



# Intuition, prayer, and managerial decision-making processes: a religion-based framework

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Executives are challenged every day to make important decisions that affect the performance of their business enterprises and, as a result, the success of their own careers. Based on that scenario, one cannot expect that only the rational approach works like a panacea for all managerial problems. This paper aims to propose that the best solution tends to embrace a complementary or integrated decision-making approach.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper seeks to demonstrate that the convergence between rational and non-rational decision-making processes can be optimized by integrating several religious tenets.

**Findings** – The paper finds strong evidence that a religion-based framework might enrich the sensitive topic of decision-making processes in organizations.

**Practical implications** – Overall, the paper strives to show that intuition and prayer are two faces of the same coin, and argues that both forms of decision processes (e.g. rational and non-rational analysis) might coexist perfectly in an integrative frame.

**Originality/value** – The article proposes prayer as a transcendent coping mechanism whereby executives might refine their intuition flux. As a result, it depicts a conceptual framework encapsulating all those constructs.

**Keywords** Beliefs, Religion, Decision making, Managers

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Decision making has been one of the hottest topics investigated in management science. After all, executives are challenged every day to make important decisions that affect the performance of their business enterprises and, as a result, the success of their own careers. Further, nowadays businessmen and businesswomen have to deal with a lot of things ranging from hiring, product portfolio, pricing policy, branding and internal relationships to legislation, stakeholders' claims, acquisitions, mergers, environmental issues, competitors, alliances, technology breakthroughs and the community, to name but a few. Taken together, all these points have contributed to making managers' lives very harsh. Worse still, it seems that every day new variables are added to the organizational decision-making process, making it an increasingly complex task.

Clearly, many management scholars have dedicated sizeable amounts of their time to understanding this topic, and up to now their findings have been astonishing. Nutt (1999), for instance, based on his two decades of inquiry in this field, concluded that half the decisions made in organizational settings are surprisingly doomed to fail. Importantly, this huge failure rate cannot be simply understood through conventional wisdom. In addition, his study also found evidence that managers who are accustomed



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to making decisions merely based on standard solutions and few options are prone to failure. Focusing on the pragmatic side of this managerial problem, Isenberg (1989, p. 98) noted that on a daily basis, executives strive to find a point where both their “gut” and their “head” are touched. In this regard, one can claim that there is some consensus as to the lines of inquiry over this topic. Basically, the majority of researchers have been highlighting either a rational decision-making approach or an intuitive one. Obviously, each side strives to show the weaknesses of the opposite side, and why its arguments must be accepted.

Therefore, one cannot expect that only the rational approach works as a panacea to all managerial problems. Actually, organizational decision-making sometimes requires other resources even when they do not fall in the scientific domain or are at least not labeled as belonging to it. In this paper, it is proposed that the best solution tends to embrace a complementary or *integrated decision-making approach*. Such a view is fully aligned with several researchers’ work (e.g. Wild, 1938; Harper, 1989; Agor, 1989; Sinclair and Ashkanasy, 2005) toward an integrated model where both approaches are employed through an iterative way. In this light, managers also demonstrate that they feel comfortable falling back on an intuition tool (see Parikh *et al.*, 2003).

In a related vein, there is no reason to believe that intuitive decision-making could not be associated with a religion-based approach, as proposed by Fernando and Jackson (2006). To Fernando (as quoted in Fernando and Burrows, 2005, p. 3), linkage with a transcendent dimension or power could provide inspiration and guidance to business leaders to make the right decisions. Based on that frame, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate that the convergence between rational and non-rational decision-making processes can be optimized by integrating several religious tenets of the Spiritist or Spiritism Doctrine (SD).

We posit that the insertion of a religion construct into management decision-making theory contributes and enriches substantially the study of this field as well as providing a new stream of research. Further, religion is a pervasive subject that – through its tenets – tends to influence somewhat people’s (including managers’) behaviors, perceptions, and decisions. Thus, to reach such an aim, the rational (i.e. the *orthodox perspective*), the intuitive (*the heterodox view*) and the *integrated decision-making approach* literatures are firstly reviewed. As there has not been research covering decision making, intuition, and prayer, this paper presents a conceptual framework encapsulating these constructs through a religious approach based on SD. Next, the findings of these constructs are discussed. It is worth mentioning that research on prayer is a topic of growing interest among scholars (Spilka, 2005). As a result, the paper argues that prayer is a helpful transcendent mechanism whereby intuition is triggered, and this paper explores how SD principles explain its functioning. Finally, the paper offers some suggestions for future research and presents some concluding remarks. In summary, it is hoped that such an approach contributes to enriching the study of decision-making theory.

### **An overview**

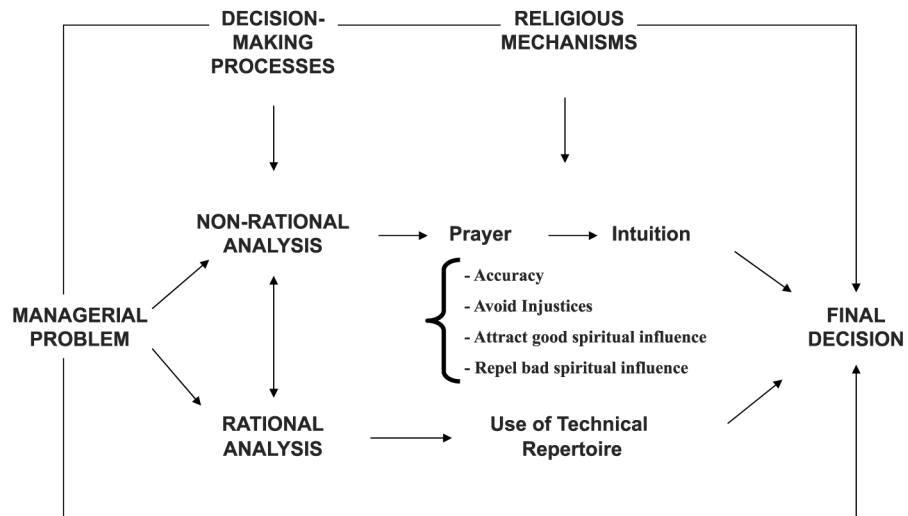
Broadly speaking, the management decision-making field has no more than three theoretical lines of research. In one of these research streams scholars have followed a more *orthodox* perspective, in which a quantitative approach, large amounts of data, simulation technologies, analytic computer programs or, in a nutshell, so-called

management science, is pointed out. In contrast, another stream of research has embraced a *heterodox* view in which number crunching or piles of data have lesser importance than in the previous stream. In this view, managers' feelings, experience, and even spirituality play a key role. Nonetheless, there is another research stream that relies on both approaches combining and integrating them into the problem or task that is being faced. It tends to be seen as an *integrated decision-making approach* because it employs holistically what is unique to the other perspectives, but *in accordance with what the situation calls for in order to get the best result* (see Figure 1). In this section, all these approaches' features are reviewed, along with their major contributions and weaknesses.

#### *Orthodox perspective*

Bearing that in mind, the orthodox perspective has been labeled differently by scholars as logical (Barnard, 1938), rational (Simon, 1987), analytic thinking (Shoemaker and Russo, 1993; Burke and Miller, 1999), or bounded rationality (Shakun, 2001). In essence, the mental process of decision making under such an approach is underpinned by conscious reasoning, analytical tools and/or other symbols. As a result, within this perspective rest decision-making techniques such as rules and shortcuts, importance weighting, and value analysis. Of course, these techniques show pros and cons and features that must be regarded appropriately.

For example, Russo *et al.* (2002, pp. 154-5) believe that rules are the sort of technique that takes little effort and provides a moderate level of quality; nonetheless, they remember rules are subject to biases and dangers especially derived from changes that can make the rules that are being used obsolete. Decision weighting, in turn, provides a high level of quality and clarity. In addition, this technique offers the advantage of being very transparent in terms of importance weights. But it presupposes careful attention to avoid applying current models in future decisions given that the context could be totally different, requiring, by extension, new variables and weights. The last technique is value analysis, which is attributed to the highest level of quality.



**Figure 1.**  
Integrated managerial  
decision making  
supported by religious  
approach

Nevertheless, it demands equally strong effort to gather the necessary data and to explain the technique as a whole. However, if this task is done appropriately, such a technique is suited to any sort of inquiry. On the other hand, Russo *et al.* (2002) place a low value on an intuitive technique. In their view, "The successes of intuitive choice are exaggerated and its risks greatly underappreciated" (p. 137). Overall, in our conceptual framework the rational analysis derived from an orthodox perspective is indispensable; however, it requires the contribution of other approaches.

#### *Heterodox view*

At the other extreme of this continuum, we argue that there lies a typical *heterodox* view in which scholars have suggested intuitive skills as a legitimate means by which organizational decision makers also take into account their corporation choices. Actually, it has not been seen as an alternative worthy of disdain by the majority of researchers. On the contrary, they have increasingly recognized its pervasiveness and importance in corporate life. To Sadler-Smith and Shefy (2004), for instance, it is especially relevant "when outcomes are difficult to predict through rational means, executives need to acknowledge the uncertainties, be more tolerant of ambiguities, be able to respond to complexities in pragmatic, intelligent and fast ways in the face of unknown, and recognize the potential that their intuitive judgments may offer" (p. 78). Also, intuition has been referred to as a by-product of non-logical (Barnard, 1938), non-rational (Simon, 1987), non-conscious processes (Epstein, 1994; Shapiro and Spence, 1997), or non-linear intelligence (Carlson and Kaiser, 1999). Although there has been some harsh criticism, especially from Russo *et al.* (2002), intuition has been part of the decision maker's arsenal and is helping managers in a broad range of critical managerial decisions. Dane and Pratt (2007) remark that "Intuition, as a holistically associative process, may actually help to integrate the disparate elements of an ill-defined problem into a coherent perception of how to proceed" (p. 45). These authors argue that there is great confusion related to this management topic. Rather, there has been some confusion as to when intuition should be used effectively. They also suggest that under certain conditions intuition can streamline effective organizational decision-making, but they researchers also warn that "The mere use of intuition, however, is not a panacea for the speed-accuracy trade-off, as its use may simply facilitate speed at the expense of accuracy" (p. 34). Therefore, it does not make sense to disregard intuition. Further, to consider it a worthless component of management decision-making tools is an undeniable bias. Thus, in our conceptual framework, non-rational analysis derived from a heterodox perspective is also required.

#### *Integrated decision-making approach*

Overall, an integrated view seems to gather the best of each theoretical stream because it equally draws on orthodox and heterodox strengths. Actually, there has been a growing consensus toward such a view. In his seminal work, Barnard (1938) argued in favor of both approaches, because they are "much better than either alone if the conditions permit" (p. 306). Simon (1987), in turn, claimed that intuition is a process that works well under the analytical frame, and thus both processes act in a synergic way towards an "effective decision making system" (p. 61). More importantly, he surmised that:

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It is doubtful that we will find two types of managers (at least, good managers), one of whom relies almost exclusively on intuition, the other on analytic techniques. More likely, we will find a continuum of decision-making styles involving an intimate combination of the two kinds of skill. We will likely also find that the nature of the problem to be solved will be a principal determinant of the mix (p. 61).

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Gradually, other researchers have agreed with that approach (e.g. Shapiro and Spence, 1997; Burke and Miller, 1999). Given the disruptive technology advances as well as fast-paced changes that managers have to deal with routinely, it would not be smart to discard because of bias any decision-making tool that could help. Indeed, some managerial problems are increasingly complex and multifaceted, and thus it would be intelligent to employ all alternatives under a congruent and integrative frame in order to reach the best decision. Relatedly, Cavanagh and Hazen (2008, p. 44) note that "Obtaining fuller information, and doing so in a receptive fashion and in prayer, lessens the chance of making an erroneous decision". Therefore, in the sections that follow it is suggested that *intuitive skill may be substantially enhanced and maximized through the usage of praying*. And to reach this end, the paper argues in favor of a religion-based framework and explains why.

#### **Intuition resource: the science view**

First and foremost, it must be emphasized that intuitive decision-making has mainly been seen as a consequence of the subconscious process of making decisions underpinned by either solid judgment experiences or "gut feelings". Many researchers have pointed out that intuition, to some degree, overlaps with experience due to training, learning, gathering of facts, patterns, concepts, procedures, and abstractions that can be stored in one's mind throughout the years (Simon, 1987; Agor, 1989; Vaughan, 1989; Behling and Eckel, 1991; Eisenhardt, 1999; Khatri and Ng, 2000; Matzler *et al.*, 2007). The underlying assumption is that the longer the executive career (the reasoning is equal to other professionals), the lesser the likelihood of making wrong decisions. In contrast, Klein (1999) remarks that our experience can sometimes mislead us; nonetheless, we will likely make mistakes that must be somewhat added to our experience as a whole. On the other hand, it seems exaggeration to consider intuition as knowledge obtained *without* rational thought as suggested by Rowan (1989), given that when it happens, recipients are consciously searching for answers, inspirations, and paths to solve their concrete problems and challenges. Exploring other interesting research vein, Khatri and Ng (2000, p. 59) refer to intuition skills as a "synthetic" psychological function that allows us to see an integrated picture. To Eisenhardt (1999), that perception enables managers to get a higher understanding of competitive forces that affect business stability. Also, forecasters in their predictive exercises – as well as in the process of choosing which data and potential scenarios they judge to be pertinent – use some level of intuition (Goldberg, 1989). In its purest sense, intuition is a kind of competence that enables the intuitor (Wild, 1938) to understand or portray a whole frame; that is, something that neither exists nor was clearly outlined earlier. Yet, when that inspirational moment takes place it commonly sparks some idea or thought that will likely engender an innovative solution, a very special human creation, the understanding of a certain situation or just a conclusion to an intricate problem. Perhaps, therein lies the reason why Jung conceived it as the "noblest of human gifts" (as quoted in Wild, 1938, p. 60). In this regard, Khatri and Ng

(2000) envision intuition as a “holistic perception of reality that transcends rational ways of knowing” (p. 60). Following the same line of reasoning, Shapiro and Spence (1997) define intuition as “a nonconscious holistic processing mode in which judgments are made with no awareness of the rules of knowledge used for inference and can feel right despite one’s inability to articulate the reason” (p. 64). However, Khatri and Ng (2000) believe that intuitive mechanisms fit perfectly in strategic decision making, given that, by and large, it is fueled by scant data and knowledge that molds business arenas today. At this juncture, it is worth remarking that the intuition approach does not necessarily relinquish any sort of quantitative analysis.

It must be also acknowledged that intuitive skills are clearly employed by rank-and-file people, and the situation is not different with top managers. More exactly, a manager who is worthy of praise uses it a lot. In this sense, Harper (1989) stated that top executives show great expertise in using intuition along with pre-emptive management. Therefore, there are strong reasons accounting for why intuition should not be disregarded as a managerial tool. Furthermore, it is commonly associated with situations where discoveries, inventions, scientific inquiries, artistic inspiration, creative problem-solving, perception and mathematical problems, among other things, are clearly identifiable (Wild, 1938; Vaughan, 1989). Indeed, Wild (1938) explained that intuition works as a guide to action as well as being suitable to novel situations, closer to instinct, although it is not always available. In other words, it seems that “pure intuition” takes place only in special moments. Alas, it does not occur whenever we want it to; nonetheless, it is comprehensible, especially when we take into account that creative insights are rare. Therefore, this discussion suggests the existence of a kind of uncontrollable force, power, or transcendent mechanism, at least when one is trying to grasp something deeper or propose a breakthrough discovery. In contrast, on a regular basis or in dealing with common situations the flux of ideas or thoughts tends to happen in an ongoing fashion.

However, as Klein (1999, p. 34) wisely notes, intuition is not an infallible mechanism. Agor (1989) detected such a possibility in his important study with executives. In addition, he accurately noted the causes (factors) that were related to intuition, namely:

- *projection mechanisms* such as attachment and dishonesty;
- *time constraints*, characterized by hurrying in making decisions, failure to gather necessary facts and to do appropriate homework, and acting impulsively;
- *stress factors* derived from physical/emotional tension, fatigue, and illness; and
- *lack of confidence* due to anxiety, fear, confusion, a feeling of unbalance, and the inability to accommodate various demands.

In that study executives admitted that their mistakes resulted primarily from failings in dealing with their intuition skills in an effective manner. Broadly speaking, they allowed factors such as an ego involvement to prevent their intuitive capacity from work properly. Such a conclusion suggests evidence that we are responsible for activating or not activating our intuitive power (actually, we see it as a sort of power that requires, at a minimum, a healthy emotional or spiritual state to flourish). With reference to this point, Peter Drucker once stated: “I believe in intuition only if you discipline it. The ‘hunch’ artists, the ones who make a diagnosis but don’t check it out



with facts, with what they observe, are the ones [...] who kill businesses” (quoted in Matzler *et al.*, 2007, p. 14).

In fact, sometimes we are intuited in a wrong direction. To put it another way, suggestions, thoughts, and ideas come to our mind that do not make sense (anecdotal evidence shows that sometimes people around us try to call our attention to avoid certain mistakes, but we just reject or disregard such advice). On a related note, there are cases where we simply do not take into account other possible solutions, alternatives, paths, and so on. Actually, it seems that our reasoning does not work appropriately, at least on some occasions. In these situations, the decision maker just tends to grab his or her original idea without any respect or consideration for another opinion or counter-argument. In doing so, the decision maker is predictably prone to failure in his or her duties, and could also constitute a burden for his or her organization and staff. In the section that follows, *we propose prayer as a transcendent coping mechanism whereby executives can refine the flux of their intuition*. It must be pointed out that prayer was cited as one of the relaxation techniques used by top executives to expand their intuitive abilities in Agor’s (1989) study. Nonetheless, despite this important finding, it was not satisfactorily explained how it works effectively. Thus, there exists a theoretical gap that we intend to fill in through this paper by employing a religious framework.

### **The usage and perception of prayer**

#### *As a coping mechanism*

In large measure, prayer is a subject that falls within the religion-based domain, and, in essence, it is best expressed as a form of communication within the context of a spiritual relationship, as posited by Baesler (2003). More exactly, prayer can be employed in a lot of forms such as ritual, conversational, petition, meditative, thanksgiving, contrition, adoration, confession, sacrifice, intercession, contemplation, or vows (Poloma and Gallup, 1991; Baesler, 2003; Zaleski and Zaleski, 2005). Therefore, the most elucidative perception regards that prayer – be it verbalized or not – offers a channel by which one enters into a direct communication with God (Fontana, 2003) or another deity. According to Baesler (2003), it tends to enact an experience of mystical union with God (or whichever entity) by which the cognitive thoughts and expected behaviors associated with Christian values increase and thoughts and behaviors linked to sin decrease. Of course, there is reason enough to expect that prayers are a mechanism that trigger the best feelings, states and proposes in us. Fontana (2003, pp. 196-7), in turn, accounts for the fact that prayer can encompass a lot of things such as praise, gratitude, supplication, guidance, support, forgiveness, healing, spiritual strength, wisdom, or any thought or desire that is compatible with a loving and omniscient God.

Research shows that those who usually draw upon prayer believe and feel they are supported by God in their problems and difficulties, even in those cases where it is impossible to pinpoint any solution or amelioration (Vasconcelos, 2009). In contrast, there are also people who embrace a more skeptical view and have no faith in the function of prayer. However, there is no denying that prayer is linked with a better psychological state for those people who rely on it. Munroe (2003) remarks that despite all the questions, confusion, and uncertainty related to the effect of prayer, it represents one of the greatest denominators, among thousands of believers, throughout history.

Drawing on a historical perspective, Munroe cites well known characters such as Moses, Abraham, David, Solomon, Esther, Deborah, Daniel, Joseph, all the prophets, and, of course, Jesus Christ, who had dynamic and deep commitment to the act of praying. In fact, their feats and records, as well as the records of numbers of Christians through the ages, consistently show the direct impact of prayer on their lives and on those around them. Speculating about who was the first human being to pray, Zaleski and Zaleski (2005) surmise that perhaps *Homo erectus* (1.6 million-300,000 BCE) was the first to have sufficient cranial capacity to accommodate the symbolic thought that prayer requires.

In contrast, Fontana (2003) raises other interesting points about prayer outcomes and scientific measures that must be mentioned. This author ponders as follows:

If prayer really does work on a level other than the purely psychological, it provides potential support for nonphysicality, for some form of contact between a nonphysical mind and energies unknown to science. In theory it should be possible to put prayer to scientific test, but the difficulties are formidable in that we have to disentangle the individual's own psychological resources from these hypothesized spiritual energies (p. 197).

On the other hand, McCullough and Larson (quoted in Krause, 2003, p. 379) noted that people rely frequently on prayer in order to cope with the stressors they encounter. Accordingly, there is strong evidence that today's workers suffer great pressure from their employers to obtain significant organizational results. In a related vein, Poloma and Gallup (as quoted in Krause and Chatters, 2005) surveyed a sample of 1,980 individuals from different religious orientations about prayer practices and found that *meditative* prayer is most effective in exerting beneficial effects on psychological well-being compared to any other sort of prayer. Nonetheless, in their factor analytic study, they also found that *conversational* prayer is the type of prayer by which believers usually ask God to provide guidance *in making decisions*. In effect, in this paper we intend to dig deeper into this important topic, given that executives have been employing prayer either in decision-making processes or within a more elaborate context of spirituality in business (Agor, 1989; Cavanagh, 1999; Benefiel, 2005a, b; Mano, 2006; Fernando and Jackson, 2006; McCarty, 2007; Cavanagh and Hazen, 2008).

#### *Evidence from organizational life*

Regardless of the paucity of empirical evidence regarding the effects of prayer in work settings (Vasconcelos, 2009), the anecdotal evidence shows that it has been positively associated with the spirituality in business movement (Cavanagh, 1999; Benefiel, 2005b; Biberman and Tischler, 2008; Cavanagh and Hazen, 2008). More importantly, evidence indicates that managers are grasping that prayer can be a source of accuracy or a lesser margin of error in their corporate decision making (Cavanagh and Hazen, 2008; Vasconcelos, 2009).

Delbecq's (2000) research on classrooms has indicated that one generally prays without realizing it, although prayer is strongly integrated into people's lives. In this regard, McCarty (2007) and Biberman and Tischler (2008) note the growing number of media reports pointing out the incorporation of prayer practices, among other spiritual tools, in workplaces by small-business owners, executives, and rank-and-file employees all asking for God's help. McCarty (2007) also remarks that the participants have reported very interesting results from these prayer meetings, such as increased employee morale and productivity, and decreased employee turnover as well.



Similarly, McGee and Delbecq (2003) assert that executives regard prayer as being beneficial to them because it helps them to keep their mental and emotional capacities at an optimal level. Furthermore, they feel somehow inspired to make right decisions.

Managers have also drawn upon Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Discernment process, where prayer represents a key component as highlighted by Cavanagh and Hazen (2008). Benefiel (2005a), in turn, reports the case of the Reell Precision Manufacturing co-founders, who employed prayer and discussion to surpass an organizational crisis and product development challenge. Apparently, this organization succeeded in integrating this spiritual resource with its strategic decision-making process. Benefiel (2005b) also reports that the same coping mechanism was implemented at HealthEast: Joe Clubb, pervading all levels of this organization. Benefiel (2005b) wisely posits that reflection and prayer may help leaders to examine vast amounts of data and keep focused on what is relevant.

Mano (2006), on the other hand, revealed the case of a Brazilian retail store chain named Insinuante (founded in 1959). It is rated as the fourth ranked organization in the retail sector in Brazil, with strong market penetration in the North of the country. Mano (2006) adds that in this organization, the monthly meetings of the board of directors are preceded by a prayer. This is a long-held habit adopted by Insinuante's founder, Mr Antenor Batista. As a result, the organization is increasingly larger and more competitive in one of the fiercest business sectors. Similarly, at another successful giant retail store in Brazil, Magazine Luiza, all employees gather every Monday morning in their respective branches and spend some minutes in a spiritual meeting and praying (Santana, 2008). As Tacey (2004, p. 52) suggests, prayer, meditation, and contemplation are sorts of spiritual exercise that lead us to free ourselves from ordinary wishes and connect us with a deeper will and purpose. Apparently, these businessmen and executives get such a connection when they search for help by praying.

Additionally, it is worth echoing Benefiel's (2005b) thoughts:

Maintaining a reflective inner disposition, patiently seeking underlying issues, gathering information, approaching a decision with reflection and *prayer*, and testing a decision by its fruits all help keep a leader operating on all cylinders" (p. 59, emphasis added).

Thus, prayer is a spiritual tool that can be employed to help solve problems related to organizational life (Vasconcelos, 2009).

### **The Spiritist Doctrine (SD) approach**

Likened to traditional religious beliefs, SD can be seen as a relatively new doctrine if we consider that it has been around for just a century and a half. Nonetheless, its thoughtful tenets and principles have been widespread worldwide, especially in Latin and North America, as well as Europe. Basically, what distinguishes SD from other religions is the fact that its principles are strongly supported:

- by faith in the hereafter;
- on the phenomenon of the spirits' messages and teachings through mediums;
- on Jesus Christ's teachings (the Gospel) and his behavior as a paradigm of perfection to be followed by all human beings; and
- by the practice of charity.

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Further, under the SD belief, all human beings living a corporeal existence on Earth should strive to do good as much as they can, to embody moral and ethical principles, to accept the reincarnation phenomenon as a universal law through which any individual needs to make inroads into the spiritual realm, to be prepared to deal with the cause-effect and/or action-reaction law (in this sense, both good-doers and wrongdoers will reap the beneficial or punitive consequences of their acts – sooner or later – in future earthly existences as well as in the spiritual life), and to be charitable and benevolent in order to assure their future happiness.

In sum, through the SD tenets people are urged to *practice reasoning faith* as a means to better understand their role here in this corporeal dimension and prepare themselves more appropriately – avoiding as much as possible making or engaging in bad decisions, errors, mistakes, vices, and unfair attitudes, among other things – so as to return to spiritual life – after death – as souls spiritually enhanced. According to SD supporters, this is an ongoing process until an individual (spirit) reaches a state of perfection. In addition, they draw heavily upon Jesus Christ's teachings such as: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"[1]. In this light, SD researchers have pointed out that:

Selfishness is the source of all our moral faults, just as compassion is the source of our virtues. To destroy the former and nurture the latter should be the aim of everyone who wants to ensure human happiness, both in the present and in the future (Kardec, 2003a, p. 337).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that both SD principles and independent researchers' intriguing findings regarding reincarnation phenomena (see, for example, Haraldsson, 2005; Haraldsson and Abu-Izzeddin, 2004, 2002; Mills *et al.*, 1994) are, taken together, in stark contrast to the terror management theory that, at some point, suggests that humans should place the subject of mortality "outside of their focal consciousness" as a way to enjoy a normal existence and be free of ongoing concern (cf. Stein and Rupp, 2005). From the SD standpoint, by contrast, earthly life must be seen as a means of people getting rid of their bad inclinations so as to build a better future and streamline their spiritual advance.

Despite the lack of consensus, theoretical grounding, and convergent views about the topic of religion in business (King, 2008, for example, offers a very interesting analysis of this gap), the major reason to address SD as the religious source in our conceptual model has to do with the fact that, as will be seen, *it strongly embraces both the prayer and intuition constructs*. Put differently, SD dovetails prayer with intuition in a suitable manner, providing convincing explanations about how it works. On the other hand, one does not want to proselytize anyone towards the SD faith; far from it. To be a follower of a certain religion doctrine and profess some sort of faith – and herein lies an undeniable subjective experience – is always a personal choice. Actually, the human journey has been fueled extensively by some form of faith, be it anchored in religious tradition or not. Further, there is undeniable and strong evidence showing people's ancestors asking for divine help in times of trouble by means of prayer or other similar ways. However, it must be pointed out that the majority of people who live on this planet follow some kind of religious faith. As a result, religious supporters tend to behave in accordance with the principles derived from the religion they embrace. Thus, the study of religion approach *vis-à-vis* corporate life demonstrates symmetries that cannot be refuted. To some degree, many organizations have already

realized that they need to accommodate and integrate employees' religious needs into the workplace. On the one hand, it must be recognized that it is a thorny issue to be dealt with, but on the other it cannot be swept under the carpet because of the imperative cultural diversity issue faced by organizations as a whole. Bearing this in mind, the following sections cover the SD approach to intuition and prayer synergies.

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*Intuition skill*

As noted earlier, the capability for intuition has been examined through many different lenses. Overall, this construct has undoubtedly obtained a respectful space among scholars from different lines of inquiry. Apparently, several situations that take place in organizational environments push managers toward intuitive mechanisms. In fact, Burke and Miller (quoted in Fernando and Jackson, 2006) point out five different aspects related to the intuition resource, namely subconscious mental programming, values or ethics-based decisions, affect-initiated decisions and cognitive-based decisions that could leverage a decision made by a religion-driven leader. As discussed previously, researchers have regarded intuition as a cogent managerial tool even when coupled with more rational decision-making processes. In a related vein, however, SD has since its inception attributed great importance to intuition capabilities. More exactly, both SD researchers and mediumship messages have highlighted the transcendent functioning of intuition on people's lives. In this light, Denis (1977, p. 324), for example, remarked that the majority of all great discoveries came from ideas and insights derived from *intuition* or some form of human deeper feeling. He reminds us that Newton had conceived the universal attraction law previously to when the falling apple demonstrated to him, in a subtle way, how it worked. Moreover, SD argues – based on validated mediumship messages – that all of us currently living corporeal lives are accompanied by spirits from all levels of spiritual progress. In other words, there is an ongoing interplay between embodied spirits (we) and disincarnate spirits. Apropos this point, spirituality in the workplace theorists (e.g. Lewis and Geroy, 2000, p. 685) examined some workers' perceptions (beliefs) about spirits or ghosts inhabiting the same building where they worked and obtained some very intriguing opinions. Actually, these scholars found that some workers believed that evil spirits used to possess their managers and coworkers.

In essence, what appears to be the determining factor in attracting spirits from one or other spiritual spectrum (i.e. bad or good spirits) is our behavior, thoughts, emotions, merits, and faith or even lack of faith. Kardec (2003a) explained this point thus:

Spirits constantly interrelate with human beings. The good ones inspire people to take the high road, sustain them through trials, and instill in them courage and acceptance. The less advanced ones inculcate sordid ideas and depressing thoughts. They take pleasure in our troubles and strive to make us like themselves (pp. 12-13).

Kardec's (2003a) findings showed that the interplay between ourselves and spirits can be either subtle or in a direct form. Importantly, in the former, the phenomenon takes place without our awareness, that is, by the inspiring way, but in the latter, according to him, occurs "through writing, speech, and other physical manifestations, usually with the intervention of a medium who acts as a link between the two worlds" (p. 13). Kardec also advised that we have often to care about the content of messages (that is, they must make sense at all in order to be considered as valid).

Either way, we are in a position to attract or repel spirits whatever their nature is. It seems clear that we can be protected from bad inspirations if we are urged by *higher senses and purposes on life*. Otherwise, if we display preferences for opposite stimuli, we will probably cope with harsh consequences sooner or later. Therefore, to Kardec (1986):

... inspiration comes to us all, from spirits who influence us, for good or for evil, in every circumstance of our lives, and in every resolution we make, and it may therefore be truly said that, in this respect, *everyone is a medium*, for there is no one who has not about him his familiar spirits, who do their utmost to suggest salutary or pernicious counsels to those with whom they are connected; a truth which, were we duly penetrated with its reality and importance, would frequently lead us to oppose a more effectual resistance to the suggestions of evil, by seeking the inspiration of our guardian-angel in our moments of uncertainty as to what we should say or do. At such times, we should invoke that watchful guardian with fervor and confidence, as a providentially-appointed friend; and, if we did so, we should often be astonished at the new ideas which would arise in our minds, as though by enchantment, whether for the taking of an important decision, or for the accomplishing of our special work. If, after such an appeal for guidance, no distinct idea occurred to us, it would show that we must wait a little longer before *taking a decision* (p. 192, emphasis added).

Relatedly, it is worth mentioning that scores of spirits' messages come to terms with that proposition. Indeed, they have been channeling such messages through different and distinguished mediums for decades validating, so to speak, SD tenets and teachings. The medium Francisco Cândido Xavier[2] (Xavier, 1977), for example, was the recipient – by a kind of mediumship named psychography, also known as automatic writing – of many messages from the spirit Emmanuel covering this subject. And one of them explained that all human beings (embodied spirits, according to SD) need to put into practice their intuitive skills through ongoing exercises of mind, yet they must focus on reverberating generous aspirations to be effective. Another message strikingly revealed that intuition is a universal capability. In this sense, we all are *receiver* of higher inspirations derived from the spiritual dimension toward religious, philosophical, artistic, and scientific problems. As a consequence, that intuition flux cooperates with the achievement of sentimental and cultural conquests in this earthly dimension, in conformity with God's will (Xavier, 1978).

Kardec (1986) also offered an intriguing explanation related to so-called genius's outputs. In his words, they are:

... doubtless spirits of superior advancement, able to comprehend and to conceive great ideas; and it is precisely because of this ability that the spirits who desire the accomplishment of some particular work select them as their instruments, suggesting to their minds the trains of thought required for their special ends, so that, in a majority of cases, "men of genius" are mediums without being aware of it. Many of them, however, have a vague intuition of this extraneous help, and every one who seeks inspiration performs, unconsciously, *an act of evocation, whenever he makes an appeal to his "good genius" to come to his aid* (p. 193, emphasis added).

Therefore, intuition skill requires an extra effort to be activated even in corporate life. Apparently, intuition, as suggested in our model, is rightly triggered through the prayer mechanism given that we all need to be, based on SD tenets, in "good spiritual shape" in order to be recipients of good suggestions and inspirations. Conversely, we

could be guided to pursue wrong directions, make mistakes or bad decisions that we could regret.

### *Prayer mechanism*

SD vigorously emphasizes the importance of prayer as a transcendental mechanism. Further, SD explains that such mechanism works as a route or a telephone line by which any individual can establish a linkage between him or her and God, celestial entities or even disincarnate spirits such as parents, relatives or friends. In essence, prayer is an act of wholehearted communication, and, the more intense and pure it is, the greater the likelihood that one will be heard by deities. Similarly, Denis (2003) proposed that a prayer appeal that contains stronger and sincere impulses likewise yields more distinct and clear “revelation of the harmonies, the voices, the purity of their higher worlds” (p. 150).

Kardec (2003a) stated that prayer can just work if it comes from the heart. Hence, he argued:

*It is the thought behind the prayer that counts.* A heartfelt prayer is more meaningful than one you simply read from a book, no matter how elaborate the prayer book is. So when you pray, don't do it just with your lips but with your whole being. Prayer is meaningful if it is offered with conviction, love, and candor. If you are vain and self-centered, your prayers are going to be shallow unless they can actually lead you to consider a humbler attitude (p. 253, emphasis added).

Moreover, Kardec (2003a) also remarked that the true essence of prayer “is an act of worship. To pray is to think of and to draw yourself closer to God. As you commune with the Source of Life keep in mind three things: praising, asking, and thanksgiving” (p. 253). However, it must be emphasized that such a conclusion does not divert from the views of non-religious researchers discussed earlier. But it is worth emphasizing that in Kardec's findings, prayer may have the power to make anyone feel better. Rather, we have not found any evidence that prayer can yield a harmful effect. Therefore, in his words:

A heartfelt prayer not only gives you more strength to withstand life's various trials, but it also puts you in closer contact with good spirits who are eager to help you. A heartfelt prayer is an unfailing means of obtaining spiritual assistance (p. 253).

On the other hand, scores of mediumship messages underlie this transcendent connection issue, thus reinforcing its benefits to believers (see, for example, Xavier, 1978; Franco, 1988, 1999). In contrast, it is noted that people who are not used to praying are vulnerable or, in other words, are at the mercy of bad spirits that could leverage them to make bad decisions (Baccelli, 2002). In supporting this line of reasoning, Kardec (2003b) highlighted that prayer is the mechanism by which people receive help from good spirits who support them to make good resolutions and inspire them with encouraging thoughts and suggestions. In this regard, prayers replenish believers with inner strength through their life's problems and ordeals. At the same time, prayer apparently works like a moral compass because it also tends to help believers not to lose self-control and sense. Being very optimistic about prayer's positive inspirations, Kardec claimed: “With prayer we can also *avert the troubles* that are *the natural product of bad personal decisions*” (p. 313, emphasis added). And this is a turning point in relation to this paper's aims.

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After all, we have to admit that organizational environments are loci where emotions such as selfishness, envy, and anger, among other not praiseworthy things, are largely present. Put differently, these are places that tend to be dispirited. In a related vein, Marques *et al.* (2007, p. 37) state that spiritually nurtured workplaces are not associated with words such as negativity, excessive control, egocentric behavior, mistrust, dishonesty, strong hierarchy, and backstabbing. However, according to SD supporters, at the minimum, the act of praying has the power to calm us. At the same time, it helps us to find solutions to problems that we are facing. In other words, by praying one tends to avoid making offenses to anyone and behaving inappropriately as well. Further, by praying one is in better condition to exert self-control and curb bad humor and temper.

Kardec (2003b) explained that:

If we were to admit that we can't do anything about certain unavoidable adversities and that prayer won't save us from them, wouldn't it still mean a great deal if we could spare ourselves the harm that comes from our own behavior? It's easy to see the role that prayer plays here, since its aim is to attract beneficial inspirations from the good spirits and to gather strength to resist bad thoughts, especially those whose realization leads to disastrous consequences for ourselves. In this case, the good spirits won't do away with the hardships, but they will turn us away from the bad thoughts that may cause them. The good spirits won't prevent the fulfillment of God's Laws or suspended the Laws of Nature for us. They will inspire us, *in a most subtle and intuitive way*, so as never to violate our free will. We're in the position of someone who asks for good advice, but who is still always free to take the advice or not. Providence wants life to be like this, so that we can take responsibility for our actions and take full credit for choosing correctly between good and evil. This much everyone should trust in when they pray with sincerity of heart. This above all is the kind of situation where we can apply the words "Ask and it will be given to you" (p. 314, emphasis added).

It seems, therefore, that *intuition is better enacted by praying mechanisms*. The evidence suggests that both intuition and prayer are forces that must be coupled together in order to encourage a decision maker, in this case, to reach, so to speak, wiser results or, to put it differently, maximized spiritual outcomes. In other words, the flow of ideas, thoughts, and insights are apparently optimized when this spiritual tool is activated. As a result, the decisions tend to be more accurate and fair. As suggested in our model, based on SD tenets, principles, and explanations, this frame helps decision makers to attract good spiritual influences and, by the same token, avoid bad ones. On the other hand, the SD view of how prayer operate in order to elicit its better effects is similar to other trains of thought (see, for example, Cavanagh and Hazen, 2008). Nonetheless, SD researchers remarked that the power of prayer is derived from the thought. Further, the place or time in which the prayer is addressed is irrelevant. Moreover, prayers can be expressed anywhere, at any time, alone or in a group, but:

The influence of place or time is relevant only to the extent that these induce quiet concentration. In addition, a group prayer has a more powerful effect only when all the participants join together in a heartfelt thought and focus on the same objective (Kardec, 2003b, p. 315).

Focusing on its effectiveness, Denis (2003) warned that disdain the power of prayer implies in scorning a force – which is sustained by permanent and immutable laws of the universe – that can lift us above the material interests, passions, and transitory things.

Historically, avatars, saints, angels or "pure spirits", as they are termed by SC supporters, have drawn intensively on prayers when emergent and/or complex situations



called for their action. And for some reason, they were the recipients of considerable help, namely, miracles and healing power, inspirations, and intuitions, among other things. Therefore, there is no reason to ignore this force in organizational settings. We think that suppressing it from our lives could be a manifestation of a lack of interest, knowledge, wisdom or even bias against transcendent tools as well as being totally incongruent with the complex challenges and dynamics that organizational members face on a daily basis.

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### **Future research**

As we have seen, it appears that there is much room to explore intuitive power in corporate life. As a result, researchers have hunkered down over this mystic force, trying to elicit more answers as to use it appropriately (see Dane and Pratt, 2007; Sonenshein, 2007; Vasconcelos, 2009). However, we envision some research veins that can be explored. Thus, given that internal relationships and/or connections represent a salient issue in organizational settings, we think that one could probe how intuition permeates – if at all – organizational members' perceptions related to this subject. In other words, are people able to anticipate by intuition, for instance, disagreements, colleagues' misbehavior, betraying acts, enemies' reactions, some sort of discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment or something hostile? In this sense, it would be interesting to investigate more deeply how workers intuit certain choices, for example helpers and supporters (or not) for their ideas and projects. Regarding the growing role of coaches in organizations, another research question arises: could workers feel some intuition in the process of choosing a certain person for this task? On the other hand, one could also examine whether workers intuit the impact of the replacement of bosses in their careers, the upshots of organizational change, and operational problems. In other words, do they receive some intuition about these things before they take place?

As for prayer as a coping mechanism underlying individuals in the corporate life, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a construct that is practically unexplored. Aside for some initiatives derived from the fields of medicine and religion, there has been a paucity of empirical contributions, let alone in management studies. Therefore, knowledge about this topic must be deepened, whether it is intertwined with intuition skill or not. Thus, one can surmise that people could use prayer on a daily basis, hoping to solve their job issues. Taking such a premise into account, one would welcome studies aiming to find how often managers and executives pray before making important decisions in their organizations and personal careers. Accordingly, one could also examine afterward if they were satisfied with the accuracy of their decisions. In a related vein, one could, for example, delve into people's usage of prayer to deal with unfriendly bosses and their colleagues. Another potential research vein has to do with the kind of prayers, as proposed by Poloma and Gallup (as quoted in Krause and Chatters, 2005), that people usually employ in the workplace.

More importantly, one might verify, as proposed by our model, whether people rely on the thoughts and ideas that come up (i.e. intuition) after asking for God's help (by the prayer mechanism), especially when they are assigned to carry out complex tasks or new job assignments and the results of such a procedure. In another research direction, one could examine the effects of prayer. Rather, one could investigate whether it has been helpful in attenuating workers' stress and pressure derived from their work environments. In a broader sense, one could collect people's narratives over prayer effects upon their job activities and interplays.

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### Managerial implications and conclusions

Perhaps the important managerial implication of this paper rests on the conclusion that decision-making might be more efficient if it preserves the strengths of each approach whenever it is necessary. Nonetheless, in the synthetic frame that has been depicted, we have attempted to emphasize other potential benefits related to transcendent knowing. Furthermore, we found strong evidence that a religion-based framework might enrich the sensitive topic of decision-making processes in organizations. It must be recognized, on the other hand, that it relies on managers' needs, faith, and time constraints to draw upon the best mix of analysis.

Overall, we have striven to show that intuition and prayer are two sides of the same coin. As we have tried to demonstrate, both forms of decision processes (e.g. rational and non-rational analysis) may coexist perfectly in an integrative frame. The religion-based approach that was outlined here reinforces, or at least so we hope, such a possibility. In this regard, we have retrieved a set of teachings from SD that poses the intrinsic linkage of both the intuition and prayer constructs. Thus, that knowledge seems to fit appropriately in the broader framework proposed in this paper. Importantly, we also conclude that this religion-based framework probably enables decision makers to avoid injustices, to attract good spiritual influence, to repel bad spiritual influence and to enhance the accuracy of their final decisions.

Arguably, people who are prone to an atheistic view would feel uncomfortable considering the points and approaches that have been extensively discussed throughout this paper. However, we are aligned with King and Crowther's (2004) opinion that religiosity and spirituality have beneficial influences and effects on workers' attitudes and behaviors as well as on the organizations that employ them. In addition, as wisely suggested by King (2008), it is an appropriate time for the management field to be employing its expertise in exploring the convergence between religion and work. This paper is an attempt to show that it is feasible.

### Notes

1. Matthew (5: 48).
2. Francisco Cândido Xavier (1910-2002), also known as Chico Xavier, was one of the world's most distinguished mediums. Astonishingly, he psychographed 412 books during his life and never admitted to being the author of any of them. He used to say that he just wrote what the spirits told him. For this reason, he never accepted a cent derived from sales of those books. It is important to mention that Chico Xavier's spirits' books sold more than 20 million copies and he gave all the copyrights to charity institutions and Spiritism Doctrine groups from the first book being published. One of his most impressive automatic writings, which attracted worldwide press coverage, was related to the case of José Divino Nunes, who was unfairly accused of murdering his best friend, Maurício Henriques, in the city of Goiânia, Brazil in 1979. That terrible mistake was fixed thanks to Chico Xavier's mediumship work. Actually, he psychographed a message from that spirit. Taken together, that message with other proof proved that the accused man was innocent. Chico Xavier's first book was *Parnaso de Além-túmulo*, published in 1932 and composed of 256 poems attributed to dead Portuguese poets such as João de Deus, Antero de Quental and Guerra Junqueiro as well as Brazilian poets such as Olavo Bilac, Cruz e Sousa and Augusto dos Anjos. His best selling book was *Nosso Lar* (translated in English as *The Astral City*), with 1,300,000 copies, attributed to the spirit of André Luiz.

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