

What is spirituality in the context of leadership and management? And of nature?

There are many versions of what spirituality is in the context of leadership and management. In one version, it means the explicit acknowledgment of God in the workplace – God as understood by Christianity and other religions. In terms of behaviour, this form of spirituality is associated with morality as conventionally understood by the given religion.

An example would be a charitable organisation founded by a religious order, where acknowledgment of God is part of the practices of the organisation and the people in it. This is manifested not only in moral conduct but also in shared notions of knowing God and being known by God, and in an overall conception of life, for example, that our life here is a prelude to life hereafter in paradise.

A second version of spirituality could be called God Incognito. It accepts the secular society, and it sees spirituality as acting morally, but accepting that it is not appropriate in the workplace to expect or require others to subscribe to God. This perspective is understandable historically, but it leaves two questions unanswered: (1) Has spirituality thereby been reduced to being no more than morality? And (2) If not, what is the nature of this spirituality?

There ought to be a way of framing spirituality that is relevant in the contexts of business and organisations and that is relevant across religions and rooted in our evolving knowledge of humans, our planet and the diverse nature of all things.

What is an alternative version of spirituality?

Spirituality is the life that animates human values and looks for the well-being of the whole in both the physical and social realms. It leads us to seek to learn how to tune into and serve the harmony of the physical whole, which for us is Planet Earth, and the social whole, which is the whole of our social connections, in families, local communities, nations and the global community. In this conception of spirituality, fulfilment lies through the growth and development that are inspired by knowing that you are an essential, integral and loved part of all-that-is.

This stance is fundamentally different to what is the norm in the modern business world, which has promoted and/or condoned two erroneous and destructive notions:

- (1) That business and society work best when everyone acts in their own best interests, and
- (2) That society works best when business is allowed to operate with as few “restrictions” as possible.

These notions are destructive because:

- They are not true (and never have been)
- They ignore the fundamental condition of life, namely, a planet that is liveable into the far future

- They ignore our connection with the earth: that we are, in fact, of the earth and it is necessary for our own peace and health that we honour it, respect it and care for it.

This form of spirituality holds a central place for ethics, but it is different from what is commonly understood by ethics in three ways:

- (1) Rather than promoting ethics as adherence to sets of morals that are the dominant conventions of a society, it sees ethics as the positive and selfless (non-egotistical) endeavour to maintain and enhance the well-being of the whole (in both the physical and social domains), and each of us as part of that whole;
- (2) It moves beyond compliance with rules towards commitment to the harmonious purposes and expression of the whole of society and nature;
- (3) It sees ethics as the ground of and the gateway to spirituality, where personal integrity and ethical conduct evolve into an understanding of meaning and purpose and an experience of what poets might call the luminosity of all-that-is.

In this conception of spirituality, the values of peace, love, joy and beauty are paramount.

[Yes, a statement like this invites expressions of further nuance, explanation and qualification, but the statement as it stands seems to me robust, and I think it stakes out the necessary ground for a conception of spirituality that enlivens leadership and management for our contemporary business environment.]

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