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The changing meaning of work calls for care and concern for the spiritual dimension of the workplace. Toward this end, a more liberal form of workforce education and human resource development in response to workplace preparation for managers is needed.

Spirituality as Foundation of Agency in Turbulent Economic Times

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> Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.
>
> Ian McLaren, 1850–1907

Writing about spirituality invites, like few other dimension of adult and continuing education, reflection about one's own trajectory as well as a personal and conversational style of expression rather than the traditional analytic and detached form of writing. Markers of my own development, both private and professional, might be a commitment to the existential philosophies of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre during early adulthood and professional training and qualification in psychological counseling approaches affiliated with the humanistic orientations of Rogers and Janov. The shift to a career in workforce and human resource education since the mid-1980s, as administrator, consultant, and university teacher, I was driven by the desire to be of use beyond the confines of the one-to-one clinical setting and to test what insights I may have gained in the wider world of work. An underlying theme of my scholarship in areas as disparate as leadership competencies, education of workforce trainers, and the changing meaning of work has been an interest in exploring the personal and inner dimensions of being at work. More precisely, a fascination is with the private selves at work, so often hidden behind the veil of the public persona, we enact our occupational roles in organizational and institutions. Questioning the demarcation between public and private selves, I have critiqued the functionalist reading of workforce education as insufficient for pragmatic and ethical reasons and instead positioned a liberal form of education as a much needed antidote (e.g., the critique of the business school preparation of modern managers (Kuchinke, 2007). Although instrumental and managerialist

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orientations are endemic to contemporary workforce and human resource education, and, sadly, the wider field of educational research and practice (for an excellent set of articles on the state of the humanities in education, see Higgins, 2015), care of and concern for the spiritual dimension of work and working should be seen as a central concern of adult, professional, and continuing education.

A second consideration in writing this chapter is the need for respect, perhaps even reverence, for the nature of the topic, the deep intellectual traditions of its foundations, and our own shortcomings and limitations. Here, I echo Kang's insightful essay on the need for humility in theorizing and practicing our craft: "Humility as a virtue in both the East and the West is characterized as embracing self-awareness about one's own capacities, exercising self-discipline and having a humanitarian orientation . . . . It is the recognition . . . of the limits of one's own virtues and talents" (Kang & Kuchinke, 2008, p. 5).

Although the growing interest in spirituality in many areas of educational practice is welcomed by many educators, mainstream corporate and neoliberal ideologies easily dismiss it as the idle obsession of starry-eyed academic idealists, who do not understand the real world of business anyhow (see e.g., Milton Friedman's [1970] wholesale dismissal of corporate social responsibility). Where spirituality does find acceptance, I observe the tendency toward commercialization and cheapening of what, in my understanding, is a dimension of human existence that eludes easy capture and instrumental use. Spiritual growth and development, in many wisdom traditions, are connected to notions such as blessings and grace, struggle and failure, longing, lifelong quest, and unknowing (e.g., Foster, 1988; Johnston, 1996; Loy, 1996). Based on this understanding, I view with concern the attempts to put spirituality to use in order to achieve exterior goals, to build it into the formal workforce education or corporate curriculum, or to create corporate cultures built on spirituality. The important lessons in life are learned and not taught, and the teacher will arrive only when the student is ready, as two old axioms go. To me, matters of spirituality are private and the role of the educator best described as the guide who, ever so gently, listens, supports, offers guidance when requested, and, perhaps foremost, leads through her own example in words and action. And yet, despite the private nature of spirituality, I welcome the rise of interest, publications, and research on the topic in educational and even workplace contexts. They are evocative reminders of the need for a holistic understanding of ourselves and of the interdependence of heart, head, and hands so well articulated in the cooperative education movement. They also suggest powerful ways to counter the tendency toward fragmentation and consumer-oriented nihilism in contemporary society and to strengthen the focus on humane education as a much-needed alternative to behaviorist-focused teaching and scholarship.

In this chapter, I try to articulate some perspectives as a scholar, teacher, and practitioner in workforce education and human resource development.

The focus on inner dimensions of the self takes on particular salience in an educational field of practice that attempts the balancing act between performative dimensions and well-being and flourishing in workplace settings (Kuchinke, 2011) in what Fenwick (2011) has aptly described as our field's "dance with capital" (p. 88). I begin with a reflection on the state of the discussion in the professional community to show the range of approaches and considerations as exemplified at a recent annual meeting. I then explore the burgeoning interest in spirituality in a historical frame and then as related to conceptualizations of the role of work and career in today's society. Three ways of connecting spirituality and work are described, and I conclude with some thoughts on the role and responsibility of adult education and workforce and human resource development. Throughout, I refrain from attempts to bound, limit, or define the term, an effort beyond the scope of this chapter and undertaken elsewhere, not the least in the 2000 issue of this journal (English & Gillen, 2000). Instead, I simply refer interchangeably to the spiritual, inner, and personal dimensions of work, a stance taken in light of the thorny problem of capturing a holistic notion within the limits of language. I recognize further that spirituality, by whatever definition or approach, is not anything special or extra, but in fact part and parcel of our being, and that the struggle to realize deeper aspects of our being does, indeed, characterize every one of us, and thus Ian McLaren's aphorism at the beginning of this chapter.

Discourse of Spirituality in the Workplace

A starting point for this essay might be the symposium on spirituality at a recent national conference of the Academy of Human Resource Development (Abichandani, Alagaraja, & Ghosh, 2015). Although the topic had gained acceptance and even popularity over the past several years—some 25 conceptual and empirical conference papers have been presented since 2012—the 2015 session was the first focused event bringing together scholars from a variety of perspectives, persuasions, and cultural backgrounds. Panelists and participants addressed, in often highly personal style, their commitments, struggles, and hopes for an understanding and a practice of workforce and human resource education that was not fragmented and paid homage to the holistic nature of being in this world. The range of contributions was broad indeed. Several colleagues were quite comfortable exploring the utility of spirituality in the workplace in terms of individual-, group-, and organization-level outcomes and argued for operational definitions, measurement, and theory building. Some spoke of the need for conceptual clarification, whereas others still warned of the risks of normalization and instrumental use in the hands of business consultants, self-help book authors, and corporate executives, and others questioned if the private and sacred nature of spirituality could find a place in the rough and tumble of organizational life.

Spiritual Dimensions and Work in Historical Context

A short foray into the historical understandings of the relationship between the spiritual dimension and work serves to show the context and time-bound nature of today's discussion and perspectives. Many authors have alluded to the hunger for connectedness and grounding in today's highly individualistic and fragmented society. Conger (1994), for example, notes the decline of traditional institutions, such as religious and civic organizations, and the increased expectation that employment settings provide meaning and belonging. Yet workplaces have become unstable institutions unable to provide sustained meaning and satisfaction of deeper needs. The *betrayal of modern work*, the subtitle of Joanne Ciulla's (2000) book, is a frequent theme in the sociology of work. Postmodern scholars speak of the untethering of meaning and identity from tradition in today's consumer-oriented society, a moment in history well characterized by Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) term of *liquid modernity*. In this context, a burgeoning literature positions spirituality and meaning as a personal resource to counter the vagaries of today's social and economic environment. Ambrose (2006), for example, invites readers to "find meaning in the madness [of work]" (p. 1) by exploring its mysteries and paradoxes and making peace with our work. Simplistic as this form of self-help advice may be, it points to a widely felt need grounded in the increased expectation of work as a source of spirituality.

Placher's (2005) analysis of the evolution of work and spiritual identity provides a historical perspective. Writing from a Christian perspective, he distinguished four historical periods. During the centuries preceding the Reformation in the early 16th century, spiritual growth and development were entirely separated from work and maximally connected to formal religion. Being called was seen as a particular form of spiritual expression and meant allegiance to the church in the early centuries. During the Middle Ages, it became associated with joining the clergy. The vocation of early Christians, the term derived from the Latin *vocare* meaning to name or to call, was divorced from any secular meaning, and the process of working not linked to spiritual identity or inner meaning. Not until the Reformation is there a link between work and religious or spiritual identity. "[Y]our job was your vocation, and thus everyone, not just priests, nuns, and monks, was called by God to their particular work" (Placher, 2005, p. 8). The critique of work under an emerging capitalist economic system, expressed in the Marxian notion of alienated labor and later in the critique of consumer-oriented society, tarnished the potential and promise of work as an expression of the individual's inner dimension. The hunger for deeper meaning in life and work appears as a consequence of the individualization and isolation of the spiritual dimension from the collective. It further signals a retreat of the spiritual dimension into the private domain, with a vacuum of inner meaning and spiritual dimension felt keenly in the harried, breathless, and shallow routines of much of contemporary work life.

Spirituality and the Changing Nature of Work and Career

The resurging interest in meaning of work is a marker of the enduring nature of spirituality as a central human concern. The United States, for example, is among the most individualistic, fast-paced, and consumption-driven societies in the world but also ranks high in spirituality, whether this is measured by membership in organized religion, in private forms such as meditation, personal prayer, and yoga, or in the search for meaning in work. Many observers of contemporary work have noted the tension between the realities of everyday work and the dream of an integration or harmonization of the self and the workplace. This tension has become a significant characteristic of industrialized work and modern society. It is well expressed in the opening page of the best-selling book *Working*, which contains first-person narratives from individuals in a wide range of occupations:

> This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us. (Terkel, 2004, p. xi)

There is growing disenchantment with the possibilities and ethics of large organizational bureaucracies, be they U.S.-style multinational corporations, Korean family-owned *chebol,* or nongovernmental organizations of the United Nations. In the North American context, the philosophical tenets of quality management of the 1980s have given way to harsher employment regimes and the corporate landscape is now characterized by downsizing, restructuring, outsourcing, and offshoring of jobs. Work in modern organizations is described as increasingly complex, ambiguous, and uncertain (Baldry et al., 2007). This has altered the nexus between work and identity in the current volatile and shifting economic and societal moment where

> the catchword is flexibility, and this increasingly fashionable notion stands for a game of hire and fire with very few rules attached but with the power to change the rules unilaterally . . . [T]he prospect of constructing a lifelong identity on the foundation of work is, for the great majority of people, . . . dead and buried. (Bauman, 2006, pp. 316–317).

Career researchers, likewise, have noted a far-reaching change in how careers are constructed and enacted. Much attention has focused on the emergence of a new career pattern, promising to offer individual fulfillment, growth, and self-determination. The protean career model stands in sharp contrast to the traditional one that is governed by the demands and provisions of the employing organizations. Although there is little doubt that some

individuals have been able to carve out their own niche and succeeded in remaking their careers in line with their talents, values, and desires, there is little evidence to suggest that this model holds true for a majority (Kuchinke, 2013).

The context in which careers are lived out in today's institutions and organizations is complex, dynamic, and contradictory. Benefits in the form of challenging assignments, intrinsic rewards, and fulfilling work occur to some individuals some of the time, but this is often accompanied by high levels of stress and personal sacrifices. Living and working on the edge is the norm for some, as was shared with me in an interview with a regional manager of a global pharmaceutical company in charge of human resource management for Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East: "When I stand on the shores of the Red Sea at night after a business meeting, I cannot believe the turn my life has taken after growing up in a small village in Germany. It even makes me forget my two divorces and the fact that my children don't want to talk to me any more" (personal communication, name withheld, September 25, 2007).

In light of far-reaching changes in the world of work and in career progression and patterns, empirical research on the meaning of work shows that individuals preserve the value of the personal and limit the extent of engagement or identification with work in countries around the world. In an international survey of white-collar employees in eight countries, Kuchinke (2011) reported that individuals tended to value involvement with family higher as a source of meaning and identity than engagement in work. Another survey, conducted by the German association of labor unions, found that a majority of German manufacturing employees gladly traded higher salaries and advancement at work for more personal time (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, 2008). Based on these and many other studies, the wholesale colonialization of the private domain by corporate agendas predicted by critical scholars such as Deetz (1992) seems to have been countered by spirited assertions of the individual enacting firm boundaries between personal and work domains and, where possible, limiting time and energy involvement with work demands.

Spirituality and Work: Integration, Differentiation, or Fragmentation?

How, then, does spirituality, characterized by search and struggle for wholeness and belonging, inner peace and connectedness, fit with the complex, contradictory, and fast-paced nature of modern work and career? Three forms of fit might be considered. An integration perspective proposes unity and consistency, a differentiation perspective suggests tension and conflict, and a fragmentation perspective points to ambiguity and movement in and out of focus and clarity (see also Kuchinke, 2005).

The integration perspective assumes a harmonious relationship between spirituality and work, either actually achieved or at least potentially achievable given the right circumstances and sufficient energy and determination. Much of consultant-based and mass-marked business writing adopts this

perspective. Here, work is portrayed as an extension of the self where inner values find outward expression, where spiritual growth and professional engagement are mutually reinforcing, and where the spiritual dimension of the self flows easily into work roles and activities. This concordance of the inner dimension of the person and work might have resulted from a struggle with adversity or a breakthrough in consciousness in form of a vision or inspiration.

The differentiation perspective, in contrast, denies the easy fit of spiritual growth and work. In this understanding, there exists conflict and contradiction between the work domain and the inner dimensions of the self, and this is due to the pressures of economic and organizational goals that constrain and even hinder spiritual development. As a result, compromise and compartmentalization are needed to cope. The segmentation of the self into inner and outer worlds might be experienced as natural in contemporary society or as a necessity that is accepted with regret. Role performance at work is guided by organizational mandates and objectives, and individuals contribute to corporate goals on the basis of their training, interests, and ambitions. Spiritual growth finds its place in the private sphere, such as family, friends, and spiritual community, shielded and protected from the pressures of daily work, and can serve as a source of rejuvenation and strength.

The fragmentation perspective removes the assumption of fit or balance and emphasizes, instead, multiplicity of meaning and discontinuity. The spiritual dimension, along with other central commitments and concerns, moves in and out of focus in the push and pull of competing endeavors and may even lose relevance in dark night of the soul. This perspective is aligned with the critique of the modernist agenda of progress, stability, and order. Even the search for authenticity, spiritual awareness, and agency become suspect and contaminated by attempts at domination by powerful institutions and ideologies (e.g., Deetz, 1992). As Martin (1992, p. 156) wrote:

> [A] fragmented self constantly fluctuates among diverse and changing identities, pulled by issues and events . . . .The self is fragmented by a variety of nested, overlapping identities, external influences, and levels of consciousness: The perceiving subject, deluded by imagined notions of its unity and coherence, is in actuality split in such imponderable ways.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to reflect on the spiritual domain in the context of work. Starting with the observation of the strong and increasing interest in the topic among educators and in workforce education and human resource development circles, I have traced the changing historical understandings of the relationship between the inner dimension of the self and work roles and activities. For many centuries, the mundane activity of work and the spiritual realm of religion coexisted without intersecting. The Protestant reformation of

the 16th century linked spiritual salvation to worldly endeavors in direct manner. The rise of capitalism, its early critique of alienated labor, and the recent disenchantment with modern work have put into question the ability of organizations to provide meaning and to still the hunger for spiritual growth and connectedness. Empirical research into the meaning of work and career provides clear evidence that individuals in countries around the world safeguard personal interests and commitments from the demands of work and work organizations wherever possible. The expressed preference for family and personal time over work and career indicates the importance of nonwork domains in the lives of individuals and counters the exclusive search for meaning and belonging through engagement with work.

In my own understanding, the three modes that were introduced to frame the relationship between self and work are ideal types that illustrate alternatives but rarely exist in pure form. Reflecting about my own life and career, I can see instances, periods, and circumstances where one or the other mode prevailed, while competing forms were often in the background. The search for meaning and spiritual growth has certainly been a constant theme over the years, but career, family, and other obligations have often overshadowed the ability to focus as much as needed or wanted. Thus, compromise and segmentation of life pursuits appeared reasonable, though the little voice in the background kept nagging and suggesting to search for better balance. The dark night of the soul, where everything is questioned and not much makes sense any longer, has certainly been no stranger, and the path back has involved the kindness and wisdom of friends, counselors, and mentors. In my work with students, clients, and colleagues alike, openings and invitations to explore deeper issues are never far away. With students, these teachable moments may be discussions over the direction and content of term papers and dissertation projects, reviewing career plans and choices, or trying to help with personal conflicts and difficulties. In organizational consulting, particularly around issues of leadership and culture, I am frequently struck with the depth and sincerity of reflection among leaders wanting to act on their values, behave in authentic manner, and create nurturing and sustainable structures and processes. At the same time, I observe the anguish and pain when competing demands, corporate politics, and economic pressures stand in the way of aspirations and goals. In my university service roles, the struggle to find solutions to governance and resource allocation, finally, offer further opportunities and openings to dig deeper and surface issues of meaning and spirit. Of note is that these deeper conversations often happen unplanned, in the hall way after meetings, over lunch, or after hours. Rare is the occasion when spiritual growth and development are on the formal agenda, and yet this dimension is never far from the surface. It seems of great importance to let the other set the pace and depth of discussion around these issues and never to push, prod, or proselytize. Matters of spirituality are private, sensitive, and tender. Even though spirituality is core to our being, there are vast differences in levels of awareness, willingness, and

ability to tend to this dimension and address them in the course of work and education.

Many come to workforce and human resource development by way of counseling, religious training, social work, and other areas of human care and concern. As educators we have the opportunity and privilege to address in our work the search for wholeness and care for the spiritual dimensions in ourselves and those whose lives we touch in our work. Education, as many progressive educators have noted, is about the whole person, and not separate facets, and in this vein it should be welcomed that the focus on spirituality is receiving greater attention in the research, writing, and practice in our various domains of practical involvement.

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