

Chapter 3

Spirituality and Religion: Seeking a Juxtaposition That Supports Research in the Field of Faith and Spirituality at Work

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Abstract The relationship between the concepts of spirituality and religion remains unclear in the field of faith and spirituality at work. If the field is to mature, more clarity must be attained. This chapter examines the faith and spirituality at work literature to date, drawing out a number of possible juxtapositions of the two terms. It then offers six propositions to identify the underlying issues of the debate and to help guide future research in the field.

Introduction

The relationship between the concepts of spirituality and religion remains unclear in the field of faith and spirituality at work. Hill et al. (2000) conducted an extensive examination of the diversity of perspectives on those two terms and found little systematic conceptualization of the relationship between religion and spirituality. Development of conceptual boundaries between spirituality and religion is a necessary step required before the field of faith and spirituality at work can move forward (Dent et al. 2005). More recently, in their overview of the state of research on spirituality and religion in the workplace, Benefiel and Fry (2011) identified the distinction between spirituality and religion as a central issue facing the field as it moves forward. Thus the field, if it is to mature, needs both conceptual clarity on the two terms and a working understanding of the relationship between the two.

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The need for clarity on the relationship between spirituality and religion in the workplace is visible in the literature. Prior works on spirituality and religion in the workplace have imagined a number of juxtapositions including mutually exclusive, overlapping, synonymous, religion nested within spirituality, spirituality nested within religion, and contextually determined. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how prior works have juxtaposed spirituality and religion in the workplace and propose an understanding of the relationship between spirituality and religion that will allow for the most productive research moving forward. This will be accomplished by examining each of the possible juxtapositions, then reviewing the important factors to be considered by the field when considering the relationship between these concepts.

Mutually Exclusive

Cavanaugh (1999), in a seminal article, argued that religious claims that a specific religion provides an exclusive path to God and salvation exclude those not involved in that religion and are thus inappropriate in the workplace. Mitroff and Denton (1999) followed the same line of reasoning and went on to claim that spirituality unites the workplace, while religion divides it. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003), following Mitroff and Denton, argued that placing religion into the consideration of workplace spirituality has the potential to be divisive since it can promote zealotry.

Underlying these arguments in favor of spirituality and against religion in the workplace is the belief that the two can be cleanly separated. In essence, this perspective sees spirituality as something that can be embraced by the workplace to the exclusion of religion. The term “workplace spirituality” is used by many authors, suggesting that questions of spirituality have a unique expression at work, wholly separate from any religious connotation. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) noted that spirituality at work borrows from religious imagery but is distinct from religion nonetheless since it does not seek to advance one particular belief system. Duchon and Plowman (2005) defined workplace spirituality as “a particular kind of psychological climate in which people view themselves as having an inner life that is nourished by meaningful work and takes place in the context of a community” (p. 816). We can see in this definition the conceptualization of spirituality as a distinct construct operating in the workplace, separate from any particular religious expression.

Overlapping

Other authors have argued against the imposition of a distinction between spirituality and religion, calling it a relatively recent phenomenon (Hicks 2003; King 2008; Miller 2007; DeJongh 2011). Hicks agreed with spirituality in the workplace advocates who claimed that employees should not be asked to park their souls at the door, recognizing that employees bring their whole selves to work. At the same time, he

argued that efforts to decouple spirituality and religion in the workplace were naïve and ineffective:

[T]he mantra “spirituality unites, but religion divides” is much more problematic than scholars or proponents of spiritual leadership would have us believe. . . [T]he corresponding definitions of spirituality are too broad to be coherent and the frequent emphasis on the potential of spirituality to create unity or common ground in the workplace overlooks difficult issues. (Hicks 2003, p. 48)

Hicks contends that scholars have invoked the religion/spirituality dichotomy as a way to use definitions to relieve the difficulty of beliefs that may be controversial, rendering them irrelevant because they are “religious” in nature (Hicks 2002). Hicks proposed an alternative way to integrate spirituality, religion, and work: “Respectful pluralism.” Hicks claimed that effective leaders should create an environment for employees to express their own religion and to respect others’ religions.

DeJongh (2011) roots spirituality primarily in religious traditions and thus sees religion and spirituality as interconnected and overlapping. At the same time, he argues that “individualized spiritualities,” i.e., spiritualities residing outside religious traditions, also deserve respect and attention in the study of spirituality in the workplace.

Removing religion from research on spirituality in the workplace is problematic, according to King, given the significant portion of the US employee population for whom religion is important, and given the fact that religion is afforded specific legal protection (King 2008).

Synonymous

For some authors, the distinction between spirituality and religion has been one to avoid. Mohamed et al. (2001) argued that there is no significant distinction between spirituality and religion, despite the differences in how people perceive the two terms. Cash and Gray (2000) examined this question through the lens of managers deciding whether to provide accommodation for religious beliefs. They concluded that it made no sense to use different standards in considering religious belief versus nonreligious beliefs. Instead, they concluded that all sincerely held beliefs, whether religious or not, should be accommodated as religious beliefs. Others have pointed out the disparity in treating Christianity as inappropriate for the workplace because of its perception as a religion while advancing Eastern thinking such as Zen or Taoism as philosophies or values (Krahnke and Hoffman 2002).

Religion as a Subset of Spirituality

Some researchers have made the case that religion is a subset of the larger category of spirituality or nested within it. This perspective sees religion as a particular expression of the larger phenomenon of spirituality. Fry (2003) argued that spirituality is necessary for religion, but religion is not necessary for spirituality. Similarly,

Dent et al. (2005) observed, “theory development should recognize that any form of spirituality also includes practices and beliefs (i.e., a religion) and that the accompanying beliefs are an important, if not more important, element of how someone’s spirituality is manifest in his or her leadership” (p. 642). White (2003) also approached spirituality as the broader construct that encompassed religious expression. Some authors have used this approach to avoid the appearance of promoting one religion. For example, Gotsis and Kortezi (2008) addressed the challenge of defining the two terms by approaching spirituality as an “all encompassing reality” that “transcends individual involvement in a particular religion” (p. 578).

Spirituality as a Subset of Religion

While some authors have seen religion as a subset of spirituality, a few have argued the converse. Lynn et al. (2009) pointed out that in other social sciences, spirituality is seen as a sub-domain of religion. Lynn describes this approach as treating spirituality as “the life inside the cloak of religion” (p. 228). Similarly, Hill et al. (2000) described spirituality as the quest for the sacred, while they described religion as the quest for the sacred plus additional elements. While this approach has not been adopted widely in the field of management, it does represent a possible way of understanding the relationship between spirituality and religion.

Contextually Determined

Others have attempted to demonstrate that definition of these terms may be dependent upon the audience. Zinnbauer et al. (1997) found general support for the idea that “spirituality” references the individual experience with the transcendent, while “religion” refers to institutional theology and rituals. More importantly, they found that the desire to differentiate between the two is less prevalent among those who are highly religious. Those who identified themselves as spiritual but not religious saw less overlap in the terms.

Relevant Considerations

From the review above, it is clear that various researchers have advanced a variety of juxtapositions between spirituality and religion in the workplace. This variety could be seen as the inevitable product of having multiple researchers address the problem. If we see it in this light, then the task of the field is to choose one of the juxtapositions in order to provide uniformity and clarity. However, rather than seeing the variety as a sign of disorder, we propose that various researchers have imagined

the juxtaposition differently in order to meet legitimate needs in their particular context. In other words, the variety of ways religion and spirituality have been understood reflect the diversity of perspectives in researchers and research contexts. Those who have imagined them to be mutually exclusive were responding to a particular need: the risk of proselytizing. Those who imagined them to be synonymous were also responding to a legitimate need: the inherent risk for a manager in promoting spiritual beliefs while excluding individuals' religious beliefs. When the various juxtapositions are understood as the product of legitimate needs and interests, the task of the field changes. No longer should the field be choosing the optimal juxtaposition. Instead, the field must develop an understanding of how spirituality and religion in the workplace are related that allows researchers to investigate these dynamics in the greatest number of contexts, with the greatest clarity. In order to do that, we must look back at the ways prior researchers have understood the relationship between these terms and ask what considerations led to that juxtaposition.

Practical Needs for Differentiation

Those researchers who have sought to avoid the promotion of one religion in the workplace (Cavanaugh 1999; Mitroff and Denton 1999; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003) were raising the very legitimate concern that religion and spirituality in the workplace should not be about one person's understanding of religion. This is of particular concern as researchers seek to advance models of spiritual leadership for practitioners. Models of workplace spirituality aligned with particular religious expression would rightly be rejected by industry. Therefore, any resulting juxtaposition must allow the field to speak of spirituality without speaking about religion.

Proposition 1

The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace must allow the field to speak of spirituality without speaking about religion, when necessary.

Protecting Individual Rights

Another aspect of diversity concerns making space for those who see spirituality and religion as synonymous in their own practice. As King (2008) points out, a significant portion of the population practices some form of religion, and they tend to not see spirituality and religion as separate (Zinnbauer et al. 1997). When conducting research on spirituality in the workplace, it seems contradictory to exclude those whose practice is religious in nature and to do so in the name of preserving their rights. As Hicks (2003) and others have pointed out, the goal should be a workplace with room for spiritual and religious expression by all, not just those who hold a particular belief system. Therefore, any resulting juxtaposition of spirituality and

religion in the workplace should allow for and protect various expressions of spirituality and religion.

Proposition 2

The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace adopted by the field should allow for and protect various expressions of spirituality and religion.

Fostering Cross-Cultural Dialogue

There is an inherent risk to the field in separating spirituality from religion. The risk is that the field will in turn focus its study only on those environments where spirituality and religion can be cleanly separated. In reality, this means that large portions of the world would be excluded from the study. The notion that religion can be excluded from important cultural and civic considerations is consistent with Western notions of separation of church and state, but does not translate well into some cultures. In places such as the Middle East where religious belief is a central tenet of civic and cultural life, studying spirituality at work to the exclusion of religion could be problematic. As a result, any resulting juxtaposition should allow researchers to explore spirituality and religion in a variety of cultural contexts, fostering dialogue between those who see the relationship of work and faith in differing ways.

Proposition 3

The juxtaposition chosen by the field should allow researchers to explore spirituality and religion in a variety of cultural contexts and foster dialogue between those who see the relationship of work and faith in differing ways.

Opening Avenues for Relevant Research

While researchers have a legitimate need for the separation of religion from spirituality, such a separation has another inherent risk. If the field were to focus exclusively on spirituality to the exclusion of religion, it would not be studying workplaces as they currently exist. As Hicks (2003) points out, the notion that the two could be separated is a fairly recent phenomenon. And, as King (2008) notes, a significant portion of the US employee population claim that religion is important to them. So a commitment from researchers to study only spirituality would be a commitment to impose a dichotomy on research subjects that does not otherwise exist in many cases. Such research would tell us less about those we study and more about ourselves as researchers. Instead, the field must find a juxtaposition that opens avenues for relevant research of the workplace while acknowledging the nature of the workplace as it currently exists.

Proposition 4

The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace adopted by the field should open avenues for research in ways that mirror the work world as it currently exists.

Evaluating the Possible Juxtapositions

If we now take the possible juxtapositions of spirituality and religion in the workplace discussed above and hold them up for examination in light of these propositions, we can begin to see the ways in which they meet and fail to meet the stated objectives. Put another way, when we take the criteria implied in each juxtaposition advanced by authors in the field, and apply them across all possible juxtapositions, we can see that most of the juxtapositions meet only some, but not all of the needs. For example, imagining spirituality and religion to be mutually exclusive would meet the need stated in Proposition 1 but would likely fail to meet the need stated in Proposition 2. Table 3.1 attempts to show how each juxtaposition can be evaluated using the propositions. While many of these are clearly matters of judgment, the table is meant to illustrate visually how decisions about the juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace should be made: using criteria drawn from authors and researchers in the field. And more importantly, those criteria should be applied to all possible juxtapositions, not just one.

A Proposed Juxtaposition

Given the discussion above, it appears that viewing spirituality and religion as overlapping constructs best advances the needs of the field (Fig. 3.1). By seeing them as separate domains with some shared content, researchers can study either or both when appropriate. This also addresses the findings of Zinnbauer et al. (1997) that the desire to differentiate between spirituality and religion is less prevalent among those who are highly religious. Seeing them as overlapping categories acknowledges that, for some, they are not separate.

Proposition 5

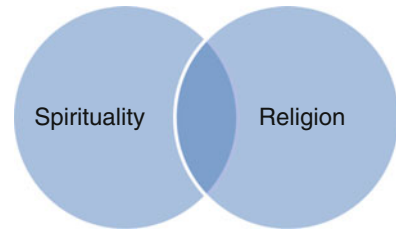
The field of faith and spirituality at work should treat religion and spirituality as distinct but overlapping constructs.

Understanding the relationship of spirituality and religion in this way makes it possible for us to clearly articulate the arenas for future research on spirituality and religion in the workplace. If we overlay the third construct of management on our overlapping fields of spirituality and religion, we see three distinct areas of possible research:

Table 3.1 Evaluating the possible juxtapositions

| | Mutually exclusive | Overlapping | Synonymous | Religion as a subset of spirituality |
|--|--------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Proposition 1:</i> The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace must allow the field to speak of spirituality without speaking about religion, when necessary | Supports | Supports | Does not support | Supports |
| <i>Proposition 2:</i> The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace adopted by the field should allow for and protect various expressions of spirituality and religion | Does not support | Supports | Supports | Supports |
| <i>Proposition 3:</i> The juxtaposition chosen by the field should allow researchers to explore spirituality and religion in a variety of cultural contexts and foster dialogue between those who see the relationship of work and faith in differing ways | Does not support | Supports | Does not support | Does not support |
| <i>Proposition 4:</i> The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace adopted by the field should open avenues for research in ways that mirror the work world as it currently exists | Does not support | Supports | Does not support | Supports |

Fig. 3.1 Spirituality and religion as overlapping constructs



1. The exploration of management and spirituality, as distinct from religion, e.g., examining the effect of mindfulness on ethical decision making
2. The exploration of management and spirituality, as expressed both in and out of religion, e.g., studying how beliefs about forgiveness relate to organizational healing
3. The exploration of management and religion, e.g., studying how doctrinal statements influence managerial decision making among religiously devout managers

Seeing the intersection of management, spirituality and religion in this way makes it possible for researchers to clearly identify whether they are studying spirituality, religion, or both in the workplace. If future researchers were to specify the scope of their research, we believe much of the confusion and tension surrounding the question of spirituality versus religion would be alleviated. For this reason, we propose that future researchers in this field should specify whether they are studying spirituality, religion, or both (Fig. 3.2).

Proposition 6

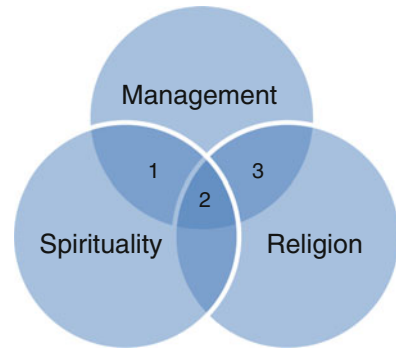
Future researchers should specify whether they are studying spirituality, religion, or both.

Conclusion

As the field of faith and spirituality at work matures, there is a need for more clarity regarding the relationship between religion and spirituality. There are valid concerns, which need to be understood and respected, behind each approach scholars have adopted in past research in the field. There are six propositions outlined in this chapter:

1. The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace must allow the field to speak of spirituality without speaking about religion, when necessary.
2. The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace adopted by the field should allow for and protect various expressions of spirituality and religion.

Fig. 3.2 The intersections of management, spirituality, and religion



3. The juxtaposition chosen by the field should allow researchers to explore spirituality and religion in a variety of cultural contexts and foster dialogue between those who see the relationship of work and faith in differing ways.
4. The juxtaposition of spirituality and religion in the workplace adopted by the field should open avenues for research in ways that mirror the work world as it currently exists.
5. The field of faith and spirituality at work should treat religion and spirituality as distinct but overlapping constructs.
6. Future researchers should specify whether they are studying spirituality, religion, or both. Such clarity would help scholars delve more deeply into the issues underlying the debate.

Furthermore, these propositions can help guide scholars as they seek a way forward in faith and spirituality at work research. As the field of faith and spirituality at work continues to develop, scholars need to continue to move beyond surface debates and delve deeply into the concerns and issues that lie beneath them. It is our hope that these propositions can help in that endeavor.

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