



## OpenAIR@RGU

### The Open Access Institutional Repository at The Robert Gordon University

<http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

This is an author produced version of a paper published in

Aberdeen Business School Working Paper Series (ISSN 1753-6766)

This version may not include final proof corrections and does not include published layout or pagination.

#### Citation Details

Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

TOURISH, D. and TOURISH, N., 2008. 'The Prayer Factory': spirituality at work, and the paradoxes of performativity, monoculturalism and dissent. Available from OpenAIR@RGU. [online]. Available from: <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>

Citation for the publisher's version:

TOURISH, D. and TOURISH, N., 2008. 'The Prayer Factory': spirituality at work, and the paradoxes of performativity, monoculturalism and dissent. Aberdeen: The Robert Gordon University.

#### Copyright

Items in 'OpenAIR@RGU', The Robert Gordon University Open Access Institutional Repository, are protected by copyright and intellectual property law. If you believe that any material held in 'OpenAIR@RGU' infringes copyright, please contact [openair-help@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:openair-help@rgu.ac.uk) with details. The item will be removed from the repository while the claim is investigated.



**TITLE:** 'The Prayer Factory': Spirituality at work, and the paradoxes of performativity, monoculturism and dissent  
**AUTHORS:** Professor Dennis Tourish & Dr Naheed Tourish  
**DATE:** December 2008  
**VOLUME:** 2  
**NUMBER:** 1

**ISSN:** 1753-6766 (Print)  
**ISSN:** 1753-6774 (Online)

**ABERDEEN BUSINESS SCHOOL WORKING PAPER SERIES**

**TITLE:**

**'The Prayer Factory': Spirituality at work, and the paradoxes of  
performativity, monoculturism and dissent**

**AUTHORS:**

Professor Dennis Tourish\*  
Aberdeen Business School  
Robert Gordon University  
Garthdee Road  
Aberdeen AB10 7QE  
Email: D.J.Tourish@rgu.ac.uk

Dr Naheed Tourish  
Aberdeen Business School  
Robert Gordon University  
Garthdee Road  
Aberdeen AB10 7QE

**\*Address for correspondence**

## **'The Prayer Factory': Spirituality at work, and the paradoxes of performativity, monoculturism and dissent**

### **Abstract**

Recent years have witnessed a significant growth of academic and practitioner interest in 'spirituality' within the workplace, and in particular in spirituality management and leadership development. This paper argues that the literature in the area is replete with unresolved paradoxes. These revolve around how spirituality is defined, with advocates variously stressing its religious dimensions, usually from a Christian perspective, and others articulating a more secular approach focusing on non-denominational humanistic values. Additionally, much of the literature stresses the value of spirituality as an aid to increasing productivity and profits. Thus, spiritual means are attached to performative ends, even as its advocates stress its emancipatory intent. In exploring these contradictions, this paper argues that, despite asserting the opposite intention, spirituality management approaches seek to abolish the distinction between people's work based lives on the one hand, and their personal lives and value systems on the other. Influence is conceived in uni-directional terms: it flows from 'spiritual' managers to more or less compliant staff, deemed to be in need of enlightenment, rather than vice versa. It is therefore argued that, despite the emancipatory rhetoric in which much spirituality discourse is couched, it promotes constricting cultural and behavioural norms, and thereby seeks to reinforce managerial power at the expense of individual autonomy. The implications for the management of culture, and such issues as conformity and dissent, are considered.

## **INTRODUCTION: SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

Spirituality at work (henceforth, SAW), along with associated movements promoting spiritual management and leadership development, has grown in significance over the past decade, particularly in the USA (Brown, 2003). Aburdene (2005) has argued that it now constitutes a 'megatrend', likely to dominate much business activity in the years ahead. Indicative of this, articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Fortune* and *Business Week*. The *Academy of Management* has a special interest group devoted to the subject with almost 700 members, a development which has created 'legitimacy and support for research and teaching in this newly emerging field' (Neal and Biberman 2003: 363). Special issues of various journals have been produced, including the *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, the *Journal of Organization and Change Management*, the *Journal of Management Education* and *The Leadership Quarterly*. The field now has its own journal (*Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion*). A thick handbook has been published, which attracted input from major luminaries in the field of organisational studies, including Stanford's Jeffrey Pfeffer (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003). It is scarcely surprising that some advocates have been able to note with evident satisfaction that 'Spirituality at work... appears to be an idea whose time has come' (Singhal and Chatterjee, 2006: 162).

Efforts are also underway to legitimise its place in the business school curriculum. Barnett et al (2000: 563) urge the teaching of spirituality on business courses, in order to 'engage students in self-discovery about the inner energies of the soul, their connections to personal and professional development, and their contributions to social and economic evolution.' On this principle, albeit in an extreme form, a 'Maharishi University of Management' has been created in which spirituality is expressed through twice daily gatherings for meditation, and the transmission of cosmic vibes of spiritual energy intended to heal a stress-stricken world (Schmidt-Wilk et al., 2000; Barnett, 2004). Advocates of SAW challenge the notion that work should be a spirit-free zone, and assert that organisations should facilitate more holistic personal expressions by employees (Lewis and Geroy, 2000). Since people now spend most of their waking hours at work, it is claimed that they increasingly look to their organisations 'as a communal centre' (Mirvis, 1997: 702), thereby legitimating managers' concern with what might previously have been considered to be the private belief systems of their employees. It is argued that SAW is 'changing the fundamental nature of work' (Konz and Ryan, 1999: 200), with employees increasingly expecting their leaders to offer meaning in both their work and wider lives (Konz and Ryan, 1999; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). The management of meaning is therefore held to be a crucial activity for managers (Singhal and Chatterjee, 2006), which the adoption of SAW related practices will purportedly help them to perform. Thus, Fry (2003: 702) suggests, without any suggestion of irony, that 'Companies as diverse as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, BioGenex, Aetna International, Big Six accounting's Deloitte and Touche, and Law firms such as New York's Kaye, Scholer, Fierman, Hayes and Handler are extolling lessons usually doled out in churches, temples and mosques.'

With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Ashforth and Pratt, 2003; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008) the phenomenon has attracted little critical attention. It is this critical perspective which this paper seeks to apply. Our core argument is that: SAW has been poorly defined, and has attempted to straddle both secularism and a particular stress on religion; non-spiritual, utilitarian and performative notions of productivity underlie much of its advocacy; it is presented without sufficient acknowledgement of power differentials in the workplace, and therefore ignores the additional power which its practice may cede to a managerial elite; as a result, its claimed emancipatory agenda may serve as a vehicle for the advancement of a more controlling and oppressive managerial agenda than is normally acknowledged or may be intended. In particular, SAW can be employed as yet another means of establishing monocultural workplace environments, in which employee dissent is demonised as the sinful antithesis of pure spiritual values, to which only morally deficient individuals could object.

### **SAW – A RELIGIOUS OR SECULAR PARADIGM?**

A key problem is the multiple ways in which SAW has defined itself. We review some of the contradictions that this creates, and then argue that a common feature of the competing definitions on offer is their tendency to reify organisations and, intentionally or otherwise, promote the desirability of a monocultural environment, in which the power of managers is intensified and dissent is marginalised.

In general, SAW has been defined in terms that imply a deep relationship with the core of what it means to be a human being. It has been described as something that involves ultimate and personal truths (Wong, 1998), as the promotion of a relationship with a higher power that effects how one conducts oneself in the world (Armstrong, 1995), as being intimately bound up with religion (Dent et al, 2005) and as an animating force that inspires one towards purposes beyond oneself and which in turn gives life meaning and direction (McKnight, 1984). Mason and Welsh (1994) define it as wonder, play, spontaneity, joy, imagination, celebration, discernment, insight and creativity – which might be a revelation to those who disdain the nomenclature of spirituality and who view such terms as 'joy' and 'spontaneity' from a humanist or secular perspective. In straightforward religious terms, spiritual well being has also been posited as requiring an affirmation of life in a relationship with God and the celebration and nurturing of wholeness (Ellison, 1983). Reave (2005: 677) argues that 'Most spiritual teachings urge the appreciation of others as fellow creations of God worthy of respect and praise. Praise of God's creation is widely considered to be a means of prayer, so appreciating others may similarly be considered an expression of gratitude not only to individuals but also to God.' In this view, spirituality and religion are inseparable constructs. Daniels et al (2000) are among those who argue for a specifically Christian approach to management and management education, including an advocacy of the need to model a sense of Christian community on University campuses. Similarly, Cavanagh (1999) argues that spirituality includes acknowledging both God and the importance of prayer.

This overtly religious orientation is also evident in an increasing body of practitioner oriented literature. Granberg-Michaelson's (2004) text includes chapters with titles such as 'Listening for God's call'. This asserts that 'Beneath the challenges posed to any leader by temptations arising from money, sex, and power is a more fundamental question: how does one hear God's "call" for one's life at a particular point in one's journey?... I have no doubt that God does call us in this way; our problem comes in listening, so that this call can be heard' (p.36).

Such religious definitions offer a narrow, normative framework, of limited appeal when significant numbers of people have abandoned formal Church attendance and the rituals of religious commitment. It is nevertheless suggested that leaders can articulate this framework in such a manner that it assumes a wide appeal, and so unleashes a unifying force within their organisations. Although these assumptions are a given in the literature, we argue in this paper that they are deeply problematic. Overt religious symbols are unwelcome in many workplaces, precisely because of their divisive potential – for example, in Northern Ireland (Dickson et al., 2008). Such perspectives also confer considerable additional power on managers and leaders, whom it is assumed can and should encourage employees to redefine their views of God and religion in terms determined by managers. There is no evidence that such an approach would be welcomed. In addition, attempts to pursue it may be viewed as an effort to create a monocultural environment that, by privileging particular belief systems over others, reproduces a repressive managerial agenda at odds with a claimed emancipatory intent.

While this critique can be applied to the overtly religious definitions of spirituality, we argue that the more secular motions also on offer suffer from similar limitations. With such approaches, a seemingly humanistic approach is to the fore. Duchon and Plowman, (2005: 807) assert that 'Workplace spirituality is defined as a workplace that recognises that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work that takes place in the context of community.' SAW is therefore depicted in emancipatory terms, simply intended to 'help' people bring more of themselves to work, without incurring sanction or ridicule. Thus, Mitroff (2003) promotes spirituality as a transcendent force connecting people to the universe and therefore enables them to bring the deepest essence of themselves to work, while being distinct from religion, particularly of the organised variety. Consistent with this, Pfeffer (2003) views SAW in secular terms, as that which enables people to learn, develop, have a sense of competence and mastery, and live an integrated life in which work roles and personal roles exist in harmony with each other. On first inspection, this might appear an entirely benign ambition. The problem lies, however, in how it is to be translated into practice, in the power saturated organisations in which most people work.

Ashmos and Duchon (2000) epitomise the difficulty. They argue that SAW encompasses three major themes: the importance of a person's inner life, the need for meaning at work and the importance of a sense of connection and community within organisations. It is commonly assumed that the

promotion of 'connection' and 'community' requires employees to align their values with the organisation's larger purpose, as it has been defined by senior managers (Milliman et al., 2003; Ashforth and Pratt, 2003). SAW is therefore advocated as a means of personal rather than organisational transformation. People's attention is directed internally to whatever obstacles that block their full engagement with the management agenda – rather than externally, to those systemic difficulties that might prevent the emergence of more humanistic work organisations.

The presumption is also that those at the top will have ultimate say, and that how leaders view themselves is a key ingredient behind the 'successful' development of SAW. Thus it is often argued that

'the president or CEO is usually the key person to initiate a process defining an organization's mission and vision, and, as stated, this should be part of his or her job description, but a governing board should be deeply involved in the process, especially in the case of religious and other non-profit institutions. Granted, the process may create new expectations for them and change their role. Similarly, staff must be consulted throughout the process in meaningful ways that take seriously their input but don't place inappropriate expectations on them to ultimately control the outcome' (Wagner-Marsh and Conley, 1999: 107).

Evidently, staff may offer a view, but must ultimately be prepared to embrace powerful value systems set for them by others. Thus, it is routinely asserted that spiritual management leadership involves 'creating a vision wherein organization members experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference' (Fry, 2003: 711). Leaders, it is argued, must promote a common vision and achieve value congruence at all organizational levels (Maghroori and Rolland, 1997). Much that is ostensibly positive is claimed to flow from this, including improved organizational learning (Bierly et al, 2000), unified communities in the workplace (Cavanagh et al, 2001), a greater feeling of connection between employees, and between employees and their work (Khanna and Srinivas, 2000), increased compassion, wisdom, and connectedness (Maxwell, 2003) and increased corporate social responsibility – at no cost to key indicators of financial performance (Fry and Cohen, 2008). Leaders must therefore aspire to instil a sense of the spiritual realm within individuals, teams, and the organisation more widely (Cacioppe, 2000). A key proposition is that workplace spirituality is related to the leader's ability to 'enable' the worker's inner life, sense of meaningful work, and community (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). Accordingly, a leader who embraces SAW will have a heightened ability to create a definition of what represents a meaningful life, to predefine employees' sense of community excessively in the direction of workplace relationships, and to transform their inner life so that it is more consistent with corporate purposes. It is an agenda which seeks to extend managers' power in ever wider and more intrusive directions, on the assumption that it will have a benign intent.

In order to prepare for such a role, it also follows that managers require 'development' (i.e. training/ indoctrination) in its precepts. Spiritual management and leadership development is therefore increasingly offered by providers, who 'claim to enable the release of managers from their socialised selves so they can be liberated from the 'negative thoughts', 'fears' or 'barriers', which impede the development of a successful corporate culture' (Bell and Taylor, 2004: 441). In so doing, it reflects a focus on managing identity (and thus ensuring compliance through the internalisation of dominant corporate values), rather than old hierarchical structures and simple mechanisms of command and control. The focus is on the need for individuals to adapt everything they possess, body and soul, to the organisational environment in which they find themselves, in pursuit of meaning and solace. The possibility that such a colonisation of people's affective domain might be oppressive, invasive or unwelcome is not generally considered.

Thus, while some texts acknowledge that there is a danger of overly 'enthusiastic' CEOs attempting to impose a particular religious belief system on others (e.g. Cavanagh, 1999), such writers generally still favour a unitarist view of organisations which privilege a managerial voice above that of other organisational members. Cavanagh (1999: 192) also posits the view that 'If handled well, common religious and spiritual beliefs in an organization can be fruitful. But if not handled well, it can lead to divisiveness and even law suits.' It is simply assumed that an organisation must have 'a common view' about such inherently contentious subjects, and that, somehow, managers can become adept at managing whatever tensions inadvertently arise. Cavanagh (1999) proceed to argue in favour of prayer within 'religiously oriented business schools,' in order to bring a sense of 'perspective' to the curriculum. Meanwhile,

'Spirituality enables a businessperson to gain a better perspective on their firm, family, neighbours, community and themselves. Furthermore, acknowledging dependence on God gives the individual manager a more stable and helpful vision. The manager then knows that his/ her success also depends on someone beyond themselves, so such a view also lessens stress. Such a vision also enables the manager to integrate their life, so that it is less segmented and compartmentalized' (Cavanagh, 1999: 198).

Whether employees will be likely to feel the same is not considered.

Consistent with an approach which privileges a managerial voice over issues of personal belief, and hence which prioritises conformity over dissent, Benefiel (2005) approvingly discusses one US organization, where the organization's founders committed to 'follow the will of God in business decisions, to be determined through prayer and their unanimous agreement.' It is routinely assumed that this is a model way to proceed. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz's (2003: 663) assertion that 'a theory of spiritual leadership would start with the leader's own ethics and integrity' is typical of the literature. Once a leader has clarified such issues to their own satisfaction, their next task is to transmit them to others, who presumably are little more than empty vessels, awaiting a transfusion of integrity from

their managers. But there is no reason to believe that such a transfusion can be accomplished without evoking dismay, suspicion and resistance.

Again, we note that many of the terms used in the literature are much more problematic than is acknowledged. One manager's definition of integrity in decision making (e.g. on such issues as downsizing) can be defined as unethical with equal or greater legitimacy by other voices. However, the dominant discourse within the SAW literature does not consider such an approach. Rather, the role of God in spirituality is central; spirituality is generally synonymous with a Christian belief system; and a managerial voice is permitted and encouraged to define core values for everyone within its orbit.

### *The illusion of inclusivity*

Many advocates of SAW, particularly those who place less emphasis on the term's religious connotations, have been keen to stress the inclusive nature of their approach, as a means of addressing these issues. Mitroff and Denton (1999) argue that spirituality must be broadly inclusive by definition, since it promotes values that are 'universal and timeless'. It is also 'the ultimate source and provider of meaning and purpose', dealing with 'the sacredness of everything' by exploring 'the deep feeling of interconnectedness of everything'<sup>1</sup>. Ashmos and Duchon (2000: 634) argue that 'spirituality is neither about religion nor about getting people to accept a specific belief system. Rather, it is about employees who understand themselves as spiritual beings at work whose souls need nourishment, a sense of purpose and meaning, and a sense of connectedness to one another and to their workplace community.' The language is aimed at the articulation of appealing values that lie beyond the domain of one religious world view, and which it is claimed can therefore escape controversy. In line with this, Reave (2005: 655) concludes that 'there is a clear consistency between spiritual values and practices and effective leadership. Values that have long been considered spiritual ideals, such as integrity, honesty, and humility, have been demonstrated to have an effect on leadership success.'

However, many of these statements are themselves deeply ambiguous and therefore contested. For example, what does it mean to say that spirituality is 'universal and timeless'? Arguably, there is no one set of universal values to which all people subscribe. In addition, 'universal' values must, by definition, be so general in nature as to confer little real meaning on what they ostensibly denote. Thus Daniels et al (2000) cites a magazine article on South-West Airlines in the United States which argues that the organisation's culture is based on spiritual values. These are identified as a strong emphasis on community, an (alleged) employee perception that they are part of a cause, a culture of empowerment and an emphasis on emotion and humour. Clearly, the linguistic terms employed can withstand multiple interpretations – an elasticity of meaning which creates further paradoxes. As Hicks (2003: 165) put it,

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Mitroff and Denton (1999) here are from pages 23-25 of their book.

'... if citizens do hold in common a few values, such as freedom, equality, and toleration, these values are not "thick" enough to provide the resources to settle morally challenging leadership questions such as what role religion should play in the contemporary workplace. Attempts to translate religiously particular values into common spiritual or secular values are reductionist at best and inaccurate at worst.'

Definitions of SAW therefore suffer from a twofold problem. When couched in religious terms they exclude many and are opposed by others. Such definitions are likely to have a limited and perhaps diminishing appeal. This may not prevent managers who have bought into such a philosophy from expending enormous energy in the pursuit of a monocultural environment that, in reality, is likely to prove elusive. On the other hand, when SAW assumes an inclusive and secular form it lacks real regulatory power, since allegedly universal values are in reality vulnerable to multiple and contested interpretations, and hence applications. Again, despite the effort invested in its advocacy, it would therefore have a limited impact on people's thoughts, emotions and behaviour – the three main areas where it aspires to have a normative effect.

## **THE STRESSES AND STRAINS OF PERFORMATIVITY**

The literature on SAW inherently reifies organisations. It assumes that they have a taken for granted quality and a unitary nature that precludes multiple and contested interpretations of either the common good or spirituality. A performative intent is therefore endemic to much of this discourse – that is, the assertion is made that by embracing spirituality organisations (i.e. senior managers) will improve effectiveness, productivity and profitability.

Summarising this position, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003: 9-10) argue as follows:

'The scientific study of workplace spirituality must be founded on sound theoretical justification of its utility. Researchers must effectively demonstrate the utility of spirituality in the workplace by framing it as a question of value-added: How does spirituality help us to undertake work processes more effectively?'

In this 'spirit', spirituality audits have been conducted in many workplaces, with some key spirituality auditors arguing that their research shows how spirituality enhances competitiveness (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). It is routinely claimed (albeit with minimal supporting empirical evidence) that such workplaces are more productive, flexible and creative (Eisler and Montuori, 2003), that they lead to reduced absenteeism and turnover (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003), that SAW enhances individual creativity (Freshman, 1999), increases honesty and trust (Wagner-Marsh and Conely, 1999), provides employees with an enhanced sense of personal fulfilment (Burack, 1999), and in general increases commitment to organizational goals (Delbecq, 1999). They will also be better primed

for successful implementation and adaptation to 'change' (Heaton et al., 2004).

In addition, it is argued that organisations which embrace SAW are inherently more likely to become exemplars of the 'learning organisation', in which greater intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic motivation will be unleashed (Fry, 2003). Again, profits will rise. Such organisations will, it is claimed, be 'love-led', obsessed with customer/client satisfaction, diverse, flexible, networked and much less hierarchical than in the past, since new normative frameworks will replace the need for previous models of coercion (Ancona et al, 1999). For most senior managers these would be alluring goals, and are clearly offered to attract their attention. To advance this agenda, a Spiritual Leadership Theory (SLT) is posited, as 'a causal leadership theory for organizational transformation designed to create an intrinsically motivated, learning organization' (Fry et al, 2005: 835). Since leaders will be enabled by this approach to integrate their personal and professional lives, it is also argued that it will improve their effectiveness (Neal, 2001). It follows that they need to sign up for workshops run by 'experts', who are well schooled in spirituality related issues. But not only leaders will gain. Tischler et al (2002) argue that, for similar reasons, individuals who embrace SAW will have greater success at work. Within this unitarist framework, it appears that no one stands to lose – all will have prizes.

Paradoxically, organisations are urged to promote increasingly religious values, and require employees to buy into them – in order to make more money. Spirituality seems to be viewed as another means of asserting that the visions developed by an organisation's leaders have been designed to genuinely reflect their followers' interests – as opposed to, say, enhancing shareholder value. Followers should therefore comply, to boost organisational performance. This paradox is heightened by the context in which it is occurring. Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004: 26-27), in noting that downsizing and re-engineering failed to accomplish improvements in organisational performance, characterise SAW as being among efforts to develop 'work environments that foster employees' creativity and personal growth...The assumption is that such environments will foster more fulfilling lives for employees and positive outcomes for organizations.' Thus, even as the traditional psychological contract is violated, SAW is deployed in an attempt to increase loyalty (Burack, 1999: Cash and Gray, 2000), precisely in a context in which the credibility of managers as advocates of humanistic values has been damaged by previous (and discredited) management fads.

There are some more cautious voices in the literature. For example, Dehler and Welsh (2003: 115) acknowledge that:

'The most serious danger may be managerial attempts to exploit the emotional side of work by turning it into an instrumentality, that is, embrace people's spiritual side *because* it impacts on the bottom line, rather than treating people as complete human beings as the "right" thing to do. Inevitably, there will be tension in the relationship between workers and their institutions, in part as a

result of business cycles... There are...legitimate concerns about the usurpation of first the body, then the mind, and now the heart of workers by employers.'

Nevertheless, this kind of acknowledgement is rare. For the most part, and as we have argued here, theorists in the field presume that organisations have a unitarist interest, and that performative ends can be safely attached to a means founded on the articulation of SAW.

Performativity also intrudes into the development of a future research agenda. To date, there has been relatively little empirical research, designed to test the frequent assertions that SAW confers multiple organisational benefits (Dean, 2004). While advocates have been compelled to recognise that this is a weakness, their response may accentuate rather than resolve the issues at stake. Thus, Milliman et al (1999) acknowledge that many senior managers will only embrace SAW if they believe that it offers bottom line benefits. They then argue that research designed to validate this notion 'is needed if we are to create a paradigm shift in CEOs so that they incorporate spiritual principles into their organizations.' This comes close to determining the findings of empirical research in advance – an approach which would have more in common with pseudoscience than genuine academic inquiry.

Performativity is therefore embedded in the extant literature, even though this would appear to violate the notion that SAW should be promoted primarily because of its intrinsic ethical superiority and emancipatory potential. It is doubtful that managers and organisations pursuing it for these ends could sustain a credible impression over the long term. Rather, it may be that such an obvious intent further undercuts the possibility of the concept taking deep root in people's minds. Instead, it may generate further cynicism about management intentions in the workplace. However, as we will now argue, even if SAW is not well placed to exercise a colonising impact on the affective domain of employees, this is clearly its intent.

### **SAW AND CORPORATE CULTURISM – THE SECOND COMING?**

Our critique is consistent with the suggestion made by Willmott (1993: 517), to the effect that the emphasis on the importance of a strong corporate culture that was prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s 'aspires to extend management control by colonising the affective domain. It does this by promoting employee commitment to a monolithic structure of feeling and thought.' Willmott's analysis focused on the notion of 'excellence', utilised to promote the notion that employees should reframe their identity in corporate terms, so that all organisational members should 'see themselves reflected in the emerging conception of the enterprising organization and thus to come increasingly to identify with it' (du Gay, 1991, 53-54). These approaches promoted monoculturism in the workplace, at least as the ideal. But, by extending managers' power into the affective domain, all forms of dissent and resistance can be deemed to be off limits. Within this world view, it is no longer permissible merely for

employees to do a decent job while holding a privately critical attitude towards an organisation's goals, culture or its leaders. Senior managers are encouraged to extend their influence into every area of employees' lives, including their most private values and belief systems. The implied goal seems to be that behaviour will be rendered consistent with the needs of the corporation, always and everywhere. We suggest that if something such as 'spirituality', which sounds inherently positive to many people, can be invoked as the basis of an organisation's culture, then it may be appropriated for the same ends as were served by the 'excellence' and 'strong cultures' movements that were critiqued by Willmott (1993).

The problem is that the literature on SAW fails to adequately address the issue of power, particularly at what is termed a 'deep structure' level. Surface-level structures are defined as being readily identifiable, such as those evident in organisational charts or a worker's job title, objectives, and goals. Deep structures are defined as forms of constraint that are less readily identifiable (Clegg, 1989; Deetz, 1985; Clegg, 2000). Advocates of SAW tend to present management prerogatives in an unassailable and uncontested light, and merely assume that managers have a perfectly legitimate right to determine values and beliefs for employees. We argue that, in reality, this kind of emphasis on corporate culturism and an emerging focus on spirituality management constitute major mechanisms for the deep structure exercise of power and constraint in organisations, albeit couched in emancipatory and humanistic rhetoric.

Thus, it is axiomatic in much of the literature that leaders should seek to mould the organisation's culture, and hence the personality of those who work within it. An organisation's culture is therefore viewed as merely another resource, to be defined and moulded by its managerial elite (Smircich, 1983). It is assumed that managers can demonstrate to those lower down the organisation how they should perform, think and feel, by a judicious combination of example and exhortation. But managers, in turn, are expected to take their ideological cue from the CEO at the top, and internalise his/her values accordingly. The challenge is to frame spiritual values so that they are inclusive – but yet capable of exercising a powerful enough normative appeal to constrain behaviour. Management development programmes play a critical role in this effort. The use of management development programmes which have appropriated much of the rhetoric and ritual of self discovery, faith and commitment are therefore increasingly common (Ackers and Preston, 1997).

Such programmes often just assume that managers can and indeed should embark on the personal transformation of whatever value systems are held by their employees (e.g. Gozdz and Frager, 2003; Reave, 2005). An environment characterised by 'bounded choice' may then emerge, in which only a limited repertoire of feelings, attitudes and behaviour is permissible (Lalich, 2004). Within this paradigm, it is not too fanciful to see managers as a priestly caste, endowed with greater wisdom than other lesser mortals, and empowered with the dispensation to impart it unidirectionally to all within their orbit. It is taken for granted that managers can frame productivity targets and organisational goals for everyone, in a manner that secures the interests of all, that managers'

goals are intrinsically uncontentious, and that these goals can/ should be linked to spirituality, in the Machiavellian calculation that profit driven goals will become more acceptable to employees. The overall implication is that whatever prevents full engagement with the management agenda is a personal weakness to be overcome, and that organisations have the right to invade people's internal cognitive space to reshape their values ('We need a new vision around here'), in the unproblematic pursuit of corporate efficiency.

The deal on offer amounts to a Faustian pact – it means that managers are increasingly liberated to engineer the souls of their employees, who stand to secure management approval and career progression if they embrace the new value system. The goal is to abolish any distinction between the public and private spaces in people's lives. Little thought has been given by the advocates of SAW to the potentially negative effects of breaching boundaries between the personal and professional domains of people's lives in this manner. Thus, managers decide – everything. In the context of asymmetrical power relations in the workplace, it is difficult to see how this agenda could genuinely serve an emancipatory purpose. Whatever the intent, SAW seems well placed to become another repressive project, expressed through the coercive exercise of power.

The potential for this outcome is summed up in a text by Kunde and Cunningham's (1999). Without any suggestion of irony, their book is entitled *Corporate Religion*. Its dust-jacket argues that,

'management has to unite the organization around a strong idea, a shared vision, and then manage accordingly. That makes tough demands. In the company of the future there will only be space for believers. Dissenters must look elsewhere.'

The authors recommend that employees be screened during recruitment for attitude, in order to minimize the selection of potential dissenters. And, indeed, the blunt demand that dissenters should 'seek to fulfill their potential elsewhere' has become part of the discourse of a considerable number of managers (Tourish and Hargie, 2004). Powerful coercive mechanisms have been created by such organisations as Enron, to reinforce this message and quell dissent (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005). A great many of these mechanisms could well be employed by zealous advocates of SAW, convinced that only true believers should be permitted to belong.

Yet leaders often lose touch with reality, or view their organisations as vehicles for purely personal gain (Sankar, 2003). Such leaders are likely to see the real self interests of employees as secondary to the preoccupations of the leader. In such a context, noble sounding ideals expressed in the language of spirituality can become just another form of social control, mobilised in support of interests that are different to those implied in the surface declarations of its advocates.

Ultimately, domination is inherent to all forms of management (Alvesson, 2002; Hopfl, 2005). The challenge is to identify those areas where

domination is arbitrary, unethical, problematic or coercive, and to delineate the means whereby it is exercised. We have argued that corporate culturism, particularly when it seeks to promote spirituality in the workplace, becomes a form of management domination realised through the exercise of coercive power. This is particularly the case when the underlying purpose of such spirituality is the very down to earth goal of enhancing profitability. In a context of growing corporate power, and the concentration of authority within corporations in the hands of CEOs, it is questionable whether society should cede them the right to abolish the distinction between employees' activities at work and their private values, and hence legitimise only those aspects of spirituality that can be depicted as serving the bottom line.

## **CONCLUSION**

Brown (2003: 393) has argued that the overall concept of SAW 'is not so much elusive and intangible as confused and imprecise.' The multiple definitions on offer, and the tendency to ignore potential paradoxes, also means that the field can be classified as being 'saturated with subjectivity' (Lips-Wiersma, 2003: 406) – a subjectivity which enables powerful elites to promote sectional interests while claiming that they embody universal truths and principles. Our critique has therefore pinpointed the inherently autocratic potential that lies behind what purports to be an emancipatory agenda.

A bald assertion of 'share holder value' has limited appeal for most people, and little potential to inspire greater effort in the workplace – a problem which managers increasingly recognise. If corporate goals can be couched in more ideologically appealing forms, people are more likely to shift their attitudes in the direction deemed to be desirable. We have argued that spirituality has increasingly been invoked as the ideological foundation of corporate culturism in an attempt to achieve this, often in the overt pursuit of such unspiritual needs as enhanced profitability. Vague, highly generalised or what Taylor (2004: 28) has characterised as 'ethereal ideas' (such as those offered by many advocates of SAW) have the potential to encourage over conformist behaviour and monoculturism, at least for a period. When this occurs, formal elements of compulsion (e.g. one way communication systems, from top managers to employees rather than vice versa) may appear less intrusive or oppressive than they actually are. Spirituality offers the promise of a coherent ideology that does not question a corporate power that is now so pervasive as to be unremarkable. It may therefore underpin new rituals of commitment, and a new language of obedience, to whatever goals are deemed acceptable by senior managers, and which have a clear performative intent.

Ignoring such issues, advocates of SAW contend that leaders of business organisations should seek to fill the void in people's lives that has been created by the well documented decay of wider social networks. Putnam's (2000) classic study, *Bowling Alone*, is a powerful analysis of this process. In essence, work pressures have appropriated the time that people used to spend on sports, churches or even political parties. Altruism, philanthropy and volunteering have all declined precipitously.

But there is no obvious reason to assume that business leaders would be motivated in any endeavour to address these problems by anything other than the performative norms which have been instrumental in creating this void in the first place. In fact, as we argue in this paper, SAW could be employed as a convenient ideological tool to limit dissent, heighten commitment, and secure a redoubled focus on profit oriented goals. This danger is particularly acute when those who advocate such approaches are insensitive to the problem of power, and its unequal distribution in most workplaces. However, as Galbraith (1977: 259) wryly noted, 'By pretending that power is not present, we greatly reduce the need to worry about its exercise.' Seemingly unaware of such complications, most advocates of SAW take power differentials for granted, and propose measures which would have the effect of strengthening them.

A different approach is required. In particular, we would suggest that the workplace is not a useful medium for people to find the deepest meaning in their lives. Managers are not spiritual engineers or secular priests, charged with responsibility for the human soul, and business organisations are not a suitable forum for exploring such issues. The distinction between private and public spaces is important, and worth preservation. Work can and should be meaningful, but only in its own terms, and not as a substitute for the creation of wider social networks, interests, commitments, values and beliefs. To suggest otherwise is to extend management power in new, inappropriate and dangerous directions. More critical studies of SAW and what it represents are required.

## REFERENCES

- Aburdene, P. (2005) *Megatrends 2010*, Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing.
- Ackers, P., and Preston, D. (1997) Born Again? The ethics and efficacy of the conversion experience in contemporary management development, *Journal of Management Studies*, 34, 677-701.
- Alvesson, M. (2002) *Understanding Organisational Culture*, London: Sage.
- Ancona, D., Kochan, T., Scully, M., Van Maanen, J., and Westney, D. (1999) *Organizational behaviour and processes*, Boston: South-Western College Publishing.
- Armstrong, T.D. (1995). *Exploring spirituality: The development of the Armstrong measure of spirituality*, Paper presented at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, New York, NY.
- Ashforth, B., and Pratt, M. (2003) Institutionalized spirituality: An oxymoron? In R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.) *Handbook Of Workplace Spirituality And Organizational Performance*, pp.93-107. New York: Sharpe.
- Ashmos, D., and Duchon, D. (2000) Spirituality at work: A reconceptualisation and measure, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9, 134-145.
- Barnett, A. (2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2004) Trouble in transcendental paradise as murder rocks the Maharishi University, *The Observer*, (Available online at <http://www.rickcross.com/reference/tm/tm90.html>, Accessed 27th January 2007).
- Barnett, C., Krell, T., and Sendry, J. (2000) Learning to learn about spirituality: A categorical approach to introducing the topic into management courses, *Journal of Management Education*, 24, 562-579.
- Bell, E., and Taylor, S. (2004) 'From outward bound to inward bound': the prophetic voices and discursive practices of spiritual management development, *Human Relations*, 57, 439-466.
- Benefiel, M. (2005) The second half of the journey: Spiritual leadership for organizational transformation, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 723-747.
- Bierly 111, P., Kessler, E., and Christensen, E. (2000) Organizational learning, knowledge and wisdom, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 13, 595-618.
- Brown, R. (2003) Organizational spirituality: The sceptic's version, *Organization*, 10, 393-400.
- Burack, E. (1999) Spirituality in the workplace, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 280-291.
- Cacioppe, R. (2000) Creating spirit at work: Re-visioning organization development and leadership – Part 1, *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 21, 48-54.
- Cash, K., and Gray, G. (2000) A framework for accommodating religion and spirituality in the workplace, *Academy of Management Executive*, 14, 124-134.
- Cavanagh, G. (1999) Spirituality for managers: Context and critique, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 186-199.

- Cavenagh, G., Hanson, B., Hanson, K., and Hinojoso, J. (2001) Toward spirituality for the contemporary organization: Implications for work, family and society, Institute for Spirituality and Organizational Leadership, *Proceedings from 'Bridging the Gap.'* Retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2007, from [http://lsb.scu.edu/ISOL/contemporary\\_organization.pdf](http://lsb.scu.edu/ISOL/contemporary_organization.pdf).
- Clegg, S (2000) The vicissitudes of power/ knowledge. *Keynote Address, ANZAM Conference, Sydney, Australia – 3-6 December.*
- Clegg, S. (1989) *Frameworks of power*, London: Sage.
- Daniels, D., Franz, R., and Wong, K. (2000) A classroom with a worldview: Making spiritual assumptions explicit in management education, *Journal of Management Education*, 24, 540-561.
- Dean, K. (2004) Systems thinking's challenge to research in spirituality and religion at work: An interview with Ian Mitroff, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 17, 11-25.
- Deetz, S. (1985) Critical-cultural research: new sensibilities and old realities, *Journal of Management*, 11, 121-136.
- Dehler, G., and Welsh, M. (2003) The experience of work: spirituality and the new workplace, In R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.) *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance*, pp.108-122, New York: Sharpe.
- Delbecq, L. (1999) Christian spirituality and contemporary business leadership, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 345-349.
- Dent, E., Higgins, M., and Wharff, D. (2005) Spirituality and leadership: An empirical review of definitions, and embedded assumptions, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 625-653.
- Dickson, D., Hargie, O., and Wilson, N. (2008) Communication, relationships, and religious differences in the Northern Ireland workplace: A study of private and public sector organisations, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36, 128-160.
- du Gay, P. (1991) Enterprise culture and the ideology of excellence, *New Formations*, 13, 45-61.
- Duchan, D., and Plowman, D. (2005) Nurturing the spirit at work: Impact on work unit performance, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 807-833.
- Eisler, R., and Montouori, A. (2003) The human side of spirituality, In R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.) *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance* (pp.46-56), New York: M.E Sharpe.
- Ellison, C. (1983) Spiritual well-being: Conceptualisation and measurement, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 11, 330-340.
- Freshman, B. (1999) An exploratory analysis of definitions and applications of spirituality in the workplace, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 318-327.
- Fry, L. (2003) Toward a theory of spiritual leadership, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 693-727.
- Fry, L., and Cohen, M. (2008) Spiritual leadership as a paradigm for organizational transformation and recovery from extended work hours cultures, *Journal of Business Ethics* (in press)
- Fry, L., Vitucci, S., and Cedillo, M. (2005) Spiritual leadership and army transformation: Theory, measurement, and establishing a baseline, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 835-862.

- Galbraith, J. (1977) *The Age of Uncertainty*, London: BBC/ Andre Deutsch.
- Giacalone, R., and Jurkiewicz, C. (2003) (Eds.) *Handbook Of Workplace Spirituality And Organizational Performance*, New York: Sharpe.
- Giacalone, R., and Jurkiewicz, C. (2003) Toward a science of workplace spirituality, In R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.) *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance*, pp.3-28, New York: Sharpe.
- Gotsis, G., and Kortezi, Z. (2008) Philosophical foundations of workplace spirituality: A critical approach, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 78, 575-600.
- Gozdz, K., and Frager, R. (2003) Using the everyday challenges of business to transform individuals and organizations, In R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.) *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance*, pp.475-492, New York: Sharpe.
- Granberg-Michaelson, W. (2004) *Leadership From Inside-Out: Spirituality and Organizational Change*, New York: Crossroads Publishing Company.
- Heaton, D., Schmidt-Wilk, J., and Travis, F. (2004) Constructs, methods, and measures for researching spirituality in organizations, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 17, 62-82.
- Hicks, D. (2003) *Religion and the Workplace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hopfl, H. (2005) The organisation and the mouth of hell, *Culture and Organization*, 11, 167-179.
- Khanna, H., and Srinivas, E. (2000) Spirituality and leadership development, *Presented to the roundtable conference on developing leaders, teams and organizations: Meeting the challenges of global markets and technology*, Management Development Institute, Guragon.
- Kinjerski, V., and Skrypnek, B. (2004) Defining spirit at work: finding common ground, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 17, 26-42.
- Konz, G., and Ryan, F. (1999) Maintaining and organizational spirituality: No easy task, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 200-210.
- Kunde, J., & Cunningham, B. (2000) *Corporate Religion*, London: Financial Times Management.
- Lalich, J. (2004) *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lewis, J., and Geroy, G. (2000) Employee spirituality in the workplace: A cross-cultural view for the management of spiritual employees, *Journal of Management Education*, 24, 682-694.
- Lips-Wiersma, M. (2003) Making conscious choices in doing research on workplace spirituality: Utilising the "holistic development model" to articulate values, assumptions and dogmas of the knower, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16, 406-425.
- Maghroori, R., and Rolland, E. (1997) Strategic leadership: The art of balancing organizational mission with policy, procedures, and external environment, *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 2, 62-81.
- Mason, E., and Welsh, A. (1994) Symbolism in managerial decision making, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 9, 27-35.

- McKnight, R. (1984) Spirituality in the workplace, In J. Adams (Ed.) *Transforming work: A collection of organizational transformation readings*, pp.138-153, Alexandria, VA: Miles River.
- Milliman, J., Czaplewski, A., and Ferguson, J. (2003) Workplace spirituality and employee work attitudes: An exploratory empirical assessment, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16, 426-447.
- Milliman, J., Ferguson, J., Trickett, D., and Condemi, B. (1999) Spirit and community at Southwest Airlines: An investigation of a spiritual values-based model, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 221-233.
- Mirvis, P.H. (1997) 'Soul work' in organizations, *Organization Science*, 8 No.2, 193-206.
- Mitroff, I. (2003) Do not promote religion under the guise of spirituality, *Organization*, 10, 375-382.
- Mitroff, I., and Denton, E. (1999) *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Neal, J. (2001) Leadership and spirituality in the workplace, In R. Lussier and C. Achua (Eds.) *Leadership Theory, Application, Skill Development*, (pp.464-473), Boston: South-Western College Publishing.
- Neal, J., and Biberman, J. (2003) Introduction: The leading edge in research on spirituality and Organizations, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 16, 363-366.
- Pfeffer, J. (2003) Business and the spirit: Management practices that sustain values, In R. Giacalone and C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.) *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*, pp.29-45, New York: Sharpe.
- Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Reave, L. (2005) Spiritual values and practices related to leadership effectiveness, *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 656-687.
- Sankar, Y. (2003) Character not charisma is the critical measure of leadership excellence, *The Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9, 45-55.
- Schmidt-Wilk, J., Heaton, D., and Steingard, D. (2000) Higher education for higher consciousness: Maharishi University of Management as a model for spirituality in management education, *Journal of Management Education*, 24, 580-611.
- Singhal, M., and Chatterjee, L. (2006) A person-organization fit-based approach for spirituality at work: Development of a conceptual framework, *Journal of Human Values*, 12, 161-178.
- Smircich, L. (1983) Concepts of organizational culture and organizational analysis, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29, 339-358.
- Taylor, K. (2004) *Brainwashing: The Science of Thought Control*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tischler, L., Biberman, J., and McKeage, R. (2002) Linking emotional intelligence, spirituality and workplace performance: Definitions, models and ideas for research, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17, 203-218.
- Tourish, D., and Hargie, O. (2004) The communication consequences of downsizing trust, loyalty and commitment, In D. Tourish and O.

- Hargie (Eds.) *Key Issues in Organizational Communication*, pp. 17-36, London: Routledge.
- Tourish, D., and Vatcha, N. (2005) Charismatic leadership and corporate cultism at Enron: The elimination of dissent, the promotion of conformity and organizational collapse, *Leadership*, 1, 455-480
- Wagner-Marsh, F., and Conely, J. (1999) The fourth wave: The spiritually based firm, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 12, 292-301.
- Willmott, H. (1993) Strength is ignorance; slavery is freedom: Managing culture in modern organizations, *Journal of Management Studies*, 30, 515-552.
- Wong, P. (1998) Implicit theories of meaningful life and the development of the personal meaning profile (PMP), In P. Wong and P. Fry (Eds.) *Handbook of personal meaning: Theory, research and practice*, (pp.111-140), Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

The Business and Management Working Papers Series is published by Aberdeen Business School at the Robert Gordon University. Its purpose is to develop and promote research work which makes theoretical and/or empirical contributions to all areas of business and management practice. From time to time, at the editor's discretion, special issues may be published dealing with thematic issues. All contributions to the Series are peer reviewed.