Does the motivation to achieve spirituality at work help buffer the influence of job stress on work-life issues, and health amongst Australian academics?

Amanda S. Bell, Monash University (amanda.bell@monash.edu)

Diana Rajendran & Stephen Theiler, Swinburne University

1. Introduction

A new spiritual awareness has been stirring in workers' psyches driving them toward a more humanistic work environment, more meaning at work, and a connection to something more than just functional work (Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2005).

Three levels of **spirituality at work**: individual, work unit, and organisation-wide (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000).

• **Individual level**: how much an employee understands their own "divine" power; how it can help them obtain a satisfying internal and external life by finding individual meaning and purpose through work.
• **Work unit level**: how much employees have a sense of connection and community with colleagues, and the extent to which colleagues are caring and encouraging.
• **Organisation-wide level**: the extent to which an employee perceives a good relationship with their organisation, and perceives *their* own values and goals align with their organisation's.

Moderation model of spirituality at work
Note:
-------- Moderator influence
———— Direct influence
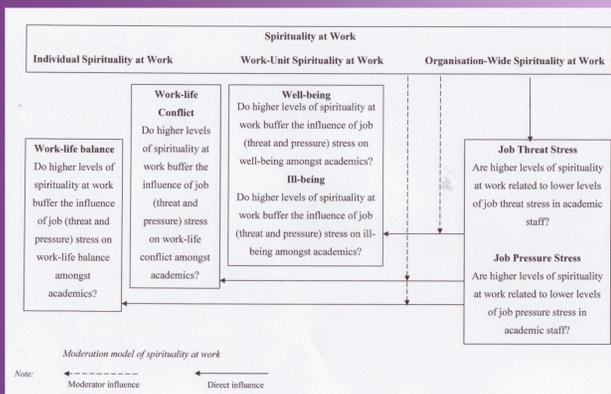
Spiritual appraisal involves making sense of the stressor based on one's spiritual beliefs or values based on Lazarus and Folkman's original (1984) transactional model of **stress and health** (Gall, Charbonneau, Clarke, Grant, Joseph, & Shouldice, 2005).

Such attempts at making meaning of the stressor may help the individual to reduce initial levels of distress, which ultimately influences health.
People are motivated to reach their full potential as a person (striving for self-actualisation) once lower-order needs (such as food, love and shelter) are met (Maslow, 1943) . This is possible through **spirituality at work**.

• Compartmentalisation of employee work life from personal life (a person's whole-self or authentic self), leads to decreased productivity (Laabs, 1995) .
• Spirituality is important for **work-life practices** as it can lessen this compartmentalisation (Marques, 2005).
• **Integration** of employee's **authentic selves** with their **work lives** is achieved when there is alignment between personal values and that of their workplaces (Dehler & Welsh, 2003).

Acknowledgements

12th International Conference on Motivation, Porto 2010

Psychological strain and work-life conflict is increasing among academics (Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006). Increasing stress, pressure and organisational change in universities has led to increased importance in examining job stress, health and work-life conflict, as well as aiding their need for self-actualisation.

Few studies have investigated academics specifically, their ability to balance work and personal life, and avoid work-life conflict.
• Few studies have been conducted on academic job stress and health.
• This study addresses whether motivation to achieve spirituality at work might be beneficial for academics in today's stressful and turbulent environment,
• where employees are seeking something more than functional work and are struggling with stress, work-life issues and health.

2. Research questions

What are the moderating effects of spirituality at work on job stress and health (well-being and ill-being) amongst Australian academics?

Based on Gall et al.'s (2005) spiritual appraisal model of stress and health.

Does spirituality at work moderate the relationship between job stress, work-life balance, and work-life conflict amongst Australian academics?

3. Methodology

139 academics in Australian universities and technical colleges anonymously completed a self-report questionnaire.
Quantitative measures of :
• Spirituality at work (individual, work-unit and organisation-wide spirituality),
• Health (well-being and ill-being),
• Work-life balance,
• Work-life conflict,
• Job stress (job threat stress and job pressure stress).

Measures:
• Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) meaningful work items were used to measure **spirituality at work** at the **individual** level.
• Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson's, (2003) sense of community items were used to measure the **work unit** level
• Ashmos and Duchon's (2000) alignment with organisational values items were used to measure **spirituality at work** at the **organisation-wide** level.
• Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, and Ironson's, (2001) Stress in General Scale was used to measure **job threat stress** and **job pressure stress**
• Hardie, Kashima, and Pridmore's, (2005) Multidimensional Health States Scale – Short Form (MHSS-SF) assessed **well-being** and **ill-being**
• Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, and Weitzman's, (2001) Work-Family Balance scale was used to measure **work-life balance**
• O'Neil, Helms, and Gable's, (1986) work-life conflict subscale assessed **work-life conflict**.

Analysis:
Bivariate correlations and hierarchical multiple regressions investigated the hypothesised relationships.

---

4. Key findings

Summary of Descriptive Statistics

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	Possible range
Ind SWS	5.44	1.18	1.50	7.00	1 - 7
Wrk SWS	4.70	1.25	1.43	7.00	1 - 7
Org SWS	3.54	1.36	1.00	6.50	1 - 7
WB	3.25	.88	.70	5.00	0 - 5
IB	1.99	1.13	.00	5.00	0 - 5
Threat	1.17	.83	.00	3.00	0 - 3
Pressure	2.07	.90	.00	3.00	0 - 3
WLB	4.34	1.45	1.20	7.00	1 - 7
WLC	3.98	1.69	1.00	7.00	1 - 7

N = 139. Note: Ind SWS = Individual level spirituality at work, Wrk SWS = work unit level spirituality at work, Org SWS = Organisation-wide level spirituality at work, WB = Well-being, IB = Ill-being, Threat = Job Threat Stress, Pressure = Job Pressure Stress, WLB = Work-life Balance, WLC = Work-life Conflict.

Significant correlations between spirituality at work (individual, work-unit and organisation-wide levels), well-being, ill-being, job threat stress and job pressure stress, work-life balance and work-life conflict.
At the multivariate level each of the three levels of spirituality at work **did not moderate** the influence of job threat and pressure stress on both well-being or ill-being.

Job threat stress significantly predicted decreased well-being and increased ill-being, but job pressure stress was not predictive of health. Spirituality at work unsuccessfully moderated the influence of job threat and job pressure stress on work-life balance and work-life conflict.

Job threat stress and job pressure stress both significantly predicted decreased work-life balance and increased work-life conflict.
The main effect of work-unit spirituality at work on work-life balance did reach significance.

Reliability Coefficients and Bivariate Correlations among Study Variables

	Ind SWS	Wrk SWS	Org SWS	WB	IB	Threat	Pressure	WLB	WLC
Ind SWS	[.90]								
Wrk SWS	.39	[.90]							
Org SWS	.33	.46	[.94]						
WB	.33	.37	.36	[.93]					
IB	-.20	-.21	-.21	-.44	[.93]				
Threat	-.37	-.36	-.40	-.57	.49	[.85]			
Pressure	-.32	-.33	-.28	-.45	.37	.65	[.88]		
WLB	.30	.38	.27	.64	-.43	-.70	-.64	[.84]	
WLC	-.32	-.37	-.26	-.61	.55	.74	.66	-.85	[.93]

N = 139. Note: Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are shown on the diagonal in bold. Ind SWS = Individual level spirituality at work, Wrk SWS = work unit level spirituality at work, Org SWS = Organisation-wide level spirituality at work, WB = Well-being, IB = Ill-being, Threat = Job Threat Stress, Pressure = Job Pressure Stress, WLB = Work-life Balance, WLC = Work-life Conflict. All correlations significant p < 0.05.

In today's high stress work climate, academics may be motivated to **focus on lower-order needs**, such as keeping up with work demands and balancing personal responsibilities with work commitments, **rather than having time to seek higher-order spiritual needs**, such as self-actualisation. This interpretation could be further explored in workplaces where employees experience lower levels of stress.

Universities should consider implementing stress management components into Human Resource Management employee well-being programs and initiatives. Work-life balance programs should also integrate stress management, and work-unit spirituality at work, as this aspect of spirituality demonstrated possible potential in helping academics achieve work-life balance.

References

Ashmos, D. P., & Duchon, D. (2000). Spirituality at work: A conception and measure. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 9*(2), 134-145.
Dehler, G. E., & Welsh, M. A. (2003). Spirituality and the new workplace. In R. A. Giacalone & C. L. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance.* New York: M E Sharpe, Inc.
Gall, T. L., Charbonneau, C., Clarke, N. H., Grant, K., Joseph, A., & Shouldice, L. (2005). Understanding the nature and role of spirituality in relation to coping and health: A conceptual framework. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 46*(2), 88-104.
Hardie, E., Kashima, E. S., & Pridmore, P. (2005). The influence of relational, individual and collective self-Aspects on stress, uplifts and health. *Self and Identity, 4*(1), 1-24.
Hill, E. J., Hawkins, A. J., Ferris, M., & Weitzman, M. (2001). Finding an extra day a week: The positive influence of perceived job flexibility on work and family life balance. *Family Relations, 50*(1), 49-54.
Houston, D., Meyer, L. H., & Paewai, S. (2006). Academic staff workloads and job satisfaction: Expectations and values in academe. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 28*(1), 17-30.
Laabs, J. J. (1995). Balancing spirituality and work. *Personnel Journal, 74*(9), 60-76.
Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* New York: Springer Publishing Company Inc.
Marques, J. (2005). HR's crucial role in the establishment of spirituality in the workplace. *Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge, 7*(2), 27-31.
Marques, J., Dhiman, S., & King, R. (2005). Spirituality in the workplace: Developing an integral model and a comprehensive definition. *Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge, 7*(1), 81-91.
Maslow, A., H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370-396.
Milliman, J., Czaplewski, A. J., & Ferguson, J. (2003). Workplace spirituality and employee work attitudes. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 16*(4), 426-447.
O'Neil, J. M., Helms, B. J., & Gable, R. K. (1986). Gender-Role Conflict Scale: College men's fear of femininity. *Sex Roles, 14*(5), 335-350.
Stanton, J. M., Balzer, W. K., Smith, P. C., Parra, L. F., & Ironson, G. (2001). A general measure of work stress: The Stress in General Scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 61*(5), 866-888.