A discursive textscape of workplace spirituality

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Abstract

Purpose – Based on themes the authors observed in workplace spirituality texts, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the historicity of these texts and induce a model to help them understand how this discourse of workplace spirituality came into being.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors perform intertextual analysis to show how authors draw upon concepts available in the broader discursive context, from which the authors produced a textscape of the workplace spirituality discourse to depict these layers of discursive interconnections.

Findings – The expressed novelty and recency of workplace spirituality as a form of management knowledge, the authors argue, is made ambiguous by its heavy borrowing from other discourses. The authors show how existent spiritual, organizational and societal-level discourses create the conditions of possibility for the discourse of workplace spirituality to emerge. Most of the authors within the corpus engaged the same theories in organizational studies that created the kind of workplaces they now seek to change.

Practical implications – The power of the workplace spirituality discourse to improve the state of workers and work and achieve the expressed desire for change may be diminished through the discursive practices of its authors.

Originality/value – The authors offer a visual "textscape" in which the findings are framed and hence operationalize this idea in a novel manner that contributes to the methods of discourse analysis. The findings also call for more critical reflection into whether workplace spirituality represents a solution to organizational problems when neither the workers nor work it constructs are particularly new.

Keywords Discourse analysis, Intertextuality, Textscape, Workplace spirituality

Paper type Research paper

Case and Gosling (2010, p. 257) observed, "to suggest that there has been a growing interest in workplace spirituality in recent years would be to court understatement." Gotsis and Kortezi (2008) dated this interest in the spiritual dimension of work only as far back as the 1980s. Yet the perceived novelty of workplace spirituality as a form of management knowledge and the recency by which it is said to have gained "movement" status (Miller, 2003), we argue, is made ambiguous by its heavy borrowing from other discourses. In our analysis of workplace spirituality texts, we illustrate Fairclough's (2005, p. 932) claim that "new discourses emerge through 'reweaving' relations between existing discourses."

We premise our work on the notion that there is a discourse of workplace spirituality, as others have before us (e.g. Calás and Smircich, 2003; Oswick, 2009). In particular, our analysis centers on a discourse of workplace spirituality in which a spiritual workplace, and the benefits that this may accrue, becomes a function of spiritual workers doing spiritual work. Discourse is understood as a structured collection of texts that bring objects (in this case, workers and work) into being in particular ways (in this case, as spiritual objects) as the texts are produced,

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disseminated and consumed (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Grant *et al.*, 2004). Such discursively constructed objects, argued Hardy *et al.* (2000), obtain their particular meaning when producers of texts draw upon concepts available to them in the broader discursive context; this context both enables and constrains subsequent discursive activity. Intertextuality exists in this process of text production, for there is a certain historicity to texts; they are "full of snatches of other texts" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 84). Keenoy and Oswick (2004, p. 140) metaphorically referred to these interconnections as forming a discursive "textscape" which is "a socially constructed account of some phenomena which, for its multitude of possible meanings, embodies continual (and often covert) reference to a wide variety of other texts and other possible texts." The idea of investigating a textscape of any kind allows one to reveal what Keenoy and Oswick (2004, p. 141) called " 'layers' of discursive interconnections;" such is the task that we undertake in this paper. Our analysis might be thought of as an investigation into the epistemology (the study of the process of knowledge creation) of workplace spirituality to show how particular ideas are selectively drawn upon and privileged in an effort to construct a reality with intended meanings.

Our first contribution rests in our interpretation of the conditions of possibility necessary for the discourse of workplace spirituality to emerge from among the many "clues to discourses that we can never find in their entirety" (Hardy, 2001, p. 26). Second, we present our argument by constructing a visual textscape and hence operationalize this idea in a novel manner that contributes to the methods of discourse analysis. Finally, our intertextual analysis leads us to suggest that the critical strands of discursive activity are unbound by the discursive context of prevailing management knowledge and ideologies which produced the organizational realities many workplace spirituality authors and advocates now hope to change. In writing this paper for these actors within this discursive realm, we enter into a struggle over the meaning of workplace spirituality. Our findings call for more critical reflection into whether workplace spirituality represents a solution to organizational problems when neither the workers nor work it constructs are particularly new.

Constructing a textscape

Our analysis adheres to Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional approach to discourse that Grant *et al.* (2001) summarized as an examination of: first, the content and meaning of the text that one chooses to sample; second, the interactions with other discourses; and third, the social context in which the discursive activity of text production is taking place. We apply this analytical lens to a sample of workplace spirituality texts, culminating our efforts in a schematic of concentric circles; as illustrated in Figure 1, the layers of discursive connections at all three levels of analysis become akin to the layers of an onion that we seek to peel back and expose.

Keenoy and Oswick (2004, p. 136) noted that "it is impossible to attend to all the potential intertexts of any particular discursive event." As a result, "we inevitably have to select a subset of texts for the purpose of manageability" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 10). According to Fairclough (1992), this choice of texts to be analyzed represents the corpus, and an appropriately selected corpus is representative of the archive, or the totality of discursive practice that falls within the domain of the research project. The challenge we face is to "identify a manageable, relatively limited corpus of texts that is helpful in exploring the construction of the objects of analysis" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 72).

In this paper we take up the search for discursive interconnections to build our textscape from two accessible sites: the textual artifacts from the ninth International

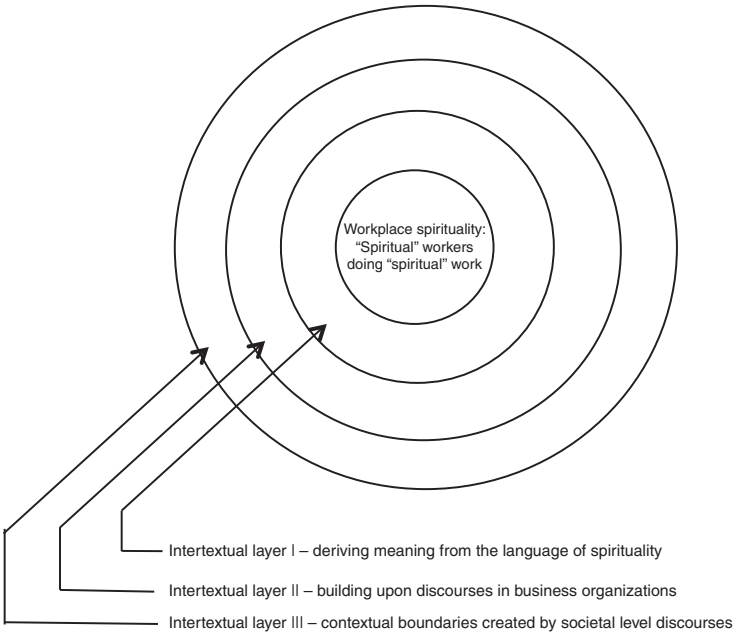

Figure 1.
A textscape as layers of an onion

Conference on Business and Consciousness (ICBC) in 2008, and chapters from one book published the same year, *Spirituality in Business: Theory, Practice and Future Directions*, edited by Biberman and Tischler. We believe that this corpus is representative of the archive based on the prominence of the text authors, the importance of the sources within which the texts were found, and their collective capacity to bridge academic and practitioner communities. The Appendix contains a detailed listing of the title and author of each text contained within our corpus. The authors of these texts are often recognizable names within the management, spirituality and religion (MSR) community, a community in which we too are immersed and of which we are familiar. With respect to the conference, a March 1, 2009 posting to the Academy of Management's MSR listserve noted the ICBC as being "the premiere conference in the field" of spirituality and the workplace. The first version of this conference in 1995 was called the International Conference on Spirituality in Business, which after the third year evolved into the conference on "business and consciousness." The conference series ended with this ninth one in 2008, likely due to the death of its founder. With respect to the book, Poole (2009, p. 77) referred to the contributors as "luminaries" whose "biographies spell out the huge investment they have made in building up this field from scratch and rendering it mainstream." According to Biberman (personal communications, August 9, 2010), this book is "the only one like it" with a collection of chapters that are all scholarly in nature and all new, invited contributions (as opposed to a collection of previously published materials). Moreover, it is an important feature of our corpus that it is drawn from a pool in which both elements of the "pracademic" (Benefiel, 2008) community are well represented, since complementing academic scholarship with practitioner perspectives is believed to be central to the growth of MSR. Finally, we recognize that both collections of texts originate in America, and many – but not all – of the authors would be primarily affiliated with the North-American MSR community. Despite the

plurality of influences that this context has upon the discursive activity of the authors contained within our corpus, we must keep this relatively limited geographic scope in mind when attempting to reveal the layers of discursive connections.

Our task was to "construct an effective narrative" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 79), yet within these parameters, there remains "considerable room for creativity" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 74). Indeed, given the constructivist assumptions inherent to a study of how language constructs phenomena, "issues of validity and reliability do not play out in the same way" (Phillips and Hardy, 2002, p. 79). The standards for verification among the multiple possible realities for how texts can be read lie with the researcher's capacity to offer "plausible accounts" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132). Nevertheless, we concur with Kolbe and Burnett (1991, p. 248) who argued that agreement between multiple researchers when analyzing the content of text "is often perceived as the standard measure of research quality." For our analysis, each author independently coded a subset of the data, developing our codes from those concepts, or themes, that were recurring in the text. We adhered to the multi-coder process employed by Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 76), which they described in the following manner: "We each then took the other through our coding, either 'signing off' where we agreed or discussing cases where there was a disagreement until we did agree." Upon reading through these texts together, we discovered much overlap between our two lists of codes, and we negotiated new codes to accommodate the discrepancies.

Intertextual discourse analysis[1]

Spirituality discourses

The texts we analyzed contained decidedly spiritual references in the construction of workers as conscious, connected leaders who in turn could make sense of work as motivating, meaningful and socially responsible. How this occurs is that the authors are drawing upon a discursive context, making connections between spiritual concepts and the objects of workers and work. It could be argued that the authors of the texts we analyzed are not making any new discursive connections between spiritual concepts and work for they may be implicitly linked from the start. In describing how the relationship between religion, spirituality and work has changed over the past two millennia, Diddams *et al.* (2005) suggested that these discourses have been interwoven for much of recorded history. Weber's (1958) landmark thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was that both Calvinism and Lutheranism promoted the idea that each one of us has been called to perform specific work, any form of which that is constructive to society can be our vocation so long as we occupy our prescribed role (Jensen, 2006). According to Weber (1963, p. 252), the adherent to Protestantism "could demonstrate his religious merit precisely in his economic activity," which was necessarily conducted in the best possible consciousness and without doing anything morally reprehensible.

Calling. Against this backdrop enters a new batch of authors reviving the idea of work as calling. The literature on calling suggests a "tripartite model of people's orientations to their work" (Wrzesniewski, 2002, p. 232), originally captured by Bellah *et al.* (1985) as the "job/career/calling model" of work. "In the strongest sense of a 'calling', work constitutes a practical ideal of activity and character that makes a person's work morally inseparable from his or her life" (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, p. 66). Moreover, "a calling links a person to the larger community, a whole in which the calling of each is a contribution to the good of all" (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, p. 66). The empirical evidence contributed by Wrzesniewski (2002, p. 232) supports the claim that "a person with a calling works […]

for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the person […]. Those with callings often feel that their work makes the world a better place."

According to the texts that comprise our data, an important part of what the spiritual seeking individual is searching for is meaning in life; these texts are very much premised upon the belief that the quest for meaning is central to the human condition and that spiritual experiences can aid in their discovery. "Even though we may sometimes feel confused and have doubts about the meaning and purpose of our lives, there is always present somewhere deep within us a pull, a yearning, a hope, or even a knowing that life's meaning and purpose somehow must be findable" (*Krahnke and Cooperrider*, p. 19). Several authors suggest that there is something unique about the time we live in – that we exist in a moment of existential crisis – which makes the search for meaning all the more pressing. According to *Bouius*, "there seems to be a blind spot in the Western world that people, individuals, don't really know who they are." *Esposito* adds that we are all too often "not getting fed by what you're doing." For *Fry* (p. 112), "we can begin with the notion that employees have spiritual needs (i.e. an inner life) just as they have physical, mental, and emotional needs, and none of these needs are left at the door when one arrives at work." As a result, continues *Fry*, developing a sense that one's life has meaning through one's work must be a central tenet of any theory of workplace spirituality. For *Bowman and Bowman*, we are called to facilitate change and transformation in the world, whereas *Ouimet* is more specific in suggesting that the vocation of "economics, productivity, and profits" can satisfy one's meaning in life. Regardless of the form it takes, says *Miller*, it is "an exciting thing when your job is no longer a job, but it's a calling with meaning and purpose. And the reality is most people are yearning for meaning and purpose in their work, whether we're 55 or whether we're 25. We want our work to matter." It is the particular location of life's meaning within the workplace, and how spirituality at work equates to meaningful work, which suggests an intertextual reliance upon the discourse of calling.

Self-spirituality. Within our corpus, spirituality was predominantly constructed as an internal concept, a self-spirituality. This was in part due to an effort to keep separate the concepts of spirituality and religion, whereas the former is understood as an individual experience of transcendence, interconnection, universality and a higher reality without the implication of particular rituals, dogmas or faith claims (*Biberman and Tischler*). As a result, the concept of spiritual was predominantly understood as an individual experience, as having an inner life and inner wisdom, as a manifestation of the conscious human mind, and as qualities of the human spirit. *Krahnke and Cooperrider* (p. 31) suggest that solutions to problems cannot be found outside of ourselves; instead, "positive change emerges from people's positive emotions, stories, and cooperative capacities […] [and by] finding and unleashing our inner wisdom." *Fry*'s (p. 112) starting point is that "employees have spiritual needs (i.e. an inner life) […] Observing, witnessing, and cultivating this inner voice as it relates to tapping into or drawing upon a higher power is often the purpose of an inner life or spiritual practice." Workplace spirituality thus depends upon the existence of a human spirit, or "the intangible, life-affirming force in the self and in all human beings" (*Fry*, p. 106). *Bowman and Bowman* insist on "not giving the power away to the universe and expecting the universe to take care of us." *Steingard* refers to "pure spirituality" as an "inner experience" bound only by one's own conscious awareness (hence he would argue that it is unbounded).

Such textual references offer evidence of a reliance on more humanistic understandings of religion which seek to accommodate both the sacrality of the "self"

and the cultural "turn to life" (Heelas and Woodhead, 2001). A humanistic religion emphasizes the individual experience, the uniqueness of the individual, the quest for spiritual needs and values, and the urge toward perfection and human potential; in other words, a humanistic religion facilitates self-realization (Wulff, 1997). Within this broader emphasis on the self that seems to have influenced the spirituality concepts found within our corpus, the particular discourse of "New Age" spirituality also appears. Very generally, New Age emphasizes such themes as interpersonal connectedness (mind, body and spirit), the self and a God within, personal fulfilment and the realization of one's potential, and connection will all other parts of the universe (Heelas, 1996; Davie, 2007). "The most pervasive and significant aspect of the *lingua franca* of the New Age is that the person is, in essence, spiritual. To experience the 'Self' itself is to experience 'God', the 'Goddess', the 'Source', or […] most frequently, 'inner spirituality' " (Heelas, 1996, p. 19). "New Agers invariably conceive their essence in spiritual terms" (Heelas, 1996, pp. 19-20). New Age spirituality, therefore, provides examples of the humanistic religious forms that consistently surface within the texts that comprise our data.

Self-actualization. To the extent that spirituality has been defined within our corpus as a self-spirituality, an inner and individual experience of transcendence or a transcendent consciousness, then it is also possible to highlight a connection to Maslow and the concept of peak experience. Maslow (1968, p. 25) defined self-actualization as "ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of mission (or call, fate, destiny or vocation), as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person's own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy within the person." "Peak-experiences," "ecstasies" or "transcendent experiences" are Maslow's (1964) terms for the triggers of self-actualization; such experiences can lead to episodic states of being self-actualized. Maslow (1965, p. 6) privileged the work organization as a place where self-actualization can best take place insofar as human happiness can be achieved "via a commitment to an important job and to worthwhile work." It is both the work itself and one's sense of duty to it that matters, requiring "devotion to, dedication to, and identification with some great and important job" (Maslow, 1965, p. 6).

Clearly there is an overlap between Maslow's observations and those of the authors found within our corpus. The link to Maslow is sometimes explicit, as with *Sallick* who credits Maslow when speaking of the importance of work that, in the first instance, fulfills personal needs, hence allowing the worker to build "the foundation to be of benefit" to others. *Fry* (p. 109) is perhaps the most explicitly influenced by Maslow's psychology, yet without any reference to Maslow he notes how spiritual leaders can produce in both themselves and their followers "a sense of continuing growth and self-realization." More specifically, it is through the articulation of a vision and mission in which organizational members place their hope and faith that fuels "an intrinsic motivation cycle" (*Fry* p. 120). As a result, spiritual leadership improves the "life satisfaction" of leaders and followers.

Common to the preceding is the notion that spiritual work, which is meaningful and satisfies the sense of calling, will produce this self-actualizing impact on the worker, where self-actualization refers to the process of becoming fully conscious and whole. Authors of our texts who speak in terms of self-spirituality, of having inner experiences of transcendence and achieving a higher state of consciousness are clearly evoking a language that was available decades earlier. What they may be doing, however, is repackaging these ideas, and in the process, establishing a subject position for themselves as specialists in helping workers to find meaning in their work.

Organizational studies discourses

In this section, we broaden our gaze to show how workplace spirituality also borrows from, is connected to, is synonymous with, and/or builds upon other discourses present within organizational studies. The fact that these discourses exist creates, in part, the conditions of possibility for workplace spirituality to emerge. Our analysis points in a different direction than Benefiel (2003) who argued that the discourses of workplace spirituality and organizational studies are fundamentally different.

Positive organizational scholarship (POS). As noted by *Lund Dean et al.* (p. 188), there is a decidedly "positive tone" within most of the literature on the role of spirituality and religion in the workplace, and our corpus was rife with evidence for this claim. *Krahnke and Cooperrider* make repeated references to positive thinking, hope and optimism. "It often takes courage to focus on the positive and on the power to create our own reality […]. It takes a great deal of faith to be unconditionally positive, to choose to see potential rather than obstacles" (*Krahnke and Cooperrider*, p. 19). Positive psychology is often introduced in an explanatory manner to show how an individual's "positive core" is causally linked to positive energy and positive change (*Fry*; *Krahnke and Cooperrider*; *Steingard*). "Positive psychology suggests that positive emotions like hope, love, and forgiveness can lead to better individual health and organizational results" (*Steingard*, p. 91). Finally, *Marx et al.* introduce POS as the investigation of all this positivity within organizational contexts, which Cameron and Caza (2004, p. 732) label "a new movement in organizational science." According to Fineman (2006), POS elevates the assumptions about the human desire for self-realization and a life lived in accordance with moral virtues as paths toward individual and collective happiness. Such positivity becomes an organizational tool because "with positive thinking, you can focus on the dynamics that help unlock your strengths and virtues necessary to develop new ideas, flourish and achieve success" Cameron (2009, p. 8).

Clearly there is some overlap in these discourses, perhaps more complementary than competing, in that both POS and workplace spirituality are predominantly discourses of the self, of self-actualization, of moral obligation, and of social improvement, and both have been cast as movements in the field of organizational studies. The authors of the texts within our corpus would largely conclude, as *Marx et al.* (p. 212) did, that POS "offers organizational scholars who are trying to understand the concept of spirituality at work a number of promising avenues for exploration."

An alternative conclusion, however, is that such a "positive viewpoint of SRW [spirituality and religion at work] fails to acknowledge some of the major conflicts that may engender between individuals and within organizations" (*Lund Dean et al.*, p. 192). Seligman (2003, p. xii) admitted that positive psychology is in part focussed on the identification of those particular strengths and virtues that comprise the character of a "positive individual," "among them, valor, perspective, integrity, equity, and loyalty." It seems fair to be concerned for those members of organizations who fail to demonstrate the requisite characteristics of positivity or who define themselves in accordance with a separate mix of strengths and virtues, as this may "produce the very opposite of the self-actualization and liberation" (Fineman, 2006, p. 281). As a result of such concerns, *Boje* (p. 179) calls for some "skepticism of a self-development centered positive spirituality version, which is so popular in contemporary business."

Human relations. Several of the authors of the texts we analyzed place central importance upon the human dimension of work. *Ouimet* and *Feuerstein*, for example, advocate for human friendly and employee centric workplaces. *Ouimet* in particular

promotes the idea that "this system of management on the human side can really revolutionize the management of an organization on earth." According to *Krahnke and Cooperrider* (p. 17), "we are now recognizing that organizations are products of human interactions and that we have lost something fundamentally important by applying the machine model to human organizations." *Rutte* likewise suggests that it is only a recent development that "more of the human being" has entered business conversations, and credits this to the "flowering" of the workplace spirituality movement itself rather than any longstanding attention to matters of human concern. *Biberman and Tischler* (p. 4) demonstrate a longer historical sensitivity by noting the "dramatic shift over the past fifty years or so toward better treatment of employees, and this shift is accelerating" (although they offered no evidence in support of either the betterment of treatment or the acceleration of the shift). *Miller* charges the human resource department with the twofold task of, first, recognizing that religious/faith dimensions of employees are central to their consciousness and behavior and, second, developing HR practices to help managers manage these human resources toward productive ends.

Despite the preceding claims, recognition of the human element of work organizations is neither new nor revolutionary, but has existed for perhaps as long as the industrial revolution has tried to quash it. For Kaufman (2001, p. 529), a proper reading of management history would lead one to discover that "progressive employers in the 1920s set out to replace the traditional commodity/command and control system of people management with a different model that sought competitive advantage through unity of interest, cooperation, and investment in labor as a human resource." Furthermore, one can witness in the studies of early industrial organizations an emerging acknowledgment of an informal side to organizations whereby workplaces were conceived of as social groups in which individuals, as social beings, interacted (e.g. Mayo, 1933). Yet ideas about collaboration and participation have been largely ignored in the management literature that followed (Kaufman, 2001). Moreover, the privileging of managerial interests in the industrial/post-industrial era has gone unabated and the human relations insights became co-opted toward this end (Long, 2007). The human relations lessons about the social nature of work, informal relationships and intrinsic motivation became less manifest in participatory work arrangements and more subjects of management specialization, and that "new practices, such as training, leadership, communications, and motivation were added to the manager's toolkit" (Long, 2007, p. 268).

By introducing concepts borrowed from human relations, the workplace spirituality discourse carries the same problems and limitations embedded in the former. As a result, we believe, as did Fenwick and Lange (1998) before us, that HR as a discipline has become an increasingly distant partner for the spiritual development of workers where the development of consciousness, sense of oneness and interconnection, self-actualization and expression of responsibility to others are ends in and of themselves.

Diversity management. The necessity of managing a diverse workforce has also found its way into the workplace spirituality discourse. Beyond simply building upon the human relations attention to employee needs and well-being, workplace spirituality is constructed in our corpus as a vehicle for the accommodation of an increasing diversity of needs, values and interests. This connection is in part made as a reaction to the changing demographics of the workforce, particularly along the lines of age and culture. Globalization is attributed with introducing a plurality of religious beliefs and practices into the workplace (*Miller*). The implication is that an awareness and respect for religious

difference is critical as one builds global business relationships with external stakeholders. As *Miller* puts it, if you "don't know about the role that religious identities play in people's lives, you're dead meat." What *Miller* in particular is doing, more so than any other author in our corpus, is constructing workplace spirituality as the new frontier of diversity management in organizations, a discourse he acknowledges has been around for many decades prior. *Miller* envisions a time when faith is no longer an "issue" in organizations in the same way that diversity among race, gender, family status and sexual orientation have all been "dealt with." *Rutte* offers an identical and rosy version of the evolution in accommodation: "I'm black. I'm a woman. I'm gay. I'm an alcoholic. I'm a drug abuser. […] And this is for me the last piece. This is the piece called spirituality." The task at hand is to learn from "those other very difficult conversations" as well as the legacy of "leading companies" whom have earlier found ways to accommodate diversity in these previous frontiers, largely via "policies and practices and events and teachings in their HR departments" (*Miller*). "What can we learn that was done well in those topics and apply them to this topic?" questions *Miller*. Management in particular needs to be skilled at managing all of these diversity dynamics within organizations in a manner that is respectful but which maintains focus on, and does not detract from, organizational ends (*Miller*). With respect to specific workplace practices, corporate chaplaincy and the creation of multi-faith prayer rooms for employees to use are held up as examples of "creating an environment that's welcoming, that's diverse, that's respectful of different traditions" (*Miller*).

The manner in which Miller frames diversity accommodation as a corporate asset, a necessity driven by labor market conditions that can become a source of competitive advantage and employee commitment if properly managed, is largely unchallenged in our corpus. There seems less of an appetite to consider how the very fabric of an organization's culture, mission, structure and work practices could (or should) be changed by the inclusion of a genuine plurality of religious and spiritual influences introduced by spiritual workers and spiritual work. In other words, the bar for accommodation of spiritual diversity seems to be set rather low, akin to "an organizational problem to be solved" (Dass and Parker, 1999, p. 70). According to Hicks (2003), there is a moral mandate to respectful pluralism based on such values as dignity, equal respect and non-coercion; although it may also be organizationally beneficial, such is not the proper justification for inclusiveness. Within our corpus, *Boje* (p. 177) alone cautions that without change at these structural levels, spirituality as accommodation "symbolizes a collapse of spiritual diversity [, … a] case of assimilation to the global empire" or prevailing orthodoxy of capitalist society.

Leadership. Many authors in our corpus strive to revive the importance of leadership to workplace spirituality. Accordingly, spirituality is manifest in an organization when members of it embody a particular style of leadership. The word leader or leadership appears in the title of nine entries in these texts, and several more specifically address leadership within their contribution. The bulk of these contributions address the twofold objective of articulating who a spiritual leader is, and what a spiritual leader does. This begs the question of whether spiritual leaders are unique or simply a repackaged form of exemplary leaders that has been advanced in the abundant leadership literature within organizational studies. *Fry* (p. 115) anticipates this issue when noting that "the conceptual distinction between spiritual leadership theory variables and other leadership theories, such as authentic leadership, ethical leadership, and servant leadership, needs to be refined."

A spiritual leader is largely based upon the development of one's consciousness, leading to a greater sense of self-awareness and relational appreciation. We are told repeatedly how leadership begins with the development of oneself, as "we cannot lead anybody or anything if we don't know how to lead ourselves" (*Bouius*) and "I really do believe that leading oneself is the key to leading other people" (*Esposito*). Leadership is therefore a state of being (*Bouius*; *Bowman and Bowman*), of being conscious in particular. A product of such self-knowledge is the development of authenticity, which is of particular importance to the embodiment of leadership (*Esposito*). As a result, "the cultivated self is a leader's greatest tool" (*Bouius*).

This emphasis on authenticity and being authentic within our corpus (*Benefiel and Hamilton*; *Bowman and Bowman*; *Esposito*; *Landon*; *Maio*; *Ouimet*; *Sallick*; *Secretan*) is also similarly emphasized within the leadership discourse. We learn from George *et al.* (2007), for example, that authentic leaders are true to themselves, initially requiring self-knowledge and clarity as to what is important and valued, which then becomes manifest in a commitment to one's values, a passion for one's purpose, and continuous reflection to complete the feedback loop of self-awareness. According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), exemplary leadership all begins with this capacity to "model the way," which necessitates leaders' finding their own voice, articulating their values, beliefs and guiding principles and acting consistently on all of the above. Spiritual leadership of the conscious type bears much in common with the messages of self-awareness, authenticity and "being" that have much currency in the leadership literature. The point is not to establish a definitive list of traits of the spiritual leader, but rather to highlight how a focus on traits is already a recurring element of leadership studies, with workplace spirituality authors likewise finding themselves grappling with this question of which traits help distinguish leaders from non-leaders.

The most common discursive link between the leadership and workplace spirituality discourses is in the form of transformational and servant theories of leadership, which both prescribe a particular type of leader behavior. Within our data, leaders are clearly agents of transformation, engaging in transformational inquiry (*Benefiel and Hamilton*) and participating in transformational speaking (*Larsen*), all of which culminates in transformational change at the individual (*Krahnke and Cooperrider*; *Ouimet*) and organizational level (*Benefiel and Hamilton*; *Bowman and Bowman*; *Fry*; *Heaton and Schmidt-Wilk*; *Krahnke and Cooperrider*; *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant*). For example, we learn from *Bowman and Bowman* that "conscious leaders are the ones who choose to create change and transformation, and inspire everyone that they come into contact with to choose to create change and transform." According to *Fry* (p. 108), "spiritual leadership is a causal leadership theory for organizational transformation."

Furthermore, *Fry*, *Miller* and *Secretan* all make specific reference to servant leadership as a useful way of understanding spiritual work. *Secretan* goes so far as to say that "all great leaders have been servant leaders." In its most simplistic form, servant leadership claims that leadership must begin with the desire to serve others first, prioritizing the needs of others, and hence incorporates such ideas as self-awareness, empathy, stakeholders, humility and non-coercion within a mandate to heal, achieve the growth of others and promote a community ethic (Greenleaf, 1977). The workplace spirituality discourse, then, according to our corpus, is in part constructed to mean that spiritual workers (as servants or servant leaders) need be engaged in spiritual work (as service).

In contrast, *Boje* (p. 175) makes clear his disdain for the privileging of servitude at all as a form of spiritual work, as this often results in "confusing servanthood with serving the business customer." In support of this critique, Tourish and Tourish (2010, p. 207) analyzed how leadership development is constructed in the discourse of workplace spirituality and concluded that "influence is conceived in uni-directional terms: it flows from 'spiritual' and powerful leaders to more or less compliant followers, deemed to be in need of enlightenment, rather than vice versa." *Boje* (p. 164) argues that such a selective or distorted interpretation of the underlying spirituality in leadership can result in occurrences of spiritual abuse in organizations, in which leaders could be charged with a "false or pseudo spiritual practice (bringing bondage and shepherding to people)." Regardless of whether one deems servant leadership to be progressive or alienating, the ease with which it bridges the discourses of workplace spirituality and leadership begs the question of whether spiritual leadership extends or simply repackages prevailing theories of leadership within organizational studies.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR). The concept "socially responsible" was commonly attached to the object of work by the authors of the texts that comprise our data, hence highlighting the obvious connection between the discourse of workplace spirituality and the discourse of CSR. Discursive connections are plentiful in the texts we analyzed. *Fry* (p. 119) in particular situates the stakeholder concept within workplace spirituality: "The spiritual leadership paradigm also utilizes a stakeholder approach in viewing social organizations as being embedded in layers or levels (individual, group, organizational, societal) with various internal and external constituencies […], all of whom have a legitimate strategic and moral stake in the organization's performance." Likewise, *Heaton and Schmidt-Wilk* call for expanded stakeholder perspectives, *Ouimet* highlights how his company mission makes reference to stakeholders, and *Silver* suggests that stakeholders "are all faces of God." *Feuerstein* advocates on behalf of greater voice being given to worker's interests as a particularly important stakeholder, and no amount of charity giving by a business can compensate for treating workers as less than autonomous human beings. Based on our reading of the data, the stakeholder concept is embedded into the workplace spirituality discourse to the extent that workplace spirituality can be seen, in part, as an outgrowth of the CSR construct with its own advocates for an expanded stakeholder sensitivity (e.g. Freeman, 1984).

The importance of ethical behavior on the part of people working in a business organization is also a prominent feature of the workplace spirituality discourse. *Bouius*, *Fry* and *Marx et al.* all cite Aburdene's (2005) work on conscious capitalism in promoting a more virtuous form of management that can produce moral transformation among businesses. *Rutte* suggests that ethics and morality are "code words for spirituality" and *Marx et al.* note that a spiritual workplace is often perceived as synonymous with having "lofty moral and ethical intentions." *Cavanagh and Hazen* describe how, for one of their client organizations, spiritual discernment is simply an outgrowth of ethical discernment. Likewise, for *Miller*, ethics is one of the key ways that faith becomes manifest at work, for one's actions "demonstrate the ethical underpinnings of [one's] faith tradition."

Finally, within the texts that comprise our data, there exists a commentary on how all of these stakeholder considerations, and the ethical imperative to consider stakeholders, should be managed in a balanced manner (e.g. *Zimmer*). *Fry* acknowledges the pressure on management to maximize the "triple bottom line" of profits, people (the well-being of employees in particular) and the planet (as a proxy for the host of remaining relationships to society), hence carrying forward an idea originally popularized by Elkington (1998).

"One of the greatest challenges facing leaders today is the need to develop new business models that accentuate ethical leadership, employee well being, sustainability, and social responsibility without sacrificing profitability, revenue growth, and other indicators of financial performance" (*Fry*, pp. 109-110). The environmental sustainability of one's organization is a particular manifestation of social responsibility for *Cavanagh and Hazen*, *Krahnke and Cooperrider* and *Zimmer*. *Ouimet* more generally speaks to simply bridging human and economic interests. The ideal being sought is a more "enlightened" form of leading in organizations (*Biberman and Tischler*; *Maio*; *Miller*).

It is the incapacity to find balance that *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant* specifically find problematic about the CSR framework within workplace spirituality, for in practice social obligations are entertained to the extent that they do not jeopardize economic priorities. In other words, an "enlightened self-interest" is still predicated on self-interest as the root driver of behavior in an organization, and this precludes a genuinely inclusive form of stakeholder management. *Boje* likewise sees in this discourse an absence of "real stakeholders" who are democratically engaged and to whom management is properly answerable.

Societal-level discourses

In this section, we wish to broaden the analytical lens further still and note how discourses operating at the societal level in North-America, into which this workplace spirituality discourse enters, have likely been active in giving shape to it all along. Such a context further poses possibilities and imposes boundaries, creating ideal conditions for the emergence of the workplace spirituality discourse so long as it does not disrupt prevailing systems of belief, even in situations where these prevailing systems of belief perpetuate social inequities and inequalities. But what must be said about North-American society given that there is no inherent limit to what could be considered relevant? Again, as always, we must simply follow the clues that exist in the texts we analyzed.

Self-improvement. The first observation is to revisit the idea within our corpus that workplace spirituality is part of a broader project of self-improvement, a defining characteristic of the existential times in which we find ourselves. Solomon (nd) offered the following insight:

> Americans […] are very concerned, as self-help books make amply clear, with the idea of self-realization and self-improvement, the very idea of picking oneself up by one's bootstraps and making something new out of oneself […]. The idea of self-improvement really defines a good deal of American society. The whole idea of social mobility, the whole idea of mobility in general, is something that is distinctively American, but I also think, distinctively existentialist.

Clearly this central tenet of existentialism, about being in control over one's life and taking responsibility for it, has greatly influenced the workplace spirituality discourse; the self-spirituality emphasis contained within the latter only becomes possible when in the presence of the former. From Oprah Winfrey's urging to "live your best life," to best-selling titles from Eckhart Tolle (e.g. *The Power of Now*), Deepak Chopra (e.g. *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*), Don Miguel Ruiz (e.g. *The Four Agreements*), Joel Osteen (e.g. *Your Best Life Now*) and Rhonda Byrne (e.g. *The Secret*), to name a few, consumers of this popular culture are immersed within the individualistic message that they can reconstruct, improve and transcend their particular reality, lifting oneself out

of any situation in which they are not fulfilled and enjoying the full realization of their potential. Authors of the texts that comprise our data encourage the cultivation of one's inner spirituality, a conscious mind capable of realizing the God within and the interconnected nature of humanity, leading to peak experiences, transcendence and a meaningful existence. A life well lived is within the grasp of us all.

If existentialism is a positive minded philosophy (Solomon, nd), then one explanation for its lingering importance might simply be that our society is in need of a positive message. This is the exact rationale used by Seligman (2003) in explaining the rise of positive psychology – because we live in times of trouble and suffering, it is all the more important to shift attention toward nurturing what is good in life. Against the backdrop of terrorism, house foreclosures, global warming, political polarization and more, a focus on positive things and an optimistic message of personal change and self-improvement may be all the more welcome.

Prosperity. At the same time we are encouraged to improve ourselves, we are permitted to seek prosperity. In fact, according to the central tenet of the prosperity gospel, we are instructed that God will grant wealth and financial success to the faithful (Rosin, 2009). It represents "a reclamation of the Christian's right to have dominion over the earth" (Coleman, 2000, p. 27). The prosperity gospel is proliferating amongst, and to some extent dominating, mainstream, non-denominational evangelical churches in the USA, particularly the megachurches, having taken-off during the boom years of the 1990s (Rosin, 2009). It claims tens of millions of adherents in the USA alone along with such figureheads as Joel Osteen who, beyond being a best-selling author, is also "the nation's most popular TV preacher, and the pastor of […] the country's largest church by far" (Rosin, 2009). Rosin (2009) described the prosperity gospel as an upbeat theology, akin to positive thinking that has come to dominate American culture. "The advice is exactly like the message of *The Secret*, or any number of American self-help blockbusters that edge toward magical thinking" (Rosin, 2009). Furthermore, it is "a faith that, for all its seeming confidence, hints at desperation, at circumstances gone so far wrong that they can only be made right by a sudden, unexpected jackpot" (Rosin, 2009). The combined effect of pervasive messages about personal betterment and the capacity to transcend one's current reality establishes the conditions of possibility for the kind of workplace spirituality found in our corpus to emerge. See, for example Ouimet: "The Lord, the Creator, wants us to make profits. It gives and we bring that home" and *Silver*: "Who are you, as a human being, to reject what it is that the Divine gives you? Your payment, your money so you can be taken care of […]" In other words, we not only have the capacity to live our best life, but it can be a prosperous one too. This is ultimately the central message of the American dream (Rosin, 2009).

Laissez-faire capitalism. It follows then, according to our data, that the best environment in which we can play out this self-realization and transcendence is within a free market, capitalist economic system. Indeed, many authors of these texts situate their message about workplace spirituality within the context of profit-driven free enterprise. *Silver* declares "I love the game of business. I hated it when I was an activist, but I went through healing and I began to see how amazingly fun it is. It's a fun game." *Secretan* reminds his audience that "in the end, we're trying to be effective here. We are in a capitalist system. We want to make the numbers happen." For *Miller*, "I like this image of the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Bible* being very close to each other. And fill in the blank, again, whatever your holy text […] I would argue it has to do everything

with the marketplace." Common to these examples is the fact that the structure of the economic system itself is unchallenged; rather, improvements to it are sought via more spiritual workers doing more spiritual work. For these authors, spirituality belongs in the workplace as a way to improve the means by which prosperous ends are achieved.

What we have offered in the preceding discussion is evidence that discourse does indeed do ideological work (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In advocating on behalf of market principles, one advances a particular ideology in determining how economic activities should be coordinated and the ideal role for social institutions. The dominant ideology reinforces itself because certain beliefs about right and wrong become privileged and recreated through these institutions and by our ongoing action. Discourse is part of this action, and the workplace spirituality discourse can be seen not only as a product of the texts and discourses that have come before, but also as a contributor in the ongoing construction of social reality, a reality in which certain ideas of individualism, personal prosperity and liberalism prevail. We are naturalized into believing that we are our own life authors, that each person has the power to recreate oneself, that survival is of the fittest within a competitive society, and that somehow spiritual beliefs and expressions are not inconsistent with them all. Our findings echo Bell and Taylor's (2004) argument that much of the workplace spirituality movement places the onus of responsibility for change at the individual rather than structural level.

Yet the presence of ideology, even a dominant one, does not negate resistance, and this point too is exemplified within our corpus. *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant* are particularly noteworthy, for they engage in the same discursive practices as the other authors but in an effort to challenge and transform the dominant systems of belief so that they do not become hegemonic. They take issue with the more common tendency to describe spiritual work done by spiritual workers as a more enlightened, sustainable and humane way of maximizing wealth. *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant's* (p. 53) contribution to our data is a critique of neoliberalism itself, the self-interest which lies at its heart, and the "dysfunctional consequences in terms of increased inequality, commodification, environmental degradation, and the substitution of market exchange for human ethics." *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant* note how neoliberalism carries forward taken-for-granted assumptions that shape the policies and practices of social institutions such as businesses and government, to the extent that businesses themselves are no longer seen as social institutions but rather as simply instruments for the maximization of shareholder value. *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant* differ from most of the other authors in our corpus, therefore, in that they explicitly challenge the neoliberal assumptions that inform management theory and practice and position workplace spirituality as a force for social change.

Boje offers a similar critique via a different route, by synthesizing the lessons from critical scholars that have come before and much earlier reached the same conclusion. *Boje* (p. 180) draws in particular upon Horkheimer and Adorno whose views ran counter to "the illusion of economic competition as being progress, when in their view it is degenerative of cooperative exchange." According to *Boje* (p. 180), these scholars specifically challenged individualism, in which "there is an ideal of equity and freedom of choice promised by the idol of market forces that is not realized." Instead, "the individualistic competition ethic lends itself to the social Darwinian thesis" (*Boje*, p. 180), which itself "is a corporate reading of the transcendental forces of an invisible hand of competition that sorts the rich from the poor" (*Boje*, p. 168). For *Boje*, then, if workplace spirituality fails to problematize the foundations of the economic

system built upon individualism and liberal ideals, then it is ultimately a "truncated spirituality," regressive and abusive, and becomes a tool used by the "culture industry" to impose a "fundamental coherence" in support of economic conservatism and capitalist institutions. *Boje's* critique echoes the warnings of Diddams *et al.* (2005, p. 321) that modern interpretations of spirituality without a religious, cultural and historical-based contextual understanding "may lead to unexamined assumptions about spirituality and the nature of work," for example the instrumentality of spirituality and the idea that workplace should be the primary source of meeting our spiritual needs. Both of these assumptions are evident in our corpus. Yet to the extent that the discursive activity of authors challenge hierarchical servitude, consumption and self-interest, promoting instead consideration of the values of compassion, justice and cooperative exchange realized through "viable spiritual practices in business" (*Boje*, p. 160), then the workplace spirituality discourse has the potential to challenge and transform prevailing ideological orientations and disrupt dominant assumptions upon which business is constructed.

A model of the discursive textscape of workplace spirituality

In an October 19, 2010 posting on the MSR listserv, Judi Neal referred to MSR as "a fragile and emerging field." Given the discourse analysis we have just provided, we would respectfully disagree. The "field" of workplace spirituality is neither fragile nor emergent, but rather appears to be constructed out of several longstanding and popular discourses. First, it derives its meaning from the complex language of spirituality itself, in particular more humanistic conceptualizations in which notions of inner spirituality, calling (through one's work) and self-actualization are emphasized. Second, workplace spirituality appears to have been born out of such established organizational discourses as POS, the human relations movement, diversity management, leadership and CSR. The resemblance of workplace spirituality to these organizational discourses is striking – they are to some extent indistinguishable, depending on the author. Finally, at the macro level, workplace spirituality enters an individualistic social context in which certain privileged ideas about self-improvement, personal prosperity and the morally "good" economic system for the realization of both becomes imprinted into the workplace spirituality discourse. These layers of discursive interconnections are visualized in the following model (Figure 2).

In all, then, we come to receive workplace spirituality as something we have seen before, as a natural outgrowth of well-grounded roots that become visible when one seeks to uncover the intertextual links of the workplace spirituality discourse. The discursive practices of text production have allowed workplace spirituality to emerge on the organizational landscape as an established and particularly sensible discourse. All together, this social reality creates the conditions of possibility for such a construction to emerge, and in turn, the discourse serves to give credibility and legitimacy to the social context, strengthening the dominance of such ideas. Notwithstanding the contributions from *Boje* and *Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant* in particular, we invite academics and practitioners involved in this discursive activity to further consider the extent to which workplace spirituality can solve organizational problems if it largely reflects and repackages existent management knowledge and ideologies. Our findings, therefore, lend support to a previous claim that "one of the main weaknesses of the spirituality at work literature" according to Bell (2005, p. 22), is that there is "limited value in seeing individual enlightenment as the goal if organizations founded on exploitation and inequality remain unchanged by this."

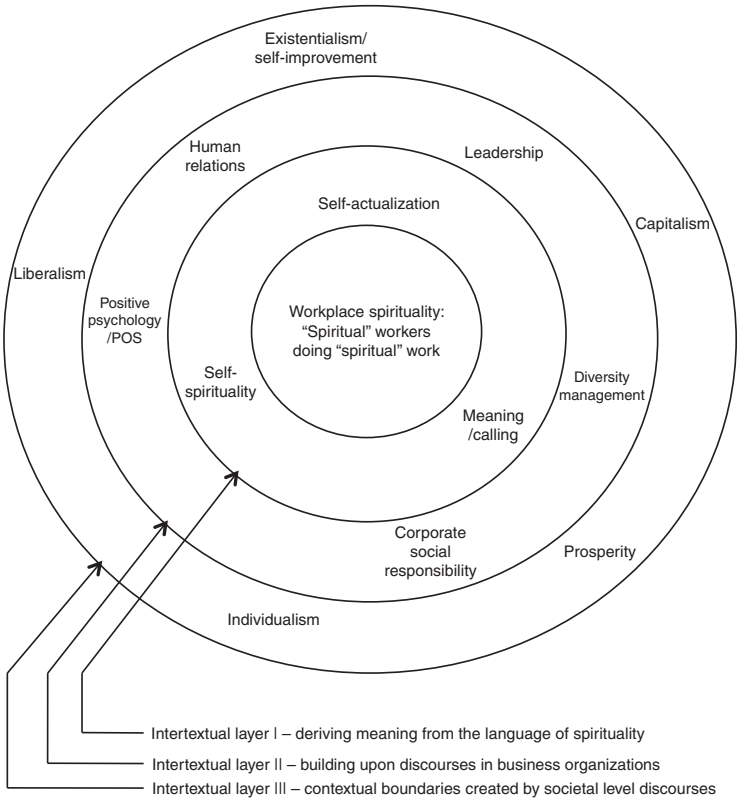

Figure 2.
A textscape of the workplace spirituality discourse

None of the preceding suggests a monolithic, unitary discourse for workplace spirituality, for as we have noted, the authors contribute in a plurality of discrete ways and contribute to a discourse with neither a singular meaning system nor a specific origin. Indeed, alternative conceptualizations of workplace spirituality have not been marginalized but rather remain embedded within its structure, providing evidence of an ongoing discursive struggle over the construction of spiritual workers and spiritual work. Moreover, our interpretation does not represent a definitive reading of the workplace spirituality discourse, and we are reminded by Grant *et al.* (2004, p. 14) that "researchers are only able to observe some of what is going on as a result of their methodological choices," including our choice of texts with their concentration of authorship in North-America. We also recognize that we are not neutral observers but instead "are part of our constructed theory [… which] reflects the vantage points inherent in our varied experiences" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 149). We are both insiders, immersed in all three of the discourse layers that have shaped the contours of the workplace spirituality discourse, and attuned to how certain concepts within it may make reference to other concepts with which we are familiar. Our modest aim was to construct a plausible, albeit indecisive (Keenoy and Oswick, 2004), textscape from our data that contributes to our understanding of how the workplace spirituality discourse came into being. To this end, we hope that we have highlighted some interesting intertextual connections that we attest are woven into our representative sample of workplace spirituality texts, connections that show appreciation for the historical context which makes possible the

emergence of this discourse and that motivate researchers to further explore any of these themes. Equally interesting would be research that sought to uncover additional concepts or an alternative discourse of workplace spirituality than analyzed herein, where the collection of meaningful texts constructed an entirely different understanding of workers and work (or gave meaning to different objects altogether). Furthermore, whereas we explore intertextuality within the discursive practice of text production, a study into the consumption processes would be useful to explore the empirical effects of this discourse upon individual sensemaking and behavior (see Laine and Vaara, 2007). As organizational members internalize the discourse, does it produce a transformation in organizational relations or, rather, is there evidence to support Bell and Taylor's (2003, p. 332) earlier thesis that workplace spirituality may be yet another managerial instrument to control workers and ensure that their "search for meaning is harnessed to specific organizational purposes?"

From our study, we may conclude that the discourse of workplace spirituality is akin to a "sheep in wolf's clothing." There seem to be some very sincere and altruistic motives driving the discursive activity of actors in this movement. It is undeniable that we need more good work, where the workplace can be a site where joy and justice thrive, where workers act out of compassion and empathy for the betterment of others, where workers do not live compartmentalized lives and feel disconnected from that which they value most, and where the promotion of higher, unity levels of consciousness may help realize all of the above. Such a statement could have been written by almost any of the authors of the texts that comprise our data. In a business community increasingly characterized by financial crisis, corruption and environmental unsustainability, and in the context of broader societal woes mentioned earlier, perhaps it is all the more timely to want to make sense of work in the manner just described, drawing upon spiritual resources to do so. Yet the power of the workplace spirituality discourse to improve the state of workers and work and achieve the expressed desire for change may be diminished through the discursive practices of its authors. Most of the authors within our corpus, perhaps unintentionally, found inspiration in texts that gave meaning to spirituality as an individual achievement and discursively engaged the same theories in organizational studies that created the kind of workplaces they now seek to change. Moreover, there has been an all-too-common (yet not universal) failure to challenge dominant ideologies, hence workplace spirituality has become as much a reflection as a new construction in which management power, wealth maximization, competitive forces and individualism are writ large.

Note

1. When citing from our data, the names of these authors will be italicized to distinguish between them and external references. Also note that page numbering for direct quotes will only be available for the text chapters.

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Further reading

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(The Appendix follows overleaf.)

Appendix

Source	Author(s)	Chapter	Title of chapter/presentation
Spirituality in business: theory, practice and future directions	Biberman and Tischler	Chap. 1 & 13	Introduction and future directions
	Krahnke and Cooperrider	Chap. 2	Appreciative inquiry: inquiring new questions and dreaming new dreams
	Cavanagh and Hazen	Chap. 3	Sustainability, spirituality and discernment or discernment upholds sustainability
	Lips-Wiersma and Nilakant	Chap. 4	Practical compassion: toward a critical spiritual foundation for corporate responsibility
	Olden	Chap. 5	Spirituality in health care organizations
	Steingard	Chap. 6	Intentional intelligence: how the new mind of leadership manifests success in business and life
	Fry	Chap. 7	Spiritual leadership: state-of-the-art and future directions for theory, research, and practice
	Heaton and Schmidt-Wilk	Chap. 8	Awakening the leader within: behaviour depends on consciousness
	Benefiel and Hamilton	Chap. 9	Infinite leadership: the power of spirit at work
	Boje	Chap. 10	Critical theory approaches to spirituality in business
	Lund Dean, Fornaciari and Safranski	Chap. 11	The ethics of spiritual inclusion
	Marx, Neal, Manz and Manz	Chap. 12	Teaching about spirituality and work: experiential exercises for management educators
Ninth International Conference on Business and Spirituality	Bouius	n/a	Birthing the leaders of the new era: awakening true power in people and business
	Bowman and Bowman	n/a	The power of conscious leadership: cultivating the beingness of a conscious leader
	Esposito	n/a	Getting to the heart of the soul: the global leadership advantage
	Feuerstein	n/a	The lowering and curtailment of American wages endangers the future of our democracy
	Landon	n/a	Don't take things personally: the secret to effective leadership
	Larsen	n/a	Spirited speaking
	Maio	n/a	SoulBranding: how authentic is your marketing?
	Miller	n/a	God at work

Table AI.
Corpus details – authors and titles of texts

(*continued*)

Source	Author(s)	Chapter	Title of chapter/presentation
	Ouimet	n/a	How spirituality in management works to reconcile the growth of human well-being with productivity and profits (Parts 1 and 2)
	Rutte	n/a	You can't teach spirituality in a business school […] Oh, yes you can
	Sallick	n/a	Embrace the journey to a fulfilling business
	Secretan	n/a	The art and practice of conscious leadership and the castle principles
	Silver	n/a	Creating a quality business: a sufi spiritual approach
	Zimmer	n/a	Altruism and sustainable development

Table AI.

About the authors

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