TECHNICAL SPIRITUALITY AT WORK:
JACQUES ELLUL ON WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT

We assess the current state of workplace spirituality from the philosophical perspective of Jacques Ellul and show how the workplace spirituality movement has not escaped the infiltration and pervasiveness of technique. First, we describe Ellul's notion of technique, that the technical processes created to serve a limited form of economic rationality predominate western thinking, and his critique that technique has become dominant, becoming an end in itself and subsuming all other ends as means in support of technique. We then demonstrate how the workplace spirituality movement presently displays the hallmarks of technique in its quest for results and facts, in its use of experts, and in the broadening and hence dissolution of the notion of spirituality. However, the dominance of technique has not gone unnoticed in the workplace spirituality movement. We highlight several scholars who have raised concerns and critiques of the movement in its technical form. Having noted the predominance of technique as well as its critique from some quarters, we suggest some possibilities for moving toward an authentic spirituality at work followed by some implications for undertaking scholarly research on workplace spirituality that explicitly recognizes technical dominance in spirituality. In conclusion we note that the logic of technique is firmly in place, and that it represents a formidable opponent to the practice of authentic spirituality in the workplace. It is incumbent upon those of us involved in workplace spirituality to resist its domination and find ways of fostering authenticity in spirituality at work.

Keywords: Jacques Ellul, Workplace Spirituality, Technique

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There is no field where technique is not dominant.

Jacque Ellul, 1954

Throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, the concept of 'spirituality in the workplace' or 'workplace spirituality' has flourished in both academe and organizational practice (e.g., Cavanagh, 1999; Conlin, 1999; Mitroff & Denton, 1999: Nash, 2003; various polls). This is evidenced in part by the number of spirituality-related books, conferences, centres, consultants, and speakers. The e-revolution has seen the proliferation of spiritually- and consciousness-related websites. Spirituality-related best-sellers, corporate seminars, and conference descriptions offer promises of personal, business, societal, and global transformation. According to André Delbecq, 'spirituality and business' is the most published new topic among business academics (cited in Miller, 2003).

This paper considers the relationship between the technical imperative and the current workplace spirituality movement in business and academe. We base our analysis on the philosophical perspective of Jacques Ellul and show how the workplace spirituality movement in 2006 has not escaped the infiltration and pervasiveness of technique in North American society and workplaces.[1] According to Ellul, technique refers to the dominating technical processes which are created to serve a limited form of economic rationality. We posit that part of the workplace spirituality movement views spirituality in the workplace as a technique to be used for instrumental, financial-centered ends rather than seeing spirituality as the central organizing principle in the workplace. In this respect, we follow the work of others who have recently

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[1] Although we believe this argument extends to other parts of the world, we primarily use examples drawn from the North American context.

suggested that the concept of workplace spirituality has become a tool to develop objective

knowledge in academia and to increase competitiveness, effectiveness, and profit in business

(e.g., Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Bell & Taylor, 2003; Zhuravleva & Jones, 2006).

THE TECHNICAL IMPERATIVE

The technical man is fascinated by results.

Jacques Ellul, 1954

In his book, *La Technique*, philosopher Jacques Ellul defined technique as "the totality of

methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development)

in every field of human activity" (*The Technological Society,* 1964: xxv; originally published in

1954). According to Ellul, technique did not preoccupy us until modern times. "No social,

human, or spiritual fact is so important as the fact of technique in the modern world" (p. 3).

Whereas technical progress used to be seen as the instrument or the means, technique has moved

from being the intermediary to being a reality in and of itself with the most efficient method

sought out in every field (p.63). Technique has a way of getting around all of the things that

would obstruct the functionality of organizations. Ellul contended that the workplace of his day

was increasingly dominated by technique and an accompanying production and consumption

orientation. He described the "new spiritual situation" in the 20th century as prioritizing the

economic and reducing human life to "working and gorging"; that is, people are led to believe

that they will find happiness and meaning in life in producing and consuming (p.220-221).

According to Ellul, society has become preoccupied with efficiency and with constantly

creating new instruments for new needs. The technician believes that their "new method is

unassailable and that their discoveries are becoming the centre of things" (p.162); "they will save

everything" (p.319); and "there is one best way" (p.368). It follows then that technique creates a

"closed fraternity of its practitioners" (p.163). The technicians typically have their own discourse

and are obsessed by facts and results. Ellul referred to a "unifying psychism" (p.370) and "psychological collectivization" (p.409) stemming from technique. The myths of the technician include the myth of progress and the myth of bettering humanity. Progress is viewed as being valid when it is scientifically rigorous and reliable.

According to Ellul, where technique reigns, human values and value judgments are threatened and critical faculties are suppressed, as "[t]echnique never observes the distinction between moral and immoral use" (p.97). For example, he contended that the technical state of mind took morality out of economics, as the primary interest became matters of fact and making the qualitative quantitative. In addition, we note that what seems to be of primary importance within technique is whether something actually works; thus what works is good, what does not work is bad. Moral judgement is redefined in pragmatic terms. In *The Technological Society*, Ellul refers to sociological studies that suggest technique destroys social groups, communities, and human relations (p.126). Because everything serves a technical end, human relations are reduced to a technical form. In other words, there is no assurance that technique is moving towards improving the public good unless that good is defined in a technical perspective.

Ellul considered how technique has been applied to management study and practice in order to make human beings more productive in the workplace. As Ellul suggested,

> Without unremitting productivity, the men, money, and time necessary to their application would not be forthcoming. Human techniques, therefore, are obliged to become a part of the technical system… (p.394).

After all, economic growth and the technical imperative require an enthusiastic workforce. According to Ellul, this has been accomplished through human relations techniques and other psychological techniques such as morale building. These techniques are designed to make the "insupportable supportable" (p.322).

In short, man creates for himself a new religion of a rational and technical order to justify his work and to be justified in it… This is the law of technique; this yield can only be obtained by the total mobilization of human beings, body and soul, and this implies the exploitation of all human psychic forces (p.324).

According to Ellul, the technical society re-creates people so that more can be demanded of them. The 'whole' worker needs to be considered so that there can be "complete integration of the worker" (p.353). Ellul described this integration as follows:

The worker is confronted by cut-and-dried procedures that must be carried out in unvarying sequence in order that work be systematic, rational, and efficient; he is bored, slowed down, and psychologically constrained. It is necessary to arouse in him reflective thought and to make him participate in the life of the entire planet. He must be made to feel a community of interest; the idea that his labor has social meaning must be instilled in him. In short, he must be integrated into the enterprise in which he is working (p.351).

According to Ellul, under the technical imperative, what purports to humanize, in many instances actually dehumanizes. This is not intentional, but rather in response to a society that is ruled by technique. Human relations are, therefore, "restricted to the technical demands of their vocational roles" (p.354). In other words, people are first seen as objects used to serve the end of increased productivity.

Man is doubtless made more compatible by techniques of human relations; but these techniques are wholly oriented toward compelling man to submit to forced labor (p.356).

Ellul also described how human techniques adapt people to mass society in order to "help put an end to what has hitherto been considered the normal type of humanity" (p.406). He refers to psychologists, sociologists, and teachers as "psychotechnicians" who desire to "restore man's lost unity, and patch together that which technical advances have separated" (p. 411). However, they only have one avenue available to them to do this and that is through the use of technique. "Man is to be smoothed out, like a pair of pants under a steam iron" (p.411). Ellul summed it up as follows,

Since the human sciences are applications of technical means, this entails rounding up

those elements of the human personality that are still free and forcing ("reintegrating") them into the expanding technical order of things. What yet remains of private life must be forced into line by invisible techniques, which are also implacable because they are derived from personal conviction. Reintegration involves man's covert spiritual activities as well as his overt actions (p.411).

Ellul believed that the various technicians who are preoccupied with reintegrating people into a technically ordered world did not intentionally plan for technique to dominate. Rather, '[t]heir error lied much more in not having clearly seen genuine alternatives" (p.411).

We have begun with Ellul's premise that technique rules all domains of life and has been applied to many aspects of management and organization. In the next section, we show how the domain of workplace spirituality has not escaped the technical imperative. Ellul described the "spiritual techniques which have increasing force in our society" (p.140). Accordingly, technique does not eliminate the spiritual, but subordinates it to 'technical spirituality'. As Max Weber concluded, "[o]ne need no longer implore the spirits…Technical means and calculations perform the service" (cited in Gerth and Mills, 1946, pp.139).

TECHNIQUE IN WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

To the degree that material techniques become more precise, intellectual and psychic techniques became more necessary. By these means man acquired the conviction and strength needed to make possible the maximum utilization of the others. So the edifice was completed.

Jacque Ellul, 1954

Results and Facts

The encroachment of technique into the workplace spirituality domain in North America and throughout other parts of the world is evidenced by the preponderance of books, consultants, awards, and speakers focusing on productivity of Soul and Spirit, spirituality as a tool or technique, and the instrumentality of spirituality in the workplace. Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of best-selling book titles such as *The Soul of Business*, *Liberating the Corporate Soul*, *Redefining the Corporate Soul*, *Soul Business*, *The Soul of the New*

Organization, and *The Ten Spiritual Pillars of Business Success*, holding varying degrees of an instrumental approach to workplace spirituality. A 1999 cover story in Business Week described the reawakening of spirituality and business in North America as follows: "Perhaps the largest driver of this trend is the mounting evidence that spiritually minded programs in the workplace not only soothe workers' psyches but also deliver improved productivity" (Conlin, 1999). This theme has been picked up by national newspapers and business magazines in the United States and Canada. Companies like consulting-based McKinsey & Co have reported their use of spiritual training programmes to increase clients' profitability.

There is a great deal of evidence on the internet of spirituality being reduced to a technical form. A Google search of spirituality, work, and technique resulted in 5,240,000 hits (28,600,000 hits for the terms spirituality and work) (Google, n.d.). These sites include references to spiritual techniques, mind techniques, meditation techniques, centering techniques, metaphysical techniques, emotional wisdom techniques, energy healing techniques, shamanic techniques, conscious living techniques, visualization techniques, etc. The movement has also been reported to have developed its own jargon (e.g., Gooding, 1998, p.6) with terms such as "holistic, integrated awareness" and "activation of energy."

The evidence of technique infiltrating the workplace spirituality domain is quite obvious in the popular spirituality and business literature and practice. Take for example, the recent work by Patricia Aburdene (2005), *Megatrends 2010: The Rise of Conscious Capitalism*. The following excerpts exemplify a technical approach to spirituality in business.

> Why wouldn't business, which is ever the patron saint of the practical embrace any technique – mundane, spiritual or Martian – that generates results? (p.117).

> Spirit will drive performance and shareholder value (p.139).

The technical imperative is also evident in academic discourse around the benefits of workplace

spirituality, namely increased organizational performance (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Benefiel, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Burack, 1999; Fry, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; King & Nicol, 1999; Krishnakur and Neck, 2002; Konz & Ryan, 1999; Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett, & Condemi, 1999; Nadesan, 1999; Porth, McCall, & Bausch, 1999; Schmidt-Wilk, Alexander, & Swanson, 1996) and increased competitive advantage (Conlin, 1999; Klein & Izzo, 1998; Overell, 2003a). For example, Butts (1999, p. 331) referred to the psychospiritual technologies of prayer, meditation, and guided imagery that companies can use to develop employee potential. It has been suggested that the achievement of organizational results is driving research in the field of management, spirituality, and religion (Benefiel, 2003). In a recent study of the workplace spirituality literature that considered eighty-seven scholarly articles, it was found that most researchers have either found or have hypothesized a relationship between spirituality and organizational performance (Dent & Higgins, 2005). Some of this research specifically considers how spirituality can impact profitability and shareholder value (e.g., Milliman, Czaplewski, and Fergurson, 2003; Thompson, 2000).

Organizational performance to a certain extent is also driving the literature on spirituality and leadership. Recent studies have looked at the link between spiritual leadership in business and increased productivity, sales growth, organizational commitment, and other measures of organizational financial performance (e.g., Fry & Matherly, 2006; see also Kaplan & Norton, 2004). According to Fry & Matherly (2006, p.18), "spiritual leadership is a lead indicator of future financial performance."

This literature is largely reductionistic in that one result is heralded above others, namely, true efficiency, which is represented by profit maximization and cost minimization. Although innovation, creativity, and empowerment of employees is promoted, it appears to be done first

and foremost to improve productivity, and only secondly for human interest. According to Covey (1989; 1990), the aim is to elevate employee loyalty, creativity, enthusiasm, initiative, confidence, and cooperation, but always in relation to organizational goals. Secretan's (1996) book, *Reclaiming Higher ground: Creating Organizations that Inspire the Soul*, suggests that higher productivity can be found through building a spiritual sanctuary in the workplace. Fry & Matherly (2006, p.19) suggest that using spiritual leadership can get employees to "go the extra mile" and 'exert the extra effort." Recall that Ellul described how technique transforms means into ends and that the technician is captivated by results.

Other evidence of the technical imperative in this domain is found in the development of concepts such as spiritual quotient, spiritual intelligence, spiritual capital, soul branding, and conscious capitalism (e.g., Aburdene, 2005; Maio, 2006; Zohar and Marshall, 2000; 2004) supported by an obsession with facts and figures. For example, Gallup and other polls are often cited in workplace spirituality literature supporting high levels of employee dissatisfaction, employees' need for spiritual growth, and the connection between spirituality and employee happiness (e.g., Gallup, 2004). Ellul described the increased application of "techniques of research into public opinion" (p.163).

Similarly, technique has infiltrated the workplace spirituality domain in the calls for more scientifically rational and rigorous (i.e. operationalizable, calculable, and predictable) research in the field of spirituality, religion, and work, as well as research that emphasizes the link between spirituality and bottom-line organizational outcomes (e.g., Fry & Matherly, 2006; Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, & Fry, 2005; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Krahnke, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Margues, Dhiman & King, 2005). The John Templeton Foundation has recently called for empirical work addressing the link between spiritual activity and health and economic outcomes.

This parallels efforts by the Management, Spirituality, and Religion interest group at the Academy of Management to increase legitimacy within the academy and within the mainstream scientific community. In addition, it has been suggested that most research in this field has adopted the perspective of organization and management theory rather than considering organization and management theory from the perspective of spirituality and/or religion (Arbaugh, 2001; Daniels, Franz, & Wong, 2000; Fenwick & Lange, 1998). For example, Cunha, Rego, & D'Oliveira (2006) have recently built a typology of organizational spiritualities using management theories. According to Zhuravleva & Jones (2006), instrumental-oriented workplace spirituality researchers draw upon work in psychology of religion, personality psychology, clinical psychology, and organizational motivation and focus primarily upon quantitative study of objective variables (see also Pratt, 2000). For example, Moore & Casper (2005) have recently operationalized spirituality using organizational commitment and intrinsic satisfaction.

Experts

> The heavenly spirit arrives in corporate America, guided by consultants…a new breed of expert: People who teach how being spiritual can improve productivity, employee relations and customer service.
>
> The Wall Street Journal, 1998, p.1

Technique is further evident in the proliferation of experts in the workplace spirituality domain. The Management, Spirituality, and Religion interest group at the Academy of Management currently has a membership of 654, that number almost doubling since 2002 (Academy of Management, n.d.). There is a corresponding increase in management consultants, trainers, coaches, and other human resource professionals specializing in bringing spirituality into the workplace (Institute for Management Excellence, n.d.; Fenwick & Lange, 1998). A google search of the terms spirituality, work, and consulting resulted in 1,470,000 hits and a search of spiritual, coaching, and business resulted in 4,450,000 hits (Google, n.d.). According to

Fenwick and Lange (1998), an increase in spirituality-based trainers and human resource

professionals is necessary to tap into the resource of workers' spirits in order to increase

productivity as well as to allow these 'spiritual educators' to gain a "novel market niche" (p.68).

Another expert in the spirituality and work domain is the Corporate Chaplain. There are

currently somewhere between 3000 and 4000 corporate chaplains in the United States (Corporate

Chaplains of America, n.d.a). The two largest providing agencies are Corporate Chaplains of

America and Marketplace Ministries. According to the Corporate Chaplains of America website,

the organization was founded in 1996 "to provide genuine 'Caring in the Workplace', while

following a structured business plan built upon process management principles" (Corporate

Chaplains of America, n.d.b). The following excerpts from these two agencies' websites

illustrate an emphasis on organizational performance.

> Chaplains are professionals committed to reducing employee stress, helping employees
> deal with personal and family emotional issues, easing potential violence and conflict in
> the workplace, with a focus on bringing improvement to a company's bottom line
> (Corporate Chaplains of America, n.d.a).

> The best way for companies to handle issues of stress and worker disconnect is to
> maintain a process that engages workers on a regular basis in order to head off and/or
> minimize lost productivity (Corporate Chaplains of America, n.d.a).

> The 'Top Line' is people - employees and their family members. Caring for this "line"
> will generate deeper loyalty, a commitment of the "rank and file" to the goals and mission
> of the company. Simply put, you take care of employees and they will take care of profit
> (Marketplace Ministries, n.d.).

According to Silverman (2001, B1), the goal of the corporate chaplain is "to listen confidentially

to workers' spiritual, professional and personal concerns". As one corporate chaplain describes

his role, "we're often used as a kind of conduit for things that people would rather not say

directly" (Overell, 2003b). Compare this to Ellul's (p.353) description of the company counselor:

> Their sole duty is to encourage the voicing of complaints and to listen to them. It is well-
> known that suffering expressed is suffering relieved…It is dangerous to allow the

workers to talk over their problems among themselves. It is far more prudent to give them a safety valve in the form of a discreet company agent, a psychological technician, than to let them air their grievances in public.

The emphasis on organizational performance and the proliferation of corporate chaplaincy in Corporate America raises questions as to whether the primary interest is employee spiritual development or technical development. In other words, have some corporate chaplaincy programs been co-opted as another "human engineering" effort to increase productivity?

Broadening 'spirituality'

What was once prized in its own right now becomes worthwhile only if it helps achieve something else.

Jacques Ellul, 1954

The technical imperative is also evident in the broadening and qualifying of the concept of 'spirituality'. The literature reveals many definitions and types of spirituality related to work. It is difficult to figure out what to include in workplace spirituality. Much of the 'new' workplace spirituality literature is secular in nature. In the 1970s, spirituality began to increasingly appear in popular literature as something that needn't be attached to religion (Marty, 2003). For example, in much of the literature published in the 1990s, there is no reference to a particular religion or faith perspective (e.g., Briskin, 1998; Bolman & Deal, 1995; Chappell, 1993; Conger, 1994; Lee & Zemke, 1993). Marcic's (2000) review of 100 books and 100 journals on the topic of spirituality and work found that less than 20% mentioned God or a Divine Presence. Cash & Gray (2000) noted that by broadening spirituality to a broad definition of belief, people will not connect spirituality to any one particular religion. Some liken spirituality to values (e.g., Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Wheaton & Baird, 2002) or a new personality dimension (e.g,. Mohamed, Winieski, & Syed, 2004). Others have described spirituality and work as combining religion, psychology, and therapy in order to market it to today's workforce (Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000). Some have promoted the efforts by some

authors such as Steven Covey to secularize spirituality so that it is more "corporately palatable" (e.g., Spencer, n.d.). According to Mitroff & Denton (1999: 23-24), "spirituality is broadly inclusive and embraces everyone…it asserts the sacredness of everything". One definition of spirituality was found to be 116 words long (Marques, Dhiman, and King, 2005). The most frequently advertised spiritualities are those that relate to "a metaphysic of universal energy and connection" (Marty, 2003:49). This includes non-Western religion, self-help, New Age, holistic and alternative health techniques, the occult, spiritual and charismatic leaders, etc. This secular spirituality has become a multimillion-dollar market (Nash, 2003). According to Aburdene (2005: 133), "[s]eekers on the spiritual path turn to Spirit for anything and everything. Peace, compassion, love, a new car or a healthier bank account." In addition, most of the spirituality and work literature focuses on individual spiritual development, rather than broader social concerns (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

Wedemeyer & Jue (2002) have introduced the notion of 'pragmatic spirituality'. For these authors, pragmatic spirituality is seen as distinct from one's belief systems (p.18). According to them (p.14), "Spirituality in business can succeed only if the application of spirituality enhances the effectiveness of the organization and its bottom line…" They emphasize that it is important to keep the bottom line in spirituality (p. 221). For Wedemeyer and Jue, it is similar to much of the corporate responsibility arguments. "In today's marketplace, unless 'doing good' is compatible with the competitive viability of a private corporation, it is not realistic – or responsible" (p.222). The bottom line is based on economic performance and organizational efficiency first and spirituality, however defined, is second. Alternatively, the concept of spirituality is changed to become something else. In Ellul's (1964, p.425) words,

> The very assimilation of ideas into the technical framework which renders them materially effective makes them spiritually worthless. This does not mean that ideas have

no worthwhile effect on the public at all. They have a great effect, but not the effect their creators intended.

THE CRITIQUE

With the final integration of the instinctive and the spiritual by means of these human techniques, the edifice of the technical society will be completed…It will not seem insane, for everything will be ordered, and the stains of human passion will be lost amid the chromium gleam. We shall have nothing more to lose, and nothing to win. Our deepest instincts and our most secret passions will be analyzed, published, and exploited. We shall be rewarded with everything our hearts desired. And the supreme luxury of the society of technical necessity will be to grant the bonus of useless revolt and of an acquiescent smile.

Jacques Ellul, 1954

Technology, rather than self-restraint, has become our saviour.

James E. Ellis, 2006

For the most part, mainstream academic scholarship has overlooked alternative narratives and critical perspectives in the area of workplace spirituality (Bell & Taylor, 2003; Forray & Stork, 2002). However, there are some scholars who have criticized a results-oriented and technical approach to workplace spirituality (e.g., Benefiel, 2003; Bojé & Rosalie, 2003; Bell & Taylor, 2003; Brown, 2003; Elmes & Smith, 2001; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Fornaciara & Lund Dean, 2001; Forray & Stork, 2002; Nadesan, 1999; Zhuravleva & Jones, 2006). For example, Bell & Taylor (2003) suggest that recent spirituality and workplace discourse emphasizes organizational performance and economic outcomes.

> Somewhat paradoxically, rather than enabling liberation from the constraints of work and modernity, workplace spirituality ensures that the search for meaning is harnessed to specific organizational purposes. Existential questions about the purpose of life and suffering are translated into technical questions of self and organizational management (p.331).

They conclude that "managers are turning to the instrumental use of technologies that appropriate spirituality in order to establish what they are encouraged to perceive as total obedience among a workforce" (p.336).

Some of the workplace spirituality discourse fails to critique the instrumentality of the

exchange-based relationship between employee and employer. "Individuals are portrayed as wholly free agents responsible for determining their own spiritual development and the work organization is cast as a source of spiritual opportunity" (Bell & Taylor, 2003, p.333). Others have suggested that humanistic psychological techniques have been used for personal development in the workplace with no connection to making the workplace more democratic (Montuori & Purser, 2001). Ellul (1964) suggested that people are required to be content with their situation and those not content can be distracted so that they are satisfied with the mechanical and mindless.

Similarly, Fenwick and Lange (1998, p.63) have described spirituality-based workplace training and development as the "handmaid of corporate power" (p.63), exploiting spiritual needs by promising spiritual fulfillment that is in line with corporate values. They ask the question whether companies are "targetting the worker's spirit as a final frontier to be colonized and developed for the company's benefit" (1998, p.82). Zhuravleva & Jones (2006, p.6) also describe the corporate control aspects of some applications of workplace spirituality.

> …[W]e also dread the thought of giving out mind technologies used by meditators and monks in spiritual traditions for centuries to those power figures who will see them as a brilliant and the most sophisticated instrument in moulding the minds and behaviours of employees into the ones desired by the organization.

Others have suggested that much of the literature in this domain is reductionistic. Instrumental and superficial spirituality is reductionistic in that it sees human beings as instrumental ends, "human resources" to be managed to improve productivity. For example, Cunningham (2003) contends that although the work of people like Deepak Chopra (e.g., 2000) and Steven Covey (e.g., 1989; 1990) has therapeutic value, it is still reductionistic and instrumental, and therefore a partial rather than holistic approach to spirituality in the workplace.

According to McGeary (2003, p.224), spirituality cannot be seen first and foremost to

motivate employees to increase productivity because productivity is simply "repetition at least cost with consistent quality". This approach to spirituality sees human beings as productive units first and spiritual beings second, or as Ellul suggested, technique is the end rather than the means.

In addition, according to Marty (2003, p.51), a spirituality that focuses on individual spiritual development "helps the individual cope with many aspects of corporate life but is less poised than classical ethical, philosophical, religious, and communal heritages to engage in krisis, protest, and reform." He goes on to say that "this spirituality is virtually powerless in respect to governments, globalization, and multinational corporations" (51). Nash (2003) similarly contends that much of the material in new spirituality books (both secular and religious) focuses on empowerment and therapy and difficult questions such as global poverty are avoided. According to Porth et al. (2003), spirituality without a communal aspect is disconnected from the idea of social change.

Most religions would critique the idea of spirituality being seen primarily as an instrumental good (e.g., Williams, 2003). Marty (2003: 31) proposes the thesis that "the triumph of the market casts issues relating religion and spirituality to business into new forms." He contends that religion's critique of business and economic structures dissipates "when individualized and eclectic spirituality dominates" (33). Brown (2003) concludes that this 'organizational spirituality' has little in common with 'spirituality'.

According to Fenwick and Lange (1998), spirituality-based human resource development does not acknowledge the conflicts between values such as caring, sharing, reflecting, and empowering that are promoted in workplace spirituality and economic structures of competition for wealth and power in a global marketplace.

Material gain, which drives the pursuit of individualistic success in this world, is irreconcilable with spiritual gain, which represents a loss of goods and ultimately of the ego-self. The corporate demand for subordinating creativity, insight, energy, and relationships to the profit bottom line conflicts with the spiritual demand to release creativity, insight, energy, and relationships in service to humanity and the divine (p.80).

For many religions, commercializing spirituality leads to it losing its distinctiveness, its otherworldliness. Broadening spirituality to a broad definition of belief, not connected to any one particular religion, leads to a loss of richness and depth in a faith tradition. Holiness, orientation to Creator, and purpose in life are all removed from technical spirituality. Smiley, enthusiastic, technical spirituality never faces a dark night of the soul. As Fenwick and Lange (1998, p.64) contend, these initiatives "manipulate human spirituality, and offer a shallow hurry-up-and-feel-good response to the difficult spiritual journey."

Technical spirituality fits well, however, in a context of an individualized, corporate, and competitive society. According to Williams (2003: 13), "business people find a great dichotomy between the values they cherish in their personal lives and the reigning values in the workplace. In large measure, the quest for a 'new spirituality' by business people reflects this void." However, the question remains as to whether this quest for a 'new spirituality' by business people reflects what Ellul has described as the "unconscious materialists who are always prating of their spirituality"(p.338)?

Several authors have also criticized the reductionistic approach to the study of workplace spirituality evident in the quantification of spirituality (e.g., Bell & Taylor, 2003; Fornaciara & Lund Dean, 2001; Hicks, 2003; Zhuravleva & Jones, 2006). According to these authors, the goal of measuring and modeling workplace spirituality in a data-driven way is a reductionism that adds to the demystification of both spirituality and the individual.

Finally, others have challenged the newness of the concept of workplace spirituality (e.g.,

Brown, 2003; Porth et al., 2003). First, the idea of people bringing their religious values into the workplace is neither a new idea nor one that has not been studied for a long time (Williams, 2003). For example, theologians have a long history of studying the relationship between spirituality and work (Miller, 2006). In addition, health care has a rich history of spiritual values being integrated into work. Most of the hospitals in the Western world were started by religious organizations. Second, in many respects much of what is being discussed under workplace spirituality has been previously described and studied in human relations, corporate social responsibility, human resource development, and organizational development, among other places. The link between employee health and happiness and productivity is not a new idea (e.g. Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman, 1959; McGregor, 1967). For example, McGregor's (1967) theory Y suggests managing workplace relationships in order to make people feel respected and engaged so that productivity will increase. Some of the 'spiritual' terms that are used in workplace spirituality research look a lot like human resource and organizational development concepts such as 'empowerment', 'creativity', and 'values'. For example, Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2004) use a values framework to measure impact of spirituality on organizational performance. Others have used proxies for spirituality drawing from measurements that are legitimate in psychology (e.g., Milliman et al., 2003; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Corporate engineering of spirituality fits with the corporate purpose of maximizing shareholder returns. It is not surprising then that "many spiritual techniques in business are compatible with other HR approaches to increasing employee engagement. This leads the more skeptical to wonder whether workplace spirituality is a repackaging or rebranding of these older concepts, which incidentally, also debases the currency of the word 'spirituality'" (Brown, 2003, p.397). Hicks (2003, p.165) concludes that "[a]ttempts to translate religiously particular values into common

spiritual or secular values are reductionistic at best and inaccurate at worst."

THE SYNTHESIS

> Some [movements] are indeed more authentic and "truer" than others because they better express human revolt…
>
> <div align="right">Jacques Ellul, 1954, p.426</div>

What steps can be taken to make the workplace spirituality movement more authentic? What are the genuine alternatives to a technical spirituality at work? Perhaps a first, though ultimately inadequate, step is to be explicit about undertaking the translation of spiritual practices into technical ones meant to better the organization. For example, Weick and Putnam (2006) note that the Eastern (Buddhist) practice of mindfulness can produce "secular benefits" which are "most relevant to organizations" (2006:281). Their work demonstrates connections between "Eastern thinking, Western thinking, and organizational thinking (282-283), all of which is in the service of the organization and its goals: "Because mindfulness meditation involves attending to the mind itself, the insights will be of the nature to further improve mental skills that benefit organizations in all the mediator's activities" (281-282). Becoming explicit about the technical and organizational ends of spiritual practices lifts the façade of those practices being 'spiritual' in the context of the work organization.

Moving to a deeper level, authentic spirituality in the workplace needs to have human welfare as a primary end. Workplace spirituality cannot involve exploiting workers to increase productivity and profit. In addition, some challenge the very idea that the work domain should take on a more significant role in people's lives and that spirituality should move from other spheres into the workplace (e.g., Bell & Taylor, 2003; Williams, 2003). For example, Williams (2003, p.19) suggests that "[o]nly when the social nature of the person finds an important part of its fulfillment in institutions other than the market, especially in the family and the church, can

we expect a human community".

Some might consider the workplace spirituality movement to be a counterbalance to the technical imperative and we believe that many of the authors cited in this paper believe this to be the case. Ellul noted that people react spiritually to the "aggression of technique" (p.415). We believe Ellul would refer to technical spirituality as "offering a partial solution to old problems" or "digging a new hole to fill up an old one" (1964: 12). Are some bringing spirituality into the workplace primarily because workers are interfering with the function of technique? There is a fundamental contradiction between the purpose of authentic spirituality and the purpose of technical spirituality. Issues such as distributive justice and ecological sustainability are not seen as primary to the technical spiritualist, so there is no need to emphasize concerns about the moral structures of politics or economy. How much of the current workplace spirituality movement is being driven by technicism and scientism? Should search for meaning in life be linked to organizational productivity? Spirituality is not a technique that a manager must learn, but rather involves a fundamentally different approach to management and strategic purpose for an organization. Bowles (1989) has suggested that any new discourse will change the meaning of work and behavior in organizations only if there is a fundamental change in the relationships in an organization and the nature of the relationship that people have with work. In other words, does the 'spiritual' training program have a functional aim to reconcile spirituality with a status quo approach to business or to radically redefine business within an authentic spirituality?

We acknowledge the dark side to integrating spirituality into the workplace, just as there is a dark side to charismatic leadership and strong organizational culture (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005) and other forms of emotional and moral influence on employees. Whose meaning of meaningful work or spirituality is being used and promoted? Porth et al. (2003: 260) suggest

that, "instead of cloaking the issue in the language of spirituality, we focus on a concept of management based on a deep, abiding commitment to respect the intrinsic value of the human individual…these systems and practices would resonate with the spiritual dimension of the human individual but avoid the potentially ambiguous and divisive language of spirituality." There are themes in common to many wisdom- and faith-based traditions, but technical spirituality does not mesh well with most of them. The rhetoric in technical spirituality ultimately focuses on a results-based measurement system.

We are not suggesting that the current workplace spirituality movement's only aim is to use spirituality to achieve financial and material ends or that there are no examples of authentic spirituality in workplaces today. There is potential and promise in this movement in 2007, just as there was potential and promise in the human relations movement and other movements in the past century. The workplace spirituality movement is diverse and engages a wide range of people and perspectives. However, authentic spirituality in the workplace has to fundamentally question accepted models of economic growth as the relationships between current global economic structures and systems and issues of environmental degradation and work-life imbalance become more obvious. Authentic spirituality at work may mean accepting lower profits as a result of integrating spiritual values into the workplace. Morality must guide the means of economic activity, not the other way around. In Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments (1969 [1853]), he emphasized that an individual's self interest is shaped by the community's morality. In a global marketplace, this concern extends to the moral forces in a global community. Authentic spirituality at work involves making the world a better place and not just one's workplace a better place to work, and definitely not just soothing workers' psyches.

According to Porth et al. (2003:254), authentic spirituality "forces people fundamentally

to be concerned not just about themselves but about others; it causes them to respect and promote the full flourishing of other humans." For example, Kernochan, McCormick, and White (2007) detail how their practice of the Buddhist values of compassion, mindfulness, and no-self in the context of academic management teaching has transformed not only themselves but has increased their respect for students, even those who are deliberately difficult. "Being in a state of compassion drew our attention away from our own needs to the needs of others and so diminished the demands of our egos" (Kernochan, et al., 2007:70). Garcia-Zamor (2003: 362) refers to "transforming leadership and employees so that humanistic practices and policies become an integral part of an organization's day-to-day function". Again, Kernochan, et al., (2007:71) provide an excellent example:

> Without spiritual values, our actions were guided by a professional desire to be the best possible management education teachers. Our metrics for success were job related and focused on content transfer and student response. The work of integrating our spiritual values changed our perspective from a strictly professional lens to one that included a spiritual lens. As that lens began to frame and guide our actions, our teaching became connected to our deepest values, the ones we cared most about….Our teaching became less a job or career and more of a calling—more rewarding because our teaching was connected to heartfelt spiritual values.

Authentic spirituality transforms management rather than simply uses spirituality as an instrumental and superficial tool to increase productivity. Benefiel (2003) refers to moving companies to a higher state of consciousness. As such, management is seen as integrating concern for all stakeholders affected by business activities.

Authentic spirituality contrasts with 'pragmatic spirituality' (Wedemeyer & Jue, 2002) and the 'technical spirituality' described by Porth et al. (2003). Authentic spirituality in business means that profit is not a purpose but a goal of corporations and tough questions have to be tackled; for example, who does this business really benefit, shareholders, other stakeholders, people in developing countries, the world's ecology, future generations, etc.? According to some

scholars, the intent of the company would be evident in things like commitment to work-life balance as exemplified by flexible hours, job-sharing, broad social and environmental responsibility, and authentic acts of leadership, among others (Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Zhuravleva & Jones, 2006). Some hold that there is promise in the idea of integrating spirituality, work, and learning, but only when spiritual development becomes an end in itself and the process of spiritual development is not results-oriented in the workplace (Zhuravleva & Jones, 2006).

Despite the potential of the workplace spirituality movement, there remain dangers and risks in the infiltration and apparent dominance of the technical imperative in much of the workplace spirituality movement. There is a need to demystify some of the claims and recommendations being made in the name of spirituality.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOLARLY RESEARCH
IN WORKPLACE SPIRITUALITY

The more techniques develop, the more unobtrusive they become.

Jacques Ellul, 1954

A particularly important approach to the study of workplace spirituality is the development of longitudinal studies. It is often difficult to distinguish between an authentic spirituality and a superficial and instrumental spirituality (Porth et al., 2003), just as it is difficult to distinguish between espoused organizational values and actual ethics in practice. Hence, it is difficult to empirically study this difference. One has to uncover underlying motives and deeply held values that are driving the integration of a spiritual dimension into the workplace. Since outcomes between technical spirituality and authentic spirituality might appear similar, especially in the short term (Porth et al., 2003), appropriately longer timeframes (Zaheer, Albert, and Zaheer, 1999) are needed to look at how organizational systems and structures integrate or

drop spiritual aspects as productivity and other economic measures of success increase or decrease. Longitudinal studies provide the opportunity to observe these changes (e.g. Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, and Hunt, 1998).

Furthermore, if/as spirituality in the workplace becomes institutionalized in the North American context, it becomes important to know whether spirituality has truly been integrated into the enterprise, or if it has been largely decoupled from day-to-day workplace practices (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Here one could also assess what role is played by national religious and/or spiritual organizations, or more loosely connected entities, such as boutique business consulting organizations with a significant 'spirituality in the workplace' component, in the diffusion and level of adoption within particular organizational domains (e.g. high tech, education, manufacturing, professional, health, etc). To this end, neo-institutional theory incorporating both the old and new institutionalism (e.g. Hirsch and Lounsbury, 1997; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996; Seo and Creed, 2002) could provide useful insights. Such a study would not be unlike that of Lounsbury (2001) who examined the diffusion of recycling programs in universities and colleges in the Great Lakes states following recycling mandates in those states. He demonstrated that while some universities and colleges adopted recycling programs substantively, others did so ceremoniously. A significant aspect underlying the distinction was how the respective programs were staffed. The former staffed their programs with eco-activists who were highly intentional and intense—virtually 'religious'—about implementing the program and touting its benefits; the latter utilized existing staff for whom recycling was merely an additional responsibility which they implemented in a minimalist fashion. Another important aspect underlying the distinction was the role played by a national level social movement organization, the SEAC (Student Environmental Action Coalition). Lounsbury found that

schools with a substantive recycling program had a connection to the SEAC through its student environmental activist groups. The SEAC provided resources, network connections, and, importantly, advice and strategies for influencing the adoption of recycling programs. In the realm of spirituality in the workplace, we might well ask whether the creation of a dedicated spiritual position, such as a chaplain, reflects the substantive adoption and integration of spirituality in the workplace, or whether it remains ceremonial or coopted by instrumentality. Then, further, does the connection of persons within the organization to national level religious organizations encourage the substantive adoption of authentic spirituality in the workplace, or does the increasingly ceremonial and private nature of religion in North American society as a whole militate against it?

Approaching workplace spirituality from the perspective of non-instrumentality suggests several research approaches. For example, Zhuravleva & Jones (2006) report that non-instrumental researchers in the domain of workplace spirituality draw on work in consciousness studies, transpersonal psychology, and modern physics. They call for more research that uses interpretive, empathetic, and introspective methods such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and mindful inquiry (p. 19). Forniacara & Lund Dean (2001) have also called for greater use of qualitative methods in the study of workplace spirituality.

Specifically countering the tendency of technique toward quantification, researchers of workplace spirituality could employ both ethnostatistics and enumerology (see Gephart, 2006; Bogdan & Ksander, 1980). These methods study how statistical and numerical rhetoric are being used in the literature, media, polls, as well as the workplace itself, to present an organizational reality that undergirds and promotes an instrumental and technical approach to workplace spirituality. As Gephart (2006: 426) notes:

Numbers, including statistics, symbolize science, which is essentially the religion of desecularized modern society…ethnostatistics [can]…explore, interpret and dereify myths of rationality based in quantification and statistical practices.

More broadly, there is a need for more of a critical tradition in the academic area of management, spirituality, and religion. Following Ellul, we contend that the marginalization of critical perspectives in mainstream workplace spirituality literature is due to technique dominating the field. Too much in the domain is going unchallenged, with many of the discussions remaining at a status quo and superficial level. For example, is workplace spirituality simply reinventing previous academic wheels (e.g., human relations, corporate social responsibility, human resource and organizational development)? A secular spirituality that defines spirituality as values, attitudes, and beliefs adds little to discussions from a human relations, business ethics, and social issues in management approach to organizational issues. Spirituality can become so broad, bland, and lowest common denominator that the same criticism that has been applied to a status quo approach to corporate social responsibility can be applied to workplace spirituality and nothing will really change. In our opinion, the workplace spirituality domain is at a crisis point and there is a strong need for alternative ways of perceiving spirituality in the workplace as well as management, spirituality, and religion as a legitimate domain of study.

Perhaps one way to achieve greater critical perspective is to approach the subject from different domains. For example, researchers could approach workplace spirituality from the perspective of spirituality and/or religion rather than from the perspective of organization and management theory. Many of the world's major religions have a very long history (millennia) of spiritual practice as well as critique of that practice. One source among several that is exceedingly rich is the Christian tradition. Researchers could draw on this tradition to typify and

even challenge the practice of spirituality in the workplace. For example, John of the Cross (1542-1591), challenged the instrumental use of Christian spirituality by individuals, noting that God would eventually confront such a spiritual orientation through the 'dark night of the soul'. The 'dark night of the soul' exposes and confronts the sins of pride, greed, spiritual luxury, spiritual wrath, spiritual gluttony, spiritual envy and spiritual sloth, and replaces them with humility, simplicity, contentment, peace, moderation, joy, and strength (Foster and Smith, 1993: 33-37). Thus the Christian's practice of spirituality 'grows up', being weaned from a self-serving and self-aggrandizing orientation. We could ask, then, to what extent has workplace spirituality 'grown up'? Is it in infancy, or is it maturing, as described by Christian tradition? For the possibility exists that even as spirituality in the workplace may initially be coopted to serve the purposes of profitability, authentic spirituality may yet begin to be practiced as room for spirituality (e.g. discussions, chaplains, prayer rooms) is created in places of work. Then, further, if an authentic spirituality begins to rise, we could examine whether it continues to form an important part of human resource practice impacting the organization (as presumably is the case in its coopted form), or whether it becomes decoupled from the organization, taking on either a symbolic position (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), or leading to the creation of a separate organization (e.g. a foundation for charitable purposes).

From the perspective of Christian theology, one could apply Siker's (1989) adaptation of Niebuhr's typology of the interaction between Christianity and culture to assess the practice of spirituality in the workplace. Siker's (1989) five types of interaction between Christianity and business (Christ against business, the Christ of business, Christ above business, Christ and business in paradox, and Christ the transformer of business) do not allow for easy dismissal of various expressions of Christian spirituality in the workplace, but rather provide a basis to

critically assess each approach, noting both its merits and its shortcomings.

More generally, understanding the human tendency toward, and effect of, sacralizing the workplace could help us better understand whether (and how) spirituality in the workplace is being coopted to serve the goals of the organization, or whether the organization itself is displacing individuals' spirituality through the development of the organization as a (secular) sacred religion (Ashforth and Vaidyanath, 2002).

Beginning from varied academic perspectives and using a wide range of methodological approaches will allow academics to challenge the technical imperative, in other words place spirituality ahead of objective knowledge and bottom-line organizational performance, and to better understand the relationship between them.

CONCLUSION

If the larger context does not change, spirituality becomes yet another technique to keep doing what we have always been doing.

Peter Senge, 2004

To follow Ellul's reasoning, it does not matter whether or not there is lasting proof that workplace spirituality as a technique accomplishes the goals that have been set out. The logic is in place. The workplace spirituality movement has been legitimized. For the time being, there is evidence that its techniques have found ways to re-engage and re-enchant a disengaged and disenchanted workforce. Research and popular press have shown that by bringing technical spirituality into the workplace, people experience renewed meaning in their work; a sense of community and interconnectedness in the workplace; and companies gain employees who are more energetic, more committed, and hence more productive. By bringing a myth of meaningful work to a dehumanized workplace, the technician calls it progress. Although there are examples

of authentic spirituality in business today, we are not convinced that the corporate behemoth has turned its colors. There has been no significant transformation in business since the recent flourishing of 'workplace spirituality'. We continue to witness increasing disparity between the developed and developing world and between the rich and the poor in North America, as well as an increase in corporate ethical scandals and ecological degradation around the globe. Granted, there are many organizations that are integrating spiritual values into their activities and doing progressive things from an ethical, social, and ecologically responsible perspective. Some of these organizations use the term 'spirituality' and others choose not to. According to Marty (2003, p.51), a spirituality that focuses on individual spiritual development may help people "in their personal and private lives and may inspire a sense of vocation and aspects of stewardship and mission". Technical spirituality in the workplace can in some cases result in short term improvements over current conditions, but this 'spirituality' is not new and it is not transformational, and in some cases it will perpetuate inhumane working conditions under a guise of spirituality. As Ellul states, "I am somehow unable to believe in the revolutionary value of an act which makes the cash register jingle so merrily" (p.417).

Jacques Ellul admits that we cannot foresee the total effect of technique and offers little in the way of solution to the domination of technique, but does suggest that each person must find ways to resist and transcend the pull of technique and to put it back in its proper place as secondary. If as has been suggested that the contemporary spirituality movement is a work in progress (e.g., Marty, 2003), those of us studying workplace spirituality, holding conversations about spirituality in the workplace, and practicing spirituality in the workplace must find ways, as Ellul recommends, to resist and to transcend the infiltration of technique into the workplace spirituality domain. Technique is simply a means to an end. Employees' souls should not be

commodified and objectified. Spirituality in the workplace should be unconditional.

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