

## **Spirituality and wellbeing in the workplace**

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### **Synonyms**

Spirituality, spiritual capital, spiritual intelligence.

### **Definition**

There is a plurality of definitions for spirituality and spiritual wellbeing in the context of work, and the extant literature suggests it is a research topic of fragmentation, dearth, and incomprehensibility, which sometimes makes it difficult to propose a sound and practicable theory (Khaled *et al.* 2012; Afsar and Badir, 2017). However, most scholars and researchers refer to it, in a broad sense, as the expression or experience of spirituality in the context of the workplace (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2010; Benefiel *et al.* 2014, Pawar, 2016).

### **Introduction**

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have seen a growing interest in spirituality in general and its role in the workplace (Petchsawanga and Duchon, 2012; Bell and Burack, 2001; Sedikides, 2010; Wagner-Marsh and Conley, 1999). However, despite this growing interest in spirituality and its place within the organisation, the concept remains undertheorized, and there is no generally accepted definition. The literature is primarily dominated by speculative discussion, fragmentation, dearth and incomprehensibility and a marked lack of empirical data, especially quantitative research (Khaled *et al.* 2012). Corner (2008: 377) goes on to note that, much of this work is in fact useful and thought-provoking but "...needs to be extended with experience or empirical data to prevent theories being remote from the phenomenon they intend to describe." Often, the words spirituality, ethics and religion tend to overlap, so there is a need to clarify the concepts (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2010). In a broad sense, ethics normally differentiates between right and wrong, religion is concerned with beliefs, prayers, and related formalised practices, whilst spirituality tends to refer to an individual's determination to experience a deeper meaning to life through the way in which they live and work. (Snyder and Lopez, 2008).

Spirituality has been linked to workplace health and wellbeing in a variety of ways, including positive effects on employee morale, work stress, and burnout (Moghaddampoura and Karimianb, 2013). More recent evidence has found that practicing workplace spirituality, as a form of wellbeing, has a positive relationship with general sense of wellbeing, and other forms of wellbeing such as psychological, physical, and mental (Pawar, 2016). This research has found that "workplace spirituality accounted for statistically significant variance ranging from 8.5 to 16 percent in all forms of employee well-being" (*ibid*: p986). Similarly, Fry *et al*'s (2017: p22) research confirmed this, and found a "a positive and significant relationship" between the experience and expression of spirituality with "organizational commitment, unit productivity, and life satisfaction". In this way, spirituality in the workplace has been associated with the potential for a greater sense of wellbeing in addition to wider organisational benefits.

This chapter synthesises the literature on spirituality and wellbeing in the workplace and does this by focusing on three key areas of discussion: first, it explores how spirituality is conceptualised in the workplace, second, it considers the perceptions of how it manifests through leadership in the workplace context, and finally it considers the potential forms of conflict and their effects in the workplace context. The final section concludes with the potential trajectories of spiritual wellbeing in the workplace.

### **Emergence of the spiritual problematic in the workplace**

In a time of public debate about spiritual tolerance and cultural freedom in a multicultural society, it is important to gain a true understanding of how differing religions and spiritualities can manifest within organisations (Wall and Knights, 2013). However, given the paucity of empirical research into the subject, this is problematic. Many traditional management approaches to addressing spirituality in the workplace have under-achieved, due to a dearth of empirical evidence, particularly with respect to understanding individual spiritual needs (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2010). Managers often find the term ambiguous and highly nuanced and organisations and individuals remain confused about the concept and its implications and often have little idea how to deal with or manage the phenomenon (Richards *et al.* 2009).

Thus, managing spirituality and religious diversity is not straightforward as it may not be feasible for an organisation to observe all spiritual practices or occasions. Due to the individualised nature of spirituality, organisations can encounter difficulties in demonstrating fairness and equality within a diverse workforce. In addition, employees' belonging to the same religion may exhibit significant differences in how they demonstrate or observe their beliefs. A topical example is taken from the English Premier Football League where Muslim players have demonstrated differing perspectives on whether to fast during match days which falls within their Ramadan observance (Cowling, 2013). As a result, employers can struggle to produce policies and procedures that support the complex spiritual requirements of employees. Furthermore, due to the importance and awareness of employee spiritual well-being as a feature of organisational health and resilience, it is necessary for management to explore the probable actions for not just employee well-being but for also sustainably doing so. (Wilson *et al.* 2004).

In a study by Lips-Wierma and Mills (2002), 20% of their US sample had been subjected to religious bias by having to use their holiday entitlement to observe significant dates in their own religious calendar, whilst Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter were public holidays. This was reflected in Forstenlechner and Al-Waqfi's study (2010), where employees felt that spirituality in the workplace was tolerated to different degrees, depending on their particular belief system. However, they also suggested that such perceptions might be misplaced. Their study showed that the perceived view of Muslim workers in their study was that discrimination against them existed within the workplace, whereas employers in the study showed a high level of commitment to respecting the traditions and beliefs of Muslims with little discrimination against Muslim employees being apparent (*ibid.*).

However, earlier research by Weller *et al.* (2001) found that Muslims reported the highest level of discrimination incidents in the workplace, both in terms of the number of respondents indicating that unfair treatment was experienced, and the number reporting these incidents as frequent rather than occasional. Christians on the other hand were generally much less likely to report unfair treatment than Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, and nearly all the unfairness they reported was occasional rather than frequent. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that black-led Christian organisations, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, which are often seen as outside mainstream Christian traditions, were much more likely to report unfair treatment than those respondents belonging to what is often seen as more established traditions such as Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism. Recent research echoes the contemporary issues of racial discrimination in the workplace (Wall *et al.* 2017). Samah *et al.* (2012) suggest that an updated and clear emphasis of human resource development, terms like 'knowledge worker' aim to improve performance, efficiency, competitive edge and product quality level.

## Spirituality and leadership in practice

The significance of spirituality at work was put forward over two decades ago by Hendricks and Ludeman (1996), who state that the concern of big organisations towards the ethical and spirituality element of their workforce has grown rapidly in the global market place. More recently, spirituality as a concern has developed and been extensively debated, mainly due to the upsurge of moral consciousness that affects organisational sustainability (Wall, 2017). From this perspective, Ary (2009) explains that spiritual awareness, knowledge and commitment, have started to find their position within those organisations which strive to achieve through dedicated leaders and effective human capital, a more holistic form (Wall, 2016).

The role of an organisation is seen as crucial to the development of employee spiritual needs (Samah's *et al.*, 2012), and within this context, spiritual leadership involves motivating and stimulating employees by instilling a vision and organisational culture based on altruistic values. In turn, such a context produces a highly enthused, committed and industrious workforce where most of the employees will have a sense of belonging (Fry and Slocum 2008; Fry *et al.* 2017). A previous study by Reave (2005) suggested that the values of a leader have historically been viewed as spiritual ideals and include key traits such as integrity and humility and have a very positive influence on the leadership success. In agreement, Kolodinsky *et al.* (2008) claim that organisational spirituality was found to be more positively related to job involvement, organisational identification and work satisfaction and was negatively related to organisational frustration. Therefore, business leaders who have attempted to provide goods and services that typically enhance quality of life often do this without considering the impact on the spiritual well-being of their employees and stakeholders, or even the broader community (Collins, 2010).

Despite the prevalence of spiritual beliefs within United Kingdom organisations, the predominant momentum of spiritual leadership is to assimilate the fundamental needs of employees for spiritual survival. Such collective beliefs can create a comradery across employees which can provide increased levels of organisational commitment and productivity (Javanmard, 2012). However, for the business to be successful in the corporate world, a business leader is expected to be prepared and hold the necessary skills and qualities to be aware and knowledgeable about the many faith systems within and around their organisation (Wall and Knights, 2013). This approach highlights the need for managers to have a range of qualities which include a passion for dynamism and entrepreneurship in addition to loyalty, integrity, honesty, accountability and trustworthiness (Pal and Kapur, 2011). Managers should also provide scope for improving the organisational culture by maintaining a healthy balance between organisational culture, values and ethics, as well as growth and profitability. It is important that those in managerial positions have the desire and adaptability for change as well as a desire and capability for handling risks, and this requires communication and receptive skills which will facilitate the empowerment, engagement and retention of employees (*ibid*).

However, it is unrealistic to expect business leaders to possess all of these qualities and skills whilst remaining focused on the organisational goal. Laub (2004) argued that there are two types of leaders which might determine a different focal point of leadership activity. A *servant* leader values people, builds community, displays authenticity and provides leadership continuously, whereas an inspiring leader is more focused on organisational integrity, personal fulfilment and a solid organisational foundation. In contrast, Javanmard (2012) argues for a different view that spiritual leaders must have vision, and whilst moving the organisation forward, management should perform actions such as synchronisation of all aspects of their role. These views illustrated by Javanmard, (2012) include, organisational leadership, which seeks to identify the organisation's vision; altruism, which refers to an individual's unselfish concern for the welfare of others within the workplace and faith in the organisation, which highlights the belief the employee has in their employers.

Spiritual leaders with these unique characteristics can envisage the future of the organisation and inspire employees in a way that encourages them to believe in the strategic direction of the business and the organisation's vision, thus becoming committed to the organisation's future and sustainability (Ziaee *et al.* 2008). The key argument surrounding the spirituality leadership debate for management and business leaders has prompted various journals to be produced, such as *Change Management* and the *Leadership Quarterly Journal* (Herman, 2008) and transpersonal leadership texts (Wall and Knights, 2013; Wall, 2017).

Organisations are usually far from homogenous in terms of leadership and normally work environments are melting pots for different spiritual groups and religions along with various other human values. Unprepared leaders and managers may be unfamiliar with the issues that could arise from the confluence of diverse religious faith groups (Lundrigan *et al.* 2012). Rosinski (2003) supports this line of thought by stating that organisations have learned that diversity should not be prevented but embraced. Whilst it is important for organisations to understand and respect all demographic groups in the workplace, emotions shown, such as empathy, can be very rewarding and for most companies, the mixture of different perspectives and skills that are part of a diverse workplace are essential to remain competitive and move the company forward. Additionally, leaders who adopt a positive attitude towards others equally, will have a much greater wealth of human resources and a more content workforce; this transforms into greater productivity, more satisfying job relationships, longer employee retention and a stronger supply of fresh and innovative ideas. Prudent leaders realise that utilising all demographic groups effectively will increase the organisation's numbers and strengthen the business long term (Lundrigan *et al.* 2012). As such, organisational managers and leaders have a role in enabling the experience and expression of spirituality in the workplace, both in terms of spiritual wellbeing but also the other forms of wellbeing outlined above.

### **Spirituality and conflict in practice**

There is increasing awareness that spiritual well-being addresses key humanistic traits relating to the workforce, such as compassion with one another, joy at work and honesty and trust (Petchsawange and Duchan, 2012). There is evidence that organisations, such as Ford Motor Company, have introduced proactive initiatives in to the workplace to enable the positive expression of spirituality at work to improve their employees' well-being and knowledge (Burack, 1999). However, although organisational managers and leaders have a role in enabling the experience and expression of spirituality in the workplace, spirituality is often considered to be a controversial area and a source of conflict. Over a decade ago, Young (2007:8) argued that:

In the 1960s and 1970s blacks and women fought for their rights. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was gays and lesbians. Now it has turned into employers and employees and the battlefield is spirituality in the workplace.

Growing numbers of spiritual people are beginning to speak out in the workplace, with employees pressing employers for greater freedom to express their spirituality (Wennes and Quinn, 2008; Zohar and Marshall, 2004; Ahmed and Omar, 2014). Indeed, diverse workforces are urging organisations, on a global basis, to accommodate a wide variety of workplace issues, including religious expression. Whilst employers may be aware of discrimination based on race, gender and even disability, religion is not so prominent, with knowledge and process lacking (Young, 2007). As management is often unfamiliar with the concept of spirituality, cases or signs of religious discrimination may be increasing as the employer struggles with the growing variety of religions and cultures acknowledged (Van Tonder and Ramdass, 2009).

Morgan (2005) suggests that there are many ways to discriminate against people, and examples of spirituality discrimination can include: firing an employee or withholding promotion due to the employee's spiritual beliefs; failure to give an employee a pay rise until the employee no longer spends time discussing spiritual beliefs with co-workers; harassment of employees because they wear religious clothing or visible signs of their faith. Such discrimination does not need to be overt or even consciously done. Instead it can be identified as a subtle, often unintentional form of bias. (Green. 2003). Lee, (2002), points out that, such discrimination can often be described as aversive racism, where the character of the employee consciously endorses strong egalitarian ideals but are generally less favourable and tolerant towards minority groups.

A study conducted by Dovidio and Gaertner, (1998) indicate that there is one problem regarding aversive racism and discrimination in the workplace. The problem of aversive racism is that it is often entrenched in normal, often adaptive, psychological processes which involve the desire to maintain power, processed through an internalisation of societal values and beliefs. Due to the focus on the

conflict perspective, most researchers use scales that highlight only the negative implications (Kossek and Ozeki, 1998).

However, long standing perspectives point out that rather than experiencing only conflict, facilitation between roles may occur, that is, when participation in one role is made better or easier by participation in the other role (Marks, 1977). The occupation of numerous roles in this way potentially provides a sense of security, a sense of purpose in life, enhanced self-esteem, social support and buffering against role failure (Sieber, 1974). However, Pinholster, (2016) argues, organisation such as the National Academies of Science and American Association for the advancement of Science still have a way to go and has actively called for the scientific communities to identify and countenance implicit bias as impediment on minority participation and enhancement within the STEM subjects such as Mathematics, Engineering and Science. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) further state that the degree to which an employee experiences conflict is likely to be influenced by their personality. It would therefore be enlightening to examine the personality backgrounds which inform the consequences of facilitation on work and family outcomes.

However, Conlin (1999) argues that conflict is inevitable when it comes to religion and consequently there has never been complete peace and cooperation between opposing beliefs, especially in the workplace. However research presented by Riordan (2000); Williams and O'Reilly (1998) concludes that individual employees may react differently in work situations in which they must work with individuals who are demographically similar to themselves in terms of ethnic background or origin, as opposed to situations in which they must work with individuals who have a dissimilar ethnic, spiritual or values background. Where significant differences in employee backgrounds occur, it was found that this was often associated with negative outcomes to the workforce and increased higher levels of personal conflict and disagreements amongst employees. Similarly, as Steinberger (2007) points out, if an employer finds that an employee's religious or spiritual activities damage or hinder the organisation in ways which cause higher financial costs, loss of efficiency, or discrimination against other employees, the employer does not have to accommodate them. Grozinger and Matiaske (2010) validate this point by claiming that organisations have been more focused on how to take better care of the spiritual needs of all their employees. However, these claims are based on the idea that an individual's spirituality and organisational profit form a win-win situation for both the organisation and employee.

Subsequently, Steinberger (2007) advocates that it is important for employees who wish to take specific time off for their spiritual needs always to notify the employer of their religious motives to justify their absences, because if an employer is not notified that the absence is religion related, employment could be terminated regardless. Additionally, Weller *et al.* (2001) argue that religious holidays can sometimes be a source of conflict with mandatory or key days within the workplace. Employees are often forced into a position of having to choose between their religion and important work-based events, such as working on a bank holiday / labour day if in a retail environment, which in turn may contravene the organisation's directives or guidelines. This position is supported by Conlin (1999) who stresses that it is important that employers be warned to always offer options to its employees in these circumstances to help remedy any potential problems that may arise before claiming any hardship to the company. In this way, the employee is given a fair and reasonable solution and if taken to court, the employer can prove that they offered accommodations and are flexible and tolerant. However, Steinberger (2007) claims that this advice is not always followed through and in many situations, if a problem does indeed arise within the organisation, the employer and the employee may both offer numerous ways of accommodating the problem, which may not be suitable for either party.

The number of discrimination cases filed against private and public sector employers relating to spirituality are on the rise and different spiritual court cases work their way through the system all the time (Moulton, 2010). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reported more than 1,800 discrimination cases in 1999 and the number of such cases has increased by 43% within the last decade (Digh, 1999). Subsequently Stock and Chan, (2015) indicate that religious discrimination complaints are the fastest growing type of workplace discrimination claim. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has reported the fact that these workplace discrimination claims have more than doubled from 1,709 in 1997 to 3,721 in 2013, peaking at 4,151 in 2011. As a percentage, the claims have increased from 2% to 4% for all religious discrimination claims filed during this period. These claims

are being filed by individuals of numerous spirituality groups, including adherents to mainstream Protestant Christian religions as well as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jews, Muslims and Sikh. Experts from the International Bar Association (IBA) believe the number of religious discrimination claims will continue to rise.

However, one such organisation was General Motors who successfully won litigation filed by a worker who wanted to establish a Christian employee network within the workplace. General Motors turned down the employee's request and, although it improved relationships amongst the employees belonging to various ethnic groups, it was not deemed beneficial to the organisation to have such a network established (Wolfe 2006). However, discrimination is not culture specific. In 2006, Nadia Eweida, a Christian employee of British Airways, was asked to cover up a Christian cross necklace and was placed on unpaid leave when she refused either to do so or to accept a position where she did not have to cover it up. She was wearing the necklace on the outside of her uniform, contravening BA's uniform policy for jewellery. Nadia planned to sue the airline for religious discrimination. Some Christian groups accused British Airways of double standards, as Sikh and Muslim employees are not prevented from wearing religious garments at work, since these are impractical to cover up. Though the wearing of garments is a requirement in some faiths, in this case, British Airways believes that wearing a cross is not necessary in Christianity, in general. The outcome was that The European Court of Human Rights heard Ms. Eweida's case in September 2012, and this was against the UK government for failing to provide a domestic law to protect the claimed rights, rather than against BA. In January 2013, the court found that Eweida's rights had been violated under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and awarded her damages. The ruling was, ECHR indicated that British Airways had not reached a fair balance between Eweida's religious beliefs and the company's desire to have a particular corporate image. (BBC, 2013; Mancuhan and Clifton, 2014)

The experience of conflict in the workplace also differs by spiritual group. Weller *et al.*'s (2001) early work indicated that Muslims predominately reported the highest level of complaints about spiritual discrimination in the workplace, both in terms of the proportion of respondents (which indicated that some unfair treatment was experienced) and by the proportion (which indicated that these experiences were frequent rather than occasional). However, Christians were generally much less likely to report unfair treatment than Muslims. Sikhs and Hindus indicated that the unfairness they reported was occasional rather than frequent. In addition, black-led Christian organisations and those representing groups such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses were much more likely to report unfair treatment in nearly all occupations than organisations in what is often seen as the mainstream Christian traditions. It is unclear, however, whether these findings can be effectively attributed to the workplace, or whether in fact they indicate general societal perceptions towards these specific groups. The implication of this is that such patterns are unlikely to be challenged in the workplace if it is still being exhibited in the wider community and particularly if these views are being promoted within the media (Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram, 2008). Furthermore, the nature of the conflict outlined by Weller *et al.* (2001) has not been clearly identified, therefore, it is not possible to ascertain the legitimacy of the perceptions of conflict or to determine whether any of these complaints led to direct action, either by the company or by individuals with respect to policies and procedures or through litigious action.

The validity of this argument is supported by Zafar (2010), who suggests that these internal issues in the workplace have led to further studies being conducted within organisations. Furthermore, the debate does not examine the situation from all employees' perspectives and companies are finding it very difficult to avoid conflict and cater to everyone's needs, such as respecting all employees' viewpoints. Wolfe (2006) follows the same line of thought by arguing that, in many incidences, employers must restrict employees who want to create a spiritual presence in their working environment or organise a place within the workplace where groups can get together in a spiritual setting. Moreover, Moulton (2010) points out that the issue of spirituality does not stop within the employee environment and there are many examples where an individual's spiritual beliefs can also affect the organisation's customers. Recent examples in the media include when restaurant owners or employees refuse to serve gay couples, or where a couple was refused service at a hotel because the man and woman did not share the same last name.

Such examples, however, are the exception rather than the rule. Such incidents are rare and whilst an individual's spiritual belief can play a significant role in the products or services offered by the organisation, it should not discriminate against customers who do not share their views as that will

no doubt deter future business and subsequently hinder the organisation's longevity. Wolfe (2010) claims that when a large number of customers are of a certain set of beliefs and values, it may become difficult for employees to be tolerant of these differences. As a result, this brings direct conflict and problems to the organisation. Nevertheless, management by requirement, are bound to try to resolve these conflicts for the best interests of the business. According to Weller *et al.* (2001), traditional spiritual values and beliefs are still very much restricted within an organisation and therefore employees may struggle to balance their work and spiritual commitments:

For 8 years, it was never a problem. Then, for one and a half years, they picked on this (Sikh) woman for wearing her bangle. Finally, they moved her to a different part of the organisation. They said she must take it off, but she said no. Representatives from the Sikh temple had a meeting with Personnel to explain, but they said no because it was classed as jewellery. This controversy had important knock-on effects for other Sikh women who came forward in support of this woman to state that they themselves also wore bangles and who then also became subject to harassment by other employees' as well as by the management.' (Weller *et al.* 2001: 55).

However, there is a perspective which argues that the overall responsibility of management is to define the reality of their employees and not the other way around, concluding that the workforce needs to accept the organisation's definition of reality and use this "as a frame of reference for orienting their own activity irrespective of their own values" (Long and Mills, 2010:238). This element of organisational control comes from the inherent and complicated conflicts present within organisations. In the unlikelihood that employees and management will reach a consensus of values, it is perceived as important that management take the lead in aligning employees' beliefs with those of the organisation (Bell and Taylor, 2003). In line with this, Karakas (2010) indicates that employees should be able to speak out openly and express their feelings, values and spirituality, regardless of fear, alienation or exclusion from the organisation. However, in practice, spirituality remains a taboo in workplaces; it is something felt, but very rarely overtly discussed in organisations (Jawahar, 2012). Spirituality in the workplace is essentially like a Chinese whisper, along the way it inevitably loses its original message and meaning and subsequently becomes distorted and exaggerated.

The essence of the above debate is that whilst it is possible for some employees to resist the organisational meaning given to spirituality that is imposed by management, an appropriate social reality is more readily defined by decision makers with power and strengthened by their policies and procedures (Long and Mills, 2010). Weller *et al.* (2001) disagree with Long and Mills' (2010) argument by claiming that organisations which do not allow their employees to express even some of their beliefs are indeed discriminating against them, which in turn creates unnecessary conflict. In line with this, evidence suggests that organisations which encourage workplace spirituality tend to out-perform those that suppress employee beliefs (Jawahar, 2012).

Building on Weller's *et al.* (2001) view is some additional research conducted by Thompson (2005) who investigated the Pepsi Company. This organisation introduced an approach that sought to identify the benefits of having diversity in their workforce and reported that, in 2003, around \$250 million of Pepsi's revenue growth was from new products inspired by ethnic diversity efforts. The Chairman for the Pepsi Company suggests that organisations that appreciate the diversity challenge will have a competitive advantage, whilst narrow-mindedness is not only a sign of weakness, it also undermines the organisation (Wall Street Journal, 2005). Furthermore, when an organisation limits the workforce they are willing to hire or restricts how individuals express their spirituality in the workplace, they reduce the available talent pool they draw from. The subsequent conflict and discrimination which can arise from such tactics can lower the productivity of the organisation, prospects for growth and survival (Thompson, 2005). However, Khaled *et al.* (2012) suggest that workplace goals and objectives do not support the employee's needs when it comes to expression of spirituality and suggest they do not take into account the practicality for supporting the organisations long term productivity from the employer's perspective. Furthermore, for the business leaders and managers who would be willing and encouraged to build and sustain a spiritual workplace, it would require that spirituality is compatible and aligned with the organisation's mission, vision and goals (Neck and Milliman, 1994)

Lundrigan *et al.* (2012) suggest that management should stress the importance and advantages of having a diverse workforce because when an organisation does not close the door to any particular

demographic group of people, they will benefit from a large range of ideas, creativity and innovation that come from having this diverse group. However, it is worth noting that diversity programmes may not work for all organisations. As Michele *et al.* (2004) suggest, although diversity initiatives are likely to strike a good balance between employees and management requirements, increasingly these programmes do not always build employee commitment, enhance their motivation or reduce conflict throughout the organisation. In addition, there is another misconception, which is that a happier and more harmonious workplace will result from diversity, whereas the diversification of the workforce often has the opposite effect. Longstanding research concludes that individual employees react differently in work situations in which they must work with individuals who are demographically like themselves in terms of ethnic background or origin, as opposed to situations in which they must work with individuals who have a dissimilar ethnic background (Riordan, 2000). Where significant differences in employee backgrounds occur, it was found that this was often associated with negative outcomes to the workforce such as increased higher levels of personal conflict and disagreements amongst employees.

## **Conclusions and future directions**

Evidence raises several key issues relating to the management and perception of spirituality within the workplace and how employee well-being is affected. The significant role spirituality plays in an organisation, along with the benefits of addressing spirituality at work, are key elements that have been raised by numerous researchers (Lundrigan *et al.* 2012; Javanmard, 2012; Wall and Knights, 2013; Pawar, 2016). For an organisation to cope successfully with the complex spirituality challenges ahead, management and business leaders' attitudes still need to make a fundamental shift. In transforming to a new business model, the literature suggests facilitating a spiritually based organisation. Indeed, employees and managers are making considerable progress towards accommodating spirituality in the workplace, for example in providing a communal space for use in worship. Nonetheless, the subjective nature of spirituality and a lack of common understanding of what spirituality means to an employee, presents challenges in implementing such initiatives.

Workplace spirituality encompasses elements of awareness, interconnectedness with others and a higher existence. There is also a sense of fulfilment and value, which adds meaning to an individual's vocation. (Bodla and Ali, 2012; Karakas, 2010; Brown, 2012; Lundrigan *et al.* 2012). Spirituality encompasses ethics, trust, fairness of decisions, respect, honesty and integrity of actions, all of which influencing one's sense of spiritual well-being as well as other forms of wellbeing. The experience and expression of spirituality exerts a positive influence on employees' ethical behaviour and well-being, through having a greater awareness of the views of others. (Moghaddampoura and Karimianb 2013; Badrinarayanan and Madhavaram; 2008; Mitroff, 2003 and Kolodinsky et al. (2008)) Future research will continue to identify and clarify management strategic and tactical plans that facilitate employees' spirituality and the well-being of their employees, the initiatives currently in operation and the main issues surrounding the perceptions of the employees towards spirituality.

## **Cross References (to other entries)**

Flourishing and eudaimonic wellbeing

Holistic and complementary approaches to health and wellness

Holistic wellbeing: Mental, physical, spiritual

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