Understanding spirituality in the workplace: A qualitative study

Patricia Purnell-Webb, Ian Glendon and Peter Creed
Griffith University

ABSTRACT

Although there has been much interest in recent years in developing spirituality in the workplace there is little rigorous research available to support its effectiveness, for example, in respect of work performance. Without this type of research, many CEOs and business leaders are sceptical that spirituality is anything more than a millennium fad. In order to begin developing robust models to demonstrate the relationship that spirituality has with such criterion measures as employee well-being and performance, it is first necessary to arrive at a common understanding of the construct of spirituality and how this construct applies in the workplace.

For this study, five focus groups were conducted, with an opportunity sample that provided a cross-section of employees, managers and professionals (n = 33). Two main questions were examined: "What does spirituality mean to me?" and "How do I demonstrate my spirituality in the workplace?" Data from these focus groups were analysed using a grounded theory approach and the computer programme NVivo. Results are reported in three major categories: (1) defining and operationalising spirituality; (2) understanding employee spiritual behaviour and needs in the workplace; and (3) identifying organisational blocks to spiritual development. A preliminary model of spirituality is proposed.

Defining spirituality, operationalising spirituality, employee spiritual behaviour

Interest in spirituality in the workplace has increased rapidly during the last few years. What began as a topic of discussion amongst a handful of "new age" theorists has now become a major management issue. Companies such as The Body Shop and Tom's of Maine have explicitly written spirituality into their business plans and operating procedures (Chappel, 1993; Gibbons, 1999b). However, spirituality at work is still in its infancy in terms of rigorous academic research.

Some theorists argue that by its very nature spirituality defies research (Bauman, 1998; Staron, 1999). However, the effects of even the most intangible of psychological constructs can be rigorously studied, for example, personality or intelligence. Thus, as a paradigm that has the potential to create far-reaching social and organisational change, spirituality deserves considerable research attention. Without this type of research many CEOs and business leaders will continue to be sceptical about the value of spirituality within an organisational context.

In order to begin developing robust models of spirituality that can demonstrate a relationship with employee well-being and performance it is first necessary to arrive at a common understanding of the construct. While some attempts at definition have been made, few have encompassed more than general dictionary descriptions or personal belief accounts (See Table 1).

These descriptions vary considerably. Beazley (1997), Neal and Perez (2000) and Twigg (1999) refer to spirituality as being connected to a belief in a metaphysical dimension variably describes as transcendent, divine, ultimate, etc. Elkins et al (1998), Laabs (1995) and Miller (1992) describe spirituality in terms of a range of diverse values. Gibbons (1999a) and Hungleman et al (1996) view spirituality as a search for life meaning. Nevard (1991) and Sykes (1987) see it as the driving force or spirit behind an individual's behaviour, while Buckley and Perkins (1984) and Hungelman et all (1996) connect spirituality to personal growth and integration of past experience. It is likely that each theorist is describing some aspect of spirituality. However, none appear to capture the concept of spirituality in its entirety.

In their attempt to operationalise spirituality in the workplace Mitroff and Denton (1999) utilised a qualitative analytical approach. These authors systematically analysed the content of interviews with senior executives and responses to questionnaires sent to HR executives and managers. They found that participants were able to define spirituality without being given an initial definition and that most people had a similar definition. Mitroff and Denton concluded that spirituality was "…the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe" (p. 83). They described it as: the basic belief that there is a higher power that affects all things; a belief that there is a guiding plan that governs all lives; a feeling of interconnectedness encompassing caring, hope, kindness, love and optimism; being universal and timeless; and an inexhaustible source of faith and will power.

While their study was useful in identifying that spirituality appears to have universal meaning to a broad range of individuals, Mitroff and Denton (1999) did not systematically draw these common themes and meanings into a concrete picture of spirituality from which researchers might begin to operationalise the concept.

Table 1. Definitions of spirituality

Definition	Source
…a faith relationship with the transcendent	Beazley (1997)
…the ability to be unique and to be recognised as something that is dynamic and has integrity. It involves having the ability to be regenerative and to self-examine, as well as being able to integrate past personal history by letting go and moving on	Buckley and Perkins (1984)
…a way of being and experiencing life that is characterised by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be the 'Ultimate'	Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, and Saunders (1988)
…the search for direction, meaning, inner wholeness, and connectedness to others, to non-human creations and to a transcendent	Gibbons (1999a)
…a sense of harmonious interconnectedness between self, others/nature, and Ultimate other which exists throughout and beyond time and space. It is achieved through a dynamic and integrative growth process which leads to a realisation of the ultimate purpose and meaning of life	Hungleman, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, (1996)
…incorporates concepts such as honesty, balance, trust, open communication, harmony, mission and co-operation	Laabs (1995)
…can be referred to in terms of values such as peace, truth, right-action, well-being and love	Miller (1992)
…a belief in, and connection to the Divine	Neal & Perez (2000)
…refers to any religious or ethical value that is concretised as an attitude or spirit from which one's sanctions flow	Nevard (1991)
…from the word spirit meaning breath of life; the animating or vital principle of a person…the intelligent or immaterial part of the person; soul; a person's mental or moral nature or qualities, i.e., courage, self-assertion, vivacity, energy, dash; a mental or moral condition or attitude; an animating principle or influence, a mental or moral tendency	Sykes (1987)
…has two dimensions: 1. Having to do with something outside of worldly things; 2. A connectiveness to other human beings, other living things or even to worldly things in general (such as nature)	Twigg (1999)

Freshman (1999) on the other hand, utilised a grounded theory process in an exploratory analysis that examined text samples from a variety of sources. She used transcripts of a discussion group's emails, survey responses from this same discussion group, survey responses from other discussion groups and bulletin boards on-line, as well as literature about spirituality in the workplace . Through an iterative process of reflection, Freshman argued that text passages could be coded into four "families" of expression:

- nouns, referring to persons, places or things;

- actions, referring to things that can be done, verbs and activities;

- theories, referring to interpretations, assumptions, beliefs, and value added thoughts;

- qualities, referring to experiences, feelings, attributes, adjectives and non-tangibles.

Freshman re-interpreted these "family views" into sentences that resulted in four long and complicated interpretations of each "family". For example, the noun family sentence interpretation reads:

[Goals] associated with [higher purpose] lead to [Spirit@Work]. When [Management] [communicates] about [values] which are related to aspects of the [paradigm shift] this helps/supports [Spirit@Work]. [Organisational Structure] and [leadership] influence [culture] which in turn influences [Spirit@Work]. [Management] applies [storytelling] to influence [culture]. [Personal] [relationships] are actions of [applied spirituality]. A [home office] is an example of an [authentic] [path]. (p. 323-324).

While the complexity and diversity of these interpretations make operationalisation seem almost impossible, like Mitroff and Denton (1999), Freshman (1999) found that when individuals talk, write or think about spirituality there is much common ground, that is, participants generally have a "sense" of spirituality and talk about it in terms of words like connection, higher power or higher truth, a guiding plan or purpose.

Gibbons (1999b) argued that existing definitions of spirituality are too abstract, universal and inclusive and subsequently provide little or no practical assistance in understanding the phenomenon or in suggesting the manner in which it might be studied. Thus, in contrast to the single definition approach, Gibbons suggested the use of a typological approach to spirituality. He argued that spirituality could be condensed into three types: religious, secular and mystical.

In his typology religious spirituality is based on the ideology and rituals of a particular religious society (e.g., Catholicism or Buddhism) and is widely argued to be an inappropriate topic in the workplace (Barrett, 1998; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Nevard, 1991; Vaill, 1990;). Secular spirituality included earth-centreed, nature-centreed and humanistic spiritualities and incorporated pantheistic and atheistic beliefs as well as social and environmental activism. This form of spirituality is demonstrated by organisations such as Greenpeace and World Vision. Lastly he argued that mystical spirituality comes from sub-disciplines within Christianity, Judaism and Islam and that it provided a link between these religions and most Eastern spiritualities. Concrete examples of these links include the increasing popularity of meditation and physical practices such as Tai Chi and yoga in western cultures.

While a typographical approach to spirituality may be useful in limiting the type of spirituality that is targeted in the workplace in terms of staff and organisational development, Gibbons (1999a; 1999b) does not expand on how or whether each type of spirituality applies in the workplace, or indeed how it can be observed or related to individual or organisational outcomes.

From the above it can be seen that spirituality in the workplace is an area of research still very much in its infancy. It is an area that requires scientific definition and operationalisation before the many claims made by theorists pertaining to the benefits of spirituality in the workplace can be rigorously investigated. Existing descriptions of spirituality indicate that a multi-dimensional operational framework will be necessary in order to encompass the pluralistic nature of the construct. Further, attention will need to be given to identifying the scope of the construct as it applies within the organisation as opposed to how it applies to individuals generally. For example, identifying whether religious, secular or mystical spirituality, each has a place within the workplace.

The aim of this qualitative study is to define and operationalise the construct of spirituality as it applies in the workplace. The study utilises a grounded theory approach to analyse data and endeavours to provide a preliminary research model of the construct that will be useful in future organisational research.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Thirty-three employed adults, 19 females and 14 males, ranging from 21 to 63 years of age (M = 39) voluntarily attended one of five focus groups of between five and eight persons. All participants held university degrees. Information regarding current religious affiliation and occupational area can be found in Table 2.

PROCEDURE

Participants were recruited through an advertisement placed in a business-to-business newsletter that had a circulation of approximately 900. Sixty-eight people initially responded to the advertisement via telephone. Thirty-eight people (68%) agreed to attend one of the five scheduled focus groups. Each participant was sent a confirmation letter advising them of the time, date and venue. The letter also explained that the group would be an informal discussion that would focus on two questions: Question 1 – What does spirituality mean to you? Question 2 – How do you demonstrate your spirituality in the workplace?

Table 2. Breakdown of current religious affiliation and occupation of participants

Declared current religious affiliation	No of participants	Current Occupation	No of participants
Protestant	9	Business manager	7
Catholic	7	Psychologist	5
Atheist	6	Administrator	3
Pagan	3	Nurse	3
Presbyterian	2	Public Servant	3
Buddhism	2	Accountant	3
Baptist	1	Information Technologist	2
Fundamental Christian	1	Teacher	2
Theosophist	1	Theologian	2
Jewish	1	Natural Therapist	2
		Lawyer	1

Five participants who indicated they would attend, did not, this left a total of 33 (49%) participants in the study. The facilitator, who was a doctoral student in psychology, began each group with a short introduction regarding the research purpose and outlined the agenda for the meeting. Participants were asked to complete a consent form and provide information on age, gender, educational level, current religious affiliation and occupation.

Each group engaged in an unstructured discussion for a total of approximately 90 minutes, spending 45 minutes on Question 1 and 45 minutes on Question 2. Discussions were video and audio taped. The facilitator took no part in the discussion except to occasionally probe for more information and to direct the group to the second question. At the conclusion of the discussion participants were thanked and invited to ask questions.

Verbatim transcripts were prepared from the audio tapes and sample transcripts were checked for accuracy against the video tapes. All transcripts were analysed using the computer program Nvivo Version 1. This application was designed to assist researchers in handling non-numerical unstructured data by indexing, searching and theorising. It allows users to create, edit, code and explore large volumes of text into idea, theme or concept trees. These trees can then be broken down into hierarchical branch or node structures containing complex webs of links between data and modelling ideas. Thus, it is ideal for analysing verbatim

transcripts and allowing the researcher to systematically code text into any number of simple or complex hierarchical concept trees.

Results

The iterative nature of this type of analysis requires that the researcher reads the text of the transcripts several times and codes segments of the text into common themes. It is usual to begin by coding text into general themes, perhaps using a typology of some description. This would then be followed by a second analysis where themes or ideas within each typology would be coded. Further analysis might then be conducted to code ideas into sub-categories, and so on until the researcher is satisfied that ample detail has been documented.

In the present study, five iterations of analysis were conducted in the first phase. First, the researcher read each paragraph of the transcripts and asked the question "What type of spirituality is being discussed?" Each group began by discussing religious spirituality before quickly reaching a consensus that this type of spirituality was not relevant to the workplace but simply one way in which some people chose to demonstrate their spirituality.

Discussions then centred on what could best be described as philosophical or self-spirituality, that is, a personal set of beliefs, values, behaviours and experiences that were relevant to the workplace. These described ways of relating to others in the workplace, such as through authenticity, honesty and openness. Additionally, while most participants (28 or 85%) spoke about spiritual experiences utilising meditation, reflection or visualisation, which could be categorised as mystical spirituality using Gibbon's (1999a; 1999b) typology, only five participants (15%), all self-nominated pagans, spoke about any other form of mystical spirituality, that is, a belief in or experience of magical energy and/or magical occurrences.

In the course of the second pass through the transcripts, data were extracted on the basis of the question "What is being described?" This resulted in three broad concepts emerging. These were named "beliefs", "values" and "behaviours", based on the emerging content of the data in each. For example, the following paragraph was coded under beliefs:

> Is the future painted sort of nothing or is there something already out there and we're just putting in the colours and the defining lines? I suppose me with my spirituality is that there is something already out there and that it's just being filled in with colour. That's what I think, when I think about spirituality in my life. You remember those pop up books, you know with the pages that actually stood up? Now I'm three quarters through the book and all these things have stood up along the way and are now in my past. The rest of it's written, I've got no idea what's coming, but as I turn the pages, it will all just naturally pop up. That that stuff is already written, and it's a pretty interesting area, predestination, that gives me comfort that there is a plan or a reason for me being here. I may not understand the big picture, but I know that somehow my little part is important in it.

Third, text passages were again reviewed asking the following questions, "How is this concept being described? What terms are being used? What is the content of the message?" From this analysis 24 nodes consisting of 474 references were identified within the three concepts of beliefs, values and behaviours. However, it became apparent from this process that large chunks of text remained un-coded. Thus, a fourth analysis was conducted to review this material and a further two concepts emerged: spiritual relationships and experiences of spirituality. These two concepts were accordingly added. A fifth and final iteration of analysis was conducted whereby all text passages were again reviewed and coded or re-coded into one of the five concepts. This resulted in a total of 900 references being coded within the five concepts. Due to this large volume of references it was decided to conduct a secondary analysis to identify sub-categories within each of the concepts. These secondary analyses are described below.

CONCEPT 1 – RELATIONSHIPS

In talking about what spirituality meant to them and how they demonstrated it in the workplace, participants made 262 references to aspects of relationships. These references were again reflectively analysed and coded into sub-dimensions on the basis of to whom or to what the relationship referred. This resulted in the emergence of three sub-dimensions within the concept: relationship with the self (128 references), relationships with others (102), and relationship with the environment (32). Due the large number of references in each sub-dimension a further review was conducted by asking the question "What is the nature

of the relationship?" This resulted in each sub-dimension being broken down into a number of categories. The sub-dimension of "relationships with self was broken down into four categories: personal development (53 references), integration of experience (35 references), self-reflection (25 references), and self-acceptance (15 references). The sub-dimension of "relationships with others" was broken down into three categories: empathy (45 references), understanding (35 references), and acceptance (22 references). The sub-dimension of "relationship with the environment" was broken down into two categories: being in nature (22 references) and social responsibility (14 references. This concept tree is illustrated in Figure 1.
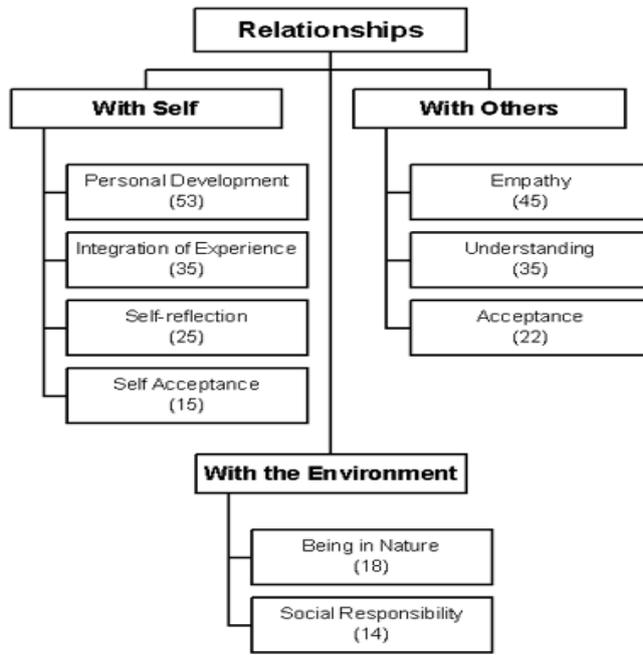

Figure 1. Concept Tree 1 – Relationships *(Figures in brackets refer to number of references to that category).*

CONCEPT 2 – BELIEFS

Participants made 151 references to spiritual beliefs. These were coded into seven sub-dimensions by asking the question "To what does the belief being discussed here refer to?" The seven sub-dimensions were: mission or higher purpose (35), intuition (27), faith (20), higher power (17) transcendence (15), mystical energy (15), and immortality (12). This concept tree is illustrated in Figure 2.
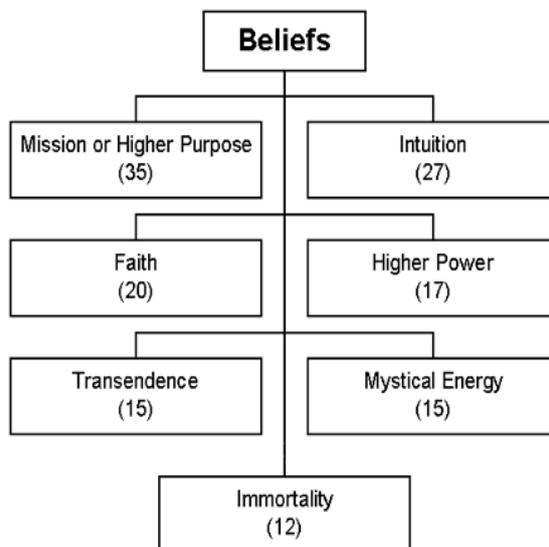

Figure 2. Concept 2 – Beliefs *(Numbers in brackets refer to number of references to that category)*

CONCEPT 3 – VALUES

The 179 references in this concept were coded into eight sub-dimensions by asking the question "What value is being discussed here?" The eight sub-dimensions were: fairness (42), trust (40), freedom (32), achievement (27), love (16), balance (12), and harmony/peace (10). This concept tree is illustrated in Figure 3.
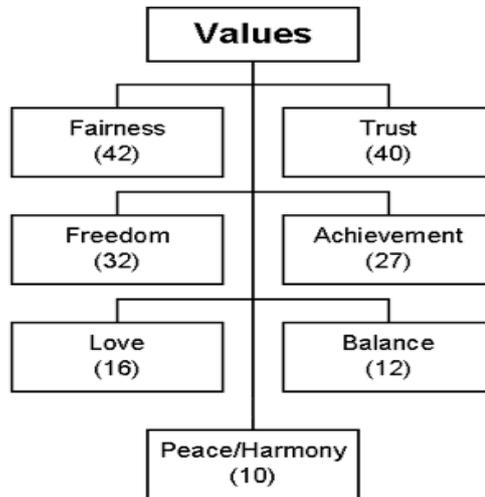

Figure 3. Concept 3 – Values *(Numbers in brackets refer to number of references to that category).*

CONCEPT 4 – EXPERIENCES

Participants made 164 references to spiritual experiences. These were coded into eight sub-dimensions by asking the question "What sort of experience is being described here?" The eight sub-dimensions were: synergy (47), wonder (27), awareness (24), oneness (22), connectedness (17), timelessness/other worldliness (17), and being in the here and now (10). This concept tree is illustrated in Figure 4.
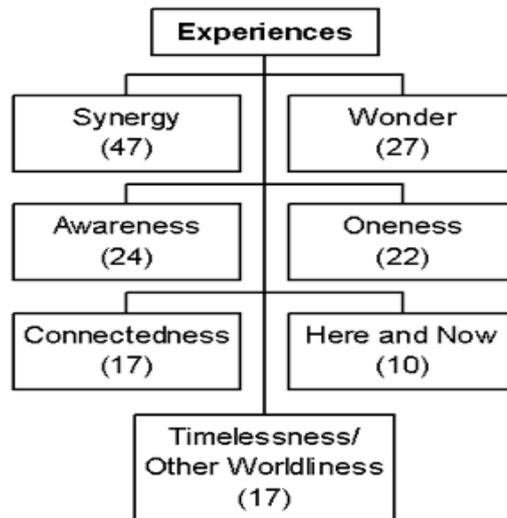

Figure 4. Concept 4 – Experiences *(Numbers in brackets refer to number of references to that category).*

CONCEPT 5 – BEHAVIOURS

All 90 references to behaviours were coded by asking the question "What sort of behaviour is being described here?" This resulted in nine sub-dimensions: compassion (37), discipline (30), passion (25), meditation/visualisation (22), vulnerability (22), genuineness (20), congruency (15), grounded (12), and authenticity (7). This concept tree is illustrated in Figure 5.
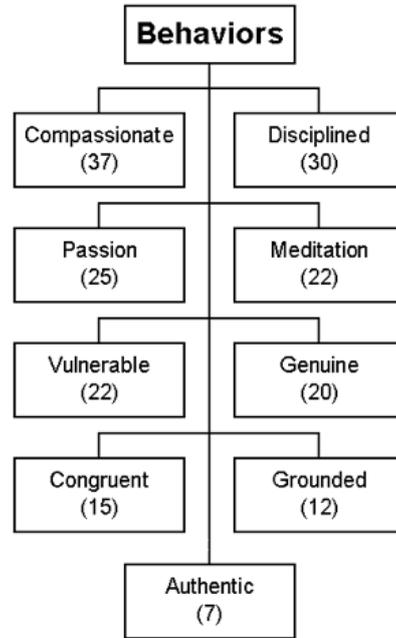
8

Figure 5. Concept 5 – Behaviours *(Numbers in brackets refer to number of references to that category).*

From the above it can be seen that spirituality is a complex multi-dimensional construct that can be operationalised into five major dimensions: relationships, beliefs, values, experiences, and behaviours. Each of these dimensions can be further described in terms of a number of sub-categories as shown in Figures 1 to 5. These will be discussed below.

Discussion

The aims of this study were first to define and then to operationalise the construct of spirituality in the workplace. These two aims will be discussed below. Additionally, a preliminary model of spirituality will be proposed and discussed in terms of understanding employee spiritual needs and behaviours and understanding organisational blocks to spiritual development.

DEFINING SPIRITUALITY

Although Gibbons (1999b) argued that existing definitions of spirituality are too abstract, universal and inclusive, it is necessary when exploring the complexities of such a construct to begin with a broad, but shared, definition or understanding of it. Those definitions already cited in this study, with the exception of Mitroff and Denton (1999), have been developed by individual theorists based upon their personal beliefs and experiences, and are therefore, not necessarily shared by the wider population. Mitroff and Denton's definition "…the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe" (p. 83) provided a good starting point when analysing the data in this study.

While participants in this study did refer to the feeling of connection as being a part of their experience of spirituality they generally referred to spirituality as being a personal belief system that provided a sense of meaning in their lives. It is this belief system that provides them with a sense of personal connection to something outside the physical world, for instance, to a God, higher power, higher self, or intuitive energy. It is through this personal connection that insight into the self, a personal mission and a personal path is found. Thus the following preliminary definition of spirituality is proposed:

Spirituality is a personal belief system that provides a sense of a personal connection to a metaphysical dimension. This connection is a source of insight into the self, a personal mission and a personal path that enables us to find meaning in our lives and to strive to live in congruence with our personal values.

Metaphysical is defined as "…a theoretical philosophy of being and knowing; a philosophy of the mind…" (Sykes, 1987, p. 679). This definition is an attempt to provide a universally accepted basis, regardless of individual religious or spiritual beliefs, from which further research into this area of study can be conducted.

OPERATIONALISATION

When operationalising a theoretical construct it must necessarily be examined in terms of component parts or dimensions that can be observed or tested in a practical sense. For example, the theoretical construct of personality is widely accepted as consisting of five major component parts, or dimensions – conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness and extraversion (Costa & Widiger, 1994)). It is these dimensions that psychometric researchers measure and observe when studying personality.

Similarly, the theoretical construct of spirituality can be operationalised in terms of its component parts or dimensions. Results of the present study indicate that spirituality can be operationalised through five dimensions – relationships, beliefs, values, experiences and behaviours. Each dimension is discussed below.

1. RELATIONSHIPS

When discussing spirituality, participants frequently referred to three types of relationships, relationship with the self, relationships with others and a relationship with the environment. Relationship with the self was expressed as being tied to personal development, that is, by being spiritually aware people were more able to self-reflect, understand themselves and their motives, and attach meaning to their behaviour. This understanding and meaning can then be integrated into the self and used as a basis for personal development.

Relationships with others were described as close intimate connections where empathy, understanding and acceptance were consistently demonstrated. This seems to describe the notion of unconditional love, however, this terminology was frequently rejected by participants as being too "touchy feely" to be acceptable in the business world.

Relationship with the environment was discussed in two ways, respect for and enjoyment of nature, and a feeling of social responsibility not only to the natural environment but also towards mankind as a whole. This also included such things as altruism and philanthropic ventures.

Participants also identified that maintaining all of these types of relationships required them to operate in awareness that in turn required energy and "headspace". They further identified that this was not always available to them, particularly during times of stress and pressured activity. During these times participants reported "operating on automatic" and described this as a mechanical outcome-focused state that frequently left them feeling dissatisfied and disappointed with themselves as well as with the outcomes achieved. Similarly participants had a general attitude that organisations prevented employees from developing and maintaining these relationships by creating excessive work demands, limiting resources and, in some cases, regulating and structuring working environments to preclude employees from forming relationships with each other and the environment. For example, constructing windowless work cubicles to prevent conversation and exclude the distractions of a picturesque view, adopting systems and procedures that are harmful to people and the environment.

2. BELIEFS

While specific beliefs varied significantly among the participants, analysis of these data established several common beliefs held by all participants. For example, the belief that life has meaning and this meaning is found through discovery of a personal mission or higher purpose. Participants also shared a belief in the existence of a "higher power". This was variably discussed as a god, higher self, or an invisible metaphysical essence of some sort. This was one of the most problematic areas of discussion. With the exception of one participant (a Fundamental Christian) people demonstrated discomfort when using the term "God". Participants indicated that the term "God" was too closely associated with religiosity and they did not want to confuse religious belief with spirituality which they saw as two separate but related issues. Further, the majority of participants articulated the belief that using religious terminology would stereotype them as being overly religious which was seen as possible grounds for rejection by the rest of the group. Thus, religious spirituality was categorised as being an inappropriate, or indeed to some people, irrelevant area for discussion, both in the focus groups and in the workplace.

Faith, intuition and transcendence were also strong common beliefs. These were described as being central to knowledge that a higher power existed. Additionally, participants believed that it was possible to "tap into a source of mystical energy" that could provide the necessary resources one needed to accomplish one's mission, although it was only possible to "tap into" this energy once the mission had been identified and the individual had chosen the right personal path.

Spirituality was related to a belief in immortality in that participants believed in some form of life after death whether it be re-incarnation, ascension into some form of heaven or movement into another dimension of living. This allowed their spirit to live on to eternity.

Frequently this area of beliefs was slow to emerge in discussion within the groups, however, once the discussion began and participants felt comfortable that their beliefs were not going to be judged or ridiculed by others in the group a deeper level of self-disclosure and intimacy between group members developed. This led to group members openly expressing positive feelings for each other and a desire to be able to hold similar discussions with their friends and colleagues. However, participants contended that although they believed they would feel closer to other people if they discussed their spiritual beliefs, they also felt that societal norms prevented them from doing so, especially in the workplace.

3. VALUES

Participants agreed that people who they perceived as being spiritual shared certain values. The most commonly nominated values were: fairness, trust, freedom, achievement, love, balance and harmony/peace. According to participants these values provided guidelines for interacting with others as well as for making life choices. For instance a spiritual person, while valuing achievement, will not pursue achievement through unfair tactics or untrustworthy behaviour. They will also moderate their need for achievement with the pursuit of balance in their life. Participants argued that living these values in most organisations was extremely difficult since management generally valued materialism, monetary success and power. The perception was that these values led to ruthless, destructive and untrustworthy behaviour by managers, and that in order to survive and succeed in such an environment employees also had to adopt this kind of behaviour.

4. EXPERIENCES

Participants talked with most animation when describing their experience of spirituality. This was described as: experiencing synergy when working in groups; being struck by the wonder of the moment/nature/feeling, etc; having an awareness of some greater force at work; a feeling of oneness with the universe; feeling a strong, sometimes overwhelming sense of connectedness to a person/group/situation, etc; a sensation of timelessness or otherworldliness; and, being in the "here and now". These sensations and feelings were all related to a euphoric, joyous feeling and a delight in being alive, thus, participants expressed a desire to be able to sustain these experiences over longer and longer periods of time.

5. BEHAVIOURS

Participants described a number of behaviours that they perceived as being spiritual. Compassionate behaviour was seen as important in being able to relate to others as well as to themselves. Discipline was seen as important in being able to fulfil the personal mission and to resist "un-spiritual" behaviour, for example, becoming materialistic or avaricious. Passion was also described as being necessary in order to fulfil one's mission. In fact, participants asserted that it was through passion that individual were able to identify their mission. Passion was also seen as necessary in socially responsible behaviour.

Meditation or purposeful reflection was deemed necessary to personal development, as well as to identifying one's mission, and as a means for communication to one's higher power. Spiritual people were seen having the ability to be vulnerable, genuine, congruent, grounded and authentic. These behaviours were related to the way in which people interact with others, however, participants felt that it was extremely difficult and personally risky to demonstrate these behaviours in the workplace as ruthless managers and colleagues would take vulnerability, genuineness and authenticity as signs of weakness.

This study has provided strong evidence that spirituality can be operationalised through these five dimensions and sub-dimensions in a way that is applicable to a wide range of people and workplaces. However, it must be remembered that while these proposed dimensions and sub-dimensions have been developed through a rigorous systematic analysis, data were collected from a relatively small number of participants. The nature of qualitative research is such that large amounts of data are generated by small numbers of participants, thus it is difficult and often unwieldy to attempt this type of research with larger participant groups. Therefore, the dimensions proposed here provide a starting point for further investigation. Replication of the current study would be one way of testing the dimensions hypothesised here. Another way would be to develop scales based on these dimensions and to test them on a large, varied sample.

In an effort to integrate the multi-dimensional nature of spirituality suggested by this research with the

typological approach suggested by Gibbons, a matrix of spirituality consisting of three domains and five dimensions can be hypothesised. This is illustrated in Figure 6.

In terms of applying this model to the workplace, there is strong evidence in the literature to suggest that religious spirituality is generally thought to be inappropriate in the workplace (Laabs, 1995; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Nevard, 1991; Vaill, 1990). Indeed, data collected in this study support that contention. For example participants said things like:

- "I think spirituality for me is definitely individual, intangible. I can't describe it but I know that it's there somehow. I'm not sure in what form, but certainly for me it's not religious. In fact if anyone starts telling me about their religion I immediately switch off, but when someone opens a discussion about their spirituality I am immediately engaged."

- "Well I feel like starting with a definition of what spirituality is not necessarily, and I think it's not necessarily religion. I think there is confusion in our society between spirituality and religion. There is quite a distinct difference between the two and also there is a distinct difference between behaviour in religion and behaviour in spirituality. For example, I think I try to act in a spiritual way in all my dealings with people, however, I rarely act in a religious way. I think of religion as more of a codified belief that has some spiritual reference. Whereas spirituality is more of an experience of the self that goes deeper than cognitions and emotions and tends to synergise in a whole sense of self.

It is likely that these kinds of attitudes are common within most organisations, with the possible exception of those founded by religious bodies (e.g., Sanitarium, Centacare). Additionally, in this day and age of political correctness enquiring into an employee's religious affiliations is considered inappropriate. Similarly mystical spirituality was considered by participants to be something of a taboo subject in the workplace and likely to lead to being stigmatised as weird or strange.

Table 3. The three domains and five dimensions of spirituality

	Spiritual Domains		
Dimensions of Spirituality	*1. Religious*	*2. Philosophical/Self*	*3. Mystical*
1. Relationships – self, others, environment/ universe	Self as sinner Others as sinners Universe as god's creation	Self as potentially perfect Others as potentially perfect Environment as resource	Self as magical Others as magical Environment as nourishment
2. Beliefs – life principle, life purpose, life mission	Existence of God and Satan Purpose to become Godlike as opposed to Satanic Mission to lead a blameless life	Existence of Higher Self Purpose to Self-Actualise Mission to fulfill personal potential	Existence of mystical energy/life force Purpose to connect with collective energy Mission to receive ultimate understanding/ knowledge
3. Values	Humility, charity, asceticism, faith	Love, trust, integrity, achievement	Harmony, peace, balance
4. Expressions	Saintliness/holiness, salvation, grace	Wonder, joy, acceptance	Enlightenment, awareness
5. Behaviours	Prayer, communal worship	Empathy, genuineness, right conduct, ethical practices, respect for the environment, community involvement, self-reflection, social reform	Meditation, oneness, synergy, community creation, worship of nature, social responsibility

In contrast, philosophical or self spirituality places emphasis on personal development and personal responsibility for fulfilling one's mission as well as ethical conduct, integrity and achievement. Therefore this type of spirituality is very relevant and applicable in the workplace.

Results of this study demonstrate that it is possible to define and operationalise spirituality in a manner that is generalisable to the wider population and applicable in the workplace. Spirituality can be operationalised as a multi-dimensional construct that can be observed and measured in the workplace, thus relationships between spirituality and other performance indicators such as job satisfaction, work commitment, absenteeism or stress can be examined and researched. This research has also highlighted some organisational blocks to spiritual development such as command and control styles of leadership, unreasonable work demands, ruthlessness of management, fear and stigmatisation of spiritual openness, and the rigid construction of many work environments. These issues can be addressed with management by demonstrating that encouraging employees in their spiritual development will lead to positive outcomes for organisations. As a starting point, Psychologists can contribute by developing rigorously researched valid measures of spirituality.

REFERENCES

Adams, J. (Ed.). (1984). *Transforming Work: A collection of organization transformation readings*. Alexandria, VA: Miles-River Press.

Barrett, R. (1998). *Liberating the corporate soul: Building a visionary organization*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann

Bauman, Z. (1998). Postmodern religion. In Heelas (Ed.) *Religion, modernity and postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Beazley, H. (1997). Meaning and measurement of spirituality in organizational settings: Development of a Spirituality Assessment Scale. (Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University, 1997). UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations, 1998, No. 9820619.

Buckley, K., and Perkins, D. (1984). Managing the complexity of organizational transformation. In J. Adams (Ed.), *Transforming Work: A collection of organization transformation readings*. Alexandria, VA: Miles-River Press.

Chappel, T. (1993). *The soul of a business: managing for profit and the common good*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Costa, P., & Widiger, A. (Eds.) (1994) *Personality disorders and the five factor model of personality*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Elkins, D., Hedstrom, L., Hughes, L., Leaf, J., & Saunders, C. (1988). Toward a humanistic-phenomenological spirituality: definition, description, and measurement. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 28 (4), 5-18.

Freshman, B. (1999). An exploratory analysis of definitions and applications of spirituality in the workplace. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, (4), 318-327.

Gibbons, P. (1999a). Spirituality at work: definitions, measures, assumptions and validity claims. In submission.

Gibbons, P. (1999b). Spirituality at work: A pre-theoretical overview. MSC. Thesis - Birbeck College, University of London.

Heelas, P. (Ed.) (1998) *Religion, modernity and postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hungelman, J., Kenkel-Rossi, E., Klassen, L & Stollenwerk, R. (1996). Focus on spiritual well-being: harmonious interconnectedness of mind-body-spirit – use of the JAREL spiritual Well-Being Scale. *Geriatric Nursing*, Nov/Dec, 262-266.

Laabs, J (1995). Balancing spirituality and work. *Personnel Journal*, September, 60–76.

Miller, W. (1992). How do we put our spiritual values to work? In J. Renesch, (Ed.) *New traditions in business: Spirit and leadership in the 21st century*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Mitroff, I., & Denton, E. (1999). A study of spirituality in the workplace. *Sloan Management Review*, Summer, 83-92.

Neal, J., & Perez, P. (2000). How to cope with chaos. *Spirit at Work Newsletter*, Summer, available at Http://www.spiritatwork.com/uversity/chaos.html.

Nevard, L. (1991). Management - a 'spiritual foundation?' *Management Education and Development*, 22 (3),

188-196.

Renesch, J. (Ed.) (1992) *New traditions in business: Spirit and leadership in the 21st century*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Staron, M. (1999). The invisible and unspoken: a personal perspective on spirituality in the workplace. Paper presented at the 2nd Australian Spirituality, Leadership and Management Conference, Richmond, NSW.

Sykes, J. (Ed.) (1987). *The Australian concise Oxford dictionary*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Twigg, N. (1999). Spirit scale. Available E-mail: SpiritAtWork@topica.com . Message: Subscribe.

Vaill, P. (1990) *Managing as a performing art: New ideas for a world of chaotic change*. San Francisco:Jossey-Bass Publishers.