



# Teaching the un-teachable: storytelling and meditation in workplace spirituality courses

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to review the implementation of two strategies that are actually un-teachable yet highly effective in higher education: meditation and storytelling.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Specifically focussing on workplace spirituality as a movement from corporate workers, and consequently, also a teaching topic in management education, the paper first indicates some problems faced in today's world, and relates these to the need for facilitating college courses in more compelling and comprehensive ways.

**Findings** – Spirituality and spiritual concepts can involve emotional and other non-cognitive experiences which cannot be taught using traditional teaching approaches such as reading and lecture. Specific approaches, such as meditation and storytelling are useful for teaching spirituality and spiritual concepts in a business school classroom setting. These two strategies provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences and to become more self-aware.

**Practical implications** – Using the practical strategies discussed in this paper in management classes turns out to be a positive experience for both the course facilitators and the students.

**Originality/value** – Reflecting on the overhaul attempts of management education in universities, even those with the prestige of Harvard and Stanford, the authors discuss some interesting strategies that can help management educators take their course experiences and the results attained to the next level.

**Keywords** Action learning, Workplace spirituality, Value added, Storytelling, Meditation, Vipassana, Teaching higher education, Adult education

**Paper type** General review

## Workplace spirituality: a brief overview

Over the past two decades, the growth of workplace spirituality as a movement, phenomenon, or study topic has happened at a steady pace (Poole, 2009; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Benefiel, 2003, 2007; Marques *et al.*, 2007; Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). More than 30 MBA programs now offer courses on this issue. Signs of this augmented concern about corporate connectedness have been manifested in boardrooms, company lunchrooms, business conferences, management newsletters, management consulting firms, and business schools. The recent economic turmoil and embarrassing corporate collapses have caused organizations to better realize the futility of achieving financial success at the cost of humanistic values. Employees are expecting to get something more than just employment from the workplace. At the beginning of the millennium, organizations have been reflecting upon discovering ways to help employees balance work and family, and to create conditions wherein each person can realize his/her potential while fulfilling the requirements of the job. As the Dalai Lama has noted, "[...] spirituality is a human journey into our internal resources, with the aim of understanding who we are in the deepest sense [...] and of discovering



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how to live according to the highest possible ideal. This too is the union of wisdom and compassion.”

Work is increasingly seen as an important element in fulfilling one’s destiny. Autry (1994) asserted, “Work can provide the opportunity for spiritual and personal, as well as financial, growth. If it doesn’t, we are wasting far too much of our lives on it” (p. 117). Recent years have brought Autry’s perspective more and more to the forefront, as corporations and corporate leaders kept derailing in their selfish efforts for short-term profits and hit-and-run strategies. In fact, workplace spirituality can be attributed to a multitude of reasons. Social scientists cite the following reasons:

- baby-boomers’ mid-life soul-searching;
- arrival of the new millennium;
- anxiety caused by corporate downsizing and restructuring;
- search for meaning through work;
- quest for stability in an unstable world;
- movement toward more holistic living;
- greater influx of women in the workplace; and
- developed countries’ progression from belly needs to brain needs.

While some critics believe that spirituality in the workplace is a passing fad just like its predecessors such as TQM and reengineering, others disagree with equally strong motives that this movement, even though not considered in the same way by all its proponents, is here to stay. Gotsis and Kortezi, for instance, observe that “there are good reasons to believe that workplace spirituality is more than an impermanent trend; on the contrary, the concept carries a much more substantial meaning and its potential contribution to a more rounded understanding of human work, of the workplace and of the organizational reality worthy of examination” (p. 575).

Although the interest in workplace spirituality has been growing over the past two decades, “the field is [still] full of obscurity and imprecision for the researcher, the practitioner, the organizational analyst and whoever attempts to systematically approach this relatively new inquiry field”. While there is no commonly agreed upon definition of spirituality till date, a review of most frequently cited definitions of workplace spirituality reveal the following key components: meaning and purpose in life, sense of interconnectedness and belonging, and personal joy and fulfillment (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000; Marques *et al.*, 2005, 2007; Fry, 2003; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Past research suggests that increased employee commitment strengthens motivation and reduces turnover (cited in Fry, 2003, p. 721). Although it is widely acknowledged that workplaces that nourish their employees’ spirits gain increased commitment and that attention paid to holistic human flourishing in the workplace creates increased engagement and potential for greater performance, “the jury remains out about the bottom-line relevance of organizational spirituality” (Poole, 2009, p. 577). Poole cites several studies such as by Gallup, NOP, the Work Foundation, and Roffey Park that show that the general level of engagement in most workplaces borders at a staggeringly low 20 percent. According to him, “any company able to lift these levels by even a percentage point will release additional resource and capacity from their human assets” (p. 587).

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Fry (2003), in presenting an initial theory of spiritual leadership, concludes that workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership can be viewed as constructs that are in the initial concept/elaboration stage of development. He views spiritual leadership as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for organizations to be successful in today's highly unpredictable internet-driven environment. Fry (2003, p. 712) presents a model of spiritual leadership that fosters intrinsic motivation through vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love. At the heart of this model is the practice of altruistic love which is described as unconditional, selfless, caring concern for both self and others.

It must be noted that garnering a sense of kindness and compassion has benefits for both the practitioner as well as the recipient. Recently, positive psychology has confirmed the emotional and health benefits of altruistic love. Empirical research by Lyubomirsky and her colleagues has shown that we can maximize our well-being as much as 40 percent by intentionally engaging in activities such as expressing gratitude, doing random acts of kindness, and creating a sense of optimism (Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Positive psychology focusses on character, flourishing, and fulfillment. It aims to explore how to live a happy and fulfilling life, how to define and develop human strengths, and how to build character and resilience. Fostering this mindset has added advantage in building a spiritual workplace.

### **The need to reconsider what and how we teach**

While, as mentioned above, the spirituality movement has been ongoing since the early 1990s, it seems that this trend is now becoming serious business in prominent business schools such as Harvard and Wharton. As a result of the past economic disruption, which many globally attributed to the ways business schools were preparing business leaders to perform, the Deans of Harvard and Wharton have, each for themselves, been working on rigorous revisions of their curricula.

Middleton and Light (2011) report that Harvard has recently announced a complete revamp of its MBA program to include more ethics and teamwork. Korn (2011) discusses similar plans at Wharton and states that Wharton's Dean, Thomas Robertson, is promoting more soft skills in his business programs, while he is also encouraging his business students to explore the globe and gain familiarity with different cultures and mindsets.

While these efforts are not referred to as related to workplace spirituality, it is obvious to those who have actively been participating in advocacy of this trend that there is an elevated awareness at play, very much in line with the spirit-at-work mindset, resulting in all these changes. Moreover, it is not just Harvard and Wharton that have understood the message. A brief search on Google shows us that different schools are now offering conscious MBA's, ethical MBA's, and socially responsible MBA's in their efforts to restore the reputation of business practices in the eyes of stakeholders.

This paper will discuss the essence of facilitating workplace spirituality in higher education with a business focus:

- (1) The authors will first briefly familiarize the reader with some flaws in the current situation, along with the importance of facilitating courses in a more compelling and comprehensive manner than before.
- (2) Subsequently, the authors will focus in on some specifics around teaching workplace spirituality, whereby they will briefly discuss some of their experiences from teaching this course at the MBA level.

- (3) In the third section, a closer look will be presented on the two strategies which this paper advocates for teaching in general, and for facilitating courses on workplace spirituality specifically. These two strategies are meditation and storytelling, both ancient approaches that have not yet had the privilege of being widely applied in higher education learning environments.
- (4) Finally, the authors will bring it all together with some reflections, conclusions, and recommendations.

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### **The problem with the status quo**

Thus far, the majority of business schools have implemented curricula that barely considered any systematic pattern toward including and maintaining purpose and meaning, values, and empathy. Regardless of the clear signals from contemporary college students, the emphasis remained throughout the past decade on quick fixes and massive revenues in the shortest timeframe. The spirit of the twentieth century and its main driver, the industrial revolution, turned out to be a tenacious one for many reasons, financial ones not in the least. Yet, as dissatisfaction rates kept soaring and the financial market finally collapsed, the reality finally sunk in that we were in a massive transition, and that the needs of today's and future generations were different from those of past ones.

A disturbing mismatch exists between what modern society needs of higher education and what it receives, according to the Higher Expectations Study (The Johnson Foundation Inc, 1993). A knowledge-based, globally interconnected society requires more than workplace competence. It requires individuals whose lives demonstrate the value of integrity, diversity, compassion, and personal responsibility. In short, in addition to competence, it requires character. The recent corporate scandals and global economic disruption provide an ample testimony that we cannot afford to leave the characters of our business students to chance. Whether described in the works of Plato, Sartre, Krishnamurti, Confucius, Gandhi, or Weil, responsible action requires the alignment of attitude, behavior, and cognition (ABCs). These are the same ABCs that Greater Expectations (2002) seeks to align to create informed, intentional, empowered, and responsible learners.

#### *Teaching from a mentoring perspective*

In 2010 McKeage, Tischler, Biberman, and Rosencrance discussed strategies at their business school about mentoring programs for students, and concluded that, while most mentoring models are geared toward a formal process of guiding, much of the actual mentoring happens informally. McKeage *et al.* (2010) found that there are two specific goals when mentoring is implemented: instrumental development and psychosocial development. The first one, which is the most known and implemented form, pertains to career development and progress. The second focusses on personal transformation, instigating a longitudinal shift in perspectives, dreams and awareness of the mentee (Boyatzis, 2007). Boyatzis, who has done significant research on the topics of mindfulness and awareness, calls for a deeper and more massive review of the mentoring process with inclusion of self-reflection for those that are being mentored, so that their self-awareness levels can increase. McKeage *et al.* (2010) mention meditation as an important strategy toward the attainment of greater self-awareness.

### **Teaching workplace spirituality to MBA students**

As course facilitators who have studied and written about workplace spirituality extensively in the past years, the authors of this paper intended to enhance students'

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awareness about this topic by helping them explore differences between organizations that were considered in line with the spiritual mindset and those that were not. It was our intention to get students to the point of serious contemplation about the requirements of being a leader in organizations structured around the values of transparency, contribution, connectivity, respect, dignity, integrity, and a caring concern for the welfare of their employees. We also intended to expose our students to some critical reflective, awareness-enhancing questions, such as, What is the purpose of my lifework? What am I doing here? What is going to be my legacy?

*Reported efforts of workplace spirituality teaching*

There have been various learning formats offered in the past years that link the learning process to a more spiritual approach in the work environment. Freed (2005) presented a “model for creating a total quality environment (TQE) for learning in which everyone is considered a learner” (p. 60). Interestingly, this model mirrored principles derived from literature of areas that are crucial to the establishment of a spiritual workplace. Some of these principles were “continuous improvement, leadership, learning, learning organizations, and spirituality” (Freed, 2005, p. 60). The way this learning experience was constructed was to familiarize the students with the skill set that is considered necessary in a constructive and rewarding work environment.

In his disclosure of the impact, growing frequency, and identified necessity of spirituality courses in Business Schools, Alsop (2005) also reviews Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business, where in an MBA. course is taught titled “The business world: moral and spiritual inquiry through literature” (p. B.6). Students read such works as Hermann Hesse’s “Siddhartha” and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby,” and “share their personal dreams and failures with each other” (p. B.6). Alsop then focusses his view on the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, where a similar course is taught to challenge students “to look beyond prestige and salary and ask whether a potential employer is a good fit morally and spiritually” (p. B.6).

Vega (2002) includes the aspect of adding humanity to the bottom line when she states, “Measurement of the traditional bottom line leaves room for social responsibility and a sense of spirituality if we include the theme of connection in the discussion” (p. 5). Vega continues, “Spirituality in the workplace suggests the combination of profitability with concern for the common good” (p. 5).

The above examples are merely a small component of the numerous writings in existence about the essence of teaching workplace fulfillment related topics whether labeled spirituality in the workplace or not – into the classroom. In his review of a business leadership course entailing the aspect of spirit at work, Pielstick (2005), for instance, reminds readers that “Students, as prospective leaders, need to understand issues of reasonable accommodation, religious holidays, display of religious objects, religious practices at work, and so forth” (p. 153). King-Kauanui (2004) also refers to the regular occurrence of spirituality in the workplace in the business course syllabi these days. This author further presents an interesting solution as to how spirituality at work can be achieved. She hereby introduces her findings from a survey held among business students at two universities and asserts that the majority of these students perceive being an entrepreneur as the most successful way to implement spirituality at work, because entrepreneurs usually choose the kind of activity they like, and therefore have a solid purpose to make it succeed.

The same trend can be observed by looking at the theme of various presentations in most business conferences these days. A few years ago, one of the authors of this paper

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attended an annual World Business Academy conference in Santa Barbara, California. Every other session was either on spirit at work or on transforming the workplace. Various presenters talked about sustainability in terms of “triple bottom line” comprising people, planet, and profitability. It was indicated that there are at least 600 corporations worldwide that use this triple bottom-line accountability as a part of their auditing standards. Patricia Aburdene, author of *Megatrends 2010*, stated in her presentation that spirit at work could be considered the most important trend to emerge in the twenty-first century.

*Authors' course implementations of workplace spirituality*

In 2005, two of the authors of this paper collaborated on a course titled “Spirituality in the workplace,” with the intention to prepare their students in the reality of the modern workplace. A highly participative strategy was implemented, whereby students were not restricted in their perception of spirituality in the workplace. The following definition of workplace spirituality was used as a working guideline:

Spirituality in the workplace is an experience of interconnectedness, shared by all those involved in a work process, initially triggered by the awareness that each is individually driven by an inner power, which raises and maintains his or her sense of honesty, creativeness, proactivity, kindness, dependability, confidence, and courage; consequently leading to the collective creation of an aesthetically motivational environment characterized by a sense of purpose, high ethical standards, acceptance, peace, trust, respect, understanding, appreciation, care, involvement, helpfulness, encouragement, achievement, and perspective, thus establishing an atmosphere of enhanced team performance and overall harmony, and ultimately guiding the organization to become a leader in its industry and community, through its exudation of fairness, cooperativeness, vision, responsibility, charity, creativity, high productivity, and accomplishment (Marques *et al.*, 2005).

The course was set up in a seven-week evening format, consisting of class meetings of only once a week, yet with the requirement of intense student-engagement in self- or group study outside the class meetings. The literature reviewed in this course consisted of assigned reading and collective reviewing of two main books, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace*, by Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth A. Denton; and *The Soul of a Business: Managing for Profit and the Common Good*, by Tom Chappell. Aside from these two books, multiple other readings were reviewed, such as *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, by Viktor A. Frankl, *The Tao of Leadership*, by John Heider, *If Aristotle Ran General Motors: Four Timeless Virtues and the New Soul of Business*, by Tom Morris, and *Awakening the Corporate Soul: Four Paths to Unleash the Power of People at Work*, by Eric Klein. Aside from the book readings, which were shared in various presentation formats throughout the course, a pre-selected set of articles on spirituality in the workplace was also assigned for critiquing purposes.

The major thrust throughout the course consisted of two main assignments for the participants:

- (1) Selecting, and subsequently reviewing and critiquing, an existing business entity on its perceived level of compliance with workplace spirituality. In this section, some well-known conscious business performers such as the SAS Institute, IKEA, Medtronic, the Dell Corporation, Wells Fargo, Southwest Airlines.
- (2) Developing a report entailing the main components of a spiritually oriented organization.

It was predominantly the latter of the above-described assignments, which also served as the student's final project in this course, which turned out to be the most compelling and memorable exercise of the course. Many students engaged in some form of storytelling, and shaped their stories either as role plays, letters to the children or to a dear friend, or simply narratives.

During the summer of 2009, the same two instructors collaborated in an updated version of the above-described course, again to a group of working professionals who self-selected to enroll in the course. To garner a greater sense of spirituality in the workplace, the course, once again structured in the workshop format, entailed a broader scope of learning strategies and resources than the previous one, including professional books, journal articles, audio and video clips, first-hand case studies, reflection papers and exercises, role plays, simulation projects, storytelling, and summative concept papers. The resources used in this course included professional books such as *Spirituality in the Workplace: What it is, Why it matters, How to make it work for you* (Marques et al., 2007), *Workplace and Spirituality: New Perspectives on Research and Practice* (Marques et al., 2009), *Man's Search for Meaning, Tao of Leadership*, and *Love and Profit: A Manager's Search for Meaning*. In addition to the books, multiple journal articles were reviewed for in-class dialogue, while a variety of short video clips were reviewed on topics such as emotional intelligence, social entrepreneurship, conscious capitalism, servant leadership, sustainable enterprises, wisdom economies, work life balance, corporate stewardship and the like. To ensure optimal student interest, a range of pedagogical tools such as self-reflective critiques, critical concept papers, and company case studies were employed to create an interactive mosaic of learning moments. Topics such as spirituality vs religion, work as a spiritual practice, personal mission statement, holistic human flourishing, universally acknowledged spiritual values, and ethics vs spirituality were explored at length to inform the discussions in the class.

As with the previously reported course, each participant was requested to conduct a spiritual audit on a corporation of their own choice. The intention of the spiritual audits was to focus on the corporation's behavior in light of the dialogues, readings, and lectures provided earlier in the course. Some interesting reports were presented on companies such as:

- Trader Joe, a company that primarily focusses on the well-being of the customer and purchases directly from suppliers where possible.
- Costco, which is often mentioned as the main competitor of Wal-Mart, but manages to remain free of criticism, due to its approach of respect and generosity to customers as well as employees.
- Revolution Foods, a fairly new company that epitomizes twenty-first century corporate thinking by incorporating a social entrepreneurial mindset. This company aims to provide all children access to nutritious, tasty food, in order to support the development of healthy minds and bodies.
- Zappos, a Las Vegas based e-commerce company, which sees itself as an online service company that happens to sell shoes, handbags, clothing, eyewear, watches, and accessories. According to Zappo's Chairman, CFO and COO, Alfred Lin, "you can't have happy customers without having happy employees" (Abel, 2009, p. 16).
- Google, where employees are encouraged to work on their own projects. Maccoby (2009) mentions Google founders Brin and Page's philosophy, "Do no

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harm,” whereby he underscores that moral reasoning entails more than merely following rules.

- IKEA, a company of which the success rate can be directly linked to responsibility of the all its stakeholder groups. IKEA is very resolute on corporate social responsibility (CSR), and environmental awareness. Lindgreen *et al.* (2009) consider IKEA, along with the body shop, spear headers when it comes to CSR.

Two main areas were highlighted that underscored these companies’ alignment with spiritual thinking: focus on employees and focus on values. In the dealings with employees, well-being, advancement, and satisfaction were the main drivers to be detected, while in the value area cost awareness, customer satisfaction, and environmental awareness seemed to prevail. Consistently, the emphasis on these two main areas resulted in performance excellence and growth.

### **Strategies for teaching the un-teachable in workplace spirituality courses**

In the following section, a closer look will be presented on the two strategies which this paper advocates for teaching in general, and for facilitating courses and other professional gatherings on workplace spirituality specifically – namely, meditation and storytelling. First, the strategy of meditation will be reviewed.

In this sub-section the concept of guided meditation will be emphasized, since this seems to be the most appropriate form of meditation in settings with individuals who have never meditated before. Meditation is one of the un-teachable aspects that can only be beneficial to those who decide to seriously engage in it and explore possibilities for self-growth after initial in-class sittings.

#### *The growing prominence of meditation in the workplace*

Meditation has been around for many centuries. Different forms of meditation have been linked to different religions, philosophies, and eras. Most recently, we can recall the 1960s and the flower-power era, in which meditation was considered a part of being free-spirited and untainted by societal pressure. The concept of meditation has always been considered a marvel to human beings. Many forms of meditation exist, varying from mantra meditation to guided meditations, deriving from traditions as wide and diverse as the globe. Each form of meditation has, to a higher or lesser degree, proven itself for a selected group of practitioners. Meditation has been associated with yoga, with healing practices, with hypnosis, and many other similar practices.

As the exposure to alternative ways of performing increases, receptiveness to alternative ways expands, and practices that were previously considered pure eastern or western become global. Meditation is one of those expanding practices. Though applied by selected groups in the western world for centuries, meditation is increasingly accepted in western environments, particularly now that the realization sinks in that meditation does not necessarily have anything to do with renounce one’s faith for another. In his overview of spiritual practices in today’s work environments, Karakas (2010) mentions, “holding Bible, Quran, or Torah study groups; forming voluntary prayer groups; having ‘higher power lunches’; forming interfaith dialog groups; organizing reflection sessions; offering meditation exercises; and starting servant leadership development programs” (p. 90). Karakas (2010) underscores that leaders and managers also increasingly engage in meditation practices, reflective exercises, wellness programs, sport events, fitness gatherings, and the like, in order to enhance their capability to cope with the stress and insecurity they encounter at work.



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In their efforts to distill leadership lessons for contemporary leaders from Kautilya's *The Arthashastra* one of India's oldest books on statecraft and economics, Jain and Mukherji (2009) find that a daily inclusion of one and a half hour of meditation, preferably before sunrise, can make a tremendously positive difference in the life of a leader.

Reviewing the strategies to achieve and maintain self-actualization in order to meet the needs of business, industry and society for "more effective and enlightened leaders" (p. 872), Harung *et al.* (2009) establish, "Meditation practices may provide a means to cultivate peak experiences and appear to be common among high performing leaders" (p. 887). Harung *et al.* (2009) conclude that 85 percent of the leaders they reviewed were meditators, of which 50 percent meditated daily, and 35 percent semi-regularly. Coates (2009) even reviews two of the most powerful "CEOs" of recent times, Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama of the US, which she refers to as "the world's largest organization" (p. 44), and explains that they turn to the spiritual teachings in their faith when dealing with difficult situations. Coates (2009) continues, "The world's greatest religions all advise us to engage in self-reflection as a way to gain mastery over the self and its propensity to let emotions cloud reasoning. Mind focussing techniques such as meditation are recommended" (p. 44).

Marques and Dhiman (2009) present meditation as a strong means to enhance "workplace well-being through improved communications, efficient meetings, optimum performance, better decisions, and greater understanding" (p. 84) – referring mainly to Vipassana or insight meditation without specific mention of problem solving or team practice.

In addition to the above advocacies for meditation in organizational practices, there are many other claims about the advantages of this practices. La Forge (2004) affirms that meditation can cultivate moral imagination; Wenk-Sormaz declares that meditation can help reduce habitual responding; and other studies have found that meditation can even assist in healing efforts, as it can sort improvements in cognitive processes and affect in patients with past depression (Ramel *et al.*, 2004), and symptom stress reduction in transplant patients (Gross *et al.*, 2009).

Thus, while the authors cited above, along with numerous others, refer to religion, spirituality, and meditation as practices to de-stress and perform better in leadership, or even heal more effectively in situations of illness, none of them relate meditation directly to problem solving options.

There are some studies that approach the concept discussed in this paper to a limited extent. McNeil and Ragins (2005), for instance, do make a reference to meditation in groups as a non-traditional bonding opportunity, yet their focus lies in discusses strategies and techniques for greater success in marketing, and not on problem solving for managers. Leonard and Biberman (2007), on the other hand, do describe and compare various theoretical models of decision making, and thereby mention reflective practices, as implemented in an MBA course from André Delbecq, but do not specifically refer to meditation in this regard.

As can be derived from the section above, there are many non-sectarian meditation techniques in use, which focus on the sole purpose to enhance mindfulness and awareness and bring about greater internal tranquility in an increasingly fast-paced world. In a study about the use of contemplative practices in workplaces, Duerr (2004) found enough interest expressed by the workforce members she interviewed to suggest the idea of the contemplative organization, which she describes as "an organization that uses contemplative awareness as an organizing principle for the workplace" (p. 49). Duerr noted, however, that her findings might have to be tested before

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considering generalizing them, because the for-profit corporations were underrepresented in her sample.

One way to realize the increasing prominence of meditation in western management practices is to review the annually increasing numbers of professional development workshops and presentations in major business and management conferences, and the increasing numbers of meditation rooms, labeled in many ways (silent rooms, relax rooms, revival rooms, to name a few), with the purpose of enabling workers to rejuvenate through their favorite practice, whether this be prayer, meditation, or simple silent contemplation, during stressful workdays.

*Meditation in workplace spirituality courses.* Guided meditation in a workplace spirituality course typically begins with relaxation of mind and body, and subsequently guides the individual into specific experiences. The meditation process can help students in focussing, not only on their current requirements, but also on future goals. In addition, it can help them get rid of anxiety. Through the progressive relaxation, students arrive at a relaxed mental state in which their distractions are reduced and their imagination can flow more freely. Based on a specific set of questions, students are gently encouraged to imagine themselves in new ways than usual. It speaks for itself that guided meditations work better for some students than for others, based on their readiness, willingness, and general mental state of being.

Once students are brought into a quiet mindset with eyes closed, they are asked to imagine that they can talk with an expert in this kind of work and that they can ask the expert any three questions they wish. They may think of their questions, ask each question – one at a time – and wait for an answer.

When the guided meditation is over, the students are asked to report either verbally or in written form to share their experiences. The guided meditation process lasts about 40 minutes, with a core of 15-20 minutes for the meditation itself, and the rest of the time for recording and sharing of findings.

*Meditation in professional settings – a brief look at vipassana.* In conference and seminar settings, the authors have utilized vipassana meditation (Goenka, 2001) multiple times. The responses have, without exception, been highly rewarding. Goenka stresses that the practice of vipassana contributes to becoming a better human being, and generating a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere around oneself and others. Goenka (2006) makes a strong statement for vipassana as a useful instrument toward higher consciousness of people from all religions, cultures, and backgrounds.

In the professional vipassana sessions, participants are first informed about the phenomenon of vipassana, its history and workings, and are subsequently guided in a brief exercise in which they were invited to focus on their breathing and gently redirect their mind to this focus point if they became aware of its wandering.

Guided by S.N. Goenka's (2008) world famous vipassana lectures, and tapping from their own experiences during vipassana courses, the facilitators subsequently guide the participants through a brief body scan, examining with their mind all facets of their body, from the top of their skull to their toes and back. The facilitators explain the reasons for scanning the body as an insight activity that can enhance the awareness of the body and all its physical and psychological manifestations, such as its feelings of pain and pleasure and its continuous cycle of arising and passing sensations.

The participants are invited to use their calm, collected minds to delve deeper into their emotions, feelings, and sensations to get a glimpse into the nature of the reality experienced in that very moment.

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Prior to the ending of the meditative phase, the facilitators invite the participants to quietly concentrate on possible uses of this technique in management practices. After 20 minutes of meditation session, the participants are asked to gently redirect their awareness to rise up to the normal waking state.

Thereafter, they are asked to form small groups to discuss their experiences and to contemplate on the usefulness of this practice in their personal and professional lives.

Teams usually agree on the value of developing greater focus at work when engaging in vipassana meditation on a regular basis. They emphasize potential advantages such as greater emotional intelligence and less negative emotions, such as stress and other psychosomatic symptoms.

Participants also list some points of caution, among which:

- becoming overly sensitive, which may reduce one's capable of coping in an indifferent work environment;
- discontinuation of the meditation practice by those who consider it too time consuming in their daily patterns and behaviors; and
- discontinuation of long exhibited behaviors and practices due to enhanced awareness within the worker, leading him or her to increasingly question the meaning of several of his or her activities.

*The revival of storytelling in workplace spirituality courses:*

Once upon a time a peasant had a horse. This horse ran away, so the peasant's neighbors came to console him for his bad luck. He answered: "Maybe."

The day after, the horse came back, leading 6 wild horses with it. The neighbors came to congratulate him on such good luck. The peasant said: "Maybe."

The day after, his son tried to saddle and ride on one of the wild horses, but he fell down and broke his leg. Once again the neighbors came to share that misfortune. The peasant said: "Maybe,"

The day after, soldiers came to conscript the youth of the village, but the peasant's son was not chosen because of his broken leg. When the neighbors came to congratulate, the peasant said again: "Maybe" (Huai Nan Tzu).

"The concept of storytelling and narratives about change is gaining increasing prominence in management journals" (Hughes, 2007, p. 26). "Storytelling is found in all institutions within society, and perhaps a reason for this is that it greatly reduces depersonalization" (Abrahamson, 1998, p. 150). It is Abrahamson's (1998) opinion that all aspects of learning should create experiences, regardless if the content is subjective or empirical in nature. Abrahamson (1998) asserts, "Thus, the use of storytelling has the potential to be effective in all areas of higher education. Storytelling develops a context for active learning and remarkable ownership of the learning, both in terms of process and content" (p. 150). Abma (2003) shares this opinion when she explains the procedure of storytelling workshops, in which participation is requisite for success. Abma particularly underscores the advantage of a storytelling culture for organizational learning.

In the wisdom traditions around the world, stories have been used from time immemorial as teaching/learning tools owing to their entertainment and/or moral value. Idries Shah, a modern Sufi teacher, has pointed out that stories also have a deeper, psychological dimension that accords a developmental value to them. In a classroom setting, stories may be introduced to crystallize an abstract point, to illustrate the underlying message, to enhance students' attention span, and to sharpen

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their conceptual skills. Clarifying management concepts through illustrative stories may contribute to a better assimilation and retention of the information (Dhiman, 2006).

In this section of the paper, the authors will use stories as an illustration of how to enhance teaching effectiveness in the subject area of workplace spirituality. Drawing upon the great wisdom traditions of east and west as well as modern sources, four stories will be included, which cover the entire gamut of workplace spirituality, from self-actualization to authentic leadership.

Teaching stories seems to be gaining ground again as the current generation of students in higher education demand less longwinded and more concise, moral-oriented teaching strategies. Psychologically speaking, teaching stories has the following dimensions:

- (1) Intuitive: the moment the speaker says “let me tell you a story,” the listener shifts gears (figuratively speaking) and a different faculty of comprehension is brought into play. In scientific terms, a better harmony between the left/right hemisphere of our brain is established.
- (2) Participative: a story is some kind of invitation that encourages the listener to participate in its proceedings by identifying himself/herself as one of its characters. And it is common knowledge that participation enhances the quality of learning.
- (3) Multiplicity of impacts: a good story carries a constellation of impacts within its fold and thereby creates multiple impacts on the listener’s mind. This enables us to view things from several perspectives, which, in turn, facilitates holistic thinking.
- (4) Tip of the Iceberg phenomenon: at a deeper level, there are several underlying messages. The listener/reader receives the nourishment for which he/she is ready. Like the skins of an onion, one will peel off one depth after another. Thus, a story offers something to all levels of experience. This is the reality behind the concept that we cannot really exhaust the entire meaning of a tale. And probably this is the reason that all great teachers choose to speak in parables.
- (5) An element of shock: a good story also contains an element of “shock” – an unexpected incongruity to wake the reader from the slumber of habitual thought patterns. By an unexpected turn or twist, the story teases a greater attention span out of the reader, besides preparing a way to a deeper understanding of the intended message. In the words of Cox (as cited in Sharma, 1993), “A parable is a story that draws the listener’s attention to the normal events of ordinary life, but then introduces an unexpected twist, a surprise inversion that undercuts the audience’s normal expectations and pushes them into looking at life in a new way” (p. 368).

The parables of Jesus provide a classic example of the element of shock. For example, the extra-welcome reception of the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the extraordinary help offered by the Samaritan in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the payment of the same wages by the vineyard owner in the parable of Vineyard laborers are sterling examples of the principle of unexpected shock in operation. One can only imagine the feelings of the listeners of these parables – the feeling as if the rug has been pulled out from under them unexpectedly, after having been drawn into the story!

The following story (cited in Shah, 1971, p. 70) may serve as an illustration:

On one occasion, a neighbor found Mulla Nasrudin down on his knees looking for something.

“What have you lost, Mulla?”

“My keys,” said Nasrudin.

After a few minutes of searching, the neighbor said,

“Where did you drop them?”

“Inside my home,” said Mulla.

“Then why, for heaven’s sake, are you looking here?”

“Because there is more light here,” said Mulla.

The entertainment value of the tale is quite obvious. The moral of the story is: Don’t look for things at wrong places. Now let’s dig further into the tale for its deeper dimensions of symbolic or instrumental value. Here are a few of the underlying dimensions.

Mulla is trying to demonstrate that:

- There are keys (solutions to the problems).
- Keys are not conveniently located (i.e. they are not placed next to the door).
- Mostly, keys are inside. It’s “management” relevance is obvious: The solutions to the problems of an organization lie inside the organization. For two decades, American automakers were looking for the “keys” outside, blaming the Japanese competition. As soon as they realized that the enemy is not “out there” but “in here,” we have seen a significant improvement. GM’s Saturn car, Ford’s Taurus, and Chrysler’s Mini Van are sterling examples of finding solutions within the organization rather than blaming the environment.
- Looking is the key.
- To know how (and where) to seek is to find it.

Peter F. Drucker, widely acknowledged as the father of modern management, has pointed out that organizations are very good at solving the wrong problems. This story, in a very subtle way, indicates just that. In this manner, clarifying underlying management concepts through illustrative stories contributes to better assimilation and retention of information. This methodology, used where appropriate, sharpens learners’ conceptual skills and helps to develop a habit of mind so essential to thrive during these nanosecond 1990s: the ability to look beyond the surface:

Chinese and Greek Artists and the restoration of an old Palace (Shafii, 1985, p. 171).

A group of Chinese artists claimed that they were the best painters. However, a group of Greek artists insisted that they were better. These two groups argued with each other for some time. At last the Chinese artists said to the King, “Give us a room and we will prove to you our ability.” So the king gave the Chinese and the Greeks each a room which opened one to the other.

The Chinese started to paint the wall with beautiful pictures and requested hundreds of paint pigments from the King’s treasury. The Greeks said, “We do not need any pigments,” and they started to polish the wall of the room. They spent all of their time polishing the wall until no rust was left. Finally the wall shone like a mirror. When the Chinese finished painting their wall, they were jubilant and beat upon drums in joy.

At last, the King came and marveled at the beauty of the Chinese paintings on the wall. Then he came to the Greek’s side of the room. The Greeks removed the veil. The reflection of the paintings from across the room on the mirror-like wall was, without a doubt, the most beautiful.

One of the things we could take away from this story, in workplace perspective, is that efficient people do things right (like Chinese artists in the story), while effective people

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do right things (like Greek artist in the story). Managers are generally more concerned about efficiency – doing things; leaders are more focussed on effectiveness – doing right things. Dr Deming, a great TQM pioneer, used to say, “everyone doing their best is not enough. People must first know what is best and then do it.”

Walking the Talk: A Story about Mahatma Gandhi (Milman, 1998).

A mother once brought her son to Mahatma Gandhi and said, “Sir, please tell my son to stop eating sugar.” Gandhi looked at the boy for a long time and then, turning towards mother, said, “Bring your son back to me in two weeks.” The mother did not understand the rationale of the delay in instruction, but she did as she was asked. Two weeks later she and her son returned. Gandhi looked deeply into boy’s eyes and said, “Stop eating sugar.” The mother was grateful, but puzzled. She asked, “Why didn’t you tell my son to stop eating sugar two weeks ago when we were here?” And Gandhi replied, “Two weeks ago, I was eating sugar myself!”

In light of the spiritual mindset at work, we could gather from this story that authenticity in leadership lies in the unity and purity of our thought, speech, and action. “Role-modeling” is the only time-tested way to lastingly change human behavior. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.” To be effective, the audio of our speech and the video of our actions must be in harmony with each other.

The Difference between the Window Glass and the Mirror Glass (Friedlander, 1973, p. 69). Once a rich and very stingy man came to his rabbi to ask for a special blessing. The rabbi sat and talked with him for a while and then, all of a sudden, took the man’s hand and brought him to the window.

“Tell me what do you see?” asked the rabbi.

The man answered, “I see people out on the street.”

The rabbi brought him a mirror. “Now what do you see?” he asked.

“Now I see myself,” the man replied.

The rabbi said, “Now let me explain the meaning of my actions. Both the window and the mirror are made of glass. The window is a clear glass but the mirror has a layer of silver on it. When you look through clear glass you can see people, but when you cover it with silver, you no longer see other people but only see yourself.”

Many business authors have adapted this story to illustrate the point that most people change drastically as soon as they are promoted. A wise person well-versed in the ways of the life and leadership once told this author: “When you are going up – in an organizational hierarchy – be nice to people around you. You will surely meet them when you will be coming down.” Probably modesty is the most important leadership quality that is honored more in breach than in observance in modern leaders. Jim Collins, a famous management author, calls it “compelling modesty” and identifies it as one of the two most important qualities portrayed by level five leaders, the other being fierce professional will. Organizational arrogance is the most fatal flaw that soon leads to cluelessness and brings fall. One should always be on one’s guard about it. It is very easy to feel insulated and indulge in ego trips.

Stories can be very effective tool in the hands of an experienced narrator. They have participative element and crystallize the message in a concrete manner that augurs assimilation and facilitates understanding of organization behavior concepts. Their message stays longer with the listener and/or the reader than conventional devices of learning. It is one of the most effective teaching tools to enlighten leaders and followers alike.

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**Reflections, conclusions, and recommendations**

Spirituality and spiritual concepts can involve emotional and other non-cognitive experiences which cannot be taught using traditional teaching approaches such as reading and lecture. In this paper the authors have discussed and described how we have used meditation and storytelling as two specific strategies for teaching spirituality and spiritual concepts in a business school classroom setting. These two strategies provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences and to become more self-aware.

Marques *et al.* (2011a, b) recently published a collection of experiential exercises, and will soon be publishing a collection of stories (Marques *et al.*, 2011a, b) which can be used in teaching spirituality. The authors' experience using these and similar strategies in our classes has been very positive, both from our perspectives and from the perspectives of our students.

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