Workplace Spirituality Empirical Research: A Literature Review

David Geigle
Associate Professor
Texas A&M University – Central Texas
1001 Leadership Place
Killeen, Texas 76549, USA
E-mail: *geigle@ct.tamus.edu*

ABSTRACT

Much has been written on the theories of workplace spirituality (WS). Much less has been written concerning the empirical research supporting these theories. The purpose of this article is to review the workplace spirituality empirical research. A growing body of knowledge concerning spirituality at work is evident in the literature. A small but growing subset of this knowledge concerns the empirical research on this topic. This study documents the workplace spirituality empirical research including defining and measuring; demographics; implementation; effect on attitudes; impact on performance; and WS effect on ethical decision making. Many of the empirical studies demonstrate a positive effect of WS on job commitment, satisfaction, and performance. In addition, the empirical research on workplace spirituality has demonstrated results in altruism and conscientiousness, self-career management, reduced inter-role conflict, reduced frustration, organization based self-esteem, involvement, retention, and ethical behavior. It is argued that WS constructs need to be better defined in the context of organizational behavior, organizational development, and religion. Better defining workplace spirituality in these contexts will ultimately determine if the movement is a unique body of knowledge or merely an extension of already existing disciplines.   For now, the empirical research indicates that workplace spirituality shows promise as a significant new management paradigm.

Keywords: *management, spirituality, workplace, performance, commitment, satisfaction, empirical*

1. INTRODUCTION

Much has been written on the subject of Workplace Spirituality (WS) by academics and practitioners, including the notion of a new paradigm, one that satisfies the needs of the millennial manager for achieving triple bottom line results while satisfying the unmet needs of the workforce. To qualify as a new paradigm, WS must differentiate itself from religious spirituality and other management disciplines such as positive psychology, organizational behavior, and organizational development.   In the late 1990's and early 21st century this ground swell of interest resulted in a proliferation of books and essays in academic journals. Each of these had their own definition and expectation for this new discipline. Largely missing was empirical testing of the various hypotheses. With the turn of the decade, the tide has turned and significant empirical research has been reported. This study documents the workplace spirituality empirical research including defining and measuring; demographics; implementing; effect on attitudes; impact on performance; and WS effect on ethical decision making.

2. DEFINING & MEASURING WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Oswick (2009) compared the two 10 year periods ending in 1998 and 2008 and found the number of books on workplace spirituality increased from 17 to 55 and the number of journal articles increased from 40 to 192. Karakas (2009) reviewed the literature and found 70 definitions of spirituality at work.   Most definitions make the distinction between religion and spirituality. Covey (2011) proposed the following: "The word spiritual has its roots in spirit, for which dictionaries provide many definitions, most of which are nonreligious in nature, such as 'disposition of mind or outlook' or 'a mental disposition characterized by firmness or assertiveness.' Thesauruses likewise put forward many synonyms for spirit including disposition, courage, determination, vigor, will, moral fiber, heart, enthusiasm, inner self, fortitude, and strength. Combine the dictionary definitions with these synonyms, and that is what I am referring to here when speaking of young people's spirits, or spiritual needs."