Workplace spirituality and organizational commitment: an empirical study

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to study the impact of five dimensions of workplace spirituality (team's sense of community, alignment with organizational values, sense of contribution to society, enjoyment at work, opportunities for inner life) on affective, normative and continuance commitment.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 361 individuals from 154 organizations were interviewed. Correlations, regressions and cluster analyses were carried out.

Findings – The five spirituality dimensions explain 48, 16 and 7 per cent of the unique variance of, respectively, the affective, normative and continuance forms of commitment. The findings suggest that when people experience workplace spirituality, they feel more affectively attached to their organizations, experience a sense of obligation/loyalty towards them, and feel less instrumentally committed.

Research limitations/implications – Dependent and independent variables were collected from the same source, simultaneously. This can produce the risk of common method variance, leading to an inflation of statistical relationships. Future studies may use a double source method. A longitudinal research design may also be suitable.

Practical implications – By improving spirituality climates, managers can promote organizational commitment and, thus, individual and organizational performance. It is likely that this occurs because people react reciprocally towards an organization that satisfies their spiritual needs, allows them to experience a sense of psychological safety, makes them feel that they are valued as human beings and that they deserve respectful treatment, and allows them to experience senses of purpose, self-determination, enjoyment and belonging.

Originality/value – The paper contributes by filling a gap in the organization and management literature, in which empirical studies on organizational spirituality have been scarce until now.

Keywords Workplace, Job satisfaction, Management science, Personal needs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In her discussions of spirituality and organization science as irreconcilable foes, Benefiel (2003a, p. 383) wrote that "spirituality and management, once thought incompatible, have in the past decade fallen in love". Advocates of spirituality think that a managerialist approach trivializes spirituality. They argue that, being a non-materialistic concern,

spirituality is marginalized and misrepresented when people focus on the material gains that can be reaped by integrating it in organizational life. Management scholars, in turn, sometimes think that whatever cannot be defined and measured is irrelevant to the efficient and effective functioning of organizations. Asking herself how both discourses may dialogue, Benefiel stated:

... If we are to do scholarly work that understands spirituality, that understands organizations, and that understands spirituality in organizations, we face a mammoth task. We face nothing short of creating a new language. (...) [W]e need a language that does justice to both the discourse of organizational science and the discourse of spirituality (p. 385).

We contribute to the understanding of the relationship between spirituality and organization. Empirical and theoretical evidence will be presented on how the perceptions of employees about workplace spirituality help to explain their level of organizational commitment. In the management discourse, commitment is a central variable, given that more committed people tend to devote higher efforts to work, thus contributing to organizational performance. In recent years, the likely impact of spirituality on performance became equally "seductive" as well. The appeal of spirituality may be due to several reasons:

- Organizations are a great human achievement, and work is the centrepiece of most people's lives and inextricably impregnated in people's search for ultimate meaning (Mitroff, 2003).

- When organizations perform better, managers become more able to improve the working conditions of their employees and the quality of life of customers and society as a whole. It is not easy, in contrast, to grant "spiritual richness" joy and meaningful work to employees if the organization is poorly managed and focused on material survival.

- There is nothing wrong with the promotion of workplace spirituality to improve employee commitment and organizational performance, as long as this is done in a context of respect for the dignity of people.

- In many of today's organizations, people only bring their arms and brains to work, not their souls (Mitroff, 2003). The consequence is that organizations do not trigger the full creativity and potential of their employees. Employees, in turn, do not succeed in developing themselves as holistic human beings.

- If inappropriately managed, workplace spirituality may imbue organizational structures with spiritual qualities that serve as a new technology of control, i.e. as new and more sophisticated forms of domination (Driver, 2005; Cunha et al., 2006).

- If correctly interpreted, workplace spirituality (i.e. workplace opportunities to perform meaningful work in the context of a community with a sense of joy and personal fulfilment) can mitigate and/or remove what several authors have pointed out as allegedly present in many modern organizations: injuries to employee mental health, vassalage, people humiliation and destruction, dehumanized practices and serious threats to the "human soul" (Hancock, 1997; Brown, 2003; Mitroff, 2003).

We advance these assumptions at the outset to stress the fact that workplace spirituality is not bad or good in itself. It can be a good thing for people and organizations, it may be good for one part but not for the other, or bad for both.

With the above in mind, we structured the paper as follows. We start by explaining the meaning of the three major organizational commitment dimensions. Next, we discuss how workplace spirituality can be related to those commitment dimensions. Then, we follow the usual scheme: method, results, discussion and conclusions. The major contribution of the paper resides in the evidence it provides of a relationship between spiritual workplace and worker commitment. The subtleties of this under-explored relationship are also analyzed.

Workplace spirituality: a controversial topic

Workplace spirituality can be defined as the "recognition that employees have an inner life which nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work taking place in the context of a community" (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000, p. 137). Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) suggested a different definition, arguing that workplace spirituality is:

> ... a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promote employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy.

And Ian Mitroff, in a 1998 Symposium addressed to the Academy of Management, defined the concept as "the desire to find ultimate purpose in life, and to live accordingly" (Cavanagh, 1999, p. 189).

Spirituality at work is not about religion, or about getting people converted to a specific belief system (Laabs, 1995; Cavanagh, 1999). It does not necessarily involve a connection to any specific religious tradition, but rather can be based on personal values and philosophy. It is about employees who view themselves as spiritual beings whose souls need nourishment at work, who experience a sense of purpose and meaning in their work, and a sense of connectedness to one another and to their workplace community (Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Harrington *et al.*, 2001; Milliman *et al.*, 2003). Religion divides people through dogma and the emphasis on formal structure, and excludes those who have different beliefs. Spirituality is inclusive, tolerant and open-minded (Mitroff, 2003).

As Laabs (1995) pointed out, it is much easier to explain what spirituality is not than it is to define what it is. This definition imprecision led some authors to became sceptical and ask themselves whether workplace spirituality deserves the attention it has attracted (Brown, 2003). We suggest it does, for three reasons.

First, as Mitroff suggested (interview in Dean, 2004, p. 17), the low degree of precision is part of the phenomenon. So, it is necessary to avoid "the obsession with the definition" and to work from "guiding definitions". If we require excessively severe definitional conditions to start with, "then why would [we] need to study the phenomenon?" Although definitions are important, "they are not a total substitute for the immense feelings and tremendous passions which are an essential part of spirituality" (Mitroff, 2003, p. 381).

Second, definitional difficulties should not discourage research efforts. If researchers want to contribute to a better understanding of what happens in organizations and why people behave in certain ways and form certain attitudes, they must rid themselves of "intellectual bias" (Mohamed *et al.*, 2004) and not reject studying a topic just because it is difficult to define or test empirically. It may be that each individual has a singular way to live his/her spirituality. It can also be that individuals have difficulty informing

researchers about their spiritual experiences at work. And researchers may disagree about what spirituality is and how it should be measured.

In the present research, we try to show how people are committed to their organizations in response to the way they perceive their organizations in light of five dimensions of workplace spirituality. An additional reason to pursue research on the topic is that, despite the methodological challenges it creates, spirituality is undeniably a human need for many people (Hart and Brady, 2005), and workplace spirituality is a "reality" that must not be ignored by society and organizations (Judge, 1999; Sanders III *et al.*, 2003). Mitroff and Denton (1999) pointed out that organizational science can no longer avoid studying, understanding, and treating organizations as spiritual entities. Many employees look for the satisfaction of their spiritual needs, i.e. to be unique, to commune with something greater than themselves, to be useful, to be understood by others, and as to understand how they fit into a greater context (Strack *et al.*, 2002). They wish to experience senses of purpose and meaning at work, as well as a sense of connection with other people and their work community (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Pfeffer (2003) summarized these human goals when saying that people seek in their workplaces:

- interesting work that allows learning, development and that provides a sense of competence and mastery;

- meaningful work that instils some feeling of purpose;

- a sense of connection and positive social relations with coworkers; and

- the ability to live an integrated life, so that the work does not clash with the essential nature of the worker and her/his desire to live as a human being.

The author added that it is time for investigating the differences between management practices that nourish peoples' spirits and those that harm them.

This helps us to understand why the topic is attracting an increasing attention in the walks of life of many practitioners. Companies as diverse as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, Aetna International and Deloitte and Touche "are extolling lessons usually doled out in churches, temples, and mosques" (Fry, 2003, p. 702, referring to Mitroff and Denton, 1999). As remarked by Esprit's Susie Tompkins, "the 1980s were all about style and lifestyle (. . .) The 1990s are about soul-searching." Delbecq (1999, p. 346) illustrates this trend stating that his own interest in spirituality "came from experiencing the intense spirituality of senior executives in Silicon Valley" who attended a seminar on spirituality and business leadership, taught at Santa Clara University, in the heart of Silicon Valley (Delbecq, 2000). In a special issue (Volume 9/2), the *Journal of Management Inquiry* paid considerable attention to the seminar, publishing several impressionistic testimonies of participants. For example, some leaders "confessed" that prayer and reflection helped to create the serenity to be calm and decisive in crisis situations, and that the inner voice is the ultimate source of wisdom in most difficult business decisions.

Also, in response to the rising call to include spirituality in the workplace, the transcendental meditation movement of the 1960s and "70s developed the *Maharishi Corporate Development Program* in the 1990s (www.tm.org)". In 1993, Judith Neal founded "The Association for Spirit at Work" (www.spiritatwork.com). Among the initiatives sponsored by the association, the International Spirit at Work Award and the *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* can be mentioned.

Most writings on the topic have adopted a very optimistic view of the relationship between work, organizations and spirituality. Some of them argue that it is necessary to put an end to the Cartesian split (Overton, 1998) characterizing much of Western thought, which created an artificial distinction between mind or spirit and body, the subjective and the objective, the material and immaterial. According to Waddock (1999), bringing mind, heart, soul and body into union, individually and collectively, can help organizations to acknowledge the importance of community as a basis on which success, even survival, can be achieved. Several authors stressed that leaders who are more developed in terms of their spirituality are also more effective (Cacioppe, 2000; Strack *et al.*, 2002; Fry, 2003; Fry *et al.*, 2005). Others claim that spiritual transformation is important in and of itself, due to the fact that work has become increasingly central to employees' personal growth after the declining importance of worship, neighbourhoods and extended families (Conger, 1994; Burroughs and Eby, 1998; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). Others assert that workplace spirituality is a kind of cure for the "ills of modern management" (Brown, 2003, p. 396) and a way to recapture the trust between employer and employee, allegedly lost with the alienation generated by the dehumanized practices that accompanied the massive processes of downsizing, the abuses of workers and other actions that breached psychological contracts (Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). Others even claim that spirituality contributes to organizational performance (Milliman *et al.*, 1999; Benefiel, 2003b; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Sanders III *et al.*, 2003; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004).

Despite the wide interest and optimism, empirical studies are still scarce, thus leading several authors to call for them (Strack *et al.*, 2002; Sanders III *et al.*, 2003; Dean, 2004; Duchon and Plowman, 2005). Some notable exceptions may be identified, however. One of the noteworthy studies was published by Mitroff and Denton (1999), in a book entitled *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*. It was based on experiences and opinions of practicing managers and executives. The most important findings were the following (Mitroff, 2003):

- People want to realize their full potential as whole human beings, either on or off the job.
- They wish to work for ethical organizations.
- They want to perform interesting and meaningful work.
- Making money is important, but is not the most important goal for most people.
- Organizations perceived as "more spiritual" were also viewed as more profitable.

Other empirical studies have also been carried out. For example, Duchon and Plowman (2005), studying medical units, found that work-unit performance is associated with work-unit spirituality. Fry *et al.* (2005) uncovered positive relationships between the qualities of spiritual leadership, spiritual survival and organizational productivity and commitment. Ashar and Lane-Maher (2004) concluded that mid- and senior-level executives in a federal government agency link the concept of success to spirituality, stating that to be successful one needs to embrace spirituality. For the purpose of the present research, the studies of Ashmos and Duchon (2000) and of Milliman *et al.* (2003) are especially relevant. They represent the few cases that have operationalized the workplace spirituality construct. The study by Milliman *et al.* (2003) is, to our knowledge,

the first to empirically test how workplace spirituality explains, among other attitudes, organizational commitment. Ashmos and Duchon developed and validated a measurement instrument for three levels of analysis: individual, work team and organization. They extracted seven factors/dimensions for the individual level (conditions for community, meaning at work, inner life, blocks to spirituality, personal responsibility, positive connections with other individuals, contemplation), two for the work-team level (work-unit community; positive work-unit values) and two for the organization level (organizational values; individual and the organization). Milliman *et al.* (2003) examined how three workplace spirituality dimensions (meaningful work, sense of community, value alignment) explain five work attitudes: affective organizational commitment, intentions to leave, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational-based self-esteem. The meaningful work dimension represents the degree to which people experience a deep sense of meaning and purpose at work. The sense of community dimension means that people see themselves as connected to each other and that there is some type of relationship between one's inner self and the inner self of other people. The value alignment dimension measures whether or not individuals experience a strong sense of alignment between their personal values and the organization's mission and purpose.

Milliman *et al.*'s research was based, to a great extent, on the work of Ashmos and Duchon (2000), but they selected only the three dimensions mentioned above. Three reasons were advanced as justifications for this choice. First: these dimensions were taken as important in prior studies. Second: they were expected to be associated with employee work attitudes and behaviours, considering that the transcendent dimensions of spirituality were more likely to impact an individual's personal life. Third: they allowed a parsimonious analysis of the topic. The main findings of Milliman *et al.* were the following:

- The meaningful work dimension explains affective commitment, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement and self-esteem.
- The sense of community dimension explains all the attitudes.
- Value alignment explains commitment and intention to quit.

With this paper, we join this line of research. We aim to counter the scarcity of empirical studies on organizational spirituality, by analyzing how the perceptions of employees about workplace spirituality in their organizations help to explain their commitment towards the organization. We consider that this research is pertinent because previous studies dealing with the topic have often simplistically assumed that spirituality at work has a positive impact. However, they have rarely formally postulated and empirically tested these presumed relationships (Milliman *et al.*, 2003). It is important to conduct research that helps the scientific community to understand the presumably positive impact on employee's attitudes that may occur when management supports individuals' needs in the workplace on a spiritual level (King and Nicol, 1999; Milliman *et al.*, 2003).

Our research considers not only affective commitment – as in Milliman *et al.*'s (2003) study – but also two additional commitment dimensions: normative and continuance. The study was carried out in the Southern European context, which complements the dominant Anglo-Saxon origin of studies in the field of management and organization. An individual level of analysis was adopted. In fact, we studied psychological climates (Glick, 1985; Burke *et al.*, 2002), and considered the perceptions

of people about the features of the work environment, without aggregating those perceptions to the organization or team levels.

Workplace spirituality and organizational commitment

Organizational commitment can be defined as a psychological state that characterizes an employee's relationship with the organization and reduces the likelihood that he/she will leave it (Allen and Meyer, 2000). The topic has attracted a great deal of attention from both scholars and practitioners. As Allen and Meyer (2000, p. 286) pointed out, "of the 'several work attitude' variables studied by organizational psychologists, only job satisfaction has received more research attention than organizational commitment". This wide interest is possibly due to the impact of organizational commitment on a wide range of attitudes and behaviours with organizational relevance, such as intention to leave, turnover, punctuality, organizational citizenship behaviours, attitudes toward organizational change and performance (Allen and Meyer, 1996, 2000; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). One of the most-cited models of organizational commitment was developed by Allen and Meyer (Meyer and Allen, 1991; Allen and Meyer, 1996, 2000). It differentiates three commitment components: affective (emotional attachment to the organization), continuance (perceived costs associated with leaving the organization) and normative (feelings of obligation towards the organization). Each of these components contributes to strengthening the likelihood that the employee will remain in the organization, but the nature of each mind-set differs from the others. Employees with a strong affective bond remain because they want to do so. Those with strong continuance commitment stay because they feel they have to. Normatively committed employees remain because they feel they ought to.

These three forms are viewed as facets, rather than different types of organizational commitment. This means that a given employee can be affectively, normatively and instrumentally committed to the organization. However, the model specifies that the three components are different from each other. Therefore, it suggests that measures developed for each of the three are relatively uncorrelated with the other two. Another characteristic of the model is that each component develops independently, on the basis of different antecedents and via different processes (Allen and Meyer, 2000; Meyer and Allen, 1991, 1997). Affective commitment develops when the employee becomes involved in, recognizes the value-relevance of, and/or derives his/her identity from the association with the organization. For example, employees tend to be affectively committed if they feel that the organization treats them in a fair, respectful and supporting manner. Continuance commitment develops when the employee recognizes that he/she stands to lose investments in the organization, and/or perceives that there are no alternatives other than remaining in the organization. Normative commitment develops when people internalize the organization's norms through socialization, receive benefits that induce them to feel the need to reciprocate and/or to accept the terms of a psychological contract.

Another important feature of the model is that all three components have implications over permanence or withdrawal. The stronger the commitment, the stronger the intention to stay. However, it is expected that each of the components will have a different pattern of behavioural consequences (Allen and Meyer, 1996, 2000; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Since, affective commitment relies on an emotional attachment to the organization, it is likely that affectively attached employees will be

motivated to make greater contributions to the organization compared to employees with a weak affective bond. Therefore, the model predicts that affective commitment leads to lower turnover, reduced absenteeism, improved performance, and increased organizational citizenship behaviours. Distinctly, the model suggests that employees with strong continuance commitment will feel no tendency to contribute to the organization beyond what is needed to keep their jobs. Moreover, if continuance commitment is the primary tie that bonds employees to their organizations, this attachment may lead to undesirable work behaviour (Allen and Meyer, 2000). Finally, the model predicts that employees who feel an obligation towards the organization (normative commitment) tend to want to make positive contributions. As observed by Allen and Meyer (2000, p. 294), because obligation does not carry the same feelings of enthusiasm and involvement brought about by affection, it can be hypothesized that these positive relations will be weaker.

This reasoning leads to a simple yet powerful argument: to reach higher performance, organizations need to develop affective and normative bonds with their employees, and to discourage continuance commitment. We hypothesize that the higher the spirituality at work, the higher the normative and affective commitment, and the lower continuance commitment (Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Milliman *et al.*, 2003; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004). Theoretical and empirical evidence supports this contention. For example, benevolent activities (e.g. kindness towards colleagues) generate positive emotions and can result in more positive employee attitudes about work and the organization. These, in turn, can translate into enhanced affective and normative commitment towards the organization (Pfeffer and Vega, 1999; Milliman *et al.*, 2003). When employees feel that the organization promotes their hope and happiness, they tend to reciprocate (Gouldner, 1960; Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001) with positive attitudes towards the organization, including the organizational affective bonds and feelings of loyalty.

Humanistic organizational values and the opportunity to do meaningful work also improve worker self-esteem, hope, health, happiness and personal growth. As a result, employees bring their entire self (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) to the organization, assume work as a mission more than as a "job" which in turn makes them more affectively and normatively attached to their organizations and more committed to improving organizational performance (Gavin and Mason, 2004). Employees treated fairly and respectfully feel that they are recognized as valuable emotional and intellectual beings (Kim and Mauborgne, 1998), and not just "human resources". Feeling this recognition, they experience lower levels of stress and burnout, and express greater job satisfaction (Karasek and Theorell, 1990; Adams *et al.*, 2003). They also experience a sense of psychological and emotional safety (Brown and Leigh, 1996; Burroughs and Eby, 1998) and trust the organization and its leaders. In response, they tend to develop a sense of duty and are willing to reciprocate with more cooperative and supportive actions, and with greater loyalty, commitment, enthusiasm, work effort and productivity, thus better performing their jobs and contributing to organizational performance (Gouldner, 1960; Settoon *et al.*, 1996; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001).

A person-organization fit characterized by value alignment may result in higher satisfaction and stronger affective and normative commitment (O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991; Sims and Kroeck, 1994). When individual growth and personal goals are consistent with the pursuit of organizational goals, worker identification with the organization

is strengthened. Workers having this type of identification transcend physical and cognitive demands, are more committed, and interpret their tasks as having spiritual significance (Richards, 1995). On the other hand, when their personal and organizational lives collide, people experience negative emotions, lack of connection, disparity and alienation from their work environment, further contributing to higher absenteeism, turnover, negligent behaviour and lower affective and normative commitment. The spillover effect from workplace spirituality into personal/family life may be expected to enhance satisfaction with family, marriage, leisure activities and social interactions, enabling people to live an integrated life (Pfeffer, 2003), which in turn may improve their organizational commitment and work performance (Bromet *et al.*, 1990; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004).

In short, as Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) asserted, it is plausible that organizations that express spirituality as defined by the presence of certain values and cultural traits (e.g. trust, benevolence, justice, respect, humanism, meaningful work, hope, dignity and honesty), "create an environment where integration of the personal and professional selves is possible, engaging the whole person in the work process" (p. 134). This will presumably lead to greater enthusiasm, effort, sense of "calling" commitment and performance (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Our prediction, then, is that when people perceive their workplace as facilitating the satisfaction of their spiritual needs and the search for meaning at work, they increase their affective and normative commitment, and decrease instrumental commitment.

Method and results

A total of 361 people from 154 organizations participated in the study. Mean age is 33.0 years (standard deviation (SD): 9.1), and mean organizational tenure is 6.1 years (SD: 7.1). About 35 per cent are female. Organizational commitment was measured with an instrument previously developed and validated by one of the authors (Rego and Souto, 2004) in Portugal and Brazil. It includes 14 seven-point self-report scales, measuring affective, normative and continuance commitment. Most items were collected in the literature (Allen and Meyer, 1990). A confirmatory factor analysis (Byrne, 1998) was carried out to test the three-factor model. In order to improve fit indices, three items were removed according to the modification indices and standardized residuals. The model fits the data well (Table I), Lambdas are higher than 0.70, and all Cronbach αs surpass the 0.70 level (Nunnally, 1978).

Spirituality at work was measured by 19 six-point self-report scales. They came from two sources. The first one was the literature (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Milliman *et al.*, 2003). We selected items representing four dimensions: meaningful work, sense of community, alignment between organizational and individual values, and inner life. The first three were considered by Milliman *et al.* (2003) to be the most important in predicting work attitudes and behaviours. Inner life was included because it is considered in most definitions of workplace spirituality (Duchon and Plowman, 2005). The other source was the content analysis of the answers of 23 organizational members to the following question:

> Considering that workplace spirituality may be thought of as the recognition that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work taking place in the context of a community, please, share with us one aspect of your organization and/or job that respects this sense of workplace spirituality and another aspect that harms it.

Affective commitment	*(0.85)*
I am proud to tell others that I am part of this organization	0.71
I have a strong affection for this organization	0.90
I feel like "part of the family" at my organization	0.84
Normative commitment	*(0.76)*
Even if it were to my advantage, it would not be right to leave my organization now	0.66
I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it	0.79
If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my organization	0.73
Continuance commitment	*(0.86)*
I remain in this organization because I feel that it would not be easy to enter into another organization	0.69
I remain in this organization because leaving it would imply great personal sacrifices	0.64
I believe that I have just a few options to consider leaving this organization	0.80
I remain in this organization because I feel that I have few opportunities in other organizations	0.89
I do not leave this organization due the losses that I would incur in that case	0.69
Fit indices	
χ^2/degrees of freedom	3.4
Root mean square error of approximation	0.08
Goodness-of-fit index	0.93
Adjusted goodness of fit index	0.89
Comparative fit index	0.95
Incremental fit index	0.95
Relative fit index 0.95	0.90

Notes: Completely standardized solution; in brackets and italic: Cronbach's α

Table I.
Confirmatory factor analysis: organizational commitment

A total of 36 items emerged from the two sources. A global analysis was then carried out to remove redundancies. Whenever the wording of our item reflected the same meaning of an item from literature, the latter was selected. Some items from the literature were adapted to better fit the Portuguese language. At the end of this process, 17 items were removed and the remaining 19 were placed together in the questionnaire used for the present research. Each respondent was invited to report the degree to which each assertion was true/false (1: "completely false"; 6: "completely true"). A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was carried out. A five-factor solution was extracted (KMO: 0.91; Bartlett sphericity test: 2,897.8, $p = 0.000$), explaining 70 per cent of total variance. Cronbach αs are higher or very close to 0.70. The five dimensions were labelled as follows (Table II):

(1) *Team's sense of community*. This comprises items related to team spirit, mutual care between members, sense of community and sense of common purpose. It is similar to the "sense of community" dimension identified by Milliman *et al.* (2003).

(2) *Alignment between organizational and individual values*. It includes items representing the congruence between organizational values and the inner life of individuals. It also includes an item on the involvement of leaders with the community at large. Although this descriptor may seem semantically different from the others, it is likely that it means that people feel more aligned/comfortable when they feel like working in organizations whose leaders seek the social good of

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Team's sense of community					
People in my team/group feel as if they were part of a family[c]	0.76	0.10	0.12	0.20	−0.17
My team/group promotes the creation of a spirit of community[b]	0.78	0.30	0.07	0.10	−0.06
I feel that the members of my team/group support each other[c]	0.83	0.15	0.10	0.19	−0.06
I feel that the members of my team/group care about each other[c]	0.79	0.23	0.07	0.21	−0.14
I feel that the members of my team/group are linked by a common purpose[c]	0.66	0.40	0.13	0.03	0.02
Alignment between organizational and individual values					
I feel positive about the values prevailing in my organization[b,c]	0.33	0.69	0.20	0.03	−0.07
People feel good about their future with the organization[b]	0.36	0.70	0.07	0.14	−0.06
My organization respects my "inner life"	0.22	0.63	0.17	0.18	−0.27
My organization helps me to live in peace/harmony with myself	0.15	0.71	0.28	0.33	−0.02
The leaders of my organization try to be helpful to the larger social good of the community[b]	0.15	0.76	0.27	0.21	−0.06
Sense of contribution to the community					
My work is connected with what I think is important in life[b,c]	0.14	0.16	0.80	−0.03	−0.10
I see a connection between my work and the larger social good of my community[b]	0.10	0.26	0.76	0.17	−0.03
When working, I feel helpful for the whole society	0.08	0.23	0.68	0.39	0.01
Sense of enjoyment at work					
I experience joy in my work[b,c]	0.32	0.30	0.18	0.71	−0.10
Most days, I feel joy when coming to work	0.31	0.26	0.19	0.77	0.016
Opportunities for the inner life					
My spiritual values are not valued in my workplace[a,b]	−0.20	−0.11	−0.03	0.12	0.83
In my workplace, there is no room for my spirituality[a,b]	−0.03	−0.10	−0.07	−0.16	0.85
Explained variance (per cent)	20.8	18.3	11.9	9.7	9.3
Cronbach Alphas	0.88	0.85	0.73	0.76	0.67

Note: [a]Reverse-coded items
Sources: [b]Ashmos and Duchon (2000); [c]Milliman *et al.* (2003). For both sources, some items were reworded to better fit the Portuguese language

Table II.
Spirituality at work:
principal component
analysis (after varimax
rotation)

the community, and not just the "selfish" interests of the organization and/or of its shareholders. This dimension is similar to the "alignment with organizational values" identified by Milliman *et al.* (2003) and to the "organization values" factor advanced by Ashmos and Duchon (2000).

(3) *Sense of contribution to the community.* This aggregates items meaning that work done by the individual is congruent with his/her personal life values and is helpful for the community. It is similar to the "meaningful work" dimension proposed by Milliman *et al.* (2003) and Ashmos and Duchon (2000).

(4) *Sense of enjoyment at work.* It comprises items related to the sense of joy and pleasure at work. It is a sub-dimension of the larger dimension identified by Milliman *et al.* (2003) and Ashmos and Duchon (2000) as "meaningful work". It represents a different way to achieve meaning at work.

(5) *Opportunities for inner life.* This includes descriptors concerning the way the organization respects the spirituality and spiritual values of the individual. It represents the absence/presence of the "blocks to spirituality" identified by Ashmos and Duchon (2000). It is also related to the "spiritual bonding" identified by Burroughs and Eby (1998) as a dimension of the construct of "psychological sense of community at work".

Table III presents the means, standard-deviations and correlations. On average, individuals consider their workplace as being moderately spiritual. The lower scores are those measuring value alignment and opportunities for inner life. The affective commitment score is moderate to high. The normative and, mainly, the continuance commitment scores are lower, especially the latter. Age and tenure do not relate with the perceptions of spirituality at work, but they relate significantly with the affective and continuance commitment dimensions. All spirituality variables inter-correlate significantly, with the inter-correlations between the first four variables being especially high. As a whole, the spirituality dimensions correlate significantly with organizational commitment, especially with affective and normative bonds. People who experience a sense of spirituality at work tend to develop higher affective and normative commitment and lower continuance commitment.

Table IV highlights the results of the regression analyses, showing how spirituality dimensions explain the three factors of organizational commitment. Considering that age and tenure correlate with commitment, they were included in the first analysis. The next step consisted of the inclusion of the spirituality dimensions, in order to compute the unique variance imputable to them. Age and tenure explain only continuance commitment. More aged and tenured employees tend to be more instrumentally attached to their organizations. In any case, spirituality dimensions contribute with 7 per cent of unique variance to explain this psychological bond. Regarding the other two bonds, spirituality contributes with 48 and 16 per cent of unique variance for the affective and normative commitment, respectively. As previously observed, people seem to develop stronger affective and normative commitment and weaker continuance commitment when they perceive a stronger presence of spirituality in the organization, the team and the job. Enjoyment at work and value alignment are the major predictors.

Finally, spirituality dimensions were cluster analyzed (Ward method, square Euclidian distance). After extracting seven clusters, these were compared in terms of spirituality and commitment. It was our goal to test whether the groups formed

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sense of community	4.2	1.0	–								
2. Alignment	3.9	1.1	0.61***	–							
3. Sense of contribution	4.4	1.0	0.35***	0.56****	–						
4. Enjoyment	4.7	1.0	0.57****	0.61****	0.49***	–					
5. Opportunities for inner life	3.9	1.4	0.26***	0.27***	0.16**	0.15**	–				
6. Affective commitment	5.1	1.2	0.51***	0.58***	0.44***	0.63***	0.10*	–			
7. Normative commitment	3.3	1.2	0.31***	0.39***	0.24***	0.37***	0.07	0.46***	–		
8. Continuance commitment	2.7	1.2	–0.08	–0.13**	–0.18***	–0.23***	–0.12*	–0.08	0.15**	–	
9. Age	33.0	9.1	–0.07	–0.03	0.10	0.02	–0.05	0.11*	0.04	0.25***	–
10. Tenure	6.1	7.1	–0.01	–0.02	0.03	–0.01	–0.04	0.13*	0.03	0.24***	0.68***

Notes: $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

Table III.
Means,
standard-deviations and
correlations

	Affective commitment	Normative commitment	Continuance commitment
First step			
Age	0.04	0.08	0.16*
Tenure	0.09	−0.05	0.14*
F	2.65	0.56	13.70***
Adjusted R^2 (per cent)	1	0	7
Second step			
Sense of community	0.14*	0.08	0.17
Alignment	0.25***	0.25***	0.08
Sense of contribution	0.06	−0.03	−0.15*
Enjoyment at work	0.38***	0.18**	−0.26***
Opportunities for inner life	−0.07	−0.04	−0.10*
F	48.27***	10.60***	9.3***
Adjusted R^2 (per cent)	49	16	14
Unique variance imputable to the spirituality dimensions (per cent)	48	16	7

Table IV.
Regression analysis: how spirituality explains organizational commitment

Notes: $^*p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$

according to spirituality scores were also different in terms of the organizational commitment variables. The findings are shown in Table V, and suggest an interesting trend: clusters characterized by higher spirituality levels denote higher affective and normative commitment and lower continuance commitment. Some subtleties can be detected, however, when the clusters are compared:

Group 1 includes people who perceive their organization as having a weak spiritual orientation. The consequence seems to be low affective and normative bonding. Instrumental attachment, although modest, is one of the highest among the seven clusters.

Group 2 is similar to the previous one, but differs because people report more opportunities for inner life. However, no positive effects seem to be obtained regarding affective and normative commitment.

Group 3 presents few organizational opportunities for inner life and tends to show higher spirituality scores compared with the previous groups. It seems to result in stronger affective and normative bonds.

Group 4 denotes, in general, higher spirituality scores than do the previous clusters, except regarding the sense of community, which is lower. Commitment scores are similar to those of the previous cluster.

Group 5 shows, in general, higher spirituality scores than does Group 4. The most notable difference concerns opportunities for inner life, whose scores are clearly higher. This may explain why affective commitment is stronger, and continuance commitment weaker.

Groups 6 and 7 present high-spirituality scores, which explain the highest affective and normative bonds, and the lowest continuance commitment. The difference between both clusters lies in the fact that Group 6 shows moderate scores on opportunities for inner life. This provides a possible explanation for the slightly higher score on continuance commitment.

	Group 1 Weak spirituality at work $n = 15$	Group 2 Weak spirituality, although moderate opportunities for inner life $n = 28$	Group 3 Moderate spirituality, although few opportunities for inner life and moderate enjoyment at work $n = 26$	Group 4 Moderate spirituality $n = 126$	Group 5 Moderate spirituality, although good opportunities for inner life $n = 36$	Group 6 Strong spirituality, although few opportunities for inner life $n = 74$	Group 7 Strong spirituality $n = 55$
Sense of community	2.7	2.9	4.4	3.8	4.3	5.0	5.2
Alignment	2.1	2.3	3.2	3.7	3.9	4.8	5.0
Sense of contribution	3.1	2.9	3.3	4.4	4.2	5.1	5.2
Enjoyment	2.7	3.3	4.5	4.6	4.9	5.4	5.3
Opportunities for inner life	1.6	4.6	2.1	3.5	5.3	3.3	5.6
Affective commit	3.8	3.5	4.7	4.9	5.1	5.9	5.9
Normative commit	2.0	2.3	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.8	3.8
Continuance commit	3.1	3.2	3.0	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.4

Table V.
Spirituality
configurations emerging
form cluster analysis

Discussion and conclusion

While the organizational behaviour literature has examined the emotional and cognitive facets of organizational life, little work has focused on the spiritual ones. According to Duchon and Plowman (2005), this lack of attention may be explained partly by two factors:

(1) On one hand, the nature of academic inquiry, which tends to favour behaviours easy to observe and measure and their presumed covariates (e.g. attitudes) upon something as elusive and idiosyncratic as spirituality.

(2) On the other hand, the dominating secular and a-spiritual approach to the study of organizational life.

Some authors have recently called for empirical studies that can support anecdotal evidence and theoretical assumptions of a positive relationship between workplace spirituality and performance. Our study contributed to tackling this challenge, showing empirically how the employees' perceptions of workplace spirituality predict one attitude that has received considerable research attention and fosters individual and organizational performance: employees' organizational commitment.

We concluded that our measuring instrument denotes adequate psychometric properties. The factorial structure is clear and the factors correspond, to a high degree, to dimensions identified by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) and subsequently investigated by Milliman *et al.* (2003). Cronbach αs are higher or close to the 0.70 level (Nunnally, 1978). Thus, the dimensions relate, either directly or indirectly, with the ten values present in the "values framework of workplace spirituality" proposed by Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004), which the authors considered as germane to organizational performance: benevolence, generativity, humanism, integrity, justice, mutuality, receptivity, respect, responsibility and trust.

Finally, our dimensions relate to the three core dimensions of spirituality in workplace suggested by Ashford and Pratt (2003) in a review of the literature. In their view, experiencing spirituality at work means that:

(1) The individual feels part of something bigger than him/herself.

(2) The self is integrated and is able to reconcile in an authentic way the several dimensions of the self at work.

(3) The individual feels him/herself to be on a developmental path toward self-actualization and the achievement of inner potential.

In summary, if we agree that workplace spirituality has to do with the respect for employees' inner life, the search for meaningful work in the context of a community, the employees' sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy, then our dimensions represent spiritual traits of the workplace climates.

As expected, the five spirituality dimensions predict significant variance of organizational commitment. As a whole, the results suggest that people denote higher affective and normative commitment and lower continuance commitment when they experience a sense of community in their work teams, feel that their values are aligned with those of the organization, consider that they do meaningful and helpful work, experience enjoyment at work and consider that the organization gives them

opportunities for their inner life. This may be an important finding, even from a purely functionalist perspective, in the sense that commitment has been consistently presented as an influential antecedent of organization and team performance.

Our results are congruent with theoretical and empirical evidence (Tischler *et al.*, 2002; Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Jurkiewicz and Giacalone, 2004; Gavin and Mason, 2004; Gull and Doh, 2004; Duchon and Plowman, 2005) suggesting that when people find meaning in their activities and, in general, feel involved in richly spiritual organizational climates, they become more healthy and happy, act in a more engaged and collaborative manner, apply their full potential to work and bring their entire selves to the organization. They thus become more productive over the long run compared with employees in organizations where spirituality is ignored or disrespected. Concomitantly, the study suggests that neglecting spirituality at work can lead employees to a higher continuance commitment and lower affective and normative commitment, thus generating fewer organizational citizenship behaviours, higher absenteeism and turnover, more neglecting behaviours and lower ability to satisfy customers (Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001), which in turn can lead to lower organizational performance.

Considering that organizational commitment relates to attitudes toward organizational change (Yousef, 2000; Madsen *et al.*, 2005), our study also pointed out that the effectiveness of change management may be enriched with a new or complementary perspective. As Mohamed *et al.* (2004, p. 101) asserted, "while traditional change models have debated whether change could be bottom-up or top-down, a spiritual perspective would suggest that change should be inside-out". If affectively and normatively committed employees tend to be more receptive to or ready for organizational change, and if spirituality promotes both commitment facets, then organizations and managers cannot neglect spirituality when preparing and carrying out organizational changes. On the other hand, managers and organizations need to be careful when making changes, because if changes impact spirituality in a negative way (e.g. clashing with the sense of community, harming the sense of meaning at work and/or causing a breach in the individual-organizational alignment), then the outcome can be decreasing affective and normative commitment, as well as a subsequent decrease of individuals' efforts and performance and a drop in organizational performance. A spiritually-rich workplace, on the contrary, may stimulate employees to form more positive perceptions of the organization and, thus, to appraise change more favourably and to achieve better adjustment through higher job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and organizational commitment, and lower absenteeism and turnover intentions (Martin *et al.*, 2005).

This study may be subject to criticism, not the least of which has to do with the fact that dependent and independent variables were collected from the same source, simultaneously. This can produce the risk of common method variance (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), leading to an inflation of statistical relationships. Future studies may use a double source method: with some individuals reporting their perceptions of organizational features, and others, their organizational commitment. A longitudinal research design may also be considered, with data collection of dependent and independent variables taking place at different times.

Another limitation derives from the fact that our study focuses on a restricted range of dependent variables, and does not include moderating and mediating variables.

Future studies may adopt other dependent variables, such as absenteeism, organizational citizenship behaviours, retaliatory behaviours, turnover, job satisfaction, health, psychological well-being, innovative behaviour and productivity. Variables such as trust, perceived organizational support, positive emotions and stress can act as mediating variables. For example, it is possible that perceptions of workplace spirituality influence organizational commitment through the mediating effect of positive emotions. Variables such as individual characteristics or leader behaviours can operate as moderating variables, in such a way that, for example, employees with different personality traits react differently to the same workplace climates. Finally, the improvement in the spirituality-at-work instrument should be pursued with the inclusion of at least three items in order to allow researchers to perform confirmatory factor analyses (Byrne, 1998).

Despite these limitations, the study contributes towards filling a gap in the organization and management literature. It suggests that organizations and leaders may have a crucial role in promoting organizational commitment and its consequences for individual and organizational performance (Fry, 2003; Fry *et al.*, 2005; Duchon and Plowman, 2005): they can do so by respecting the inner life of their employees, carrying out appropriate job designs and allocating meaningful tasks, enabling employees to express their "whole persons" creating a sense of joy, being fair and trustful, and building a sense of community.

Human beings are rational, but also emotional and spiritual. They have a mind, but also spiritual needs, and that spiritual development may be pivotal to mental development (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000, p. 136). As Pava (2003) argued, all human activities are spiritual to some degree. If human beings are, among other things, spiritual beings searching for a meaningful life and work, performed in a community context, then organizations that discourage the realization of these needs may be adversely affected. Therefore, we need to include spirituality in the management and research agendas. Spirituality is a deeply personal experience. People live it in very different ways, and nourish it from different sources. But, no charges of heresy can be made if we argue that most human beings like to perform meaningful work in the context of a community, hope that others respect their inner life, have a desire to work in an organization whose values are congruent with their own, and want to experience joy at work. If organizations allow them to get these "spiritual resources" and satisfy their "spiritual needs" it is likely that they bring their entire self (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual) to the organization, assume work as a mission more than a "job" feel that they are developing their full potential and become more affectively and normatively attached to their organizations. This will presumably result in individual and organizational benefits.

The spiritual turn seems to call for a paradigm change in management thinking. As Gull and Doh (2004) suggested, it is necessary that managers be able to examine their underlying system of orientation from an exclusive focus on economic and financial criteria, to an understanding of the firm as community of spirit. In short, to change the organization in the way that the "caterpillar transforms into a butterfly". In this kind of organization, ethical misconduct and its perverse consequences are less likely, people derive joy from their work, employees are more committed with the success of the company, and creativity is fostered – all resulting in higher organization competitiveness. Future research should thus compare the several effectiveness criteria of both bulldozers and butterflies.

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