In addition, most of the foreign experts who have been involved in numerous technical-assistance projects in Sri Lanka have also propagated Western concepts through their management training programs. Some Sri Lankans have also pursued postgraduate management education in American and European universities. American and European management theory and practice has thus had an enormous influence on the management practices of modern Sri Lankan organisations.

Due to this significant Westernisation of management practice in Sri Lanka, its practice in Sri Lankan organisations is unlikely to differ markedly from that in Western organisations. However, there remain significant cultural and political differences between Sri Lanka and Western nations, and the generalisability of the present findings to other cultural and political settings is therefore uncertain. One particular consideration is the difference in legislative frameworks between Sri Lanka and Western countries. In the present study, the importance of religious discrimination did not come to the fore as much as it might have done in a study conducted in the West. The inactive role of the Sri Lankan legislature in preventing religious discrimination is probably a result of the historical relationship between religion and the Sri Lankan state—especially the constitutional guarantee of a favoured place for Buddhism. However, in Western countries, the legality of enacting workplace spirituality a religion-based spirituality in organisations could be a more contentious issue. For example, under the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, organisations in America are required to accommodate their employees' religious practices, as long as such practices do not interfere with their work. Leland (2004) in *The New York Times* has reported that, with the recent

explosion of prayer and Bible-study groups in American workplaces, the number of

complaints of religious discrimination has also increased. Charges of religious discrimination

filed with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rose to 2532 in 2003 from

1564 in 1996. Despite these limitations, the present study has significant implications for

workplace spirituality theory and practice.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study, conducted in a non-Western culture, has shown that experiencing

spirituality in organisations can be explained through a self-actualising perspective. This has

several practical implications to organisations in the West. Whilst recognising the

considerable positive potential for acknowledging spirituality in the workplace, concerns

remain about possible misapplications of workplace spiritual practices that need to be

carefully considered. For example, *Business Week* (Conlin, 1999) warns of potential conflicts

in American organisations due to widespread accommodation of workplace spirituality. On

the one side, there are

> …evangelical Christians, some of whom want workplace spirituality to focus
> on a conservative message about Jesus Christ and who think the new age
> spirituality efforts are demonic. On the other are those who fear the movement
> is a conspiracy to proselytize everyone into thinking alike. Somewhere in
> between are the skeptics who think it's yet another one of management's fads,
> exploiting people's faith to make another dollar. (Para. 2 in section titled
> 'Stealth Bombers')

Many of these conflicts seem to arise due to the problematic issue of accommodating

diverse religion based spiritualities in the workplace. It is argued that religion will not work

in most workplaces. Religion is seen as dividing people through dogma and its emphasis on

formal structure. 'It is viewed as intolerant, closed-minded, and excluding all those who do

not believe in a particular point of view' (Mitroff, 2003:375). The findings of the present

study demonstrate that accommodating self-actualising spirituality in the workplace is an

appropriate and effective response to the contentious issues concerning the accommodation of religion-based workplace spirituality.

The findings appear to indicate that self-actualising workplace spirituality can be experienced exclusive of religious theory and practice. However, in the Western workplace spirituality literature, the relationship between the spirituality and religion is a complex one and arguments against the practice of religion based workplace spirituality are largely due to the confusion surrounding the distinction between religion and spirituality.

Some contributors directly link religion to workplace spirituality. This seems likely when viewed from an internal – experiential – perspective of religion. Others who consider both internal and external aspects of religion, view religion and spirituality as separate but connected in some way. This view seems likely when spirituality is perceived as being separate from the external form of religion but yet connected through the intrinsic form. Other contributions to workplace spirituality see no relationship between religion and spirituality. I share the view that spiritual concerns are separate from the concerns of any religious group and are not synonymous with those of religion (Fry, 2003). If religion constitutes the internal (experience) and the external (the rituals and rules), when religion and spirituality are viewed as directly connected to each other, it seems to suggest that spirituality corresponds to the internal aspects of religion, and hence the direct relationship.

According to Geertz (1973), a religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. The internal aspects of religion – elements two, three, four and five – help to connect with the

Ultimate; an experience which engulfs the total person, transporting them, so far as they are concerned, into another mode of existence (Geertz, 1973).

I propose that various types of spiritualities identified in the workplace spirituality discourse are linked to some degree to what is presently understood as religion. A self-actualising spirituality projects only the internal aspects of religion. It denies any significance to the external aspects of religion, and as a result, overcomes the contentious issues on accommodating diverse religious expressions at work. However in terms of Geertz's (1973) definition of religion, it falls short of a 'full' religion based spirituality in that it fails to provide those individuals who search to clothe the conceptions of a general order of things with such an aura of factuality that it helps to move the believers beyond the realties of everyday life to wider realities. Thus self-actualising workplace spirituality runs the risk of being identified as a pseudo spiritual practice by the traditional religion-based proponents of workplace spirituality. Evidence suggests that spirituality is as varied as persons and organisations are, and that attempts to exploit a spiritual dimension for productive purposes will ultimately prove ineffective (see Gibbons, 2000b). There are serious concerns both within the academic world and elsewhere in organisations that managers embrace a spiritual approach to exploit their members without any resulting personal spiritual awareness or commitment (Joseph, 2002). For example, some argue of workplace spirituality being practised simply as another tool or aspect of best practice and a way of enhancing employee performance, potentially exploitatively (Joseph, 2002). These pseudo practices can lead to the trivialisation of spirituality to the point where there is little recognition of its real meaning. However, my definition of spirituality enumerated earlier includes a transcendent Ultimate, and in my opinion, anything less than that could be identified as merely another management best practice or technique. I stand behind Joseph in supporting his claim that 'organisational

members using such approaches without demonstrating personal spiritual conviction and commitment would, sooner rather than later, be recognised as cynically manipulative and as a consequence, any transformational initiative so based is unlikely to be embraced or sustained by staff within their organisations' (2002:210-211).

This study raises important questions for future research on workplace spirituality in organisations. Researchers could conduct a similar study to assess the generalisability of the self-actualising spirituality model in organisations in the West. Future research could also verify the findings of this study from the perspectives of various stakeholders—such as non-executive employees, shareholders, customers, and suppliers.

Many of the issues concerning the cognitive and affective behaviour of organisational members' experience of workplace spirituality could be explored through cross-disciplinary research. For example, researchers could focus on the findings of neurotheology—the neurobiological study of religion and spirituality. In this relatively new field, several groundbreaking studies have offered explanations of how people experience religion and spirituality (e.g. Newberg, D'Aquili, and Rause, 2001). To the best of the present author's knowledge, theoretical or empirical contributions in workplace spirituality and self-actualisation have not considered the implications of these neurotheological developments.

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TABLE 1
Similarities between Maslow's Work and Workplace Spirituality Literature

Key elements from descriptions on 'spirituality' in the current workplace spirituality literature	Key elements from Maslow's work (from 1954, 1968, 1970 and 1971)
A dimension of human beings; the intangible essence, deepest part of ourselves (Joseph, 2002)	Spiritual life as a basic component of our biological life. The transcendent or transhuman or godlike is no longer dead, but alive within human beings.
The sacredness of everything, the ordinariness of everyday life. (Mitroff and Denton, 1999)	Sacralize life, religionize life.
Nondenominational, broadly inclusive, embracing everyone. (Mitroff and Denton, 1999)	The religious or spiritual values are not the exclusive property of any one religion or group.
Ability to see the sacred in the ordinary, to feel the poignancy in life, to know the passion of existence (Elkins, 1999)	Everything is miraculous. All kinds of serious people are found to be capable of discovering the sacred anywhere and everywhere in life.
A faith relationship with the Transcendent which is defined as 'beyond and independent of the material universe' (Beazley, 1998)	Identify with the cosmos and belong to it by right (cosmic consciousness); let the cosmos, from which they are no longer different, decide and the current take them.
Spiritual union with everything (Sperry, 1997). The deep feeling of the interconnectedness of everything (Bradbery and Davies, 1999)	It makes it easier for the person to be homonous (i.e., to merge himself as a part in a larger whole than himself). A low Nirvana from a high Nirvana, union downward from union upward.
A universal, innate, integrative energy force, with transcendent potential, that seeks to establish and maintain relational connections with existential and/or metaphysical realms (Goddard, 1995)	Identify with the cosmos and belong to it by right (cosmic consciousness). Humans have an absolute need for something bigger and higher than themselves, God means pure cosmic beauty, truth and goodness. A god that we can properly be in awe of, identify with, and serve. God, is getting reborn, redefined.
Extraordinary performance (Levine, 1994)	Go beyond the basic needs and love the ultimate good things, excellence, perfection, the good job.
Wonder, play, ignorance, spontaneity, joy, imagination, celebration, discernment, insight and creativity (Mason and Welsh, 1994). Beauty (Khanna and Srinivas, 2000)	Transcenders are those who transcend, who live more at the level of being, who are meta-motivated, who are more inclined to have had peak experiences, which are experiences of ecstasy, rapture, bliss, the greatest joy, awe, mystery, humility, surrender and the happiest moments in life.

TABLE 2
**Describing Spirituality - The Primacy of Connection in the Workplace Spirituality
Literature**

Author	Connection
Joseph, 2002	Extending beyond the mind, body and emotions
Mitroff and Denton, 1999	Interconnectedness
Bradbery and Davies, 1999	Interconnectedness
Beazley, 1998	Faith relationship
Sperry, 1997	Spiritual union
Goddard, 1995	Relational connections
Wheat, 1991	Connection

TABLE 3
Participants by Occupation

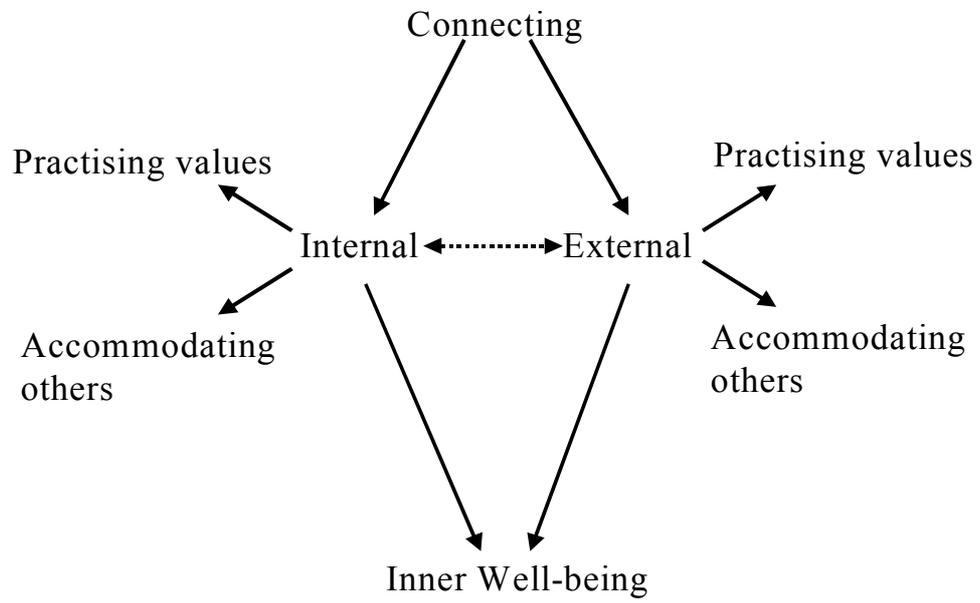| Occupation	Number
Founder Chairpersons	3
Chairperson	1
Founder Managing Director	3
Founder Director/Managing Director	1
Founder Director	2
Ex-Managing Director	1
Managing Director (family-owned)	1
Director (family-owned)	1
Total	**13**

FIGURE 1
Two Ways of Enacting Workplace Spirituality

FIGURE 2
Self-actualising Spirituality Model

Need	Activity	Goal

	Cognitive	**Experiencing the**
	Self-reflection	**Ultimate**
	Behavioural	Realising self
Innate need to	Practising	
relate to self	values	Self-unification
	Accommodating	Experiencing the
	others	oughtness

Self-actualisation
Evolving   Becoming   Growing