Organisational Spirituality – A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT. The jury remains out about the bottom-line relevance of organisational spirituality. This article reviews the arguments made thus far, using those sources most commonly cited as providing 'evidence' that organisational spirituality adds value to the bottom line. Having collated the evidence, this article offers some observation about the robustness of this existing 'business case'. It then offers some preliminary conclusions on the literature review, examining the merits of pursuing a 'business case' in this field and identifying some specific questions for future research.

KEY WORDS: ethics, meaning, motivation, spirituality, values

Introduction

Organisational spirituality has now become an accepted focus for academic research. Special issues have appeared on the subject in peer-reviewed journals, such as the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* Vol. 12, No. 3 (1999) and Vol. 16, No. 4 (2003), and *The Leadership Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 5 (2005). In 2001, the Academy of Management set up a special interest group for Management Spirituality and Religion, with funding to encourage promising dissertations in the field. However, it is not yet clear whether or not any investment in organisational spirituality adds value to an organisation's bottom line, and this may be a sticking point for the mainstreaming of the subject out of academia and into business, and back again in the form of practical research. Therefore, this article will examine the sources most commonly cited as providing 'evidence' that organisational spirituality adds value to the bottom line, and offer some observation about the robustness of this existing 'business case'. It will then offer some pre-liminary conclusions about the merits of this as an exercise, and identify some specific questions for future research. This article will not address the vexed question of the cleanness of the split between 'spirituality' and 'religion' nor the legal and ethical ramifications of manifesting these at work. This debate has received substantial attention elsewhere (Hicks, 2002; Weaver and Agle, 2002). Neither will this article discuss those country-specific issues which relate more directly to the implementation of spirit at work than to the business case behind it.

In the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*'s special issue on 'The leading edge in research on spirituality and organizations' (2003), Benefiel summarised the main approaches being taken in the field. These were: the quantitative trail, the broad 'why' and 'how' trail, and the deep 'how' and 'why' trail (p. 368f). The quantitative trail is concerned with achieving a quantitative demonstration of how spirituality in the workplace contributes to organisational performance. The broad 'why' and 'how' trail uses qualitative research methods to address why and how spirituality should and could be integrated into organisations. The deep 'how' and 'why' trail uses qualitative research methods to discover how spirituality gets manifested throughout an organisation and the impact a spiritual organisation has on individual and organisational performance. Each of these approaches draws on different resources and research to establish new insights into the phenomenon from their own perspectives. Each is ultimately concerned with demonstrating the correlation and, if possible, causality, between a spirit-friendly workplace and enhanced organisational performance, the business case for organisational spirituality. Since the concept of a business case is itself quantitative, it is unsurprising that the majority of 'evidence' in this field has been produced in pursuit of Benefiel's quantitative trail.

Those sources which better fit Benefiel's qualitative trails therefore tend to represent arguments pertaining to opportunity cost or risk rather than to costed benefit per se – or to argue that spirituality is an obvious 'good' that should not require quantitative justification – although these intangibles might well be susceptible to additional quantification albeit in an approximate way.

Business case arguments

The first part of this article will survey in turn each of the main sources cited, in chronological order, to obtain an impression of the development of the business case over time. Some conclusions on its robustness will then be offered, before its merits as an exercise are debated, and suggestions made for future research in this field. It should be noted that these sources are cited variously within the discipline, where the definitions in use of 'spirituality' vary, and tend to include purpose, values, meaning-making, being good or ethical, connectedness, transcendence, self-actualisation and other-worldly. The question of a definitive definition has been addressed elsewhere (Dent et al., 2005; Kinjerski and Skrypnek, 2004), and the issue of definition and proxies will be considered in the light of the review of key sources.

Motivation through the design of work

In 1976, Hackman and Oldham proposed a model that specified the conditions under which individuals would become internally motivated to perform effectively on their jobs. The model was tested on 658 employees occupying 62 different jobs across 7 organisations, and showed positive causal links between core job dimensions (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback), critical psychological states (experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, knowledge of work results), and personal and work outcomes (high internal work motivation, high quality work performance, high work satisfaction and low absenteeism and turnover). While an individual's motivation will also be affected by their 'growth need strength' (p. 254), the research found that job enrichment does not de-motivate employees with low growth need strength (p. 275).

Of particular relevance to the current exercise was the causal importance of 'experienced meaningfulness of the work' for personal and work outcomes, defined as 'the degree to which the individual experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable and worthwhile' (p. 256).

In search of excellence

While some of their excellent companies have lapsed, Peters and Waterman's (1982) best-seller remains a classic. Later echoed in the findings of Collins and Porras, they found that companies who 'stood for something' outperformed those that did not. The excellent companies they looked at had superordinate goals that motivated employees to believe in the company and to be motivated to further its mission. While they did not use the term 'spirituality' to describe this sense of mission, their study demonstrated how the spiritual concept of contributing to the greater good has been harnessed by successful companies.

Requisite organization

Jaques' 1988 total system for effective managerial organisation and leadership, revised in (1996), popularised the idea of matching work roles to the potential capability of employees, on the grounds that it was a universal truth that people want to work to their full capacity and achieve their potential (p. 14). However, he said that the extent to which they chose to do so would depend on the extent to which their values were aligned with the role, as that would drive their commitment to it and thus their work effort (p. 32). He concluded that companies therefore had a responsibility to match both the capability and the values of an employee to their job role to optimise their performance. His emphasis on values as the key to unlocking potential is consistent with the 'macro' conclusion of Peters and Waterman, reported above, about superordinate goals.

The 'nice' company

Published in (1990), Lloyd's book looked at corporations through an evolutionary lens, and argued

that the companies of the future would not only be described as 'nice', but might also be described as 'imaginative, caring, sensitive and loving' (p. 225). Using lessons from game theory and elsewhere, he showed that having a 'nice' strategy ultimately pays off. For example, in one of his key measures of internal 'nice-ness', earnings per share were 41% higher for those companies recognised as being the best companies to work for (p. 197). He also used the example of Band Aid to show the 'enormously rich source of creative energy and commitment' that is available to companies when they rise above a pure profit motive (p. 208). While he argued for the adoption of a nice strategy in general (e.g. companies that had refrained from hostile takeover bids outperformed those who had not by 86% (p. 109)), these findings would appear to show that establishing 'nice' corporate goals, and supporting these goals with 'nice' internal policies, will lead to better-than-average bottom line results.

New traditions in business

In 1992, Renesch edited a book about new traditions in business, bringing together a number of contributors interested in the emergence of a more values-based approach to business life. Harman contributed a chapter about twenty-first century business, noting the emergence of 'intuitive leadership' which is designed to tap into the inner resources traditionally neglected in business, and arguing that in the twenty-first century 'the critical question is not how to gain advantage but how to discern purpose and meaning' (p. 20). In his contribution, Channon noted that the CEO is the holder of the soul or spirit of the organisation and that the generation by them of a greater sense of *esprit de corps*, perhaps through the use of council circles, story-telling or shared experiences, builds loyalty and leads to better team-working. Further, belonging to a group that is making a difference in the world can be a powerful motivating factor, because 'people who know they are working for something larger with a more noble purpose can be expected to be loyal and dependable and, at a minimum, more inspired' (p. 58). Rosen contributed a chapter about the healthy company, sketching a utopian picture of a positive, motivated and proactive company which radiates a feeling of respect. A feature of all such healthy companies is that they 'possess and emanate a certain vitality and spirit ... a deep feeling of shared humanistic values at the core of the company', and it is these values that are 'the glue that binds healthy, successful employees with healthy, productive workplaces' (p. 115). In the chapter by Brown, she argued that a sense of community at work led to greater employee satisfaction, because our heart's desire is 'to be part of a larger community of endeavour that is worthy of our best effort' (p. 124). This theme is reprised by Kiefer who coins the term 'metanoic' to describe those businesses that are increasingly looking for higher purpose in the work that they do, for something that is 'worthy of each person's highest personal ideals and commitment' (p. 176). He concluded that, assuming people are basically capable, trustworthy and dependable, 'the desired state of alignment is one in which people can freely commit their life energy to a certain collectively desired result' (p. 180).

Reawakening the spirit in work

Hawley's (1993) classic about dharmic management – living by your inner truth – drew a distinction between spirituality and religion where spirituality was the goal and religion was the path (p. 3). He held that 'all leadership is spiritual because the leader seeks to liberate the best in people and the best is always linked to one's higher self' (p. 5). He therefore argued that the only way to get the best out of people at work – their best energy – was to help them move closer to the spirit. He quoted Peter Vaill's research which showed that the spiritual dimension was the 'special energy' behind all situations of great achievement (p. 26), and argued that allowing people to access the spiritual dimension of their work would not only improve their health and well-being but could also accelerate organisational change (pp. 30, 107). Hawley's methodology is largely experiential and anecdotal, and follows a Cartesian and rather circular line of argument (essentially that the spirit by definition must improve organisational performance), but his book represents the line of argument that, if one holds the spirit to be an important element of human being and flourishing, not to release it in the workplace is unnatural and likely therefore to be deleterious.

Thought self-leadership

In 1994, Neck and Milliman published an article in the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* (9:6) which argued that spirituality positively affects employee and organisational performance by enhancing intuitive abilities and individual capacity for innovation, as well as increasing personal growth, employee commitment and responsibility. They linked spirituality with Mazlow's concept of self-actualisation, and noted that, as spirituality is all about fulfilling human potential, enabling its development at work would be crucial to competitive success. Their thought self-leadership construct was designed to reframe self-talk and visualisation in a spiritual context, to improve well-being and performance accordingly.

Built to last

Also in 1994 Collins and Porras published a successor to *In Search of Excellence*, looking in particular at successful companies that have stood the test of time. Thy found that visionary companies, those held up as role models by their peer-group over time, not only had vision, but also a clear sense of deep purpose and of standing for something beyond mere profits. While, again, they did not use the term 'spirituality' to describe this sense of deep purpose, the built to last companies demonstrate how the spiritual concept of contributing to a higher purpose is linked to long-term corporate success.

The loyalty effect

Reichheld's (1996) book argued that loyalty, rather than market share, was the primary driver of company profitability. He noted that business loyalty comprised customer, employee and investor loyalty, and that on average typical companies lost 10–30% of customers per year, 15–25% of employees and 50% of investors (p. 4). Regarding each as an annuity and managing for zero defections would not only save costs, but also create 'tremendous competitive advantage, boost employee morale, produce unexpected bonuses in productivity and growth, even reduce the cost of capital', as well as ensuring that former customers/employees/investors – people convinced the company offered

inferior value – would not outnumber the company's loyal advocates in the marketplace (p. 2). Further, he found that the employees of loyalty leaders were proud of their work, because 'their pursuit of self-interest is balanced by the organisation's dedication to serving others. Partnerships are structured to reinforce the idealistic but still practical ethic that only in serving others well can we serve ourselves well. Work that is congruent with personal principles is a source of energy' (p. 29). Reichheld noted that this pride was a powerful source of motivation which redoubled the economic advantages inherent in a loyalty-based system.

The impact of people management practices on business performance

In 1997, Patterson et al. published the results of their study into the impact of people management practices on business performance. Their 10-year longitudinal study examined over 100 small and medium-sized UK manufacturing companies, mainly single-site and single-product to maximise the clarity of the data, looking at factors that impact on company effectiveness. As well as people management practices, the study looked at the impact of managerial practices such as business strategy, emphasis on quality, use of technology, and R&D. Together, these averaged a +3% impact on changes in both productivity and profitability, as compared to the +17% impact of people management practices (p. 19). As well as demonstrating the contribution of people management practices, the study showed that a company owed +5% of its variation in profitability and +16% to its variation in productivity to employees' job satisfaction (p. 7). While none of the findings flagged elements exclusive to the concerns of organisational spirituality, the direction of the findings emphasises the importance of optimising employee satisfaction, though formal HR processes, to boost company performance.

The service profit chain

Also in 1997, Heskett et al. published a book looking at how leading companies link profit and growth to loyalty, satisfaction and value. Looking in

particular at the service industry, their research demonstrated the strong and mutually reinforcing relationship between profit and customer loyalty, employee loyalty and customer loyalty, and employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction (p. 12). Indeed, between 1986 and 1995, the share price of the companies they studied increased by 147%, nearly twice as fast as their competitors (p. 16). This research served to confirm the intuition that loyal and satisfied employees lead to loyal and satisfied customers, and thus to increased profits.

The employee–customer–profit chain at Sears

In a similar vein, Rucci et al. brought out an article in 1998 documenting the link between employee and customer satisfaction at Sears, expanding on the mini-case study described in Heskett et al. Their research showed that employee attitudes drive customer service, employee turnover and referrals, and thus profit. At Sears, a 5-point improvement in employee attitudes drives a 1.3-point improvement in customer satisfaction, which in turn generates a 0.5% improvement in revenue growth (p. 91).

First, break all the rules

In 1999, Buckingham and Coffman published their write-up of two large Gallup surveys undertaken over a 25-year period, involving over 1 million employees and 80,000 managers from a broad range of companies, industries and countries. Recognising that a large percentage of company value is held 'between the ears' of its employees, the first survey aimed to identify what talented employees need from their organisations. The answer was that they needed great managers, so the second study aimed to find out how great managers find, focus and keep talented employees and thus company value. This study identified 12 questions that measured the strength of a workplace and thus the core elements needed to find, focus and keep talented employees. These 12 questions were then tested on a sample of over 105,000 employees from 2,500 business units across 24 companies, to find out whether in practice a strong workplace would equate to a more profitable

workplace. While the single most important influence was an individual's manager – they found that people leave managers, not companies – affirmative answers to all 12 questions correlated with higher levels of productivity, profit, retention, and customer satisfaction. The 12 questions were:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel like my work is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, have I talked with someone about my progress?
12. At work, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

What is particularly noteworthy about these findings in this context is the prevalence of factors linked to self-fulfilment, such as doing one's best, learning and growing, and making a difference. While spiritual fulfilment does not appear on this list, Maslow's linkage between self-actualisation and the transpersonal suggests that the Gallup 12 fits well with an understanding of spirituality as meaning-making.

A spiritual audit of corporate America

The year 1999 also saw the publication of Mitroff and Denton's ground-breaking survey of the spiritual health of the US corporate scene. In one of the few empirical examples of research in this field, they concluded that spirituality was most manifest at work as 'meaning-making'. The top three sources of meaning at work they identified were: interesting

work, realising one's full potential, and being associated with a good and ethical organisation. These were followed by: making money, service to others and having good colleagues (p. 212). They also found that people perceived their organisations to be profitable *and* caring *and* ethical, and did not experience any contradiction between them (p. 39). When respondents were asked how important spirituality was in their lives, the average response was 5.7 on a 7-point scale. When this is compared with a question about how much of their soul they could bring to work, the average response was 3.4 on a 7-point scale, yet its appropriateness as a topic for the workplace averaged 4.16 on the 7-point scale (Figures B25, B29 and B30). These findings show that something considered both important and appropriate is currently under-represented in US workplaces.

Spirit and community at Southwest Airlines

Also in 1999, the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (12(3)) carried an article by Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett and Condemi looking at Southwest Airlines as a manifestation of workplace spirituality. While not couched in those terms by the company itself, its values of a sense of cause, community, empowerment, work ethic, and rich emotional expression are those described in other sources as core facets of workplace spirituality, and at Southwest have been formally linked with its consistently excellent performance.

Contented cows give better milk

In 2001 Catlette and Hadden published a book that set out to demonstrate the 'plain truth' about employee relations and the bottom line. Adopting a similar methodology to Collins and Porras, they compared two sets of US-based companies, 'contented cow' companies and 'common cow' companies, picking the former from published data on the 100 best companies to work for and from industry benchmarking, and the latter from amongst their well-regarded competitors. In order to qualify as a 'contented cow', a company had to be demonstrably profitable, to have been in business for at least five years, and to be considered desirable as an employer. In each case, while the

'common cows' were by no means lame ducks, 'contented cows' outperformed them on a number of counts: over a ten-year period, they out-grew them by a 4:1 margin and over $100 per employee; they out-earned them by nearly $40 billion and $384,000 per employee; and they generated a net difference of over 800,000 jobs (p. 32). Catlette and Hadden attributed these impressive statistics to the differences in culture between them. In 'contented cow' companies, employees felt committed, cared about and enabled, but in 'common cow' companies people generally 'lived down' to the assumptions made about them (p. 35). The quantifiable difference in output between the employees was to do with the amount of discretionary effort they were willing to exercise (where discretionary effort = personal capability − minimum requirements), and in 'contented cow' companies this was unleashed by meaningful work, high standards, clear purpose and direction, balanced rewards, a level playing field and a sense of being and feeling competent (p. 52).

Managing as if faith mattered

Also in 2001, Alford and Naughton published a book exploring the resources provided by Christian social teaching for creating spirit-friendly workplaces. In it, they recalled the teachings of Aristotle, that human beings are hard-wired to seek the good, so that companies who tap in to this yearning through their identification of 'excellent goods' will access employees' ultimate motivations, those that are further up Maslow's hierarchy of needs and subject to discretionary effort (p. 46).

The influence of spiritual ''meaning-making'' on career behavior

In 2002, Lips-Wiersma published an article in the *Journal of Management Development* about spirituality and career development. While her sample was small, her findings showed that there were four career purposes evident in people who had spiritual world views: developing and becoming self, unity with others, expressing self and serving others (p. 505). Further, careers were 'animated' when these purposes could be expressed, but if they could

not be, employees would make career transitions to address the misalignment (p. 514). Her research therefore suggests that, where companies employ people with spiritual world views, organisational capacity to fulfil these four purposes will be an important part of any retention strategy.

Healing a broken world

Also in 2002, Moe-Lobeda published her book about the fall-out from globalization. In it, she argued that moral agency and the indwelling spirit are one and the same. While her context is Christian, her identification of spirit and conscience suggests that business ethics is disorientated where workplaces deny spirituality, and that companies who seek to be genuinely ethical must nurture their spirituality.

The spirited business

Also, 2002 saw publication of Lamont's UK-based investigation into 'soul-friendly' companies. From her research into these companies, she identified three stalwart indicators of organisational soul health: below average rates of absenteeism, sickness and staff turnover (p. 276). The companies that she identified as soul-friendly were all substantially below average on all three counts, and were also flourishing, profitable enterprises. Her research, therefore, suggests a causal link between soul-friendliness and a reduced HR cost of covering staff absence and churn.

Toward a science of workplace spirituality

In 2004, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz edited a handbook of workplace spirituality and organisational performance. The handbook opened with their paper on the science of workplace spirituality in which they cited research carried out by Reder in (1982) that suggested an unequivocal link between spirituality-based organisational cultures and increased productivity. While this seems a particularly creative reading of Reder, who does not mention spirituality anywhere in his article, they may be eliding his references to human capital and optimisation, and assuming that investment in spiritual development

might be a proxy for value (Reder, p. 22). In any case, they went on to define workplace spirituality as 'a framework of organisational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy' (p. 13), and described it intuitively in terms of practical and ethical utility: the former produces better work outputs, and the latter ensures that such work is held within a moral framework. 'Non-spiritual' workplaces therefore run the risk that morality is seen as a 'private' preoccupation and is not integrated into work practices (p. 10f).

The spirit at work phenomenon

Also in 2004, Howard and Welbourn brought out a 'helicopter view' of the spirit at work phenomenon in the UK. While being careful to say that using spirituality for profit is wrong, and that there is insufficient research evidence to support the view that profits follow those who do 'right' (p. 161), they mention several spiritual companies that are profitable, most of which are referenced elsewhere in the literature. A new example they introduce is that of the UK company Broadway Tires, which, following the introduction of spiritual principles, has reduced absenteeism and increased profits, and attributes its 49% increase in profits over a 12-month period to its emphasis on the importance of the human spirit. They also cite studies carried out by the Roffey Park Institute which suggest that while nearly 75% of UK workers would be interested in learning to live the spiritual side of their values, 90% of UK managers believe that their organisations have not attempted to discuss the issue of spirituality with their employees (p. 186). This gap between employee interest and company initiative echoes with the findings of Mitroff and Denton referenced above.

Spiritual capital

A third publication in 2004 was Zohar and Marshall's redefinition of capital – that which confers wealth, profit, advantage or power – to include and be underpinned by spirit (meaning, values and fundamental

purposes) (p. 27). While light on 'evidence', the book offers a number of anecdotal reasons why spiritual capital pays. Starbucks is one such example, where every 1% increase that their CSR initiatives generate in employee tenure adds $100,000 to the Starbucks annual bottom line (p. 31).

Preliminary conclusions

In terms of evolution, the earlier studies cited above served to make the connection between meaningful work for meaningful organisations and improved bottom-line results. Subsequent studies variously revisited and expanded this connection, noticing that organisations whose mission or superordinate goals made a difference in the wider community, were consistent with personal values, and which reflected these values in their policies, inspired greater levels of employee commitment, motivation, performance, innovation and loyalty than their competitors. A separate strand in the literature focused on linking good HR processes to organisational gain through similar increases in employee output. In particular, the studies showed that satisfied employees tend to be more loyal, and this breeds satisfaction and loyalty in their customers, creating a virtuous circle. While these findings are not about spirituality *per se*, they serve to illustrate the link between opportunities for self-actualisation, employee satisfaction and enhanced performance, leaving the way clear for an analysis of whether or not spiritual policies of some kind might add to this process, thereby adding a halo effect to the virtuous circle. Further studies then highlighted the fact that there is a gap between the willingness and the opportunity to bring the soul to work, and that giving the soul a role might make companies healthier and more naturally and openly ethical.

Robustness

In terms of robustness, there are three issues in this debate which demand particular attention, variously of a technical, logical and philosophical nature. The first is a prosaic technicality. The widespread use in quality journals of the Harvard referencing system has had the unfortunate side effect in a number of cases of enabling authors to direct readers to whole publications rather than to specific arguments. This makes it difficult to discern the specific point being evidenced in support of a particular argument, and has led in some cases to 'piggy-back' referencing to support differently nuanced points, particularly in a field where definitions of spirituality vary widely. In such a nascent field, tighter referencing practices would help the academy to be more specific in its argumentation, resulting in much clearer and more robust debate.

The second issue is a logical one, to do with correlation, causality, and the use of proxies. In general, because 'spirit' or 'soul' is a disputed and virtual category, its effects are generally taken to be indicated by the workplace equivalent of a weathervane. Therefore, in this field, proxies abound. The proxies for spirit in terms of how it is defined vary – meaning, wholeness, energy, etc., as do the proxies selected for measurement – commitment, presence, motivation, etc. Hence, a study that shows that work that feels *meaningful* makes a person more *committed* to it, easily becomes proof for the efficacy of spirit at work. Rarely, too, is the difference between correlation and causality discussed in these findings, nor is the direction of any causality: my commitment could inspire me to find meaning in my work instead of the other way round, and both might instead correlate because of a prior cause, e.g. my love for my dependents. This is problematic because, for a business case to hold, it needs to be clear about precisely what is being measured, and how its measurement can be effected. However, the ephemeral nature of the concept of spirituality, and its very personal interpretation, militates against scientific clarity. Indeed, too much clarity might rob the concept of its meaning altogether (Poole, 2006, p. 33). Nevertheless, those that do seek to operate within the social science paradigm will need to define their terms explicitly, and to adopt more clarity about cause and effect.

The third issue relates to the philosophical approach being adopted in many of the sources cited, which will be further explored in the next section. Suffice it to say that there is a bias towards the empiricist tradition, which Benefiel suggests is an academic hangover from Weber (p. 372). This lends itself comfortably to any attempt to produce a business case, but means that her 'qualitative trails' are under-represented in this debate, as are those sources which attempt to argue from first principles

rather than 'evidence'. A more comprehensive approach to argumentation might encompass not only 'facts' from the field – albeit often through proxies – but also reflection and reasoning about the philosophical categories involved. For instance, an empiricist might ask: ''When people bring their souls to work, what does it mean?'' A rationalist might ask: ''As all people have souls and must therefore by definition bring them to work, what do they do with them while they are there?'' Both might then look to data, but each would be making a slightly different assumption, so their findings would vary, and be mutually enriching.

In order for the business case for organisational spirituality to be compelling, more attention will need to be paid to all three of these issues. This would not only clarify what has and has not been 'proven' in order to focus efforts on those areas which remain unclear, but would also greatly improve current debate in this field.

Objections

While it has already been suggested that any attempt to establish a connection between spirit-friendly workplaces and enhanced organisational performance will naturally lend itself to an attempt to place a quantitative value on organisational spirituality, there have been some challenges to this practice. For example, in *The Leadership Quarterly*'s special edition on spiritual leadership in 2005, Dent et al. reviewed the literature in this field more generally. In their summary of sources that discuss the productive/profitable nature of organisational spirituality, they noted the commonly held assumption that organisational spirituality is linked to enhanced performance, but also the conclusion that there were 'intellectual pitfalls' in attempts to make this case, as spirituality is by definition 'anti–materialist' and in their view analogous to other more ephemeral phenomena such as culture change, diversity awareness and leadership improvement (p. 639f). While this language is strong, it does point to the fundamental difficulty of quantifying an ephemeral. The danger of proxies has already been noted. That having been said, for those for whom the business case is worth the intellectual risk, the useful work underway in the field of valuing intangibles may be

of relevance, provided care is taken not to mistake the proxies for the phenomenon itself (see for example www.euintangibles.net). The objection to an overly materialist approach might also be eased by a move towards a less empiricist philosophical stance, utilising 'arts' methodologies rather than predominantly scientific ones.

The question of methodology was also raised in Benefiel's paper, where she identified two points concerning unexplored territories in the field of organisational spirituality, one being the harmonisation of the discourses of spirituality and organisational science, and the other being the development of new research methods that take seriously the significance and validity of spirituality in and of itself (p. 372). Her first point flags the entirely different ethos attached to the formal study of spirituality, whether as a religious practice or as a metaphysical category, as distinct from the usual *modus operandi* employed in 'organisational science', which as a discipline has tended to adopt quasi-scientific methodologies, as noted above. Attempting a 'business case' is unproblematic for the organisational scientist, but nonsensical for those of a more metaphysical persuasion, as is implied by her second point, her exhortation for researchers to take seriously spirit as an intrinsic phenomenon rather than one which can be regarded as instrumental for organisational success. This second point speaks to the ethical discomfort that surrounds discussions on the business case for organisational spirituality, lest the proving of such a case should appear to suggest that organisations might cynically exploit their employees' spirituality for material gain.

Benefiel's methodological challenge resonates with the work of Flyvbjerg, who criticised social science methodology in its entirety, to which categorisation organisational science is usually assigned. His view is that, in aping the methods of science, social science has lost its way, and he recommends a rediscovery of the original Aristotelian definitions of knowledge to identify a more fruitful way forward. In his 2002 book, he develops a conception of social science based on a contemporary interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*, as articulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is variously translated as prudence or practical wisdom:

> In Aristotle's words *phronesis* is a true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are

good or bad for man. *Phronesis* goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know-how (*techne*) and involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor. I will argue that *phronesis* is commonly involved in social practice, and that therefore attempts to reduce social science and theory either to *episteme* or *techne*, or to comprehend them in those terms, are misguided... *Phronesis* is most important because it is that activity by which instrumental rationality is balanced by value-rationality, and because such balancing is crucial to the sustained happiness of the citizens in any society, according to Aristotle. (pp. 2, 4)

This general challenge would appear particularly pertinent in this field and, coupled with Benefiel's observations, suggests that any approach which attempts to be too 'scientific' about spirituality may miss the point. That said, business case-style arguments are certainly useful, if not sufficient, in a field where the pragmatic reality often involves the need to use the language of business when in dialogue with businesses, not least because of their obligations to shareholders or to the public purse. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that business people tend to have a natural preference for the style of decision-making represented by a business case approach. Research carried out by Carr et al. (2005) into type in the business population looked at the Myers Briggs Type Indicator reported type preferences for over 8000 managers from both the public and private sectors in 86 different countries. This data showed that people with a preference for objective decision-making – a 'T' preference – are statistically over-represented in the management population when compared with the population at large (86% compared with 45% of the general population). In contrast, those who favour a more values-based and subjective mode of decision-making – the 'F' preference – are statistically under-represented (14% compared with 55%). Both of these reasons suggest that there is merit in continuing to investigate the business case for organisational spirituality, albeit in a more rigorous way, in order to be able to articulate more formally the assumed benefits of spirit at work, whilst not gainsaying the hazards of the journey.

An alternative methodology, which offers an avenue for the harmonisation of the discourses of spirituality and organisational science in answer to Benefiel and Flyvbjerg, would be the formal study of ethics. While ethics is often linked with spirituality,

it is also an independent field. While its pedigree is as ancient as those studies of spirituality that admit religion, its longevity outwith the religious sphere offers a potential model for the development of spirituality as an independent field, and its insights have much wisdom to lend to this debate. For example, ethics has itself recently rediscovered Aristotle, and in particular his concept of virtue as distinct from the deontologist and consequentialist traditions. At the risk of over-simplifying, a deontological approach is primarily concerned with rules for conduct, and a consequentialist approach with weighing up outcomes. Both examine decisions or actions, and so see ethics as something that you 'do' rather than something that you 'are', on the basis that your actions provide evidence as to your underlying nature as a moral agent. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, is more concerned with underlying character than with specific decisions or actions – morality as character or a state of being – which then governs your decisions and actions. In the same way that a team or organisation or culture is more than the sum of its parts, so too a person is held to be 'good' or 'evil' not just because of the sum total of their decisions. While this distinction may appear academic, it nonetheless offers the potential for a fresh approach to organisational spirituality. While it is of course true that, like the stroke of an artist's brush, actions create character and are therefore a proper focus of ethics, the added nuance of virtue ethics allows that even an action that would fail either a deontological or consequentialist test might still produce a useful ethical outcome through the formation of character, and should be seen in the context of the character as a whole. For example, a traditional 'sin' which failed both tests might, in remorse, create a resolution not to re-offend. Since this resolution comes from lived experience, it may be more affective in guiding future behaviour, honing the character as a more permanent fortress against future temptation and immorality. The idea of corporate character may therefore offer a useful model for further research in this field.

Conclusions

From the business case literature, flawed thought it may be, it is clear that, in the most general terms,

workplaces that nourish their employees gain their increased commitment and discretionary effort. Whether or not this represents 'organisational spirituality' depends on the definition in use, and ultimately on the felt experience of the employees in question. Regardless of semantics, this is of crucial importance to organisations because several studies, e.g. by Gallup, NOP, the Work Foundation and Roffey Park, have shown that the general level of engagement in most workplaces is hovering at a staggeringly low 20%. Therefore, any company able to lift these levels by even a percentage point will release additional resource and capacity from their human assets. Notwithstanding the intrinsic merits of such an achievement, such benefits would also differentiate them from less enlightened competitors, thereby providing competitive advantage. If, as many of the sources cited above suggest, attention paid to human flourishing in the workplace creates increased engagement and potential for enhanced performance, then it is safe to assume that the development and/or expression of a person's entire being – mind, body and spirit – is self-evidently good. Therefore the focus should now shift to a discussion on how best to create climates for this holistic flourishing, whether or not this is called 'organisational spirituality'. Indeed, this label might be counterproductive if an organisation was felt to be seeking to manipulate the spirit for material gain. Even were a 'spiritual' initiative to be embarked upon from the purest of motives, if an organisation's leadership is not prepared to embrace the consequences of such initiatives, they may well lose their staff. This suggests the need for an enquiry into how best an organisation might ready its own metaphorical mind, body and spirit for initiatives of this nature.

Questions for future research

In summary, this literature review has identified several areas which would repay further investigation. In terms of the business case argument itself, thought needs to be given not only to the methodology adopted, with more attention being paid to the qualitative and more analytical approaches, but also to the careful use of proxies, logical argumentation and the marshalling of evidence. In addition,

the fields of ethics and the valuing of intangible assets may prove fertile. Attention could also be paid to the vocations, where able people take salary sacrifices to do valuable work, which is suggestive. Needless to say, the practicality of implementing spirit at work also requires further detailed study. In practice, expressed spirituality may be hard to differentiate from expressed religion, and organisations need to be aware of the formal implications of anti-discrimination and human rights legislation in this regard, as well as the effect of changes of policy on the formal and psychological work contract.

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