# A Person–Organization Fit-based Approach for Spirituality at Work: Development of a Conceptual Framework

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*Management of meaning inside organizations has been an enduring issue in organization studies. Issues relating to commitment and control through the meaning-making mechanisms have been studied by organization culture theorists for sometime now. However, rapidly changing dynamics of the business environment lend these issues a critical salience today. Two factors of this dynamic context are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, a redefinition of the long-standing employment relationship—loyalty no longer being traded for lifelong employment—has led management to look for alternative sources of gaining commitment from their employees. Second, several factors—socio-cultural, organizational and individual—have led the employees today to explore issues relating to meaning and purpose in their workplaces. Labelled variously by different scholars, the most widely accepted term for this growing movement is 'Spirituality at Work' (SAW). In this article we link the two factors to present a framework wherein the emergence of an issue from the private individual domain to the organizational is seen as having the potential of answering concerns of eliciting commitment from employees in a turbulent environment. However, the SAW movement is accompanied by vigorous debates about the concept itself and on how it is to be studied. In the course of this article we present the central conceptual debates that have characterized the SAW discourse to emerge with three definitional themes to understand and study SAW, and then argue for utilizing the person–organization fit lens to study SAW. We end with a conceptual framework that would enable researchers to make a comprehensive study of the elusive phenomenon of SAW.*

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There were two things I thought I'd never see in my life, the fall of the Russian empire and God being spoken about at a business school. (Andre DelBecq, in Gunther 2001)

Organizations are constantly wanting and demanding more and more of us all of the time. But they can't have it both ways. They can't have more of us without getting and nourishing the whole person. Organizations must give back and contribute as much to the whole person as they want in return.
(A corporate manager, cited in Mitroff and Denton 1999a)

We believe that today's organizations are impoverished spiritually and that many of their most important problems are due to this impoverishment. In other words, today's organizations are suffering from a deep, spiritual emptiness.
(ibid.: xiv)

Spirituality at work (SAW hereafter) appears to be an idea whose time has come. Since the late 1990s when it first started being mentioned in academic circles, the last few years have seen increasing interest in a concept that was hitherto relegated to the personal and religious domains. Scholars link organizational problems of the current era to spiritual impoverishment, and attribute the lack of academic enquiry on this issue to a deep, spiritual emptiness in the academia itself (Mitroff and Denton 1999a).

The disquiet about engaging with SAW in academia emerges partly due to the whole gamut of issues being subsumed under the concept: from a search for meaning, purpose, wholeness and interconnectedness at work, and incorporation of yoga and meditation routines in organizations, SAW has also been argued to include such practices as feng-shui and reiki (Laabs 1995). Quite understandably, the scholarly community is at a loss as to what to make of a phenomenon that can be taken to mean anything and everything which contributes to employee and organizational well-being. The boundaries of the concept are rather indistinct in present-day literature and require clarification. Further, the varied conceptual issues that are still being debated call for a conceptual framework that would allow a comprehensive and internally coherent examination of this ineffable phenomenon.

To that end, this article reviews the literature in this emerging area of organizational research and distils the problems and prospects of spirituality at work for organizational studies to lead to a conceptual framework for studying this elusive concept.

## Introduction

Management of meaning inside organizations has remained a persistent concern with organizational theorists, but has assumed a critical salience today due to a number of economic and socio-cultural features in the business environment. The changes on the economic front brought about by forces of globalization have led to increased competition, corporate downsizing and rapid technological advances. Furthermore, changing values regarding work/non-work life balance and a desire for meaning in the workplace accompanies the attendant socio-cultural changes.

Owing to these economic and socio-cultural changes in the business environment, organizations today face great challenges in redefining employment relationship. The managerial challenge lies in maintaining organizational commitment that fosters a feeling of community and *esprit de corps*, while retaining the employment flexibility to cope with a dynamic context.

This article seeks to explore the academic literature on 'spirituality at work' that is being advanced as an organizational solution for issues

arising out of the changing face of employment relationship that has made attracting and retaining talent such a challenging proposition today. Further, an examination of the central conceptual debates shall lead us to a conceptual framework that would pave the way to a workable model for studying SAW.

## Growing Interest in Spirituality at Work

Spirituality at work—also called workplace spirituality by a few authors—has emerged as a growing area for empirical examination both in popular and academic literature. Not only is popular literature appreciative of the emergence of SAW, many management development programmes offered by universities and consulting firms for practising managers too validate the issues of self-discovery, self-development, self-fulfilment and self-transformation inside organizations (Bell and Taylor 2003). The most significant acknowledgement of SAW's importance in organizational studies, however, is considered to be the formation of a special interest group on management spirituality and religion (MSR) under the auspices of the Academy of Management (AoM) in 1999.

Since the AoM is a most prestigious academic organization in the field of management, the formation of such a group has provided 'legitimacy and support for research and teaching in this newly emerging field' (Neal and Biberman 2003: 363).

Further, a broader avenue of peer-reviewed academic journals and conferences has become available to channellize the research output from academicians. Several journals have published special issues on the theme, prominent amongst them are the *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *Organization* and *Leadership Quarterly*. Moreover, stray articles have also appeared in other journals such as the *Academy of Management Executive*, *Human Relations*, *Human Resource Development International*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies and Strategic Management Review*. In addition, the perception that SAW is considered mainstream today is validated by its appearance in organizational behaviour textbooks (Dent et al. 2005).

This growing interest, however, is not limited to researchers and academicians alone. Scholars only seem to be documenting a practice that is becoming ubiquitous and broad-based enough for popular business magazines, including the *Newsweek*, *Business Week* and *Fortune*, to explore similar themes. Beyond the popular culture themes that have been reported in magazines, academic articles have also documented the incorporation of unconventional, seemingly irrational, practices in organizational routines around the world (Casey 2004). These articles argue that broader social currents aimed at meaning seeking and value reconstruction that have made their impact on corporate executives as well.

The growing demand for spiritual management development (SMD) programmes, attracting participation from corporate executives at all levels, illustrates yet another evidence of the growing executive need for, and legitimization of, spirituality in the workplace (ibid.: 2004). SMD, being premised on 'personal and corporate salvation', employs a discourse based on self-fulfilment, self-discovery and self-development in relation to managerial work (ibid.: 441). While these programmes amongst the corporate executives would have seemed strange earlier, their legitimacy today is reinforced by 'academic and practitioner interest in the broader topic of workplace spirituality' (Bell and Taylor 2004: 443).

In spite of this widespread interest in SAW, most of the literature that has been produced in this domain remains in the nature of theoretical assertions with considerable scope for conceptual

clarification and empirical examination. Empirical work then has been more of an exception than the rule with studies based on anecdotal evidence rather than rigorous empirical work. Noticing this lacuna, authors have issued frequent calls for conceptual, theoretical and methodological innovation in the area lest SAW be given up as another fad (Benefiel 2003; Chakraborty 2004; Dehler and Welsh 2003; Fornaciari and Dean 2001; Gibbons 2000). In particular, SAW scholars have been advised to move from the primarily conceptual studies phase to a theory-building empirical one (Duchon and Plowman 2005). It has also been suggested that 'systematic model generation and research can help to legitimize spirituality within organizational studies and inform management practice in ways that can address pressing management issues' (Heaton et al. 2004: 63)

To that end, we next summarize the extant debates in SAW literature and generate a conceptual framework that would enable a richer and finely nuanced understanding of SAW.

## Central Debates in SAW Literature

A number of critical debates characterize the current academic literature on SAW that has an impact on any new study, namely, the denied religious underpinnings of SAW; the vigorous debate on the sources of current interest in SAW; the issue of who bears the onus of driving the movement; issues relating to defining the ineffable; the question of person–organization fit in SAW; and the contested SAW outcomes.

### To be Identified with Religion or Not, That's the Question: The Denied Religious Underpinnings of SAW

One of the fundamental debates in SAW has been its relationship with the contentious issue of religion inside organizations. Religion appears to have been crowded out of organizational studies owing to the separation of the church and the state (Mitroff and Denton 1999a). Not only has potentially divisive religion lost its earlier hold on individuals, religion as an institution too inspires less confidence today (Cavanagh 1999). It has also been argued that issues relating to fears of conversion and invasion of privacy have kept scholars away from exploring religion in organizational enquiry (Reave 2005), leading to a dichotomous relationship between 'bad religion' and 'good spirituality'. Hence, in keeping with the accepted distinction between religion and spirituality, most scholars define SAW primarily as *not-religion*.

However, the not-religion conceptualization of spirituality does not do justice to SAW's content and spirit (Harvey 2001). Other arguments have also been made against the religion–spirituality distinction. Scholars claim that the two constructs are inherently intertwined and that keeping the sacred out of the spiritual divests spirituality of its essence (Zinnbauer et al. 1999). It is argued that the definitions of religion and spirituality are both in dire need of empirical grounding and improved operationalization based on the centrality of the sacred to both religion and spirituality.

It seems, therefore, that a framework that investigates the sources of interest in SAW as also its manifestation in organizations could pave the way for clarifying the relationship between lived SAW experience and its underpinnings, religious or otherwise.

### SAW's Development: Spontaneous Expression versus Historical Inheritance

Scholars appear to have sided with one of the two positions on the recent emergence of SAW. While those on one side of the divide feel that the discontinuous changes in business context have led

to the emergence of a novel element in organizational enquiry and practice, others feel that such concerns have always been present in organizational literature albeit under different labels. We proceed to detail the arguments that both camps offer to support their respective claims.

## Spontaneous Expression

Scholars (Giacalone and Eylon 2000; Neck and Milliman 1994; Tischler 1999) argue that a discontinuous break in organizational context has forced both individuals and organizations alike to explore issues relating to SAW today. From a review of extant SAW articles, three broad domains that encourage individuals to take to SAW were apparent: socio-cultural, organizational and personal.

Amongst the many socio-cultural factors that claim to have been instrumental in leading organizations and individuals to SAW are: improvement in technologies and communication channels increasing exposure to alternative lifestyles, increasing leisure times, and the society itself moving higher on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cavanagh 1999; Neck and Milliman 1994; Tischler 1999).

The factors that lead organizations to take up SAW as a management strategy are the challenge to maintain high commitment and satisfaction levels inside organizations even as the earlier psychological contracts that ensured loyalty are being violated in a dynamic business environment (Burack 1999; Cash and Gray 2000). This dynamic environment prompts organizations to adopt such radical measures such as downsizing, restructuring and lay-offs. Such attempts since the 1980s have shaken the confidence and morale of employees, leading them to reassess the psychological contract with their organizations. It has

been argued that such a demoralized and alienated workforce is today looking for a more meaningful work life based on a more altruistic, expressive set of principles (Ashar and Lane-Maher 2004). A latent spiritual need is thus assumed to exist in employees that can be fulfilled in the workplaces. Further, from the organization's side, the resultant increased uncertainty, ambiguity and insecurity in the workplace (Kolodinsky et al. 2003) is sought to be countered by adopting SAW as a strategy that would heighten devotion to the corporate ideal (Tourish and Pinnington 2002).

At the personal level of explanations, decline in traditional opportunities for community (Vaill 1998) that has led individuals to search for meaning and purpose in one's workplace is posited as being the most urgent. It is argued that an exposure to new age philosophies and Eastern religions, with their emphasis on sanctifying the secular and thus a deeper engagement with one's work, has led those in the West to engage with spirituality at work (Garcia-Zamor 2003).

## Historical Inheritance

As against the stream of literature that asserts SAW as a new-found interest citing discontinuous environmental changes, another section asserts that such concerns have always been present in management literature. This group (Bell and Taylor 2003; Casey 2004; Kriger and Hanson 1999; Quatro 2003) cites classic studies from organizational literature in support of their position. They refer to names such as Max Weber, M.P. Follett, Abraham Maslow and Robert Greenleaf to argue that not only have the basic issues relating to SAW always been present in the workplace, but that they have also received due attention from organizational theorists over the last one century and more. We proceed to detail the central features of the evidence they present.

Max Weber, one of the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology, is well known for his *Protestant Ethic* (1958) thesis in which he argued that specific beliefs and attitudes characteristic of a protestant work ethic had led to the emergence of capitalism in the Western world. Weber claimed that foundations of religious Calvinistic beliefs had led to financial success of protestant enterprises in the west. Rejecting the claim that the current SAW discourse is either novel or that it breaks fresh ground, Bell and Taylor (2003: 344–45) link it explicitly with Weber's conception of religious underpinnings of commercial enterprises. Especially, they assert that like Weber the current SAW discourse too accepts the 'structural conditions of capitalism' and differs from it only in that it remodels the protestant ethic to mirror the current new age sensibilities better. The current social context with a renewed interest in meaning making too is argued to have been presaged by Weber (Casey 2004).

M.P. Follett is the other scholar who is claimed to have anticipated many of the current SAW concerns in his works. In particular, the following aspects of Follett's writings come in for specific mention in the SAW context (Quatro 2002): a model of collective responsibility that overcomes extant worker–management antagonism; joint problem solving for collective problem solving, leading to a sense of connectedness; a 'power-with', against the 'power-over', model of leadership; and the emphasis on 'task significance' over monetary compensation.

A natural reference in these circles (Bell and Taylor 2003; Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004; Neck and Milliman 1994), Abraham Maslow is best known for his Hierarchy of Needs model. A theory of motivation that argues for the individual's attainment of one's potential, Maslow's arguments are closely linked to those being offered by SAW scholars. Complete intellectual, emotional and spiritual fulfilment; an enlightened management style that sees the other as a means to accelerate one's self-actualization and advance organizational performance; and seeing enlightened management as 'one way of taking religion seriously, profoundly, deeply and earnestly' (Maslow 1998: 103), Maslow comes as close to SAW literature as anyone else.

Another natural name in SAW circles is that of Robert Greenleaf and his model of Servant Leadership. Marking a break from the widespread leadership literature that saw a leader as an autonomous autocratic agent directing the employees towards meeting objectives enunciated by the leader, Greenleaf saw the servant leader as inspirational and service-centred. A motivation for service and not accumulation of power characterized a servant leader. Quatro (2004) finds servant leadership's focus on others' needs and service to the wider society as common themes in the current SAW discourse.

> Optimally, the prime motivation for leadership should be a desire to serve. Servant leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers. Self-interest should not motivate servant leadership; rather, it should ascend to a higher plane of motivation that focuses on the needs of others. (Russell and Stone 2002: 145)

Citing these scholars as having presaged SAW, an argument is made that SAW scholars ought to pay more heed to their intellectual heritage lest the contemporary organizational spirituality literature be branded as 'lacking theoretical context' (Quatro 2004: 229). Nonetheless, the idea that interest in SAW owes itself to a changed sociocultural context and a current need for meaning in an organizational context is more prevalent. Surprisingly, while the SAW literature speaks eloquently about the perceived environmental

changes that has led many individuals to take to it, there is no empirical validation of this claim.

Hence, it seems only logical to infer that a contribution can be made to literature if the conceptual framework for SAW study could also look into the antecedents of SAW and investigate the drivers for the current upsurge of interest in spiritual matters inside organizations.

### Who Drives the Movement?

The discontinuous change in the environment argument referred to in the previous section leads us to an interesting SAW issue: who drives the SAW movement? The literature answers the question in two ways, which we label *employee pull* versus *organization push*.

The *employee pull* form of the answer argues that employees today, faced with a more competitive and stressful environment around them, have re-evaluated their priorities and demand a more humane workplace. It leads them to look for meaning and purpose in their workplace and thereby value relationships, harmony, balance and meaningful work within organizations (Ashar and Lane-Maher 2004). Such a change, which goes against the 'winner takes it all' premise of extant organizations, calls for a significantly different approach to the individual–organizational relationship and would make individuals responsible for initiating the move towards a more humane and spiritual workplace.

The other form, which we label *organization push*, considers organizations responsible for ushering in the current SAW movement. It argues that organizations today are wary of footloose employees who owe no loyalty. With lifetime employment guarantee becoming a luxury in a rapidly changing knowledge economy—where tapping employee ingenuity is important—managers are finding it increasingly difficult to ensure employee commitment. In the *organization push*

argument SAW becomes another tool to ensure continued employee's organizational commitment, thereby improving productivity (For a more sceptical account of SAW as a managerial tool for control, see Forray and Stork [2002]).

In a related article referred to earlier in the context of Weber's contribution, Casey (2004) documented evidence of practitioner interest in the seemingly irrational practices in corporate settings and saw in the current bureaucratic crisis 'a wider crisis of modernity' signalling that the world is moving beyond the premise of rational bureaucratic organizations. Casey (ibid.: 65) observes that the invocation of alternative sources of authority and legitimacy inside bureaucratic organizations indicates 'a turn to meaning-seeking and value-reconstruction after the crisis of modernity and its social fragmentation', and would lead to a different way of managing organizational members in the future.

A framework that explores factors prompting employees and organizations to explore SAW has the potential of further improving the understanding of antecedents of SAW in organizational discourse.

### Defining the Ineffable: Spirituality at the Workplace

Another critical issue in the SAW discourse is the definitional conundrum: there seem to be as many definitions of SAW as there are researchers!

Partly, the definitional multiplicity owes itself to the highly subjective nature of SAW as a concept, with many scholars claiming that trying to define it before initiating research forces a straitjacket the phenomenon itself does not allow (Dean 2004). Mitroff (in ibid.) argues, 'An "obsession" with finding a single correct, overarching definition of workplace spirituality does not respect the myriad traditions and belief systems embedded in our research arena.'

The issue of defining spirituality thus comes across as a major stumbling block in the empirical examination of issues relating to spirituality at work. While there are those who argue that the essential subjectivity of the construct makes a single definition impossible (Gull and Doh 2004), others argue that the concept of organizational spirituality 'is not so much elusive and intangible as confused and imprecise' (Brown 2003: 393). Further, a section of scholars argue that not defining SAW makes it impossible to compare the findings from different studies (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz 2003), a step necessary for theoretical advancement. In between these two diametrically opposite perspectives, a central position is indicated with the suggestion for identification of a few central themes from literature as a starting point and then building it up with inputs from empirical enquiry (Dean 2004; Dean et al. 2003). Another recommendation postulates spirituality as a multi-dimensional construct (Hill et al. 2000; Milliman et al. 2003), and recommends a profile analysis of each element individually—and all elements collectively—as a fruitful way of studying the phenomenon.

A number of studies have taken this approach and identified a number of themes as being central to the study of SAW. Four such oft-cited studies are summarized below to indicate a conceptual convergence in SAW.

The pioneering study in this direction finds three themes as being central to SAW: inner life, meaning at work, and sense of connection and community (Ashmos and Duchon 2000). Ashmos and Duchon conceive of the inner life as spiritual identity in Vaill's terms (1998: 218): 'the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meanings of who they are, what they are doing, and contributions they are making', and argue that for SAW to thrive it is essential for organizations to appreciate that individuals have an inner life that needs encouragement. The meaning at work component meant work that lent meaning and purpose to an employee's life. The third component, for Ashmos and Duchon, indicated the trans-individual character of SAW reflecting to the fellowship aspect of spiritual literature.

Based on Ashmos and Duchon's formulation, another study (Milliman et al. 2003) placed forward meaningful work, sense of community, and alignment of values as the central dimensions of SAW, where alignment of values encompassed the interaction of employees with the larger organizational purpose.

Another study (Ashforth and Pratt 2003), based on their inductive reading of SAW literature, puts forward transcendence of self, holism and harmony, and growth as the three essential dimensions of SAW. A connection to something greater than oneself is what defines transcendence of self; integration of various aspects of oneself into a roughly coherent and consistent self and behaviour in accordance with it is implied by the second dimension; whereas a sense of self-development in terms of realization of one's aspirations and potential underlies the dimension of growth.

A recent study proposed a conceptual convergence towards a definition for workplace spirituality and proposed that the current SAW literature is converging towards the following four recurring themes: (a) self–workplace integration; (b) meaning in work; (c) transcendence of self; and (d) personal growth and development of one's inner life at work (Sheep 2004). Sheep (ibid.: 131) defines his first theme, self–workplace integration, as 'a personal desire to bring one's whole being into the workplace (as workgroup or organization)–specifically, not to check one's spiritual component at the door.' The second theme of meaning in work is taken to imply convergence of meaning in one's life with that of one's work. The third aspect, transcendence of self, is the most complex

for Sheep. Attributing the need for transcendence in the workplace context to the increasingly central role that the workplace has assumed in people's life, Sheep admits that what is to be transcended is rather difficult to pin down. He then argues for adopting the conceptualization of 'company as community' (Mirvis 1997: 200) for this particular theme. The fourth central theme for Sheep is personal growth and development of one's inner life at work. Placing this higher order need in Maslow's hierarchical needs framework allows Sheep to put it in terms of achieving one's *full potential*.

The authors of the present study drew upon these definitional indicators and other extant SAW literature to conclude that three themes may be taken as central to a comprehensive study of SAW: integrity/wholeness, meaningful work, and being larger than oneself. The rationale for the choice of these three specific themes and how they improve upon the existing models is outlined.

### Integrity/Wholeness

'The need to feel whole is integral to spirituality in virtually any setting where people attempt to find meaning' (Mitroff and Denton 1999a). There is an increasing appreciation of the fact that people bring their whole selves to work—an idea that includes the spiritual self (Dehler and Welsh 2003). Beyond the sense indicated in Mitroff and Denton (1999a) in terms of an individual not being forced to leave out a specific aspect of one's personality out of the workplace, integrity/wholeness in this framework also incorporates the idea of being able to express all parts of oneself at work. Authenticity is thus integrated in this model. Here, authenticity is conceived as 'an experienced consistency between words and action: in order to be considered authentic—or genuine—rhetoric

would seemingly have to align with actions' (Johansson and Örndahl 2003). While the issue of authenticity has been examined in the careers of professionals in creative industries (Svejenova 2005), it can be argued that the issue would be equally relevant to all those who place an emphasis on leading non-compartmentalized lives. It can also be suggested that practice of authenticity would increase feelings of psychological safety (Edmondson 1999) induced by the sense of mutual respect in contexts that allow people to be themselves.

It is thus argued that the integrity/wholeness construct in the proposed framework not only covers the domain covered by the inner life construct (Ashmos and Duchon 2000)—inasmuch as the wholeness issue would involve the idea of an inner life—but goes beyond it by adding the idea of authentic expression in the workplace.

### Meaningful Work

The central component of SAW literature is the issue of employees' search for meaning in their lives, prompting them to look for meaning in their workplace as well. The many definitions of spirituality used in relation to work (Biberman and Whitty 1997; Cavanagh 1999; Harrington et al. 2001; Mitroff and Denton 1999a; Neck and Milliman 1994) treat spirituality as a meaning-making construct. This question of meaning can take many forms: 'What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of *my* life? What do we live for? What shall we live by? If we must die, if nothing endures, then what sense does anything make?' (Yalom 1980: 419; emphasis original).

In this context, while a few authors restrict themselves to the meaningful tasks and jobs that a particular organizational position may entail (Ashmos and Duchon 2000; Duchon and Plowman

2005) others take it further to the idea of *calling* (Hall and Chandler 2005). The concept of calling indicates a person experiencing work as being beyond instrumental goal seeking, beyond a job or career, and instead as one that is perceived as one's purpose in life. This study argues that taking one's work as a calling would enable individuals to achieve the deepest possible levels of satisfaction and psychological success.

### Being Larger than Oneself

The idea that the workplace and its inhabitants need to be factored into the issue of spirituality at work is intuitively appealing. Not surprisingly, most scholars include this aspect in their formulations in one way or the other. Ashmos and Duchon (2000) include it under the name of *conditions for community*, while Milliman et al. (2003) (echoing Mirvis 1997), label it *community*. Mirvis had earlier spoken about the cornerstones to building community namely, consciousness of the self, consciousness of the other, a group consciousness that is simultaneously aware of the whole *and* the parts, and an alignment with the 'unseen order of things'. The belonging to a community dimension in Duchon and Plowman's (2005: 814) framework indicated 'sharing, mutual obligation and commitment that connect people with each other'. However, it is Sheep (2004) who comes closest to this study's theme of being *larger than oneself* when he labels his third dimension as *transcendence of self*.

Being larger than oneself in the proposed framework goes beyond the community dimension as used in other formulations, and incorporates Sheep's fourth dimension of workplace spirituality: *personal growth and development of one's inner life at work*. Inasmuch as the emphasis in the SAW movement is on the individual transcending one's ego-imposed boundaries and feeling a sense of interconnectedness with others (seen as the essence of SAW by Mitroff and Denton [1999b]), it is imperative that the individual gradually begins to appreciate the sense of a shared identity with other colleagues at work.

Further, the sense of interconnectedness with others would necessarily predispose the individual towards service, long argued to be the 'natural expression of spirituality' (Kurth 2003), but never linked in the manner indicated in this framework.

Empirical validation alone will now confirm if the central features of SAW we have identified are accepted by practitioners in the field, or if these too require further refinement.

It would thus seem that one ought to have a few definitional indicators before initiating research in SAW and then refine it through research. The three definitional indicators of SAW we have extracted from literature could now be utilized in a conceptual framework to provide an integrative basis for future studies.

### SAW: The Question of Individual–Organization Fit

Beyond the various issues that have been discussed in the previous sections, the locus of SAW has been the subject of considerable debate. The basic issue this debate addresses is if all organizational settings are consistent with the pursuit of spiritual strivings. While there are scholars who assert that 'work organizations are not readily compatible with spiritual strivings' (Ashforth and Pratt 2003), others argue equally emphatically that all human organizations are 'inherently spiritual places' (Vaill 1998). While the two positions appear incompatible, it may be possible to think of an overarching perspective that would reconcile these two apparently dichotomous positions: the framework of person-organization fit from organizational behaviour literature.

A significant criticism of the SAW domain maintains that the discourse decontextualizes the individual, ignoring the powerful impact of the cultural, organizational and structural conditions in which the person operates. Basing itself on 'human capacity for transcendence beyond experience of the physical world' (Bell and Taylor 2004), the corporation is absolved of all responsibility and the individual is left to seek meaning and purpose by and within oneself. An analysis of spiritual management development programmes offered by a number of organizations led Bell and Taylor (ibid.) to conclude that these courses preclude all structural explanations for the contradictory demands being faced by the employee. Consequently, the entire responsibility of bringing about a change—both individual and corporate—is brought to bear on the autonomous individual neutralizing the role of the context in the entire exercise of spirituality at work.

However, it can be suggested that though spirituality may be deemed an internal aspiration inspiring the individual to search for and move towards integrity and wholeness, meaning and purpose, and develop a larger than oneself identity, all this cannot be pursued in isolation. The context has been, and continues to remain, important in this endeavour, encased as the internal aspiration is in an organizational framework!

There can be three strong arguments in favour of considering the context: (*a*) to appreciate better person–situation interactions; (*b*) to make research literature more interesting and thereby gain the attention of and respect from practising managers; and (*c*) to exploit the potential of the context to explain anomalous organizational phenomenon (Johns 2001).

A recent article observes (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone 2004: 137):

While research appears to support the ameliorative impact of workplace spirituality, we must caution that little is known about the interactive effects of personal and workplace spirituality. For example, might a very non-spiritual person have decreased personal performance in a spiritual environment because of the inconsistency between it and her own worldview? Similarly, might a highly spiritual individual in a moderately spiritual environment experience decreases in personal performance because the culture 'is not spiritual enough'? The likelihood of interactive effects is intriguing and will require a great deal of research to understand.

We argue that the mainstream organizational behaviour perspective of person–organization fit could be utilized to illuminate this debate. Person–organization fit—broadly defined as the compatibility between the person and the organization—has been explored in organizational behaviour literature for a long time now (Kristof-Brown et al. 2005; Westerman and Cyr 2004). Of the many P–O fit conceptualizations that have been offered, one of the accepted ones is the complementary relationship between the perceived needs of the individual and the perceived supplies provided by the organization (Kristof 1996). It should be possible to measure the P–O fit in SAW terms by assessing individuals' preferences for SAW, and individual perception of organizational SAW supplies on the three central themes that have been identified to assess the hitherto disregarded P–O interaction effects.

The first step in this direction is recorded in the form of an Academy of Management 2004 meeting paper (Sheep 2004) that argues for P–O fit as a mainstream theoretical context for the operationalization and measurement of workplace spirituality. Sheep linked P–O fit on four SAW themes to various organizational outcomes. However, in this study it was considered necessary to

focus on the three central themes that capture SAW issues better as indicated in the previous section on SAW definition and thus contribute to theory building.

A study of individual perceptions of P–O fit inasmuch as it relates to the individual desire for spirituality and the facilitating conditions provided by the organization may yield a better understanding of SAW's applicability to different organizations.

## To What End? The Contested SAW Outcomes

That the consequences of SAW too have remained under-examined may be attributed to the widespread belief that spirituality is so ineffable and personal in nature that it is immeasurable (Mitroff and Denton 1999a). Consequently, most SAW articles illustrate the argument that scholarly work addressing it is only now beginning to move from a conceptual phase to a theory-building/empirical-testing phase (Duchon and Plowman 2005).

Faced with the evidence that spirituality is primarily conceptualized in individual terms (Ashmos and Duchon 2000), appropriate outcome measures too would need to be at the individual level. Hence, the outcome measures adopted by Quatro (2002) at the organizational level that included annualized average growth rate in total revenues (TRG), annualized average growth rate in net income (NIG), and average return on assets (ROA) would not really be germane to this framework. Hence, the search for appropriate outcome measures may be restricted to those at the individual level. In this context, job satisfaction and organizational commitment emerge as natural choices as higher satisfaction and commitment levels are the ordinarily accepted outcomes of SAW practice inside organizations (Biberman et al. 1999; Duerr 2004; Milliman et al. 1999). Hence, job satisfaction and organizational commitment could be selected as the consequences to be tested through the emergent framework.

### Job Satisfaction

The most frequently researched variable in organizational behaviour research (Spector 1997), job satisfaction is an attitudinal variable broadly indicating the degree to which individuals like their jobs. It is amongst the most important areas of concern in organizational behaviour research because of its influence on employee behaviour and job performance (Wright and Hamilton 1978). Many employee outcomes have been related to job satisfaction in past studies: job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour; withdrawal behaviour, including absence and turnover, burnout, physical health and psychological well-being, life satisfaction; and counterproductive behaviour (Spector 1997).

### Organizational Commitment

The other construct that is argued to lie at the core of organizational psychology—other than job satisfaction—is organizational commitment (Jex 2002). Broadly, organizational commitment is 'the extent to which employees are dedicated to their employing organization and are willing to work on its behalf, and the likelihood that they will maintain membership' (ibid.: 133). Organizational commitment has been linked to a variety of variables that are of interest to researchers and practitioners of management, namely, employee retention, attendance at work, in-role job performance, citizenship behaviour at work, and employee well-being (Meyer and Allen 1997), and appears to be a natural correlate of SAW practice.

From the equivocal nature of potential outcomes from the practice of SAW, we may conclude that scope exists for a framework that includes a specific investigation of SAW outcomes.

# Discussion

A summary of the literature presented indicates that spirituality at work is becoming an increasingly important area for research and practice in organization studies. However, the definitions of SAW remain contested and the emerging field may benefit from a comprehensive framework that enables an empirical examination of the way SAW is understood, manifested and expressed in an organizational context. We concluded that the antecedents of SAW could mainly be understood as *organization push and employee pull*. While the former considers organizations as the main driver behind the SAW movement, the latter places the onus upon individuals. However, regardless of the features that are credited with launching individuals and organizations on the path of SAW, the precise factor being invoked inside organizations would have implications for the applicability of SAW and its consequences. We also noted that the SAW claims have not considered the interactive effects of individual and workplace spirituality. Thus, a significant indicator for future research appears to be the individual's perception of a fit between an individual's need for expressing spirituality at work and the correspondingly favourable or unfavourable conditions provided by the organization. It would have, we argued, a significant impact on the effectiveness of SAW as an organizational/individual intervention.

We now proceed to detail a conceptual framework that addresses the concerns raised in studies of SAW and provides the structure within which an empirical study may explore such issues in a holistic manner.

## *The Conceptual Framework*

The literature review we have presented confirms the suspicion that many definitional, application- and consequences-related concerns remain to be addressed in this emerging area of organizational enquiry. These concerns may be allayed by a framework that takes into account the antecedents of SAW, its definitional elements, the interaction between the actor and the situation, and the attendant consequences. We proceed to outline such a framework in Figure 1.

Figure 1 presents a listing and classification of the various factors that may aid an empirical study of SAW. The model hypothesizes that the P–O fit in terms of an individual's need for expressing spirituality at work and facilitating conditions provided by the organization would explain better the variance in organizational outcomes than the individual propensity for expressing spirituality on its own.

In particular, the conceptual framework presented here constitutes three specific sections:

1. Antecedent factors leading to SAW: We saw in the literature the diverse opinions expressed on the reasons why SAW has become such an important vehicle for individual aspirations and corporate endeavours today. We identified two broad strains of the arguments that have been presented: employee pull versus organization push. We also argued that a comprehensive examination of the various features under the three domains—socio-cultural, organizational and personal—would enable us to identify the precise factors that lead organizations and individuals to take up SAW.

2. SAW constituents: A summary of the extant literature alerts us to the fact that the variety in definitional elements presents today merits not an overarching simplistic reduction of SAW to banalities, but identification and testing of a few themes that would capture the essence of SAW. A detailed description of the three central themes of SAW we have identified—integrity and wholeness,

**Figure 1**
*A Conceptual Framework of SAW*
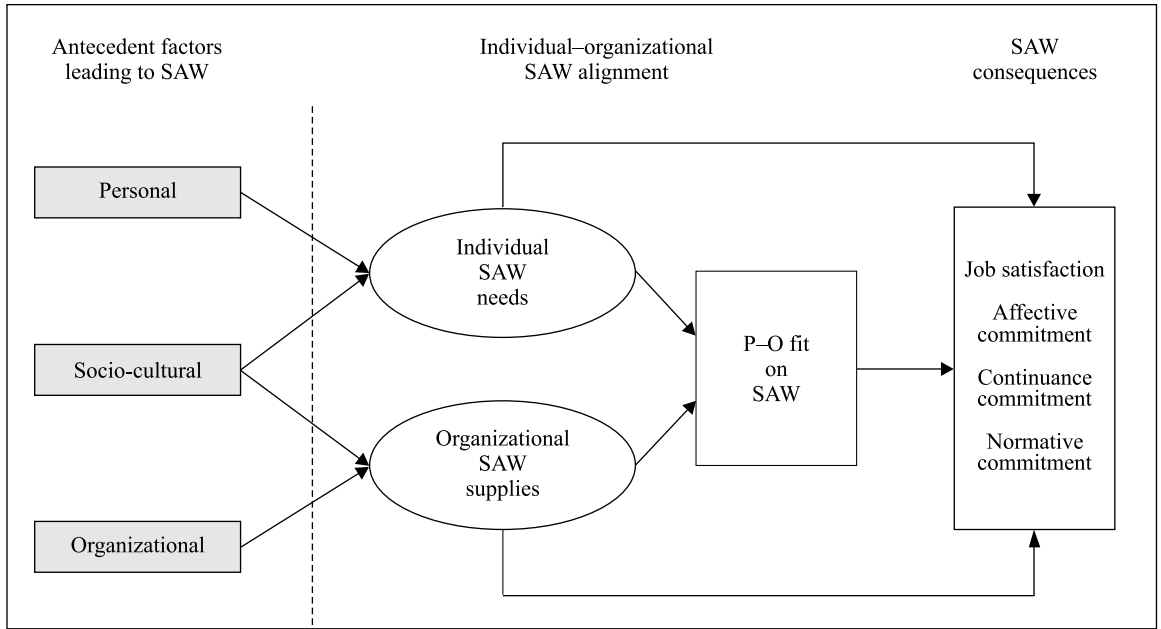


meaningful work, and being larger than oneself—has already been provided in an earlier section.

Further, we had also argued that the P–O fit section of organizational behaviour literature alerts us to the potential utility of this theoretical lens to investigate SAW. Thus, an instrument that would be able to identify individual–organizational alignment of the three central themes of SAW would help us come to a more fine-grained analysis of the effects of individual-organization interaction for SAW. Furthermore, this analysis would also help us investigate in greater detail the tacit assumption that an organization's adoption of a spiritual mission and spiritual principles for operation would fulfil the latent spiritual needs of their employees.

An examination of the extent to which individuals desire the three central themes of SAW and the extent to which their organizations present enabling conditions for SAW practice would help us validate the claims of SAW literature, beyond furnishing evidence to examine issues relating to person–organization fit in SAW.

3. SAW consequences: Literature abounds in offering extravagant claims of the potential benefits of bringing in SAW into the organizational domain. However, a more focused examination of the precise potential benefits would have more organizational theorists and practitioners take up spirituality at work and advance its theory and practice. Thus, in line with the section that seeks to understand the results of spiritual missions and principles in operation inside an organization,

we would need to collect data on the outcomes associated with the practice of SAW inside organizations. To that end, job satisfaction and organizational commitment appear to be constructs that would help us measure the potential utility of the SAW concept.

## Conclusion

This article sought to present the current state of an emerging area of organizational enquiry—spirituality at work—and propose a conceptual framework that would enable a more focused empirical enquiry into this little understood area of organizational concern. We found that disparate assumptions and opinions exist in literature on what SAW is and how its study is to be approached inside organizations.

The conceptual framework presented in this article, we argue, has the potential to address the manifold unresolved issues in SAW scholarship today. Utilizing the framework that has been presented would help scholars identify the reasons why individual and organizations embark on SAW, how the individuals' needs for expressing spirituality at work are met by the conditions provided by organizations, and what results it has for individuals and organizations.

Further empirical work alone would confirm the utility of the three central SAW themes that we have presented and the use of P–O fit lens in this domain. However, the adoption and utilization of the conceptual framework we have developed would certainly help test the promise and potential of this fast emerging area of organizational enquiry.

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