# Spirituality, Spiritual Values Treatment, and Firm Performance

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## ABSTRAK

*The purpose of this research paper is to explore the understanding and definition of spirituality and spiritual values treatment towards individual within an organization context. There have been researches that established positive correlation between workplace spirituality and firm performance. However, many researches have been focused just on the concept and the correlation with firm performance rather than its implementation. As an intervention to an organization, spiritual values treatment has shown, at least anecdotally, to be a promising tool to improve firm performance. Perhaps such intervention as spiritual values treatment need to be further researched in to and empirically tested to establish a positive correlation with firm performance.*

Keywords: Workplace Spirituality, Spiritual Values Treatment, Organizational Development

## INTRODUCTION

As noted by Milliman et al. (2003), an important trend in business in the twenty-first century is a focus on employee spirituality in the workplace (Shellenbarger, 2000). Workplace spirituality has been the subject of many business magazines, such as the cover story for both Business Week (Conlin, 1999) and Fortune (Gunther, 2001). In addition, there have been many books written about spirituality at work (Neal, 1997). More recently, academics have begun investigating spirituality in business. This growing body of literature on workplace spirituality has offered a number of insights, but it also has been criticized for lacking rigor or critical thinking (Gibbons, 2000).

One of the challenging aspects about spirituality is that it seems to mean different things to different people, making it difficult to give a universal definition of this dynamic concept

(Milliman et al., 1999). Nevertheless, most would agree that it is based more on universal values rather than religion per se. Some of the basic ideas in spirituality of an individual cover: Who am I?; What is my purpose in life? What is it that I have to offer? (Block, 1993; Hawley, 1993; Neal, 1998). An active spiritual life can help individuals find meaning and purpose in their lives and live out deeply-held personal values (Milliman et al., 1999). These values often reflect a desire to make a difference and to help create a more meaningful world (Block, 1993). However, much of what is written focuses on the concept and philosophy of spirituality rather than its implementation (Milliman et al., 1999).

If you are looking for a single case to make the argument for spirituality, it is hard to beat Southwest Air. Southwest has one of the lowest labor costs per miles flown of any major airline; it regularly outpaces its competitors for achieving on-time arrivals and fewest customer complaints; and it has proven itself to be the most consistently profitable airline in the United States (Milliman et al, 2003). The evidence of spirituality and profits objectives, although limited, indicates that the two may be very compatible. Unfortunately many firms are not built like Southwest that are endowed with such spirituality from start-up.

And for that reason and what Milliman (1999) said about scarce spirituality implementation papers, this paper was initiated. The purpose of this paper is to explore the understanding and definition of spirituality and spiritual values treatment towards individual within firm that do not originally show the five characteristics (Strong Sense of Purpose, Focus on Individual Development, Trust and Respect, Humanistic Work Practices, Toleration of Employee Expression) evident in spiritual organizations (Robbins, 2007, p. 531). Also, the role of spirituality in firm performance is discussed. Even though Robbins (2007) argued that there are five characteristics within spiritual organizations, this paper will approach these subjects from spiritual values such as the faith relationship, honesty, service to others, and humility (Beazley, 1997).

## BACKGROUND

The many researches that have been conducted have established the correlation between organizational spirituality and firm performance (Benefiel, 2003; Quatro, 2002). Furthermore Benefiel noted that organizational spirituality has explored the presence of spirituality at work and the definition of spirituality, the research method, and finally the measurement tools (Beazly, 1997; Howden, 1992).

So what? Now that the definition, correlation, and measurement have been empirically established by previous researches (Benefiel, 2003), the next logical set of questions would be:

❑  How can a firm acquire or strengthen such spiritual values?
❑  Is there such treatment that a firm can apply itself with?
❑  How effective is such treatment?

From the literature review, there have not been many studies that involve specific spiritual values treatment upon a firm to improve firm performance. This is aligned with what Milliman (1999) noted that past studies have been focused on the concept and philosophy of spirituality rather than its implementation.

Workplace spirituality is a young area and many scholars and practitioners are still convincing themselves about the correlation between spirituality and firm performance and how to better operationalize it while the rest of business scene is still watching them closely whether it is a worthwhile pursue. There has been many evidence of spiritual values presence that correlated to firm performance (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). If the implementation aspect is not well addressed, the evolution of spirituality and more application in the business world would not prevail because it will remain descriptive and not prescriptive. Many firms that acknowledge the role of spirituality will need to explore ways to instill and embed the spiritual values into the firm and sustain it so that it becomes a competitive advantage.

This paper addresses the issue that firm performance can be elevated through individual spiritual values treatment. The outcome of this research will be expected to provide alternative approach to improve firm performance. I believe that if spirituality and its related topics are well researched and the findings supports the application in the business world as well as in other types of non-business organizations, it will be the corner stone of the change in business practices into incorporating spirituality into daily activities.

## WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

The application of spirituality in business and workplace most of the time is not associated to any religious tradition, but rather is based on their own personal values and philosophy (Cavanagh, 1999; Mitroff and Denton, 1999). de Klerk (2005) proposed to use one of the existing main elements of spirituality, meaning in life, as the construct. Spirituality is often described as a desire to find ultimate purpose in life, and the search for meaning in life is a part of one's journey towards spiritual awareness (Cavanagh, 1999) and further he argued that meaning in life appears to be the dominant element of spirituality.

Some business people are comfortable using the word "spirituality" in the work environment, as it is more generic and inclusive than "religion." Instead of emphasizing belief as religion does, the word spirituality emphasizes how values are applied and embodied. Other people are not comfortable with word spiritual and prefer to talk more

about values and ethics when describing the same things that others would call spiritual (McLaughlin, 2005). Key spiritual values embraced in a business context include integrity, honesty, accountability, quality, cooperation, service, intuition, trustworthiness, respect, and justice or Rokeach (1973) calls them terminal values and instrumental values.

Even though it has been slightly over a decade since spirituality in business trend started off, not until Collins (2001) work in *Good to Great* comes in as a wake up call to many firms around the world as well as the employees. It explains that there are three qualities that are associated with the firms of study which are Disciplined People, Disciplined Thought, and Disciplined Action. In Collins (2000) work, Wells Fargo's CEO, Dick Cooley, in the early 1970s, knew that banking industry would see a tremendous change but could not clearly define what was coming, so he kept hiring outstanding people that he could find even if there was no specific job in mind. It was not until 1983 when Wells Fargo started to consistently out-performed the market. Another case study was Circuit City CEO Alan Wurtzel. He answered "I don't know" when asked where is he taking the company to, instead he got a group of outstanding people in the company and never stop asking a lot of questions in trying to picture what is ahead. These two case studies reflect the humility and honesty in style of the CEOs that are representation of spiritual values shown in disciplined people, disciplined thought, and discipline action . This paper is inspired by Collins' findings about deeply held values.

The mapping of research in spirituality by Benefiel (2003) pointed out that there are evidences from past researches that spirituality correlates significantly with firm performance which is also supported by Quatro's (2002) research. Various measurement instruments have also been developed to measure the level of spirituality for individual. Existing measurement instruments are spiritual assessment scale developed separately by Howden (1992) and Beazley (1997).

There have been many studies to establish the correlation between spirituality and firm performance, and the results have been promising so far (Mitroff and Denton, 1999). However, the challenges still lie in the operationalization and implementation of spirituality (Quatro, 2002). Another important finding by Quatro (2002), besides organizational spiritual normativity significantly influences organizational performance, is that the implementation of commonly employed spiritually-related interventions, practices, and policies results in significantly higher Organizational Spiritual Normativity. We will discuss more on intervention in the next section. The interventions are such as; training with spiritual content, spiritually influenced vision/mission statements, Paid time- off for religious/community service activities, Work-group or department retreats, and self-managed work teams. But upon reviewing the literatures, there have been little published

studies of statistically supported correlation between the effect of spiritual values treatment and the spirituality in enhancing firm performance.

There are wide ranging definitions of spirituality and it starts from as simple as simply meaning happiness (Gavin and Mason, 2004) which derives from three key defining characteristics:
1. Freedom or the ability to make choices. Happy people are those who can think independently and are free to choose.
2. Knowledge. If workers are allowed to make important decisions they need to know about the business. Happiness requires information, knowledge and the ability to reason.
3. Virtue. Happiness requires moral character.

Another definition in Heaton et al. (2004) is that it can be seen from both; pure spirituality and applied spirituality. Where pure spirituality refers to a silent, unbounded, inner experience of pure self-awareness and applied spirituality refers to the more measurable outcomes of pure spirituality which are health, happiness, wisdom, success, and fulfillment.

In his famous work of "A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America", Mitroff and Denton (1999) identified spirituality by five distinct models as to how spirituality is practiced in the workplace:
1. The religion-based organization. The principle of hope is that everything is possible through God. The definition of spirituality is deeply felt and experienced participation in the universal mystery of Christ.
2. The evolutionary organization. The evolution is possible and profits will take care of themselves if one runs an environmental-friendly business. The definition of spirituality is that it is the ultimate purpose of a business and business has a soul.
3. The recovering organization. The principle of hope is that recovery is possible if one works the program and miracles will happen. The definition of spirituality is that there is a higher power and there is a force greater than ourselves that manages recovery.
4. The socially-responsible organization. The principle of hope is that if one markets out of a deep sense of values, then one will gain incredible customer loyalty and customers are hungry to identify with ethical and socially responsible organizations. The definition of spirituality is that business is a spiritual enterprise.
5. The values-based organization. The principle of hope is that if one runs a company with good family values, then one's employees and customers will respond in kind and economic success will follow. The definition of spirituality is that greater/higher consciousness in service of higher ethical ends.

Another concept of spirituality in workplace proposed by Burack (1999) are:
1.  Spiritual growth and advancement of the human experience involve mental growth - problem solving and individual learning will often be the main vehicles of individual development.
2.  Spiritual growth reflects the gratification of individual needs especially "belonging" and those of a higher order such as a sense of achievement. The individual's context for these is broad encompassing work-family connections and work-place settings.
3.  Spirituality in the workplace is communicated and reinforced through the institution's leaders, organizational culture, policies and work design among other factors. Sensitivity to and interest in the person (employee) must be common to all approaches.

As noted by de Klerk (2005), there are three main themes that seem to be prevalent in the definition of spirituality; meaning in life, a sense of unity with the universe, and the awareness of a "life force."

Out of all the definitions mentioned above, Ashar and Lane-Maher (2004) drew a common thread: Spirituality is an innate and universal search for transcendent meaning in one's life. Although it can be expressed in various ways, spirituality at work involves a desire to do purposeful work that serves others and to be part of a principled community. It also involves a yearning for connectedness and wholeness that can only be manifested when one is allowed to integrate his or her inner life with one's professional role in the service of a greater good.

We have covered the definition of spirituality in business and past researches already made the finding that organizational spiritual normativity significantly influences organizational performance. Now, coming back to the note from Milliman (1999) about the importance of implementation aspect of spirituality, we will discuss what sets of action may possibly impact an organization so that the organization become high in spirituality. In the next section, we will discuss about Quatro's (2002) findings about the implementation of commonly employed spiritually-related interventions, practices, and policies results in significantly higher Organizational Spiritual Normativity.

## WHAT IS SPIRITUAL VALUES TREATMENT?

In the last part of the last section we discussed about spiritual related interventions that significantly influence organizational spiritual normativity which in turn significantly influences organizational performance. In this section we will discuss about the interventions in organization and finish off with a specific technique of intervention. For the purpose of this paper, we will use the term treatment and intervention

interchangeably.

Improving the organization effectiveness to reach higher organizational performance fall into the category of a field called Organization Development. What is the definition of organization development then? Organization development is a process that applies behavioral science knowledge and practices to help organizations build the capacity to change and to achieve greater effectiveness, including increased financial performance and improved quality of work life (Cummings and Worley, 2005, p. 1). Organization development is directed at bringing about planned change to increase an organization's effectiveness and capability to change itself. Organizations can use planned change to solve problems, to learn from experience, to reframe shared perceptions, to adapt to external environmental changes, to improve performance, and to influence future changes (Cummings and Worley, 2005, p. 22).

One of the early fundamental models of planned change was provided by Kurt Lewin (1951), he viewed this change process as consisting of three steps; first is unfreezing which usually involves reducing those forces maintaining the organization's behavior at its present level, second is moving which shifts the behavior of the organization all the way to the individual to a new level, and the third step is refreezing which stabilizes the organization at a new state of equilibrium.

Lewin's planned change model suggests a general framework for planned change. The framework describes four basic activities, from entering and contracting, to diagnosing, to planning and implementing change, to evaluating and institutionalizing change (Cummings and Worley, 2005, p. 28).

To further zoom into the topic of treatment or intervention which is in the implementation stage, this is where the planning and the implementing of intervention or treatment occurs. There are four major types of interventions; the first one is human process interventions at the individual, group, and total system levels. The second is the interventions that modify an organization's structure and technology. The third is human resource interventions that seek to improve member performance and wellness. The fourth is strategic interventions that involve managing the organization's relationship to its external environment and the internal structure and process necessary to support a business strategy (Cummings and Worley, 2005, p. 30).

Out of the four major types of interventions, the one that applies to spiritual values treatment is the human process interventions which have to do with social processes occurring among organization members, such as communication, decision making,

leadership, and group dynamics. There are seven major techniques that affect from individual, to group, to organization (Cummings and Worley, 2005, p. 149-150):

1.  Coaching which covers often involves a one-on-one with managers and executives.
2.  Training and Development which focus on the competencies needed to perform work and includes traditional classroom lectures as well as simulations, action learning, computer-based or on-line training, and case studies.
3.  Process Consultation which focus on interpersonal relations and social dynamics occurring in work groups.
4.  Third-party Intervention which is another form of process consultation.
5.  Organization Confrontation Meeting which usually applied when organizations are experiencing stress and when management needs to organize resources for immediate problem solving.
6.  Intergroup Relations which is designed to improve interactions among different groups in organizations.
7.  Large-group Interventions which involve getting a broad variety of stakeholders into a large meeting to clarify important values, to develop new ways of working, to articulate a new vision for the organization, or to solve pressing organizational problems.

The specific intervention what we call spiritual values treatment takes the format of training which will be discussed in the next section.

## Spiritual Values Training

Training and development interventions are among the oldest strategies for organizational change and are a large practice area with growing importance in organizations (Chin and Benne, 1976). Why is spiritual values training in a category of organizational development interventions? It is because spiritual values training focus on changing the skills and knowledge of a group of organization members to improve their effectiveness or to build the capabilities of an organization system (Worley and Feyerherm, 2003).

The spiritual values training is called Emotional Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) Training which is a type of leadership character building training that empowers participants through the increase of participants' emotional and spiritual intelligence. The training is conducted for four days from eight o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon. It is conducted in a large classroom and typically with five hundred participants. To this date, it has trained in excess of 250,000 participants ever since it was first started in 2001.

The ESQ model in the figure below (Agustian, 2005) was founded and copyrighted by Ary Ginanjar Agustian who is also the trainer in the ESQ training. The model is derived from

the five pillars of Islam (testimony of faith, prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage) and the six pillars of Islamic Faith (believing in Allah, Angels, Books, Apostles, Judgment Day, Divine Decree of good and evil). Even though the model is derived from Islamic teaching, the training is open to all religions and faiths because the emphasis of the whole training is on the universality of the spiritual values.

The model of the training consists of three major parts. The first part is the most inner circle is the spiritual dimension or the enlightened area. This is the spiritual values part of the training which consists of honesty, responsibility, visionary, discipline, cooperation, just, and service to others. These spiritual values are the abbreviated version of the original ninety-nine values which are derived from the ninety nine names of Allah. This first part is meant to awaken the spiritual intelligence as the generator of the purest human inner voice. In the beginning part of the training, all participants will go through sessions to clear the mind and heart of impurities called the zero mind process.
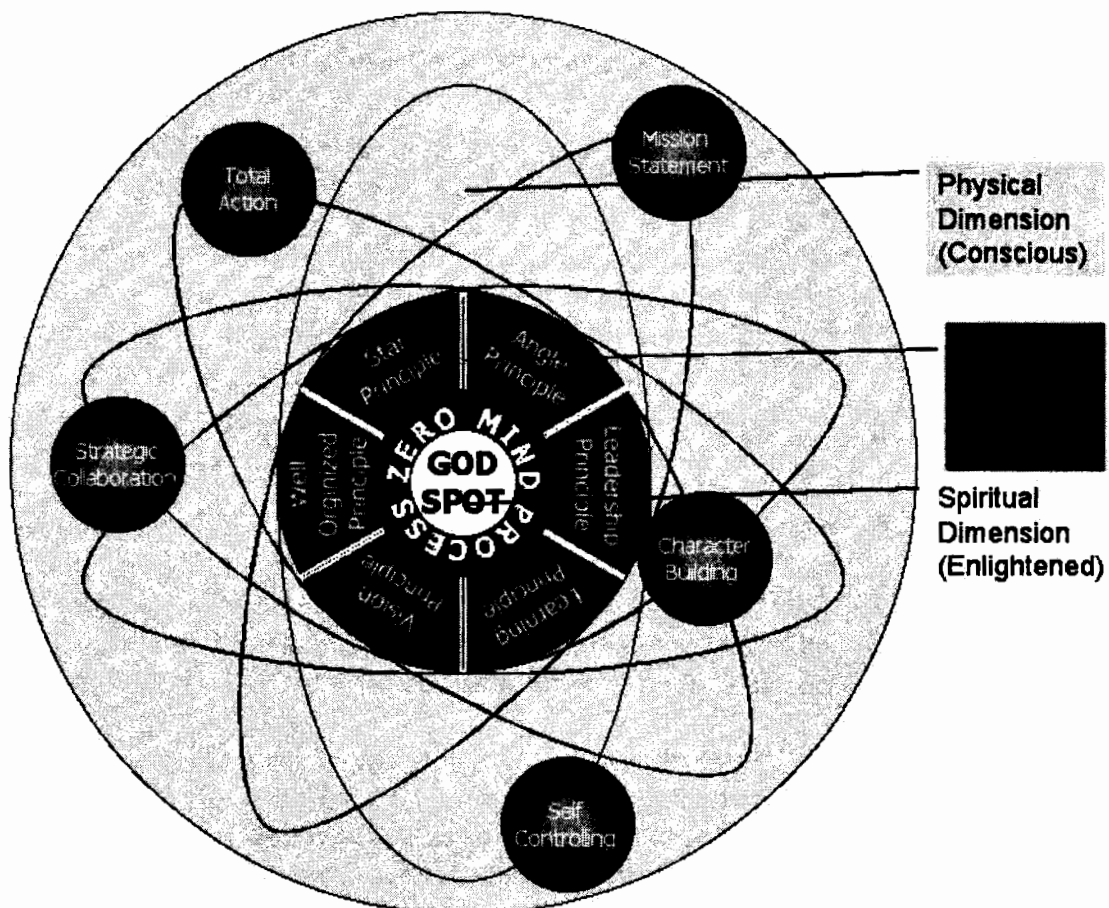
The second part of the model is the emotional dimension or the subconscious area. The participants will be shown how to build emotional intelligence systematically based on the six pillars of Islamic faith, starting from the building of Star Principle, Angel Principle, Leadership Principle, Learning Principle, Vision Principle, and Well Organized Principle. This part is the mental building process.

The last part of the training is the physical dimension or the conscious area. This is the physical part to strengthen the mind which will be carried out consecutively and systematically based on the five pillars of Islam. It starts from Mission Statement, continuous and intensive Character Building, Self Control, Strategic Collaboration, and ends with Total Action. The first three emphasizes on the personal strength while the last two emphasizes on the social strength of the individuals.

The delivery methods of the training include games, experiential learning, case studies, mini lectures, discussions, simulations, and role-play. But the most distinguishing method of this particular training is the extensive use of multimedia, sound systems, and lighting systems. It is packaged and staged equivalent to that of a musical play. The classroom typically has five large screens and equipped with 40,000 watts of sound systems. All these effects are meant to deliver close to real life experience to the participants during the experiential learning sessions.

## DISCUSSIONS

Although this particular training model as well as the method has not been empirically proven to increase organizational spiritual normativity, there have been anecdotal evidences of increased organizational performance upon completing this training. This is the fastest growing and biggest training program to date. Just to give an illustration of the growth, nowadays the trainings are held four times a month and are held every month in the major cities in Indonesia with average participants of 200 per training class.

Despite the fact that so far only non-empirical evidences are present and only one type of training observed, Nevertheless, a phenomena such as this ESQ training would justify a longitudinal study on the effects of spiritual values training on the actual behavior of the participants and eventually their organization behavior. Many determinants may still need to be taken into account in future research, determinant such as the context of the organization itself.

As noted by Quatro (2002), spiritual related interventions influence significantly the organizational spiritual normativity, the spiritual values treatment such as ESQ training certainly support the above finding. However, as discussed above, this still need to be

empirically researched to determine whether the spiritual values are manifested in the participants after the training. In another words, currently there are empirical supports that spirituality is positively related to organizational performance and there are empirical supports that training activity is positively related to organizational performance, but there is still little empirical support of spiritual values training that is positively related to organizational performance.

As mentioned earlier about the need to explore other determinants that may accompany spiritual values training for it to be positively related to organizational performance, there are other variables other than the spiritual values that can be researched, this include the model and the method of delivery itself, sustainability of the acquired values, whether or not a retraining need to be administered, would this training be classified as first level or advance level, could this model be extended for other techniques of human process intervention.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction about the intention of writing this paper which is to bring such awareness about spiritual values treatment, this paper also invites researchers and practitioners to engage in a more systematic approach into establishing the positive relationship between spiritual values training and organizational performance through individual as well as concerted researches.

Spiritual values have been taught from early age by our parents, which include among other things: being honest, being humble, and being helpful toward others. Along the lines of growing up and being immersed in routine activities, these values are strengthened, diminished, or even gone from oneself. Spiritual values intervention is intended to rediscover, restore, and strengthen these values. This intervention would occur over and over throughout ones life because values that are not solidly internalized will diminish or even disappear from ones value system. Hence, it is clear that such values treatment would benefit individual as well as organization eventually.

Of course all of the questions raised in the last part of the discussion section and other possible accompanying variables need to be empirically studied. The result of this study, when proven to have significant influence, could very well support the theory of spirituality in the workplace and its role in organizational performance.

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