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The role and need of offering workshops and courses on workplace spirituality

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present the experiences and findings of a university course in workplace spirituality in a time and stage where corporate greed and organizational instability run rampant.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors analyzed workshop dialogues and reviewed of participants' findings on corporations as well as their own changed perceptions.

Findings – There are some interesting common factors in corporations that perform according to spiritual guidelines and a highly interactive program on organizational analysis contributes tremendously to the levels of responsibility and awareness of participants.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations to the research are: the population used for data was limited, as it consisted of business and management students at the MBA level; and the findings were only gathered from one cohort, and might provide increased themes when extended over multiple courses in multiple semesters. Future research could apply this study on other populations for a greater foundation in findings.

Practical implications – Organizations that adhere to the spiritual mindset are more successful, have happier employees, and are more aware of their environmental responsibilities.

Originality/value – The paper shows that in these times when corporate greed, dishonesty, and environmental neglect have been exposed so dramatically, courses on workplace spirituality are of high importance and lead to valuable insights for immediate and non-immediate stakeholders.

Keywords Workplace, Spirituality, Courses, Employees, Values, Spiritual audits, Performance, Universities, Curricula, Business ethics

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

During summer 2009, two Los Angeles-based professors facilitated an MBA course titled "Spirituality in the workplace" to a group of working professionals who self-selected to enroll in the course. To garner a greater sense of spirituality in the workplace, the course, structured in the workshop format, entailed diverse learning strategies and resources such as professional books, journal articles, audio and video clips, first-hand case studies, reflection papers and exercises, role-plays, simulation projects, and summative concept papers. Midway through the course, a survey was conducted to find out how this course has helped the participants in integrating spiritual values in their personal and professional lives. A similar opinion survey was also conducted at the end to further access participants' understanding about creating a greater spiritual environment at the workplace, especially during tough economic times. This paper reports the findings from this unique course and indicates strategies for replicating similar-themed courses and directions for future research in this vital area.

This course explored a new paradigm that is emerging in business – spirituality in the workplace. Workplace spirituality has now come to be recognized as an acceptable research field. Special issues on this subject have been devoted in peer-reviewed journals and, in 2001, Academy of Management set up a special interest group for management spirituality and religion (Poole, 2009).

Interest in workplace spirituality has been growing by leaps and bounds over the last two decades (Poole, 2009; Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008; Driver, 2005, 2007; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Benefiel, 2003, 2007; Marques *et al.*, 2007, 2009; Neal, 1999; Hicks, 2003; Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; McCormick, 1994). A Business Week cover story quoted Laura Nash, a business ethicist at Harvard Divinity School, as follows:

> Spirituality in the workplace is exploding [. . .]. One recent poll found that American managers want a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment on the job – even more than they want money and time off (McDonald, 1999, p. 2).

An issue of the *US News & World Report* (May 3, 1999) reported:

> In the past decade, more than 300 titles on workplace spirituality – from *Jesus CEO* to *The Tao of Leadership* – have flooded the bookstores [. . .]. Indeed, 30 MBA programs now offer courses on this issue. It is also the focus of the current issue *of Harvard School Bulletin*.

Signs of this sudden concern for corporate soul have been showing up everywhere: from boardrooms to company lunchrooms; from business conferences to management newsletters, from management consulting firms to business schools. Echoing Andre Malraux – who said that the twenty-first century's task will be to rediscover its Gods – some management thinkers are prophesying that the effective leaders of the twenty-first century will be spiritual leaders (Bolman and Deal, 2001; Carroll, 2007; Pruzan and Mikkelsen, 2007).

Organizations are increasingly realizing the futility of achieving financial success at the cost of humanistic values. Employees are expecting to get something more than just employment from the workplace (Bragues, 2006). At the beginning of the millennium, organizations have been reflecting upon discovering ways to help employees balance work and family, and to create conditions wherein each person can realize his/her potential while fulfilling the requirements of the job. One writer (Aurty, 1994) has called such enlightened organizations "incubators of the spirit." As His Holiness (the) Dalai Lama (2005, p. 220) has noted:

> [. . .] spirituality is a human journey into our internal resources, with the aim of understanding who we are in the deepest sense [. . .] and of discovering how to live according to the highest possible ideal. This too is the union of wisdom and compassion.

Work has ceased to be just the "nine-to-five thing," but is increasingly seen as an important element in fulfilling one's destiny. As James Aurty (1994, p. 117) has observed, "Work can provide the opportunity for spiritual and personal, as well as financial, growth. If it does not, we are wasting far too much of our lives on it." In his writings, Aurty (1994) insists on achieving the "the exquisite balance" between the professional and personal life. "Leading others" is increasingly seen as an extension of "managing ourselves."

The implications of these changes are clear. On one hand, it is about how to work collectively, reflectively, and spiritually smarter. On the other hand, it implies how to do such work in organizations that is mind-enriching, heart-fulfilling, soul-satisfying, and financially rewarding.

Social scientists cite the following reasons for this resurgence of interest in spirituality in the workplace:

- baby-boomers' mid-life soul-searching;
- arrival of the new millennium;
- anxiety caused by corporate downsizing and restructuring;
- search for meaning through work;
- quest for stability in an unstable world;
- movement towards more holistic living;
- greater influx of women in the workplace; and
- developed countries' progression from belly needs to brain needs.

Some critics believe that spirituality in the workplace is a passing fad just like its predecessors such as TQM and Reengineering. After providing a critical review of the literature on workplace spirituality, Gotsis and Kortezi (2008, p. 575) observe that:

> [. . .] there are good reasons to believe that workplace spirituality is more than an impermanent trend; on the contrary, the concept carries a much more substantial meaning and its potential contribution to a more rounded understanding of human work, of the workplace and of the organizational reality worthy of examination.

Although the interest in workplace spirituality has been growing over the past two decades, still "the field is full of obscurity and imprecision for the researcher, the practitioner, the organizational analyst and whoever attempts to systematically approach this relatively new inquiry field" (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2008, p. 575). Although no commonly agreed upon definition of spirituality yet exists (Ashforth and Pratt, 2003), a review of most frequently cited definitions of workplace spirituality reveal the following key components: meaning and purpose in life, sense of interconnectedness and belonging, and personal joy and fulfillment (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Marques *et al.*, 2005, 2007; deKlerk, 2005; Fry, 2003; Adams and Csiernik, 2002; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Neal, 1999; Sheep, 2006).

Past research suggests that increased employee commitment strengthens motivation and reduces turnover (cited in Fry, 2003, p. 721). Although it is widely acknowledged that workplaces that nourish their employees' spirits gain increased commitment and that attention paid to holistic human flourishing in the workplace creates increased engagement and potential for greater performance, "the jury remains out about the bottom-line relevance of organizational spirituality" (Poole, 2009, p. 577). Poole cites several studies such as by Gallup, NOP, the Work Foundation, and Roffey Park that show that the general level of engagement in most workplaces borders at a staggeringly low 20 percent. According to him, "any company able to lift these levels by even a percentage point will release additional resource and capacity from their human assets" (p. 587).

Fry (2003), in presenting an initial theory of spiritual leadership, concludes that workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership can be viewed as constructs that

are in the initial concept/elaboration stage of development. He views spiritual leadership as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for organizations to be successful in today's highly unpredictable internet driven environment. Fry agrees that people need something to believe in, someone to believe in, and someone to believe in them. "A spiritual leader is someone," notes Fry, "who walks in front of one when one needs someone to follow, behind one when someone needs encouragement, and beside one when one needs a friend".

Fry (2003, p. 712) presents a model of spiritual leadership that fosters intrinsic motivation through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. At the heart of this model is the practice of altruistic love which is described as unconditional, selfless, caring concern for both self and others. Altruistic love is nurtured through spiritual values such as trust/loyality, forgiveness/acceptance/gratitude, integrity, honesty, courage, humility, kindness, empathy/compassion, patience/meekness/endurance, excellence, self-discipline, and truthfulness.

It must be noted that garnering a sense of kindness and compassion has benefits for both the practitioner as well as the recipient. Recently, positive psychology has confirmed the emotional and health benefits of altruistic love. Empirical research by Lyubomirsky and her colleagues has shown that we can maximize our well being as much as 40 percent by intentionally engaging in activities such as expressing gratitude, doing random acts of kindness, and creating a sense of optimism (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006, 2007; Kurtz and Lyubomirsky, 2008; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Positive psychology focuses on character, flourishing, and fulfillment. It aims to explore how to live a happy and fulfilling life, how to define and develop human strengths, and how to build character and resilience. Fostering this mind-set has added advantage in building a spiritual workplace. In a foreword to a recently edited volume, titled *Positive Psychology: Exploring the Best in People*, Lyubomirsky (2007), explains that positive psychology explores how to elevate people to feeling great – to living flourishing lives, to developing their strengths, gifts, and capacities to the fullest. She further states that positive psychology focuses on what is best in people as opposed to psychology's conventional focus disease, disorder, and the dark side of life:

> Positive psychology is the psychology of what makes life worth living. It represents a commitment on the part of research psychologists to focus attention on the sources of psychological wellness – for example, on positive emotions, positive experiences, and positive environments, on human strengths and virtues. The label is rooted in the principle that empowering individuals to build a positive state of mind – to live the most rewarding, fruitful, and happiest lives they can – is just as critical as psychology's conventional focus on mending their defects and healing their ailments and pathologies.

In the following section, the implementation of a course on workplace spirituality for MBA students will be outlined, after which some interesting student findings on business corporations that apply strategies resonating with the spiritual mindset, and some common themes emerging from this review, will be presented.

The course structure: strategies and resources
A variety of resources were utilized to provide a sound theoretical framework for this workshop-style course in workplace spirituality. The resources included professional books such as *Spirituality in the Workplace: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Make*

It Work for You (Marques *et al.*, 2007), *Workplace and Spirituality: New Perspectives on Research and Practice* (Marques *et al.*, 2009), *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1959/1989), *Tao of Leadership* (Heider, 1980), and *Love and Profit: A Manager's Search for Meaning*; journal articles such as "Organizational spirituality – a literature review (2009)" (Poole, 2009), "What really matters at work in turbulent times: a report of BRI's first dialogue session in 2009" (Marques *et al.*, 2009), "Towards a theory of spiritual leadership" (Fry, 2003), and "Workplace spirituality and organizational performance" (Garcia-Zamor, 2003); short video clips on topics such as emotional intelligence, social entrepreneurship, conscious capitalism, servant leadership, sustainable enterprises, wisdom economies, work life balance, corporate stewardship, and the like.

A variety of pedagogical tools such as self-reflective critiques, critical concept papers, and company case studies were employed to create an interactive mosaic of learning moments. The two texts by the present authors provided the basic conceptual framework of the course. Topics such as spirituality vs religion, work as a spiritual practice, personal mission statement, holistic human flourishing, universally-acknowledged spiritual values, and ethics vs spirituality were explored at length to inform the discussions in the class. For a pictorial representation of the course structure, please refer to Figure 1 below.

Spiritual audits
As a part of the workshop series, each participant was requested to conduct a spiritual audit on a corporation of their own choice. The intention of the spiritual audits was to focus on the corporation's behavior in light of the dialogues, readings and lectures provided earlier in the course. From the seventeen corporations presented, we selected six highly interesting corporations of various sizes and industries, and the spiritually geared essentials presented about these corporations, for discussion in the following section.

Trader Joe
Started in 1967 by Joe Coulombe, Trader Joe has grown relatively fast to a well-known American grocery store chain with 321 stores in 25 states. Their revenues currently exceed $5 billion. What is it that made Trader Joe pass the spiritual audit?

Focus on employees. In an industry that is infamous for its continuous turnover, Trader Joe has maintained an extremely low turnover rate amongst its full time employees: 4 percent annually. There is no need for in-depth research to detect the link between low turnover and employee satisfaction: when people like where they are, they will stay. Besides, anyone who has ever attended a Trader Joe store has witnessed the tropical atmosphere that is so carefully created, as well as the casual ambiance in product display and identification. The entire structure is build around having fun. The Trader Joe auditor claimed that an interview with John Shields, former CEO of the company, clarified that having fun is so highly valued, that newcomers are asked to evaluate the environment after 30 days and then please resign if they felt that they did not have a good time.

Lewis (2005) has also focused on Trader Joe's remarkable treatment of employees in his book, *The Trader Joe's Adventure: Turning a Unique Approach to Business into a Retail and Cultural Phenomenon*. He emphasizes that this corporation focuses on the human touch by including fun music, decorations, samples, and collaborative team efforts in an informal work setting to ensure happy employees. To ensure that every
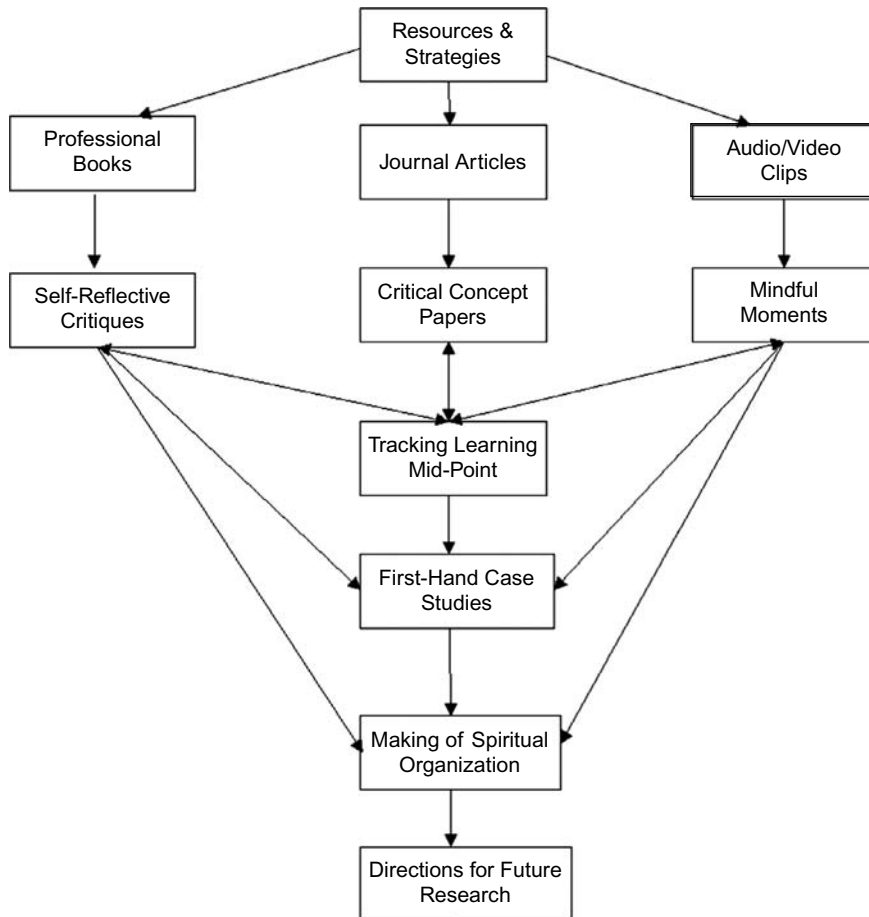
Figure 1.
Anatomy of a course in
workplace spirituality

voice is heard and valuable information is not wasted, an upward and downward communication chain is instated. A well-developed training program within the company ensures opportunities for promotion. Overall, everything is done to ensure great chemistry. Chemistry is, indeed, important for the success rate of a work team. Where people get along and have fun together, there will be a great radiation to the customers, and a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness due to low turnover and steadiness of the crew.

Values. The wellbeing of the customer is priority. Therefore, Trader Joe purchases directly from suppliers where possible, and does not hesitate to discontinue carrying a product if it does not pull its weight. The value is directed to more stakeholders than just the customers. Suppliers benefit from the direct approach that Trader Joe handles, and the early contract policies implemented. The community benefits from various forms of support given by this company. Each Trader Joe Store has its own donation coordinator. Employees experience the value of being involved with Trader Joe through a variety of benefits, such as medical, dental and vision insurance, a company-paid

retirement plan, 10 percent employee discount, paid time off, an employee assistance program, disability insurance, great pay (the average salary is about $21.00 per hour), and flexible work schedules.

Aside from the above, Trader Joe has demonstrated its ability to remain a great corporation through the years. This is where the fear of many business leaders about implementing the spiritual mindset in their workplace is defied. As long as 13 years ago, Gary Hamel (1996) asserted, "Customers shop Trader Joe's as much for entertainment as for sustenance" (p. 72). Hamel subsequently tied the corporation's human touch strategy to pure business profits by explaining that Trader Joe has virtually no competition, even though it is officially classified as a grocery store, of which there are many. Hamel describes the stores as "a cross between a gourmet deli and a discount warehouse" (p. 72), which may to a certain extent explain Trader Joe's uniqueness. Gamel's research led him to confirm that Trader Joe averages annual sales that are "twice the rate of conventional supermarkets and more than three times that of most specialty food shops" (p. 72).

Costco

Costco's inception dates back to 1976 under the name "Price Club." While Wal-Mart is generally identified as Costco's main competitor, there is a world of difference in the approaches and spirituality levels of these two large corporations. Costco registers $59 billion in sales from 488 warehouse locations, ranks no. 28 in the Fortune 500 list, fourth-largest retailer in the US, and seventh largest in the world (Boyle, 2006). What is it that made Costco pass the spiritual audit?

Focus on employees. The most obvious way to expose Costco's commendable performance is through the fact that this company generally remains free of criticism, while Wal-Mart and other large retailers consistently deal with negative media profiling. "Costco is succeeding the old-fashioned way, by earning respect for the product value it delivers and for its corporate values" (*Business Wire*, 2005, p. 1). The aspect of respect is manifested to customers as well as employees. On average, Costco pays $17.00 per hour, which is 42 percent higher than Sam's Club. Costco is also known for its superb health plan for employees. It amazes the finance industry that Costco does so well while being so generous toward its employees. Allison (2009) reports that Wall Street lost its patience when Costco wholesale refrained from laying-off workers or cutting analyst's profit expectations, entirely against national trends. Allison cites David Schick, retail analyst at Stifel Nicolaus, who explains that most retailers apply radical lay offs of employees to display better profit numbers. Yet, Costco does not look at it that way. They measure their performance on annual and decade numbers and not on weekly, monthly, or quarterly trends. As is the case with Trader Joe, Costco is also known for its extremely low turnover rates compared to other performers in its industry, due to its good wages, benefits, and overall humane-based treatment of employees. Costco CEO, James Sinegal, brushes off the criticisms of financial analysts with a simple argument that he feels should be easily understandable by all business executives: Costco's strategy is not necessarily altruistic. It is just good business. The company, according to Sinegal, prefers a long-term view and hopes to still be around 50 or 60 years from now, instead of focusing on major profits between now and next week (de Boer, 2005).

Values. Giving back to the customer happens in a responsible way at Costco: by reducing profit margins to the point that the competition decides to compete elsewhere. This is how Costco keeps customers happy with products that still represent decent quality:

> The company counts nearly 48 million people as members, and those customers are not only slavishly devoted (averaging 22 trips per year, according to UBS analyst Neil Currie), but surprisingly affluent as well (more than a third have household incomes over $75,000) (Boyle, 2006, p. 126).

The evidence that the strategy works is resonated in Costco's consistently higher profits annually than it is main competitors.

When reviewing the Costco picture, it becomes clear that value is approached in different dimensions: people, product, and economic. Spence and Kale (2008) explain, "Economic value refers to remuneration, job security and promotion opportunities, a broad definition, but all pertaining to one's financial well-being, now and in the future" (p. 201). Spence and Kale (2008) subsequently present Costco as an example of a corporation that knows how to ensure economic value, "Costco, a leading US retailer pays its employees about 65 percent more than Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer. Despite this wage differential, Costco's financial performance far outstrips Wal-Mart" (p. 201).

Reviewing the hard numbers, again, presents evidence that spirituality in workplace practices pays. This is not only illustrated by the statements from Spence and Kale above, but also by the following: "Despite having 82 fewer outlets than its nearest rival, Wal-Mart's Sam's Club, Costco generates about $20 billion more in sales" (Boyle, 2006, p. 126).

Revolution Foods
Still in its infancy, yet listed as one of the America's most promising social entrepreneurs by *Business Week*, Revolution Foods epitomizes corporate thinking of the twenty-first century, molded to the social entrepreneurial mindset. This company was founded in 2006 by two Berkeley MBA graduates, Kristin Richmond Groos and Kirsten Tobey. Revolution Foods, winner of the 2007 Global Social Venture Competition, provides nutritional meals, nutrition education and technical support to charter schools. What is it that made Revolution Foods pass the spiritual audit?

Focus on employees. Being as young as they are, there is not a lot reported on Revolution Foods and its employee policies. Currently, the organization employees 120 people, of which 80 work in the San Francisco area, where the company is headquartered (Duxbury, 2009). The corporate web site declares that all employees of Revolution Foods receive full health benefits and are paid above living wage standards. Focusing on a pro-diversity principle, the company begins its recruiting process in the school communities it serves. Adherence to ethnic diversity is underscored on the corporate web site through the display of a highly diverse set of teams in the four areas where Revolutionary Foods operates (Manager of Operational Support at Revolution Foods in Oakland, CA, 2009).

Values. Revolution Foods' vision and mission statements are an effective presentation of the company's values. The vision of Revolution Foods is that all children will have access to nutritious, tasty food to support the development of healthy minds and bodies. Our mission is to dramatically improve the food and food

service experience in schools in order to reduce obesity and improve health, education, and wellbeing for students in communities across the USA (adopted from Revolution Foods' corporate web site).

One of the ways this company stays true to its values as a social entrepreneur can be found in the fact that, despite using mostly organic foods, Revolution Foods still provides its services at prices that are comparable to those of larger competitors. According to Duxbury (2009), the company prioritizes low-income communities in its serving. About 75 percent of the children Revolution Foods feeds are covered by the federal free or reduced price lunch program. Yet, throughout its highly socially oriented operations, profit remains an important goal. Describing the practices of the founders of Revolution Foods, the US Federal News Service reports:

> Creating a profitable business that also returns a positive social impact healthier foods, higher awareness of the foods that children eat, and less obesity is the definition of a social venture ("MBA Team Revolution Foods Wins Social Venture Competition", 2007, p. 1).

Revolution Foods is highly aware of the need for environmental safeguarding. The company recycles and composts practically all of its kitchen waste, uses energy efficient insulated food storage units, works with education materials that are produced on recycled paper with the use of soy-based inks, and prefers recyclable packaging wherever possible. Aside from this green-based usage of materials, Revolution Foods only partners with suppliers that are committed to healthy, sustainable, environmentally friendly business practices. The companies energy efficient practices were awarded with a grant from the City of Los Angeles for energy efficient lighting throughout their facility.

Growth of Revolution Foods is evident. While in 2007, Chandler still mentioned that this company delivered its natural and nutritious meals daily to nine schools – mostly in Oakland, a 2008 newswire reported entrance into Los Angeles: "Within the next year, Revolution Foods hopes to serve healthy, fresh meals to over 10,000 students in public and private schools throughout Los Angeles County" ("Starting a Revolution: Revolution Foods . . . ", 2008, p. 1). Yet, growth did not stop there. At the time this article was written, the company's web site reported the presence of teams in the Bay Area, Washington, Los Angeles, and Denver. Revolution Food's efforts were supported from the beginning by a majorally, Texas-based whole foods market, which sold (and still sells) its produce, bread and meats to the start-up, and therewith enabled healthy growth opportunities for the start-up (Chandler, 2007). According to Duxbury (2009), Revolution Foods is on track to bring in revenue over $10 million for its fiscal year ending in June 2009.

Zappos.com

Zappos is a Las Vegas based e-commerce company, mainly specialized in shoe wear. Founded in 1999 by Nick Swinmurn as a result of his frustration in not finding the right pair of shoes, neither in the shopping mall nor online, Zappos sees itself as an online service company that happens to sell shoes, handbags, clothing, eyewear, watches, and accessories. The language on Zappos' web site is as informal as the entire corporate ambiance. But what, exactly, is it that made Zappos pass the spiritual audit?

Focus on employees. Zappo's Chairman, CFO and COO, Alfred Lin, explains the necessity and importance of employee wellbeing this way, "you can't have happy customers without having happy employees" (Abel, 2009, p. 16). Abel (2009)

subsequently lists some of the team building measures, which Zappos has taken in the past few years:

- The initiation of impromptu parades, during which employees sing and dance through the office to celebrate a holiday or special event.
- Managers are encouraged to devote more than 10 percent of their time with employees off-site, in activities such as hikes, happy hours or other non-business-related events.
- Maintenance of the Zappos culture book entailing quotes from employees and vendor partners about what the Zappos culture means to them.

Beaudry (2009) also notes that interaction is considered of high importance within Zappos, and that training to achieve that interaction is a priority for the entire company. Potential employees are interviewed for culture fit. Zappos seeks people who are passionate about what the company is about: service. It is irrelevant whether they are passionate about shoes.

From the statements of Zappos' CEO, Tony Hsieh, in various interviews, it becomes even more apparent that within Zappos, employee morale and interconnectedness, accessibility from top to bottom, and creativity, are highly encouraged. As a useful tool in implementing the interconnectedness mindset, information technology is highly valued, and all Zappos employees can be followed on Twitter, while there are regular uploads on YouTube about the employees' activities, as well as a steady blog in which Tony Hsieh interacts with the public.

Values. The title of the about.zappos.com page on the corporate web site reads, "At Zappos.com, Customer Service Is Everything. In Fact, It's The Entire Company" (Zappos.com, 2009, para. 1). When reviewing the company's core values, words such as service, change, creativity, open-mindedness, learning, growth, openness, relationships, communication, team- and family-spirit and humility jump out. These are the typical ingredients discussed when we review companies that apply spirituality in their workplace.

Zappo's CEO, Tony Hsieh, has determined that his entire business revolves around happiness. Tony's theory for happiness involves establishing balance among four basic human needs: perceived progress, perceived control, relatedness, and a connection to a larger vision. Gallo (2009) presents an interview with Hsieh in a May edition of *BusinessWeek* online, in which Hsieh confirms:

> At Zappos, our higher purpose is delivering happiness. Whether it is the happiness our customers receive when they get a new pair of shoes or the perfect piece of clothing, or the happiness they get when dealing with a friendly customer rep over the phone, or the happiness our employees feel about being a part of a culture that celebrates their individuality, these are all ways we bring happiness to people's lives (para. 5).

Hoops (2009) also reports interesting statements from Hshieh that display the holistic approach he takes with and within his company: "[C]ustomer service can't just be a department, and customer service agents will treat customers the same way they are treated within the company" (para. 22). In this article, Hoops explains how the entire company moved along from San Francisco to Las Vegas when the call center operations had to move. It is Hsieh's conviction that customer service is a task of every employee, and not merely the sales department.

To demonstrate once again how this spiritual approach gets translated in organizational advancement: Zappos has grown gross merchandise sales from $1.6M in 2000 to over $1 billion in 2008, and registered a three-year growth of 984 percent.

Google

Google, ranked as number 4 on Fortune's 2009 list of "Best Companies to Work for," was founded by two Stanford University students, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, in 1998, and has since grown to grown to more than 10,000 employees worldwide. What is it that made Google pass the spiritual audit?

Focus on employees. On the Google Diversity and Inclusion web page, the corporation claims the following:

> When we encourage Googlers to express themselves, we really mean it. In fact, we count on it. Intellectual curiosity and passionate perspectives drive our policies, our work environment, our perks and our profits. At the end of the day, it is Googlers who make Google one of Fortune magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For." (Google Diversity and Inclusion, 2009, para. 1).

Further explaining what makes working at Google so inspiring, a number of incentives are listed, such as:

- Google's 20 percent time program, which provides engineers the opportunity to pursue personal interests in their work.
- The high focus on employees' needs, which includes flexible hours, family programs, mothers' rooms, and transgender-friendly restrooms.
- The instatement of employee resource groups, which actively participate in building community and driving policy at Google.
- Google's Council on Disability, which meets twice a year to review internal and external accessibility issues (Google Diversity and Inclusion, 2009).

Clark (2009) adds to the luster of motivation in Google's environment by asserting, "At Google, employees are encouraged to work on their own projects" (p. 45). Addis (2009) compares Google with 3M, another great motivation-based innovative company, and explains, "Both companies noticed enhanced motivation when the employee was given ownership of a project that was appropriate and intellectually challenging" (p. 80).

Values. In his review of some model companies with values that will be crucial for the twenty-first century, Maccoby (2009) mentions Google founders Brin and Page's philosophy, "Do no harm," whereby he underscores that moral reasoning entails more than merely following rules.

> It considers the impact of actions, and it defines what we mean by the common good. Is it just what's good for me, my team, my company? Or is it a commitment to do what benefits, or at least doesn't harm, all those who might be affected by my actions (Maccoby, 2009, p. 59).

The value of Google's mere existence to the global community has been proven in the years since the corporation's inception. How many companies can pride themselves into having their name transformed into a verb? Many internet users are entirely familiar with the statement, "I Googled you yesterday", or "Let's Google this to find out more." Google, while not the first search engine since the internet's inauguration, has presented the global community the gift of learning at little or no cost, a development that serves as

a tremendous support in enhancing awareness of the members of the human cohort. This development adds merit to the company's mission, as presented on the corporate web site: "Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (Company Overview, 2009, para. 1).

As an endnote to this brief Google review, once again a quick presentation of the correlation between workplace spirituality and organizational growth: Vise (2006) captures it well in his statement:

> Google is the gateway to the Internet for hundreds of millions of users worldwide. From Arabic to Zulu, the search engine can be used in more than 100 languages. In the US, Google is the unquestionable market leader (p. 20).

While even Google feels the effects of today's economic downturn, the numbers for this company are impressive. Fost (2009, p. B2) reports, "Google's first-quarter revenue was $5.51 billion, down 3 percent from the fourth quarter but an increase of 6 percent over the first quarter of 2008".

IKEA

Founded in 1943 by Ingvar Kamprad in Sweden, the IKEA Group currently has about 127,800 co-workers, 41 trading service offices in 30 countries, 1,380 suppliers in 54 countries, 27 distribution centers and 11 customer distribution centers in 16 countries (IKEA Group in Figures, 2009). What is it that made Ikea pass the spiritual audit?

Focus on employees. IKEA's success can be directly linked to responsibility of the following stakeholder groups:

- employees;
- customers;
- community;
- the environment; and
- involvement in world issues.

One of the main strengths of IKEA's employee orientation is the fact that the company toppers refrain from hiding in ivory towers. The founder of Ikea, for instance, Ingvar Kamprad, retired in 1986 as Group President, but continues to work tirelessly for the company as a critical store customer, a watchdog for the IKEA concept and quality, a visionary, and a constant source of inspiration (Enquist *et al.*, 2007, p. 394). IKEA Group President, Anders Dahlvig, also follows this pattern of mingling with customers and floor workers. He has been unloading trucks and selling beds and mattresses at IKEA Kungens Kurva in Stockholm, wearing an "I'm new to IKEA" badge, and seeing the company from a different perspective than usual (Enquist *et al.*, 2007). It is this initiative of continuously observing the company from various stakeholders' perspectives, which enables the IKEA managers to implement the motivational, flexible, and advancement-oriented environment that has made the company so successful. Continuous improvement and opportunities for advancement within the organization are further encouraged by "IKEA's management education series which they make available to their employees globally and deliver using a 'web-based system' to develop leadership skills" (Efendioglu and Murray, 2007, p. 268).

Values. IKEA is very resolute on corporate social responsibility (CSR), and environmental awareness. Lindgreen *et al.* (2009) consider IKEA, along with the Body Shop, spear headers when it comes to CSR. They assert that managers have considerable influence over their organization's CSR involvement. IKEA's CSR performance is discussed in more depth by Maon *et al.* (2009), explaining that the company does not exhibit its CSR performance, but remains a leader in this area nonetheless:

> Inside stores, customers can read about IKEA's cause related marketing campaigns and cooperative actions with Save the Children and UNICEF, as well as review "green panels" that advise them about good consumption practices (p. 82).

From the corporate web sites it can be deduced that IKEA believes in using the least amount of resources in their product manufacturing, without compromising the quality of the product. The aim is consistently geared toward least harming the environment. Therefore, as many renewable and recyclable materials as possible are used. IKEA's suppliers are expected to produce environmentally friendly products and follow the ethical codes of conduct that are required by the corporation throughout the production process. IKEA calls this adherence to environmental awareness, the IWAY (IKEA Quick Answers, 2009a). The company has also generated kudo's globally for preventing child labor and implementing responsible forestry management. About each of these issues, there are clear statements included on the corporation's web site. For example, pertaining to child labor, IKEA reports:

> IKEA does not accept child labour and works actively against it. The complexity of the child labour issue requires input and influences from many parties. By cooperating closely with international organisations such as UNICEF and Save the Children, IKEA strives to improve children's rights and to tackle the root causes of child labour. All IKEA suppliers and subcontractors must comply with our code of conduct (IKEA Quick Answers – What is IKEA's position . . . , 2009b).

Finalizing the IKEA review with a snapshot of their performance while behaving spiritually: the IKEA corporate web site reports, "Sales for the IKEA Group for the financial year 2008 were up by 7 percent to a total of 21.2 billion euro" (IKEA Group in Figures, 2009, para. 1).

Figure 2 shows the factors that made the six above discussed companies pass the spirituality audit.

Figure 2 shows the essentials that surfaced when reviewing the six companies earlier: two main areas were highlighted that underscored these companies' alignment with spiritual thinking: focus on employees and focus on values. In the dealings with employees, wellbeing, advancement, and satisfaction were the main drivers to be detected, while in the value area cost awareness, customer satisfaction, and environmental awareness seemed to prevail. Consistently, the emphasis on these two main areas resulted in performance excellence and growth.

Reflective sharing

During the fourth workshop (out of seven), we requested for the workshop participants to respond to a brief assessment questionnaire. Two of the questions in this assessment effort may be of interest to demonstrate the effectiveness and paradigmic impact that such a workshop or course can have on members of the workforce. The responses were
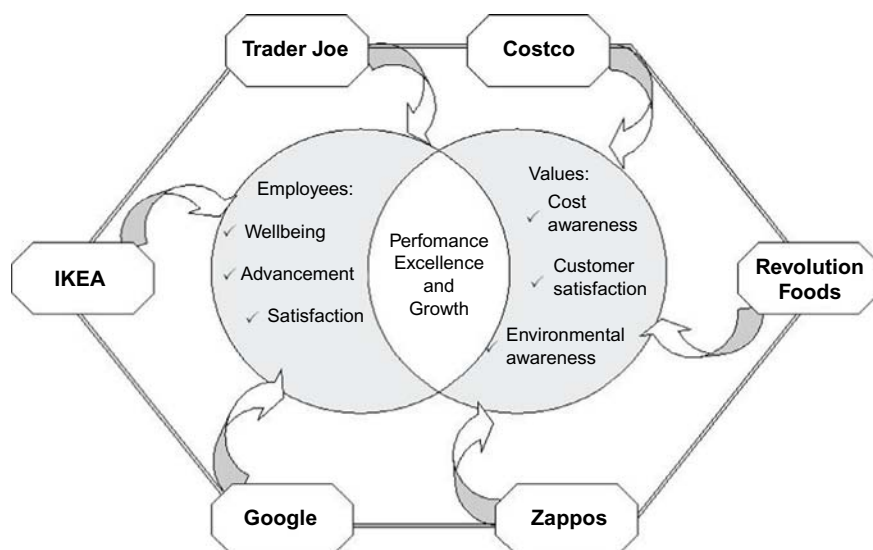
highly reflective and therefore diverging on basis of the respondents' work/life circumstances. The responses to the two questions will be discussed below.

How has this course helped you so far in your personal leadership?
The answers provided by the participants to this question can be listed in five categories:

(1) Enhanced awareness on the nature of work and the processes in the workplace. Several participants claimed that they had started to review their work and life from a different perspective, and that they were reflecting more regularly on the meaning and usefulness of their daily tasks at work, as well as the behavior of their leaders at work.

(2) Greater understanding of the purpose of one's work as a contributing factor in society: some participants explained that they had obtained a sharper consciousness about the role of their work in society, and whether they felt aligned with this role or not.

(3) Increased reflections on personal life and career goals: several participants mentioned that they had gained more clarity about their career path focus from this moment on. Some participants mentioned that they felt that this course served as a reawakening in focus, where they might have fallen asleep.

(4) Insight that ethics, honest living, and altruistic actions do not have to be incongruent with success in life: participants pointed out that they felt as if they had attained a competitive advantage as future leaders by being aware of this congruence and hence, including these values in their leadership practices.

(5) Increased sense of reflection and responsibility: these participants underscored that this course had made them aware that they should consider the effects of their actions onto others, be more generous and less judgemental toward others,

and at the same time, not be afraid to be creative and take more ownership where possible at work.

What have you been doing differently since you started taking this course?
The answers to this assessment question could be listed in ten actions:

(1) Observing self and others at work regarding ethical behavior and decision making.

(2) Taking positive initiatives by approaching colleagues that were like strangers before, and starting to connect more.

(3) Practicing more patience and kindness toward colleagues, customers, but also to individuals outside the work environment, as they were now seen as connected beings.

(4) Seizing opportunities that present themselves by being more "awake" at work.

(5) Deviating from egocentric thinking, and gravitating toward more compassionate behavior.

(6) Considering the long-term effects of one's actions, especially the legacy one chooses to leave.

(7) Focusing more on doing what is right as opposed to doing what others might want you to do.

(8) Choosing a more supportive and positive attitude in challenging situations, and not allowing depression and stress to prevail.

(9) Taking more time to engage in reflective practices such as meditation in order to maintain a healthy spiritual balance.

(10) Trying to become an inspiration to others, and being more generous to others without expecting anything in return.

Figure 3 shows an overview of the assessment findings discussed above.

Conclusions

As is evident from the foregoing, this paper demonstrated the role and need of offering workshops and courses in workplace spirituality to garner greater awareness about spiritual values in the workplace. The authors offered this course on the premise that presenting greater learning opportunities regarding organizations that embody greater ethico-spiritual practices has a salutary effect on the leaders and the workforce. It leads to greater awareness of workplace practices that are conducive to nourishing spirit, clearer understanding of work and its deeper significance, greater reflection of career paths and goals, higher sense of integrity and personal responsibility, and greater self-reflection and engagement. The participants found themselves engaging with others with warmth and empathy, practicing self-reflection, developing generosity, kindness and understanding, wakefully seizing on opportunities to do good, being more positive and helpful, and refraining more from ego-centric behaviors.

As the literature that was reviewed and the case studies that were presented demonstrate, workplace spirituality is not just a theoretical construct with little or no practical significance. Rather, as has been shown by the examples of six companies reviewed, spiritual behavior at work leads to performance excellence, organizational
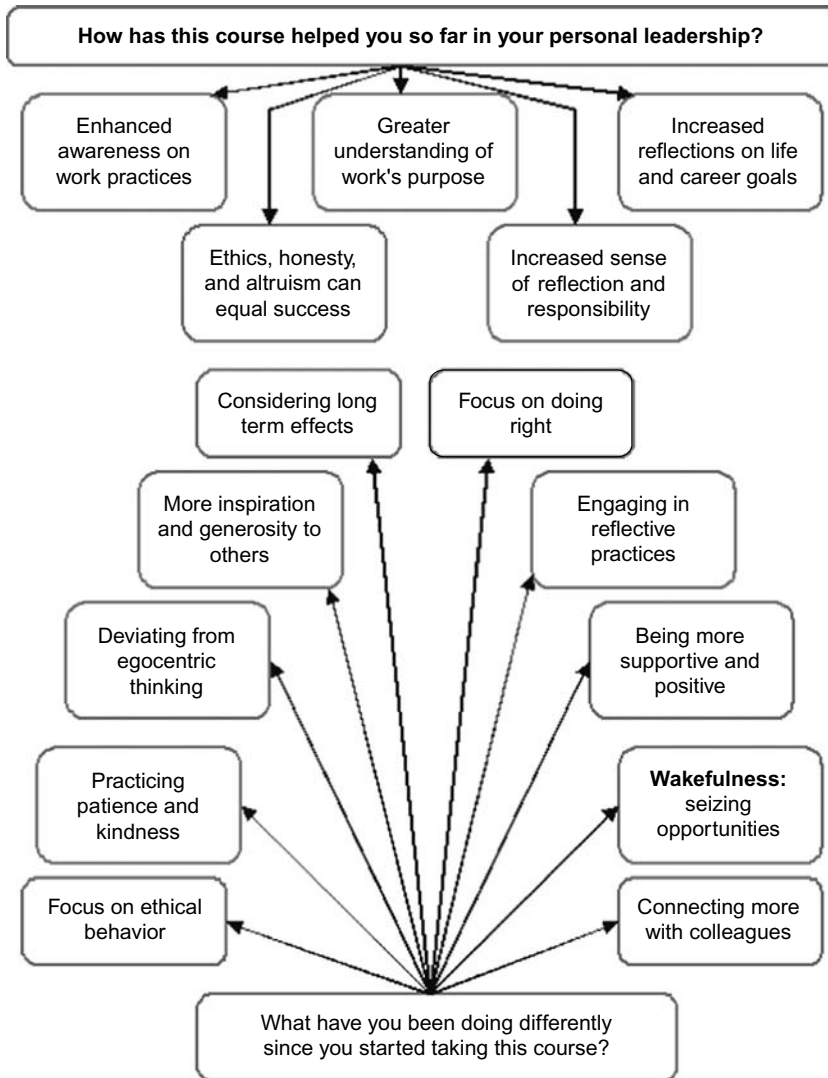
How has this course helped you so far in your personal leadership?

Enhanced awareness on work practices

Greater understanding of work's purpose

Increased reflections on life and career goals

Ethics, honesty, and altruism can equal success

Increased sense of reflection and responsibility

Considering long term effects

Focus on doing right

More inspiration and generosity to others

Engaging in reflective practices

Deviating from egocentric thinking

Being more supportive and positive

Practicing patience and kindness

Wakefulness: seizing opportunities

Focus on ethical behavior

Connecting more with colleagues

What have you been doing differently since you started taking this course?

Figure 3.
Assessment findings of workplace spirituality workshop

wellbeing, and steady growth that surpasses competitors with conventional practices. In view of the mounting evidence regarding the merits of workplace spirituality for organizations and their stakeholders, the authors of this article invite the business executives who still remain skeptical towards this concept to consider reevaluating their measuring yardstick from a linear point of view entailing immediate correlations between practices and profits to a more comprehensive perspective that honors the holistic view. Within this view, these executives may find the answers that they are looking for in term of relationship between stakeholder focus, value focus, and organizational excellence.

Courses and workshops on workplace spirituality may fulfill an important need regarding reeducating current and future business leaders in their perceptions about the relationship of spirituality and the bottom time. Implementing such courses in various settings may finally lead to a business environment in which organizations such as Costco, Google, Trader Joe, Revolution Foods, Zappos, and Ikea become more of a norm rather than an exception.

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