1. Introduction


The unexamined life is not worth living. \textit{Socrates} in \textit{Apology}, by Plato, sct. 38.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This book is a product of my dreams. It contains some answers and questions on my intense unsatisfied curiosity on life’s many mysteries. One such mystery is death. I am fascinated by the concept of death. My corporate experience and management qualifications led me to an academic study of management and spirituality. Since the conclusion of this study, I have become more aware of what I do not know. I have ended this phase of my life having achieved some clarity of the insight for which I hoped. I find myself more knowledgeable, hence a little more cautious but still a pilgrim seeking more understanding of the purpose of life. My pilgrimage started several decades ago.

I was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, second to a family of five boys and brought up in a disciplined Roman Catholic setting. However, Sri Lanka being a multi-ethnic and multireligious country, I have had the benefit of growing up in a society deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of four of the world’s major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. My primary and secondary schooling was at a Catholic school in Colombo. The earliest signs of my curiosity about the meaning of life were obvious through the many questions I posed to the Catholic clergy of this school. At the age of 13, I vividly recollect posing the first of these to the rector, about how one could be sure of the Biblical explanations about life and death. When most of my questions remained unanswered, it precipitated my rejection of Roman Catholicism. However, in accordance with my expected family values, I continued to practise this religion.

Later on, in deference to my father’s wishes, I entered the Sri Lanka Law College, and in 1987 I took oaths as an Attorney-at-Law of the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka. However, due to the common use of unethical practices adopted
in the profession, I was averse to practising any form of law and, after a short
courtship with the Colombo legal fraternity, in 1990 I joined the corporate
world and worked for ten years in human resource development. In 1991, I
graduated as a Bachelor of Commerce (Special) from the University of Sri
Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. An elective paper I opted to take for this degree
programme on Comparative Religion first exposed me to the academic writ-
ings on religions.

In 1997, I completed a postgraduate degree programme and was awarded
the Master of Business Administration from the Postgraduate Institute of
Management, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Owing to the challenging
experiences I faced during a traumatic event and my search for the meaning of
life, I developed an intense passion to know and understand the purpose of life,
the role of God and life after death. This further accelerated the process of
disengagement from organised religion. I was interested in knowing what
other spiritual traditions had to offer. In 2000, whilst I was the CEO/General
Manager of a management development company, I left the corporate world
for academia to study spirituality and management.

During my corporate career, I have been exposed to many ‘official’ religi-
ous rituals in an organisation which promoted spiritual practices. For exam-
ple, one humid morning in Colombo, the senior executives of a large
organisation gathered into an office room smartly clad in white shirts and ties
– but without shoes – to perform another ritual according to Hindu tradition.
On this occasion, it was the ceremonial opening of a new office building. The
Board of Directors, as well as divisional managers and CEOs were present.
Within this group, I was also getting ready to face the clouds of incense and
smoke. It was a custom of this private Sri Lankan business organisation to
frequently seek the blessings of the Hindu gods. There we were, most of us
from non-Hindu faiths, not having a clue about the ritual, trying to anticipate
the next move of the *Pusari* (the Hindu priest). During the *puja* ceremony, he
would sprinkle ash on our foreheads and give milk for us to sip. Having sat
through many such ‘official’ religious rituals during my long career with the
organisation, I was more familiar with the ritual than some of my newer
colleagues. At each successive occasion, I began to interpret a meaning into
the actions of the *Pusari* – without ever having read the Bhagavad-Gita.

Since 1999, I have lived and breathed the topic of spirituality. At every
opportunity, I have endeavoured to interpret life situations in terms of spiritu-
ality. For example, I was obsessed with issues such as the spirituality of a
convicted murderer.

My wild arguments and analysis have been much endured by my dear wife
and a close group of family friends. Almost every weekend we would meet,
and invariably, these evenings would lead to a discussion of one of my latest
themes. I am thankful for these informal as well as the formal academic gath-
erings where I had the opportunity to receive valuable feedback. These gatherings have helped me to accept and think of possible criticisms of my work, and to accommodate diverse views on this highly personal topic.

Because of this line of enquiry, I have come to accept that people are essentially good and spirituality is something that is essentially good. For some time, I did consider the possibility of the existence of a negative spirituality or a bad spirituality. Like Edwards (1994), I think that spirituality is like reading: although generally reading is intrinsically good, upon further reflection, it can be an instrumental good. In other words, it depends on what is read. Reading can be a means of gaining information and knowledge, of promoting critical thinking and maturity. When it does these, it is considered a good thing. However, when one reads only books containing violence, then illiteracy may actually be preferable. If this argument can be applied to the current topic as well, spirituality can then be viewed as representing a dual nature: good and bad spirituality. However, this book is about the former, and I leave others to write about the latter.

Simply put, the findings presented in this book suggest that the emergence of connection as a common theme in the conceptualisation of spirituality by the multifaith entrepreneurs was consistent with the Western workplace spirituality literature. I did not find any distinct faith-specific theme in the conceptualisation of spirituality by the multifaith entrepreneurs. This book is more about how entrepreneurs’ spiritual convictions are based on a connection with a transcendent and Ultimate reality, and how this transcendent frame of reference is likely to be a source of inspiration, guidance and solace to the entrepreneur in leading business organisations. Based on the interviews with the entrepreneurs, the findings suggest that the impact of this connection on leadership approaches is particularly significant. To the best of my knowledge, this study provides some of the earliest empirical evidence of the enactment of spiritual leadership of entrepreneurs in a religiously plural and non-Western research setting.

THE INCREASING INTEREST IN WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

Twenty to 30 years ago, since organisations around the globe begun to take notice of a phenomenon collectively called ‘workplace spirituality’, the growth in the interest in it has continued to soar. The rapid emergence of books such as The CEO and the Monk (Catell et al., 2004) and Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life (Nash and McLennan, 2001) reflects a popular and, increasingly empirically valid call for organisations to care and nurture the employee’s soul. In
2000, the Internet bookseller Amazon set up a subsection of books devoted to ‘Spirituality and Religion in the Workplace’. The rate of books published has increased exponentially since 1992 with similar growth in directly related publications of a scholarly nature and of more general interest (Joseph, 2002). More recently, the WorldCom, Enron and other corporate scandals around the globe have also added to the growth in the interest of spirituality. As a result, the role of business schools in turning out CEOs with an overriding drive to increase profit has been criticised. Stronger emphasis on business ethics and values in business pedagogy has been called for. In response, many academic institutions have launched courses on spirituality and management. Some examples are the Cranfield School of Management, UK (Programme on Spiritual Intelligence, UK); Curtin University of Technology, Australia (the Master’s course in the School of Business touches on spirituality); St Edward’s University in the USA (undergraduate course); University of Canterbury in New Zealand (undergraduate course); Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow (Spirituality and Leadership); University of St Michael’s College, Canada (Programme in Leadership, Stewardship, and Business Consciousness); and the University of Toronto, Canada (Innovation Management). In the United Kingdom, the National Education Curriculum features spirituality as an area for development (Joseph, 2002).

In addition, an increasing number of international conferences are held every year on the topic of spirituality and management. A significant number of these are held in the USA. They focus on themes ranging from inspirational and practical to the scholarly-based. This phenomenal interest in workplace spirituality has motivated the academic community to take steps to promote theoretical and empirical research into the subject.

This was especially reflected in the formation of a new interest group on Management, Spirituality and Religion by the Academy of Management, and the launch of a dedicated journal, *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*. Introduced at the year 2000 annual conference, the main purpose of the group was to encourage professional scholarship in management and spirituality among interested members. It encourages studies on theoretical advances or empirical evidence about the effectiveness of spiritual principles and practices in management, applications of theology and the wisdom of all spiritual traditions to the workplace and on the effectiveness of management approaches that nurture the human spirit (Academy of Management website). Since this formation, the membership has exceeded 700 and 20 per cent of the group members are from outside the USA (Academy of Management website). Special issues on the topic of spirituality and management have also been published in academic journals such as *Journal of Human Values* (2007, 13(1)); *Leadership Quarterly* (2005, 16); *ORGANIZATION* (2003, 10 (2)); *Journal of Applied Managerial Psychology* (2002, 19(3)); *Journal of
Managerial Psychology (2002, 17(3)); Journal of Management Education (October, 2000); American Behavioral Scientist (May, 2000); and Journal of Organizational and Change Management (2003, 16(4); 1999, 12(3 and 4); 1994, 9(6)). Since 1990, an estimate of the number of doctoral studies on the topic in progress or completed exceeds 40 and the number of Master’s theses is considerably greater (Joseph, 2002). The majority of these originate in the USA.

Business Week observes that workplace spirituality is something of a replay of the spiritual movement that took place at the turn of the last century. It notes that the difference is that in those days, workers were considered extensions of machines (Conlin, 1999). In the 1930s the recognition of worker performance was born and later, in the 1970s and 1980s, the thinking shifted towards viewing workers not just as bodies needing sustenance but as people with minds. In 1953, Fortune published an article entitled ‘Businessmen on their knees’ which reported that ‘American businessmen are taking more notice of God’ (Gunther, 2001). The story had a remarkable similarity to the current workplace spirituality phenomenon and noted that prayer groups were forming and that religious books were climbing up the bestseller lists. The article posed the question whether ‘Is it a superficial, merely utilitarian movement, or is it a genuinely spiritual awakening?’ This same question is also being asked now.

The spiritual revival in the workplace reflects, in part, a broader religious reawakening in America, which remains one of the world’s most observant nations. According to Fox News poll, as many as 92 per cent of Americans say they believe in God (Blanton, 2004), and according to the Fortune magazine, in much of Western Europe, the figure is closer to 50 per cent (Gunther, 2001). When Fox News asked ‘Do you think religion plays too large or too small a role in most people’s lives today?’, 69 per cent answered, too small. The Princeton Religious Research Index, which has tracked the strength of organised religion in America since World War II, reports a sharp increase in religious beliefs and practices since the mid-1990s. In 1999, when the Gallup Poll asked Americans if they felt a need to experience spiritual growth, 78 per cent said ‘Yes’, up from 20 per cent in 1994. Nearly half said they had occasion to talk about their faith in the workplace in the past 24 hours (Gunther, 2001).

Several writers have speculated about the reasons for these trends (Conger, 1994). Some point to the baby boomers in the USA: those who came of age during the idealistic 1960s are now reaching middle age. It is almost as if a large segment of the population is having a shared mid-life crisis. Many are looking at their lives and are calculating the time they have left. They ask themselves: What do I want to do with the rest of my life? What is my purpose? Have I accomplished what I set out to do? These questions have implications for the type of work people do, how they feel about the organisation and its products and services, and how they balance work, family,
community, and spiritual needs (Neal, 1995). The increased importance placed on workplaces as the primary source of community for many people is also identified as a cause for this interest in workplace spirituality (Conger, 1994). For example, Cavanagh notes:

The needs that businesspeople often feel are a separation from other people, alienation from their work, and a lack [of] meaning in their lives. They often experience their work, family life and their faith to be in separate compartments – 50 to 70 hours per week at work, an hour on weekends for worship, and the time left over for family. This separation leaves one feeling dry, unfulfilled and unhappy, and is often experienced as a profound absence or vacuum in one’s life. (1999, p. 186)

The increasing intensity of global competition and the resulting downsizing that organisations have been going through over the past decade have also contributed to this recent growth in interest in workplace spirituality. Many organisations view employees as costs that must be cut rather than seeing them as assets in which to invest. Employees are feeling devalued and dehumanised. They hunger for jobs that nourish their souls and that provide some sense of meaning in the chaotic and unpredictable workplace (Neal, 1995). Therefore, the key reasons for the recent growth in workplace spirituality from the employee’s perspective can be summarised as follows.

1. The baby boomers in the USA and the resulting shared mid-life crisis of a large segment of the population.
2. The increased importance placed on workplaces as the primary source of community for many people.
3. The increasing intensity of global competition and the resulting downsizing in organisations.

Also, another factor, which is yet to be acknowledged as a possible cause for the rise in the interest of workplace spirituality could be the evolution of management theory. Some claim that management practitioners’ and researchers’ reluctance to include the G and S words (God and Spirituality) in management theory and practice has given rise to this growing chorus to acknowledge the spirituality in the management of people and organisations. A closer look at some of the pivotal stages in the evolution of management theory would suggest that although present in our personal and work lives, we have failed to recognise the spiritual dimension in many aspects of people management.

EVOLUTION OF MANAGEMENT THEORY

Two of the early preclassical management theorists, Robert Owen
(1771–1858) and Charles Babbage (1792–1871) highlighted the importance of working and social conditions for employees. During this period, the ideas about work specialisation, production efficiency, incentive and profit-sharing plans began to take shape. As early technological advances enabled production processes to be mechanised, industrialisation began in earnest. As a result, larger quantities of goods were manufactured under one roof. At this time, pioneers such as Henry R. Towne (1844–1924) called for a management science. By the early twentieth century, the concept of division of labour and task specialisation for production efficiency was well established. Scientific management within the classical perspective emphasised managing work and organisations more efficiently. Prominent among proponents of this approach was the father of scientific management, Frederick Taylor (1911), who emphasised the scientific study of work methods to improve worker efficiency. His methods were based on standards of work performance and the idea that there is one best way of doing work. He argued that to improve worker efficiency, organisations should select and train the best, determine the most efficient work methods, co-operate with workers to ensure the best method is used, and divide work/responsibility between workers and managers.

Taylor placed an excessive focus on the physical aspects of the worker. Consequently, this approach gave way to a more humanising management approach, which attempted to focus on the importance of understanding various factors affecting human behaviour in organisations. Among the major contributors to this behavioural perspective of managing organisations were Abraham Maslow, Mary Parker Follet and Douglas McGregor. They highlighted the need for management to pay attention to a worker’s intrinsic needs and social relations. Mary Parker Follet, in her pioneering contribution, *The New State* (1926), argued that the universal goal of organisations should be the integration of individual effort into a synergistic whole. Since then, many new approaches to management have been introduced. The most prevalent organisational strategies employed in recent years revolve around structural solutions, particularly variations of downsizing (Tomasko, 1987) and re-engineering (Hammer and Champy, 1993). Results of preliminary studies reported in the popular press, however, suggest that reorganising approaches have not achieved the desired levels of performance in terms of either efficiency or effectiveness (Miles and Snow, 1992).

Dehler and Welsh (1994) point out that one potential explanation for such disappointing results is that these efforts at structural change, while fundamentally consistent with management theory, are necessary but not sufficient for implementing real behavioural change. A potential cause for this failure is the ignorance of the role emotions play at work, in management theory and practice. Dehler and Welsh (1994) argue that work is an emotional experience and yet for the most part this point has been neglected by management theory.
However, in my view, it is more a case of lack of application rather than formulation of management theories. Most management theories include this humane and emotional element. For example, the leadership theory of Blake and Mouton (1978) emphasises two dimensions: concern for production (economic) and concern for people (non-economic). This theory is a map of management attitudes and the best type of management is a high concern for both people and task. It is explained as accomplishing from committed people: interdependence through a ‘common stake’ in the organisation’s purpose leading to a relationship of trust and respect (Blake and Mouton, 1978). Other management theories such as McGregor’s Theory X/Y, Hertzberg’s two-factor theory, Alderfer’s ERG theory and McClelland’s three-need theory, as well as extrinsic theories of goal setting, expectancy and equity theories, whilst emphasising the need for efficient economic performance, also champion the need to recognise the non-economic humane values in the management of organisations. For example, Douglas McGregor’s Theory X/Y (1954) presented two potential attitudes managers could hold about people. The first of these attitudes, Theory X, relates to managers who assume that people are gullible, not very bright and that people hate to work. They were to be motivated by fear and desire and, therefore, a manager’s task was to force them to work. On the other hand, compassion is central to Theory Y (Harlos, 2000) and Theory Y people identify the need to work as something built into human nature. They believe in motivation, the potential for development and the capacity for assuming responsibility. Kleiner (1996) calls Theory Y an article of faith and claims that ‘Pelagius couldn’t have said it any more strongly’ (p. 46). He claims that every idea on the contemporary management of organisations goes against it: the perks, the power structure of organisations, labour relations, the curriculum of most business schools. Thus, although the emotional and people-oriented dimension is well represented in management theories, modern organisations have ignored this emotional, ‘vernacular spirit’ (Kleiner, 1996). A direct consequence of this has been the inability to spark other people’s involvement and commitment by giving them work opportunities that are meaningful – opportunities that are also congruent with their personal goals and ambitions.

The contemporary workplace spirituality seems to offer a way to ignite this spark in today’s organisations.