

# Analysing the career concerns of spiritually oriented people: lessons for contemporary organizations

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to our understanding of the meaning of work. The study is concerned with eliciting work meanings of spiritually oriented individuals with a view of establishing whether there is a common agenda identifiable and whether spirituality influences work behavior. It was found that in spite of their diversity, all research participants desired to express spiritual life purposes of "developing and becoming self", "unity with others", "expressing self" and "serving others" in the workplace. A second finding is that they seek to balance these over time. Furthermore it was found that spirituality clearly influences work behavior as research participants make career transitions if they cannot express their spirituality. Lessons are explored for contemporary organizations interested in retaining spiritually oriented employees.

### Introduction

Although definitions of spirituality vary, they have in common that they are concerned with the process of finding meaning and purpose in our lives as well as living out one's set of deeply held personal beliefs (Neck and Milliman, 1994). "Spirituality is the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, the contributions they are making" (Vaill, 1996, p. 218). Contributing to our knowledge on the meaning of work is important as increasingly scholars argue that the basic dilemmas of managerial and work life "revolve in one way or another around the meaning of work" (Jackall, 1988, p. 194). Although it is extensively argued that there are potential benefits for individuals and organizations in aligning spirituality and work, there is as yet little evidence that spirituality does actually influence work behavior. Nor do we know whether in the current diversity of spiritual beliefs there is a common agenda identifiable for organizations to respond to. The research reported in this paper attempts to answer both these questions and the paper explores how organizations might respond to the career needs of spiritually oriented people.

Battlista and Almond (1973), in "The development of meaning in life", suggest four basic characteristics of meaningful living. First, when individuals state their lives are meaningful, they have some belief that means they are committed to meaningful living. In this paper I investigate the role of spiritual belief. Within management literature a distinction is usually made between religion and spirituality: "Religion is a personal or institutionalized system grounded in a set of beliefs, values and practices. In contrast spirituality is a personal state or manner of

being. Hence religious practice may moderate one's spirituality or religious practice may itself be moderated by one's spirituality" (Barnett *et al.*, 2000, p. 574). In the past one justification for not studying workplace spirituality has been a concern with the divisive role of religion. A question is therefore not only whether spirituality influences work behavior but whether, regardless of the source of the diverse spiritual belief systems of the research participants, a common agenda is identifiable for organizations to respond to.

Second, according to Battlista and Almond (1973), this commitment to meaningful living provides individuals with a framework from which life events can be interpreted in some coherent fashion, and from which a set of specified purposes is derived. The study presented in this paper is concerned with eliciting these specific purposes in the context of a person's career.

Third, if individuals state that their lives are meaningful they can see themselves as having fulfilled or being in the process of fulfilling these purposes. This study is therefore not only concerned with espoused meanings, but whether these influence career decisions.

Finally the process of fulfilling purpose in life confirms that life has existential significance. The ability therefore to enact purpose, in itself, makes life more meaningful. I therefore discuss the findings in the context of possible responses of contemporary organizations to enhance the ability of spiritually oriented people to enact their purposes.

### Individual or organizational spirituality?

Initially I made a choice to analyse career stories rather than organizational

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spirituality. In making this choice I wondered whether organizations can or ought to influence spirituality, or whether this belonged in the private realm of experience. However in analysing the stories it became evident that individuals relate their spirituality to their personal life meanings as well as the organizational context in which these are enacted. This reflects a basic premise of career theory, which holds that there is interplay between psychological and sociological career dynamics. Psychological career theory is concerned with constellations of personal beliefs, attitudes and attributes and based on the assumption that individuals potentially have a moderate degree of destiny or control in their career (Hotchkiss and Borrow, 1990). Sociological career theory emphasizes the role of the environment. It is based on the premise that reality is socially constructed and therefore institutional influences such as culture and structure shape personal career experience and opportunities (Hotchkiss and Borrow, 1990). Career stories reflect the dual psychological and sociological influences on career theory, highlighting a range of relationships and interactions (Ornstein and Isabella, 1993).

The career stories therefore not only offered an opportunity to study personal spiritual purpose but also to study the organizational conditions under which research participants did or did not feel able to enact purpose.

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### **Meaning of work**

A variety of disciplines show that the meaning of work goes beyond the utilitarian, with many arguing that utilitarian meanings of work only become important when other work meanings cannot be experienced (Roberson, 1990). Career literature has addressed the concept of work as a calling, and is primarily concerned with the meaning of self-realization (Krau, 1997) and meaning derived from the contribution one's work is making to the lives of others (Savickas, 1993). Organizational behavior literature as well as unemployment literature shows that meaningfulness and work identity are closely connected whereas research on gender and diversity in the workplace is finding more other-oriented work meanings, for example, Ostendorf (1998) found that women derive a profound sense of meaning from relationships formed at work.

Each of these streams of literature has something to contribute to our understanding of meaningful work, although

as yet there has been little integration of these different themes and disciplines and the distinction is not often made between deeper life meanings or terminal values and utilitarian work meanings, nor do we know much about how these are prioritized in relation to work. Furthermore, Fineman's (1983) description of the state of research into work meanings still rings true: "Work meaning has become tightly circumscribed by predetermined investigator constructs and measures. We appear to have moved a long way from the idiosyncrasies of subjective meaning of work and the passions of 'being' at work" (Fineman, 1983, p. 144). In order to elicit subjective deeper or work meanings I chose to do a collaborative biographical study. Before presenting the purposes derived from this study I review two management disciplines that are more explicit about deeper life meanings and have emerged since the early 1980s: "spirituality in the workplace" and "organizational culture".

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### **Personal or organizational meaning?**

King and Nicoll (1999) in a review of spirituality in the workplace literature in management journals, found that most of it refers to the spiritual journey as a process of focusing within, in order to gain awareness of self and express self. Anecdotal evidence too shows the limited overt spiritual practice in organizations also focuses primarily on the individual. For example practices such as meditation, courses on miracles, shamanic journeying and yoga "encourage participants to define their personal purposes, mission and values" (Cash and Gray, 2000, p. 127). Where the role of the organization has been contemplated it is usually done as a system of relationships, without taking contextual issues of downsizing, power and structure into account (King and Nicoll, 1999), or as a series of typologies of best practice models (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Yet "few consider the extent to which the organizational environment fosters an individual's spiritual development" (King and Nicoll, 1999, p. 235) and whether there are human resource implications for organizations that do not.

At the same time, it is argued that individuals who fully express their spirituality do not only become personally enriched but benefit the organizations through, for example, increased creativity and intuition (Neck and Milliman, 1994; Biberman and Whitley, 1997); improved ethical behavior (Maclagan, 1991); increased empowerment (Lee, 1991); more and better

leadership (Conger, 1994; Nevard, 1991); stronger more cohesive vision and purpose (Kahnweiler and Otte, 1997) and enhanced team and community building (Hawley, 1993; Henson, 1991). An underlying assumption seems to be that in changing oneself, one can change the world (starting with the organization of which one is part).

Some place the responsibility with the individual on the explicit assumption "that workplace spirituality would be best founded on the principles of individuals 'being' spiritual, or acting according to a set of values, rather than organizations 'having' spirituality, or possessing a system of meaning" (Bell and Taylor, 2001, p. 11), to safeguard authentic expression of spirituality. However, an increasing number of authors question whether, in most current organizations, the individual is empowered to the extent that his or her values or sense of purpose influences that of the organization, and argue that we need to recognize the interplay between the individual and the organization (Elmes and Smith, 2001). It is also argued that employees' current experience of organizational conditions, such as lack of trust and being treated as objects expendable in the process of maximizing profits causes the current search for greater meaning in workplaces (Cash and Gray, 2000). It is extensively argued that many of these negative experiences create a hunger for deeper meaning of life, a need for finding an anchor and a desire for greater integration of the spiritual and work identities (Thompson, 2000).

A concern with authentic expression of deeper work meanings, raised in relation to spirituality by Bell and Taylor (2001), is explored more deeply in organizational culture writing, which addresses organizational meaning and its influence on the individual. A premise of especially earlier and more popular organizational culture literature has been that a role of organizations is to provide meaning in the sense of providing some sort of existential value. Ray (1986) in a critical evaluation of this literature suggests that an underlying premise is that ties to community and church have weakened and people's affiliatory needs are not being met. These losses of ties have led to a concomitant loss of meaning in individuals' lives. This idea is echoed in current spirituality and work literature (Conger, 1994). Ray (1986) points out that deeper life meaning in relation to work has traditionally been evoked in not-for-profit organizations, such as churches, schools or hospitals which have been driven by a profound belief in, and desire to, improve the

human condition in one way or another. She asks the question whether deeper life meanings can and should be evoked in other organizations or towards other purposes.

Several authors (Pauchant, 1995; Sievers, 1993; Willmott, 1993) strongly argue for the importance of authentic expression of personal life meanings in organizational contexts. Willmott (1993) places the rise of corporate culturalism in the context of the rise of consumerism, materialism and individualism. He suggests that these, coupled with raised expectations about the quality of working life, economic threat and a growing moral vacuum, create fertile ground for a brand of management theory that presents a recipe for economic and moral recovery by promising employees "meaning as well as money". He points out that while "the promise of corporate culture is to relieve feelings of frustration and depersonalization" it can only add to these feelings as it is cultural control itself that creates these feelings. Willmott (1993, p. 529) suggests that individuals ultimately see through this and start behaving in a self-alienating manner in which they adhere to the basic rules of the culture while distancing themselves from its underlying values:

By defining autonomy as obedience to the core values of corporate culture, the meaning and imagined possibility of freedom is tightly circumscribed.

Kofodimos (1993, p.75) expands on this by not just placing the responsibility for control of meaning and subsequent inauthentic living with organizations but also adding that:

If we are striving toward an idealized image of career success, our ambition dovetails nicely with the organization's interest in bending us to its own ends.

She suggests that these idealized images are agency oriented and leave little room for other meaningful ways of living expressed through community, intimacy and nurturing in paid and non-paid roles.

In summary, while both spirituality and work and organizational culture literature hold that the desire for meaningfulness significantly influences both individuals and organizations, spirituality and work literature primarily argues that the individual is likely to benefit by expressing spirituality in an organizational context, whereas organizational culture literature argues strongly this needs to be an authentic expression rather than the organization providing or controlling personal meaning. However both disciplines argue that the organization is likely to benefit and, at this stage, neither provides significant insights into what an organization needs to do or be in

order for individuals to authentically express their spirituality. The question becomes: if we want to benefit from the expression of spirituality, and we can only do so if it is expressed in an authentic way, how can contemporary organizations respond? This question is particularly relevant in the new career context. Weick (1996) suggests that careers:

... because they are patterns in a world of fragments ... can influence the expectations distal stakeholders use when they define what constitutes work. A career system begins to form when stakeholders take the logic which was handed to them by the people who first enacted it, and redirect it back at the enactors in the form of expectations, requests, meanings, and images that define what their enactment meant (Weick, 1996, p. 41).

Such reversals of causation should not be read as triumphs of the individual spirit in a crass capitalistic world of coercive organizations. Nor should they be read as humanistic wishful thinking. They should be read instead as straightforward extrapolations of responses to uncertainty that locate an important source of organizational design in the attempts of interdependent actors to make sense of recurring work transitions (Weick, 1996, p. 44).

While research needs to be done to confirm this, there is increasing evidence that employees make career choices that align with their values by favoring socially responsible businesses (Greening and Turban, 2000; Schmidt and Freeman, 2000). These authors write that it is particularly important to pay attention to this phenomenon as these are often the well-educated employees with vision and leadership ability that the organization wants to recruit and retain.

In order to address the questions of whether there is evidence that spirituality does actually influence work behavior and whether a common agenda is identifiable for organizations to respond to, a qualitative research design was chosen. A discussion follows on how contemporary organizations might respond if they want to enable the individual to authentically enact his or her spirituality.

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### **Research design**

In order to address the interplay between individuals and organizations, individual work meanings or purposes that went beyond the context of one particular organizational meaning were studied by looking at patterns across career paths and decisions across a range of jobs and organizations.

### **Methodology**

The method was a qualitative psychobiographical study, in which the research participants were involved in analysing the data and subsequent conceptualization. Human inquiry (Reason, 1994) involves doing research with, rather than on, people. The research participants were involved in the analysis of their own stories and the developing of concepts, thus ensuring that the interpretations of the data by the researcher are accurate and that the interpretations of the data surpass the limited worldview of the researcher.

### **Process**

The study was undertaken over three years with the first interviews taking place in 1997 and the last interaction taking place in November 1999. The process of documenting career histories was designed to enable the individual through the telling of his or her career "story" to reflect on his or her deeper meanings and values in relation to career (Lax, 1996). "A life narrative brings to the fore a frame through which purpose and direction in a person's life can be made visible" (Hydén, 1995, p. 69) and "shows the unity and purpose of a human life" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 219).

### **Participants**

The sample was chosen to reflect a diversity of cultures, jobs and religious/spiritual beliefs (see Table I). The age group of 40-50 (average age 46) was chosen in order to obtain an extensive career history, while it was anticipated that research participants in this age group were at the same time still concerned with their career future. For the purpose of research the participants' ability to articulate their beliefs in relation to their actions was an additional criterion as appropriate for exploratory research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In order to meet these criteria individuals were chosen through word of mouth. The researcher did not seek to compare spiritually oriented people with other groups. I do not want to imply that those who do not have a spiritual belief are not concerned with meaningful living, just that they were not the focus of this study. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether a spiritual belief influences the work behavior of those who do have a spiritual orientation and the conclusions should be read in this context.

### **Data analysis**

First the career history was summarized to include all career choices and transitions, the reasons for these transitions, and how

**Table I**

Study sample

Research participants	Total sample: 16
<b>Nationality</b>	9 New Zealand Pakeha; 2 New Zealand Maori; 1 German/Samoan; 1 American; 3 English
<b>Religion</b>	Anglican (2); Baha'i (2); Buddhist (1); Catholic (2); Christian, no particular denomination (2); Follower of Gurumai (1); Haahi Rangitu (1); Jewish (1); Mormon (1); Quaker (1); Spiritual, no particular denomination (2)
<b>Occupation</b>	HR manager (1); packer supermarket (1); trainer (2); manager (3); industrial chaplain (1); systems manager (1); painter (1); oyster-farmer (2); priest (1); teacher (1); business owner (2)
<b>Gender</b>	8 males; 8 females
<b>Age</b>	All participants were between 40 and 50 years old

various jobs were experienced, using the research participants' own words as much as possible, and to bring in temporal order. Next, significant characteristics and themes within and across career histories were identified by the researcher while each of the research participants did the same. We focused on "valuations". Valuating entails an active process of meaning construction. A valuation is any unit of meaning that has positive, negative or ambivalent value in the eyes of the individual and includes anything people find to be of importance in telling their life stories (Hermans, 1992, p. 363).

Research participants and myself compared themes. In the few cases where there was no immediate agreement, the interpretation of the research participant was chosen above that of the researcher. This process served both to elicit and name emerging themes.

A second form of data was collected by research participants keeping a diary on one week of work describing feelings and events and evaluating these based on their spiritual beliefs. This served to ascertain whether career meanings, as they came to the fore in career history, were also reflected in day-to-day career experience, providing an additional validity check. The diary content was analysed by the researcher and research participants using a similar method to that described above.

In summary, a particular category was formed when: the theme occurred more than once in a particular story; the theme was present in all stories and the diaries; the theme had an active role in shaping career behavior; the research participants confirmed its importance and articulated this in relation to their own spiritual belief. The specific steps of the data collection and the rationale behind them is described more extensively elsewhere (Lips-Wiersma, 2002).

## Results

Each table has three columns. The first column indicates the purpose, the second column shows the spiritual beliefs that inspire commitment to this purpose (Battlista and Almond, 1973). The third column adds an illustrative excerpt showing the extent to which individuals have fulfilled, or are in the process of fulfilling, these purposes (Battlista and Almond, 1973).

A first major finding was that in spite of their diversity, all research participants articulated four common purposes of "developing and becoming self", "serving others", "unity with others" and "expressing self", thus regardless of religious/spiritual background a common agenda is identifiable. A second major finding is that individuals make inter- or intra-role career transitions when they can no longer enact their spiritual purposes, showing that spirituality does indeed influence work behavior. A third major finding is that while research participants desired to enact all these purposes they were also concerned with "maintaining equilibrium" between them. For example, although enacting a purpose such as "serving others" is highly desirable, if the person devotes too much time to service, he or she neglects the equally valued purpose of "developing and becoming self" and is in danger of "loss of equilibrium".

## Purposes

### Developing and becoming self

The excerpts in Table II show that individuals who believe in the importance of the purpose of "developing and becoming self" through integrity, personal growth and self-knowledge make conscious choices in relation to their work. At the same time being engaged in work in itself mirrors back the relative importance of this purpose

especially when the work environment changes. James finds that he could not work with integrity in an organization that was no longer aligned with his values, whereas in Chris' case the difference in spiritual values means that he disengages from a part of his work but still finds that on the whole his work is worthwhile. He protects his own integrity by "trying not to get caught up in the politics".

Furthermore individuals assess whether their work provides them with opportunities for personal growth. For example, Hannah leaves a job where she does not feel she has these opportunities any more. As individuals gain self-knowledge or awareness they choose more consciously organizations that align with these values. For example, Hone, as he gains more self-knowledge in becoming aware of his cultural identity, moves towards a job where he feels the purpose of the organization is closely aligned with his own identity and purpose in life.

Within all of the excerpts in Table II it is clearly visible that the purposes are

articulated in the context of the organization and individuals reflect on the conditions under which these can or can not be authentically enacted. For example for James to enact his values he needs the organizational purpose to be aligned with these values. All excerpts in Table II show that where this is not, or no longer, the case, individuals often make career transitions.

### Serving others

The purpose of "serving others" is expressed through positively contributing to the working conditions of others within the organization as well as working in an organization that in itself contributes to a worthwhile purpose (see Table III). Career decisions, including declining a promotion in order to continue to serve directly and moving to a work environment where one can serve more directly (as in Hannah's case who moved shortly after she made the observation in Table III), result from individuals identifying or prioritizing this purpose.

**Table II**

Developing and becoming self

	<b>Spiritual belief underlying the commitment to "developing and becoming self"</b>	<b>Sample excerpts from career histories on the effect of developing and becoming self on career behavior</b>
<b>Maintaining integrity</b>	"I don't want to be washed away by others", "it is about resisting the pressure to conform", "it is about acting out of my own values", "I don't want the self to be swallowed up by the job"	"In my previous job, as manager of the chaplaincy services I played a major role in the expansion of the company. People patted me on the back saying this is good, but the company was becoming a cheap option to work with people through redundancies. I thought 'crap, I'm not accomplishing anything anymore'. I started to look for another job" (James, American-Caucasian, Christian, co-ordinator of an aid organization)  "I have a level of discomfort about serving causes or attitudes I do not necessarily subscribe to. An example of this is a fundamentalist Christian attitudes of our managers coming through in discussions around supporting the gay community or when the Prostitutes Collective applies for money, whereas I feel that we are here to serve the needs of all groups. I try not to get caught up in the politics of it all" (Chris, follower of Gurumay, manager public service)
<b>Personal growth</b>	"The human condition is about growing, it is a journey", "the world is a place to learn and discover truths", "scripture needs to be verified through reality for personal growth as well as for evaluating the scripture"	"I felt I wasn't growing any more, I was standing still, and it was time to look around for another job" (Hannah, NZ-Caucasian, Jewish, trainer)  "After years of nursing and giving to others, I started to look for a job in which I could extend myself" (Caitlin, NZ-Caucasian, Buddhist, manager)
<b>Self-knowledge</b>	"Understanding the me that was created by God", "I want to make conscious choices", "it is about working from my own unique strengths and talents", "if I do not know myself how can I be of benefit to others?"	"I was taught by the old people. I know who I am, where I come from and what I believe in. So in taking this job I knew what I wanted to achieve, I knew my duty was to marry our old Maori ways and European ways of doing and being for the benefit of both people. I earn less here than I did in my previous job as supervisor in a commercial organization, but I want to be here as it gives me a place to stand" (Hone, Maori, Haahi Ringatu, community centre co-ordinator)

**Unity with others**

Participants felt the need to share their deeper values with others (see Table IV). They do this by talking about what they do in a more meaningful way. This does not mean agreeing with each other, but rather recognizing and articulating that deeper values underpin collective action. Whereas “sharing values” was felt to be a connection of the mind, “belonging” was felt to be a connection of the heart. As is shown in William’s story, the interdependence of human being is closely felt. For the individual to express what is meaningful, there needs to be at least an immediate group of workers who feel it is relevant and legitimate to share these values at work.

Furthermore individuals want to care for others in the workplace and know that they are cared for as, in the words of Maria quoted in Table IV, spirituality is expressed through “the shared essence or bond that is created”. The examples below show that the purpose of “unity with others” is articulated in the context of the organization and the conditions under which it can or can not be authentically enacted. Again there is evidence of both inter- and intra-role transitions, with William becoming much more engaged in his current work, once it “became legitimate to express these values” and Maria reflecting on an organization she left, as “there wasn’t anyone she felt close to”.

**Table III**  
 Serving others

Sample comments of beliefs about the importance of serving others	Sample excerpts from career histories on the effect of purpose of serving others on career behavior
“I want to create an environment in which people can be whole – where people can survive, create, be happy”, “it is about contributing my share to what I see as answering ‘that of God’ in people, I need to recognise that and build it up”; “I need to know that I am involved in doing something that I can identify as being worthwhile”	“After several years I became the representative for the union. I had a chance to move up to cashier, but I decided that as a packer I could best serve God and His people by ensuring fair working conditions for all employees, it is about justice, social justice” (Jo, British-Caucasian, Anglican, packer in a supermarket) “When I reflect on the values I was raised, helping and voluntary work was very important. After having worked for non-profit organizations for a while, I am currently working for a commercial production company. I enjoy the work, the challenges and my personal learning, but I do struggle at times and wonder how to get satisfaction if I cannot serve directly” (Hannah, NZ-Caucasian, Jewish, trainer) “I joined a large consultancy company and this was good financially, but it became clear that I could be here year in year out doing nothing that particularly added value, so I applied for a job as HR manager in the health sector” (Jeff, NZ-Caucasian, Catholic, HR-manager in a hospital)

**Table IV**  
 Unity with others

	Sample comments of beliefs about importance of unity with others	Sample excerpts from career histories on the effect of purpose of unity with others on career behavior
<b>Sharing values</b>	“I want to be able to express myself to others, and talk about the reasons why we do what we do in a more meaningful way”, “acknowledge that our behaviors or opinions are based on deeper held beliefs”	“The company for which I currently work went through a change process and we were encouraged to articulate our deeper values. Values which I suddenly realised that I had had for a long time but had been hiding in the context of my paid work. All of a sudden it became legitimate to express these values in the workplace and I discovered many like-minded souls, which is important to me and I now actively look for these people” (William, NZ-Caucasian, computer programmer, Quaker)
<b>Belonging</b>	“I want to be involved in building a community, and experiencing trust, compassion, honouring and caring”, “being at ease with each other”, “strong relationships form a base to stand tall”	“I enjoyed the time in the monastery as they were generous and warm and it was family. I loved fitting into the community” (David, British, Anglican, part-time priest/part-time counsellor) “In this workplace there were lots of undercurrents and backbiting. I didn’t have anyone I was really close to. It was devastating and I had confirmed what I knew intuitively: that the way people are treated by management and each other is important to me as spirituality expresses itself in a shared essence or bond together” (Maria, Samoan, general spiritual belief, consultant)

### Expressing self

The theme of “expressing self” shows that meaningful living is not devoid of agency (see Table V). Creating, achieving and influencing are perceived to be meaningful extensions of the self. Participants were actively looking for organizations in which they could be creative whether it was directly through making things or indirectly through shaping their work environment. While achievement recognized by others is important to the research participants, they also value a private sense of achievement mirrored by their own standards of what is worthwhile. This theme is very important in traditional career theory as a determinant of career choice and transition; the excerpts below show that while it is important to the research participants, there were fewer occasions of career transition. This may be because organizations are already responding well to this career need or because it is somewhat less important to spiritually oriented people.

### Loss of equilibrium

“Loss of equilibrium” is defined as a state of being where one of the purposes is influencing career behavior to the exclusion of others and individuals perceive a tension between “self- and other-orientation” or “being” and “doing”.

### Self- and other-orientation

Jeff and William’s experience is common to that of other research participants who worked in not-for-profit organizations, where they experienced tension between the needs of self and those of others and found that “serving others” often goes at the expense of “developing and becoming self” or “expressing self”. Research participants often addressed this by making career transitions. Jeff starts his own consulting business shortly after our interview whereas William stops working for four months before going to the next job:

**Table V**

Expressing self

	Sample comments of beliefs about importance of expressing self	Sample excerpts from career histories on the effect of purpose of expressing self on career behavior
<b>Creating</b>	<p>“I enjoy creating, something that has come through my own hands”, “it is about leaving a mark”, “the human act is creative because it is an act of will”, “the inner me needs expressing and it is important to find form for that”</p>	<p>“Computing has kept my attention because it is combined with manufacturing and I prefer to be involved in actually contributing to making things” (William, NZ-Caucasian, computer programmer, Quaker)</p> <p>“I have been working on creating a culture that supports trust, energy and enthusiasm. On good days I experience a creative flow, where I can see this organization as a rough piece of wood that continuously needs sculpting” (James, American-Caucasian, general spiritual belief, co-ordinator of an aid organization)</p>
<b>Achieving</b>	<p>“Knowing that I’ve done well against the standards is important. I know I am at times seduced by the professional world, but there is a worth in being recognised as being competent and capable in that world. It seems self-serving, but it depends on what I do with it”, “I only have one life, I want to have a good shot at it and be the best I can be”</p>	<p>“I need to exhibit my work to test whether I still make valid statements. Valid to me, valid to others; it is important to stay in kilter with other painters. When you exhibit people look at your work, and if they are moved they ring you up, and if they weren’t moved, the phone stays silent” (Margaret, Anglican, NZ-Caucasian painter)</p> <p>“The earlier years of setting up the oysterfarm were incredibly difficult, the work is physically hard, we were strapped for finances, the children were going through their teens, and I decided I didn’t really like water. However I am very proud that we hung in there, in spite of the fact that our faith was often really tested” (Cath, NZ-Caucasian, Bahá’í, oyster-farmer).</p>
<b>Influencing</b>	<p>“I see my role to liberate others to get on with what their hearts cry out to do”, “I find it important to use my own insights, learning and abilities towards serving others”, “it is about knowing that my life has not been in vain”</p>	<p>“I got what was later called RSI and realized that there were many others in these laboring jobs who were also suffering. So I kept it very much before the noses of the union and they became very aware. By then I had become an assertive person” (Jo, Anglican, British-Caucasian, packer in a supermarket)</p> <p>“Many of the kids who work for us have never held a job before and some are quite irresponsible. I plan to approach the government or a local MP, with some ideas about how to support employment in rural areas” (Cath, NZ-Caucasian, Bahá’í, oyster-farmer)</p>

My work is quite stressful due to the sheer volume of work and sorting through resources to do the work and sheer frustration of working in the health sector because of totally unrealistic expectations of shareholders and purchasers. So you end up carrying on regardless because of commitment, patients, staff, the community. But it goes at a personal cost and is not sustainable (Jeff, NZ-Caucasian, Catholic, HR-manager in a hospital).

I had to get out [of community service] because I was starting to get burned out. I ended up doing nothing for four months before I decided I wanted to work at creating things (William, NZ-Caucasian, Quaker, computer programmer).

### **Being and doing**

Caitlin first changes career in order to address the imbalance between self and others but in her new job she perceives another tension that research participants frequently experienced at work, that between “being” and “doing”. Work was regularly described as an activity that did not leave much time for reflection on self and process. Bill echoes this:

After years of nursing and giving to others, I started to look for a job in which I could extend myself and where my achievements would be recognized. I have since had various management jobs. It has been a real battle regarding work because I felt my identity is so tied up with my ability to earn a wage, with that recognition from the world, it is so goal oriented, and I want to become more process oriented, I want to be able to let go and explore (Caitlin, Buddhist, NZ-Caucasian, manager health service).

Being quiet and being contemplate are attributes that lend themselves to spirituality, while our work is often the noise of phones, the demands of people and the demands of time frames. I struggle with this as it makes my work experience feel distinctly different from my church experience and I'd like to see more integration (Bill, Mormon, NZ-Caucasian, owner funeral parlour).

It was found that spirituality was not just expressed through the enactment of a set of meaningful life-purposes but also through the process of maintaining equilibrium between these and participants made career transitions to maintain equilibrium.

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## **Discussion and implications**

In reviewing the literature on spirituality and work we found that it primarily focuses on the inner spiritual journey whereas critical organizational culture primarily focuses on the role of the organization in

enabling authentic expression of meaning. The findings show that enactment of spirituality is the result of a positive relationship or interplay between the individual's spiritual quest and the organizational environment in which this is enacted. A common agenda is identifiable as represented in the model below, regardless of religious background, which enables the organization to address spirituality without the real and perceived divisive effects of religion and takes away a major excuse for not doing so. Most importantly, the findings show that individuals make inter- and intra-role career transitions when they found they could not, or no longer, authentically enact their life-purposes and thus we can clearly show that spirituality does influence work behavior.

These are important findings in relation to workplace performance as organizations are generally concerned with retaining their employees. Furthermore we saw in the social responsibility literature, that the type of employees that are making career decisions on the basis of their values, are likely to have the leadership qualities that organizations are looking for. This raises the question of what an organization needs to do or be to: recruit or retain spiritually oriented people; and once they are part of the organization, draw on the range of individual and organizational benefits purported in the spirituality and work literature.

In the discussion that follows each of the life-purposes of spiritually oriented people that arose from this research will be explored in relation to the organization and what it needs to do in order to retain these individuals and enhance their ability to fully express their spirituality. The findings show four categories of purposeful living that are based on the individual's belief about meaningful living (espoused purposes) and actively influence work behavior. The data indicate that these purposes are interconnected and that expressing one to the exclusion of another, over a period of time, leads to a loss of equilibrium between “doing” and “being” or “self-orientation” and “other orientation”. “Spiritual coherence” represents the beliefs that make the individual committed to meaningful living (Battlista and Almond, 1973). The findings include traditional vocational career meanings such as self-realization (becoming and developing self) as well as the contribution one's work makes to others (service to others) and offer two other intrinsically driven work meanings of “unity with others” and “expressing self”. They complement and draw together the various

strands of literature on the deeper meaning of work and add a more holistic perspective on this important area of research. Bloch suggests that the pre-occupation of career theorists with interests and abilities has not encouraged the bringing of deeper questions of meaning into career practice as “the synthesis of decision making and action is qualitatively different from the synthesis of meaning-making” (Bloch, 1997, p. 191). The findings that individuals address ongoing tensions between “doing” and “being” and “self- and other-orientation” partly address this synthesis of meaning-making adding to an integration of process and outcomes in relation to meaningful work. The findings, as presented in the model below, therefore provide a holistic conceptualization of meaningful work integrating different themes and disciplines addressing “the subjective meaning of work and the passions of ‘being’ at work” (Fineman, 1983, p. 144). In order to assist the discussion section I include a summary overview of the findings in Figure 1, which captures the categories of findings.

**Developing and becoming self**

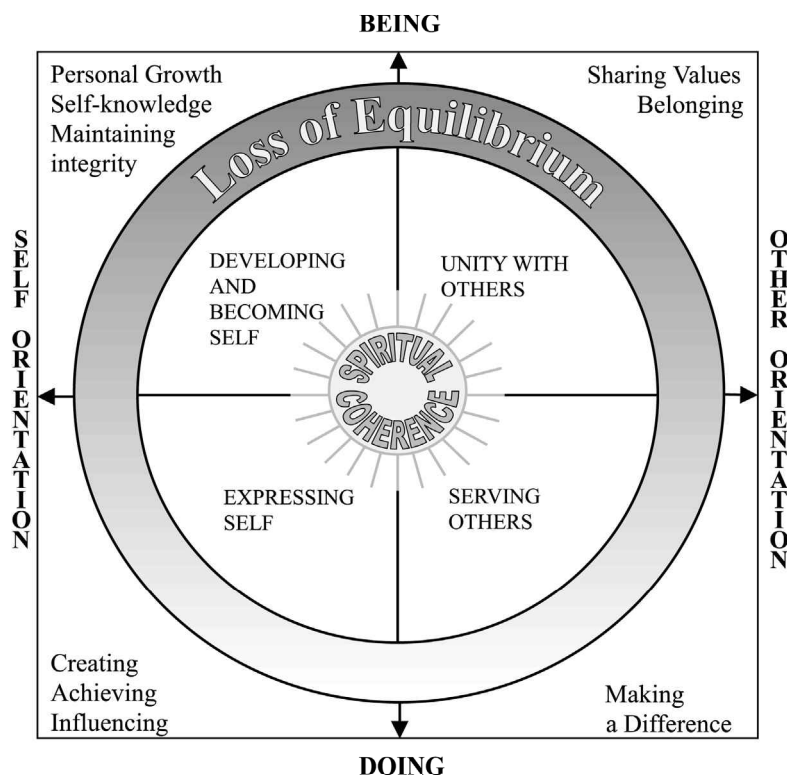
A strong desire for integrity means that individuals who express spirituality in their organizations are discerning and make conscious choices, rather than being hapless victims of a controlling organization as

portrayed in some of the meaning of work literature. Self-knowledge enables individuals to articulate their life-purposes and they are aware of when organizations, or others within them, enable them to fulfil these purposes or distract from these. If personal purpose and organizational purpose are no longer aligned individuals may leave organizations or become disengaged. If an individual locates an organization that enables them to enact their personal sense of purpose as well as their sense of who they are, they commit to this organization or choose for this organization. Furthermore, the findings complement literature that argues that the organization may ultimately benefit, for the individual to fully develop and become self (Hirschorn, 1997; Quinn, 1996; Vaill, 1996), showing that research participants while wanting to develop new skills, insights and abilities do not want to do this in just any direction. The organization therefore only benefits by the individual “developing and becoming self” if personal and organizational purpose are aligned, otherwise individuals may leave or disengage as a result of increased insight into the self.

**Serving others**

Serving others within the organization requires organizational support and recognition for emotional labor and the importance of employee well-being. Individuals also assess how the organization as a whole is serving others. For the organization to enable this, a minimum condition is that the organization does no harm to customers, the wider community and the environment. Beyond this however the organization may need to ask itself what it is contributing to the well-being of society. “Much of our work isn’t necessary at all: it makes nothing of value, contributes to nothing essential, changes nothing, or does so only for the worse” (Thorpe, 1998, p. 7). If these organizations pretend to be anything more than what they are, the individual may display the alienating behaviors discussed by Willmott (1993). At the same time it needs to be recognized that individuals do not only choose to express their spirituality in the traditional not-for-profit institutions that Ray (1986) referred to, nor can we expect every organization to be able to make a direct connection between its products and the betterment of mankind. However to enable individuals to express the purpose of “serving others”, at a very minimum, social responsibility needs to be at the center, rather than periphery of organizational strategy. An open debate about the possibilities and limitations of the

**Figure 1**  
Summary overview of findings



contribution of the organization to society also needs to be initiated.

### **Unity with others**

If we wanted to create the conditions for employees to experience “unity with others” community building within the workplace needs to be addressed. Individuals look for signals in the organization to see whether it is safe or legitimate to express their deeper values in relation to their work. At the same time, current writing on the future of career paths, such as that on protean (Hall, 1996) and boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) careers suggests some eroding of work communities signalling a future work scenario of individualization of work (Beck, 2000). In relation to belonging we may reconsider the instrumentalization of work relationships towards organizational gain. Kahn (1988, p. 40) suggests that current theoretical frameworks that employ work relationships as vehicles by which people link with one another in the service of organizational goals, “reveal part but not all of who people are at work – they do not show their desires to be with or away from others, their longing to be noticed and valued, or their despair at being ignored or isolated”. As individuals make emotional investments in relationships would they not feel that they, rather than the organization, are owners of the work community? Another issue that needs to be addressed in order to enable “unity with others” is the high workloads, politicking and backbiting that many individuals are currently experiencing in the workplace which are likely to inhibit meaningful relationships with others.

### **Expressing self**

The research showed that individuals were least likely to make career transitions in response to this purpose. This may be because organizations already respond well to this purpose as it has been at the forefront of career and organizational practice. Thus if an organization wants to create the conditions for “expressing self”, it may want to continue to stimulate individuals to be creative and innovative. However, freely expressing self requires a significant measure of empowerment. While there has been much discourse about empowerment, the struggle to fully empower is increasingly documented, with some indication that individuals feel increasing powerlessness and apathetic when considering the influence they have on their organization and society as a whole. Personal expression cannot take place in organizations where meanings are described and prescribed. As one of the research participants said “I sometimes feel that people like myself are

working against the organization by empowering others.” There is an extensive range of motivational literature supporting the individual and organizational need for self-expression. At the same time the findings seem to depart from this literature as research participants’ careers are not only animated by achievements that are recognized by others and have monetary or status rewards, but also achievements that are meaningful by their own internal standards, such as “hanging in there when one’s faith is tested”. Research participants do not want influence for its own sake, as for them true agency is derived from (co) determining what the influence is used towards. For these individuals their ambitions may and may not always dovetail so nicely with that of the organization. To enable authentic expression of self the organization needs to be willing for the employee to be empowered to the extent that he or she can influence organizational values.

### **Maintaining equilibrium**

While it has been recognized that reflection is part of good management practice, and the need to balance “doing” with “being” is increasingly documented (Vaill, 1996), the reality for many is that organizational life is speeding up and there is an increase in work-related stress. An organization that wants to create conditions for individuals to express their spirituality needs to address its own potential shadows causing “loss of equilibrium” and assess whether its culture enables individuals to be with self (“becoming and developing self”) and with others (“unity with others”).

Enabling individuals to balance the various purposes may have different implications for profit and not-for-profit organizations. Whereas many enter the caring and education professions with a strong sense of the purpose of serving others, current restructuring has meant that individuals in these professions increasingly experience burn-out and subsequent disillusionment. In these organizations personal meaning-making has dovetailed nicely with organizational needs, but individuals are often not enabled to balance service with self-development and self-expression. In commercial organizations on the other hand, the purpose of self-expression dovetails nicely with organizational needs for innovation and effectiveness, but individuals are often not enabled to serve others within the organization or in relation to what the organization stands for. If organizations want to create the conditions for spiritually oriented people to express

their spirituality, these imbalances need to be addressed.

### Conclusion and suggestions for further study

The implications drawn from a study of this size, with a very specific sample, in a field that is saturated with subjectivity and complexity, are intended to be tentative, to be followed up by more extensive research. This study shows that spiritual belief does influence work behavior and therefore is empirical evidence that spirituality is a legitimate lens through which to re-assess current organizational practices. Future study needs expand the sample beyond the limited, New Zealand based, sample of this study. Further research is needed to establish whether:

- the common agenda stands up if the sample is enlarged; and
- whether the model presented in this paper can be applied as a diagnostic model to organizations to assess organizational readiness to respond to spiritually oriented people.

A question of a different nature is whether organizations that enable individuals to express their spirituality are better performers in relation to all of the three determinants of the triple bottom line. We now know that spirituality influences work behavior in relation to career transitions and recruitment and retainment of quality employees. However there are many other performance indicators on which to do further research in relation to spirituality. It is also suggested that research is done to compare career expectations of those with and without spiritual belief to see whether we can arrive at an agenda that meets the needs of both parties. The author especially advises for a future study to be organization based to learn what individuals and organizations need to do or be in order to enhance "developing and becoming self", "unity with others", "serving others", "expressing self", the balance between these and "spiritual coherence" in a manner that these do not just become techniques but integrated "with the passions of being at work" and the sources from which these passions are derived. A related research topic is the possible role of career management in enabling individuals to keep these life-purposes alive.

The model presented in this paper appears to be more holistic and process oriented than various other contributions on the meaning of work which may reflect the nature of spirituality. This, in itself, would justify doing further research into spirituality in the

workplace. At this stage the jury is still out on whether a focus on spirituality leads to new management practices or the revisiting of classic human relations agenda. However we saw that many argue that this agenda requires greater commitment. Spirituality may breathe new life into the human relations agenda or renew it altogether and either way further study of the topic is warranted.

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