

# **An Integrative Framework for Exploring Organizational Identity and Spirituality**

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*In this paper, we explore the differences it makes, and what value it adds, to describe organizations in terms of their spiritual identity. To address these overall questions, we (1) define briefly the constructs of organizational identity and workplace spirituality, and to note their conceptual similarities/mutual implications in their respective literatures; (2) explore ways in which identity and spirituality might relate at the individual level; (3) propose ways in which organizations might be said to have a spiritual identity; and (4) discuss how understanding and accounting for organizational spiritual identity is relevant to management theory and practice.*

*“Identity is arguably more fundamental to the conception of humanity than any other notion...Therefore, it should come as no surprise to find that the concept of identity...also is central to the conceptualization of one of the most complex and fascinating of human creations, the work organization” (Gioia, 1998, p. 17).*

*“Spirituality is like gravity. It must be taken into account because it is there. Ignore it and you are ignoring the most central fact of any human situation” (Cowan, 1993, in Dehler & Welsh, 2003, p. 119)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The two quotes in the epigraph, appearing in two seminal chapters in the study of organizational identity and workplace spirituality respectively, seem quite bold. They assert that not only do these two constructs matter, but they are foundational to all human experience. How can this be? Consider two people working side by side at an identical task. One might approach the work as mundane, going about the required processes with little engagement in or satisfaction from the work, while the other might experience what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) called “flow”—i.e., self and work intertwining with little consciousness of passing time. As this illustration suggests, there may exist an intuitive, tacitly known or experienced energy that underlies and gives rise to other human processes—e.g., cognitions, emotions, and behaviors—an energy that has the potential to transform otherwise mechanical thoughts and actions into powerfully resonant creations, in the capacities of organizations to learn, to innovate, and to be effective.

In this paper, we characterize the underlying energies that may account for these differences as *human spirituality*, as it is manifested both individually and collectively, and especially as it has been conceptualized thus far in the *workplace spirituality* literature. Moreover, we propose a synergistic relationship between the literatures of workplace spirituality and *organizational identity* to extend our understandings of each concept and to bolster the relevance of both constructs to the study of organizations. Building from current psychological theories of individual spiritual identity, we address the largely unexplored question of how a spiritual identity might be said to exist at the organizational level. More importantly, what differences does it make, or what value does it add, to describe organizations in terms of their spiritual identity?

To address these overall questions, we proceed to (1) define briefly the constructs of organizational identity and workplace spirituality; (2) explore ways in which identity and spirituality might relate at the individual level; (3) propose ways in which organizations might be said to have a spiritual identity; and (4) discuss how understanding and accounting for organizational spiritual identity is relevant to management theory and practice.

## IDENTITY, SPIRITUALITY, AND CONCEPTUAL COMMON GROUND

The introduction of organizational identity and workplace spirituality to the study of organization theory and behavior dates back approximately two decades. Yet, their developmental paths have not crossed in either of their respective bodies of literature. In this section, we review the two concepts, identify several potential linkages, and articulate a rationale for their conceptual integration.

*Organizational identity* is essentially the set of self-definitional beliefs or meanings that members use to answer the question “who are we?” as an organization (cf. Mead, 1934). The construct was initially (and most often still is) defined in terms of those organizational characteristics which are central, distinctive, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Since then, the construct has been widely researched to show how organizations interpret issues, identify threats, resolve conflict, and establish competitive advantage (Foreman & Whetten (2002, p. 618).

*Workplace spirituality* has thus far eluded a singular definition. Instead, the usual approach has been to dimensionalize components that are thought to make the workplace a more “spiritual,” or at least a more spiritually-friendly, place. The rationale for such an environment is that “whole persons” report for work with physical, mental, emotional, and *spiritual* energies (Dehler & Welsh, 2003, p. 109; Richards, 1995). As memorably asked by Henry Ford, “Why is it that I always get the whole person when all I really want is a pair of hands?” (Pollard, 1996, p. 25).

Indeed, whole persons do report for work and have been shown to prefer integration to fragmentation, and expression rather than repression, of all parts of their lives in the workplace (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Sheep, 2006). An early attempt at dimensionalizing workplace spirituality was that of Ashmos & Duchon (2000, pp. 135-136), who characterized the construct as including (1) recognition of an “inner life” (i.e., mind and spirit) that impacts one’s “outer life” in the workplace; (2) meaningfulness in one’s work; and (3) a sense of transcendence toward something beyond oneself—e.g., interconnectedness with a work community. Others have proposed additional dimensions, among the most common being personal development in the form of self-actualization in the workplace (e.g., Ashforth & Pratt, 2003; Sheep 2006). For the purposes of our paper, we define workplace spirituality as encompassing these four dimensions.

In reviewing both literatures in depth, we have noted conceptual common ground between these two constructs. First, both identity and spirituality are, at their base, ontological constructs. They involve statements or distinct perspectives about the nature of “what is,” describing “ways of being” in the world as well as assumptions about reality. For example, workplace spirituality is often discussed in essentialist terms (whether explicitly or implicitly) of the inherent nature of humans as spiritual beings (e.g., Dehler & Welsh, 2003; Richards, 1995). Similarly, Ashforth and Mael (1996, p. 21) define organizational identity as “unfolding and stylized narratives about the ‘soul’ or essence of the organization.”

In addition to their common roots, both identity and spirituality have been shown to affect several common outcome variables of organizational interest. Several empirical studies in organizational

identity/identification (e.g., Dukerich, Golden, & Shortell, 2002; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Voss, Cable, & Voss, 2006) and workplace spirituality/religiosity (e.g., Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999) have shown significant effects on such variables as loyalty, commitment, turnover, organizational citizenship behaviors, and even firm performance. Thus, both constructs have been proposed and shown to “matter” in organizational theory and practice.

Finally, the literatures of both constructs have suggested the importance of linking them further to more established concepts/theories in organizational behavior and strategic management (e.g., Dehler & Welsh, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Surprisingly, there have relatively few explications of how these constructs might relate to one another (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003). This is an understudied area—a gap that this paper aims to address by proposing a framework of conceptual integration.

Our proposed framework (Figures 1&2) is grounded in the following ontological assumptions based in the literatures of identity and spirituality, as will be explicated later:

Assumption 1: People are inherently spiritual entities.

Assumption 2: People have identities.

Corollary: Identity and spirituality are related to one another within an individual.

Assumption 3: Organizations are essentially social actors.

Assumption 4: One characteristic of social actors is that they have identities.

Corollary: Organizations can be seen as spiritual entities through their identities.

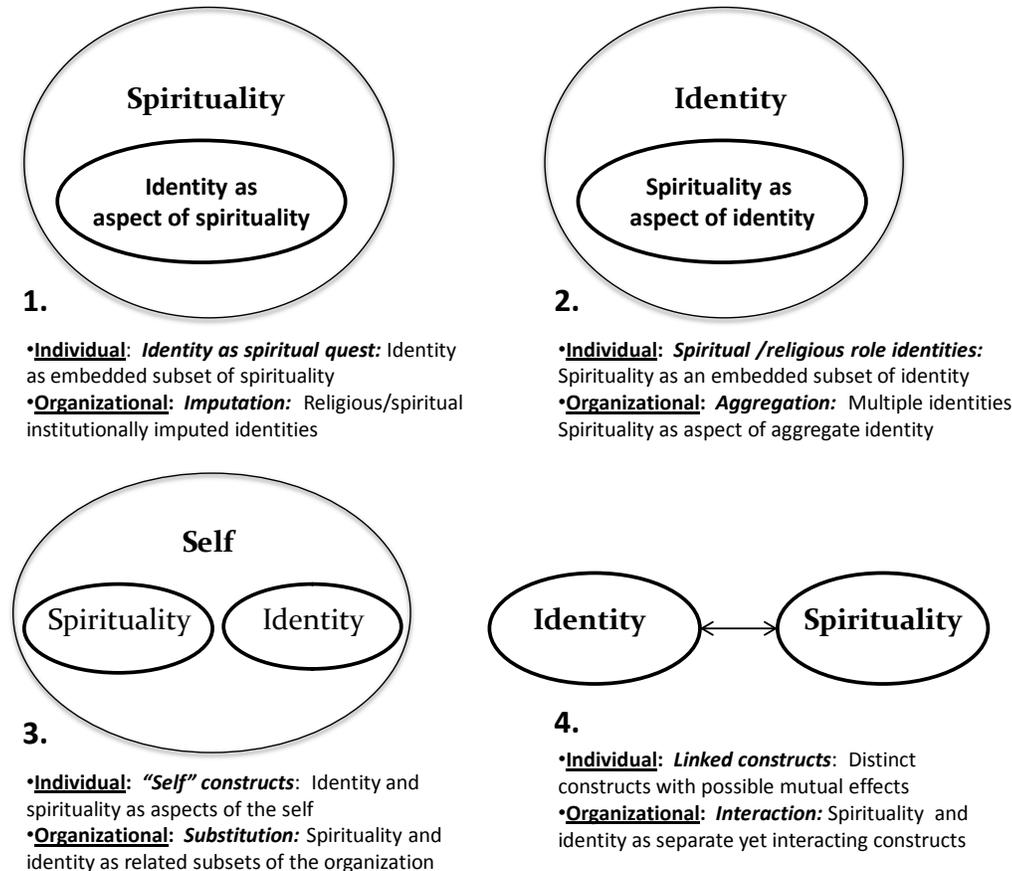
Based on these assumptions, we are proposing that organizations can be described as spiritual entities in terms of or through their identities. We argue that *identity is the key ontological/epistemological vehicle* for identifying the salience of spirituality in organizations. Although this is an understudied area, some research has used religious organizations, such as churches or orders, as contexts for developing or testing theories (Bartunek, 1984; Cheney, 1991; Kreiner, et al., 2006).

However, the inclusion of spirituality in the study of organizations is still relatively rare. We believe that this is largely due to questions of its conceptual fit and skepticism over its relevance. In this paper, we aim to address these concerns and articulate a rationale for the study of spirituality in organizations. As indicated in our assumptions above, we proceed in our discussion from an individual to an organizational level of analysis, accounting for analogous functions at each level (see Gioia, 1998; Whetten, 2006 for a review of multilevel issues related to identity). We begin by identifying four possible ways in which identity and spirituality are conceptually related to one another at the individual level of analysis. We then extrapolate to identify four related perspectives which integrate identity and spirituality at the organizational level, showing either how past research has already begun to make these connections or how future research can readily do so. We bolster our argument for the inclusion of spirituality in organizational studies with a discussion of the implications of a spiritual identity perspective on several key individual- and organizational-level outcomes. We conclude with a proposal for an identity-related research agenda which recognizes the role that spirituality plays in organizations and explores its possible effects.

## **INTEGRATING IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN INDIVIDUALS**

In this section, we propose a typology of four ways in which the construct of identity could be related to that of spirituality at the individual level of analysis (see Figure 1 and Table 1): 1) identity as an embedded subset of spirituality; 2) spirituality as an embedded subset of identity; 3) identity and spirituality as separate constructs, but as independent subsets of the larger construct of the self or subjectivity; and 4) identity and spirituality as separate and distinct constructs, but which can and do affect one another. These perspectives have varying bases in literature, as will be noted below, but they have not been articulated together as alternative approaches to the conceptualization of an individual-level link between identity and spirituality.

**FIGURE 1**  
**IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY: INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL**  
**LEVEL RELATIONSHIPS**



### Identity as a Spiritual Quest

In this approach, individuals are viewed as essentially and fundamentally spiritual, with a built-in quest for purpose and meaning. One way in which individuals gain this sense of meaning is through their identity—by establishing a clear sense of who they are in relation to the broader social order within which they exist. This perspective is based in our above discussions of essentialist ontological assumptions for spirituality (humans are spiritual beings) as well as the opening illustrations of spiritual “energy” that underlies other human processes.

Much of identity theory traces its roots back to the century-old work of William James (1890). James posited that the conscious self is comprised of three primary facets: material, social, and *spiritual*. Questions of identity may then be seen as flowing out of the spiritual aspect of the self. If spirituality is defined as that which is *transcendent*—of being part of something greater than oneself—then the quest for identity can be seen as one issue, along with one’s search for meaning, belongingness, and control, which is addressed by transcendence (as one of the components of spirituality; Ashforth & Pratt, 2003, p. 94). This view is reflected in some treatments of spiritual identity *development*, defined by Benson, et al. (2003, pp. 205-206) as “...the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred.”

**TABLE 1**  
**INDIVIDUAL LEVEL TYPOLOGY OF IDENTITY-SPIRITUALITY RELATIONSHIPS**

Perspective	Assumptions/Description	Literature examples	Examples of (Proposed) Outcomes
<b>Identity as a Spiritual Quest:</b> Identity as subset of spirituality	Individuals are spiritual beings that develop in ways that proceed toward self-transcendence. Spirit is the “vital animating essence” of identity.	Dehler & Welsh, 2003; Fry et al., 2005*; Moxley, 2000; Richards, 1995 Benson et al., 2003	performance, alignment of values, commitment, spiritual leadership*
<b>Spiritual or Religious Identities:</b> Spirituality as subset of identity (spiritual identity development; religious role-identity)	Spiritual/religious identity is just one of many components of individual identity; it is developed incrementally in life stages; it can vary in salience and role adherence	Kiesling et al., 2006*; Weaver & Agle, 2002; Wimberly, 1989	identification, ethical behaviors
<b>Identity and spirituality as aspects of “the self”</b>	Conceptually distinct constructs; may substitute for one another as perspectives of self; may be defined independently while maintaining coherence	Ashforth & Pratt, 2003; Brown, 2003; Pava, 2003	potentially distinct treatment of spirituality and identity (or other constructs); self-esteem, self-efficacy
<b>Identity and spirituality as distinct constructs that are interrelated</b>	Identity and spirituality may mutually affect one another.	Ashforth & Pratt, 2003	individual identity may impact one’s orientation toward spiritual involvement and expression; spiritual orientation may impact one’s choices or hierarchical ordering of components of identity

\*denotes empirical studies or supported outcomes

Thus, if spiritual identity development is viewed as a quest for transcendence, then the developmental path proceeds teleologically toward an identity that is increasingly part of something greater than the self. Variance in one’s preference for this personal transcendence thus becomes one of the more proximal outcomes of a spiritual self-identity. Simply put, as one transcends self, life’s purpose and meaning become more attached to a greater “whole” rather than self-defined. That greater whole may be conceived as a metaphysical abstraction (from personal deity to what William James called the “unseen order of things” [James, 1902; cited in Mirvis, 1997, p. 195]) or as a physical entity such as an organization or group. Either type of greater whole can be the prime target of attachment or “reaching out” as the individual seeks to develop his or her identity.

In more practical terms, this may mean that individual identities, as with other aspects of the self, are significantly determined by spiritual proclivities. This would seem commonsensical if we are talking about people whose calling or vocation is categorized as a spiritual one (e.g., ordained clergy or spiritual practitioners). It may seem less evident for those in more secular occupations. However, the argument is plausible that all individuals internalize and hold some sort of posture toward spiritual matters—from Islamic fundamentalist to evangelical Christian to avowed atheist—and that this spiritual posture, enacted as cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, is the key determinant (or animating essence) of other components of identity. Put in other terms, my sense of “who I am” would be undeniably shaped by my views (whatever they may be) of how the world is ordered, how I view others as spiritual beings, and what matters most in life.

Those who have articulated this perspective have proposed several outcomes. For example, Dehler and Welsh (1994, p. 23; 2003) argue that a spiritual perspective offers additional insights into models for managing organizational transformation and development with a number of individual and organizational outcomes (e.g., improved performance, alignment with values, and increased commitment). Others suggest that a predominantly spiritual perspective has profound implications for the nature of organizational leadership. This stream of research is conducted under the banner of “spiritual leadership” and is based on the view that the nature of one’s identity as a leader is just one of many aspects and enactments of one’s spiritual essence. For example, the essentialist perspective expressed by Moxley (2000, p. 8) in writing about leadership was that “spirit defines our self at the deepest levels of our being.” Moreover, rather than being viewed merely as a style of leadership under extant theories (e.g., transformational or charismatic leadership), spiritual leadership is heralded as an umbrella that can subsume others—a “springboard for a new paradigm of leadership theory” (Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005, p. 835).

### **Spiritual or Religious Identities**

The second perspective of identity and spirituality (see Figure 1) takes the converse view—that an individual’s identity is a highly complex, multi-faceted construct, and one’s *spiritual identity* is but one (albeit potentially significant or salient) component of that identity. There are two research streams that approach spirituality and identity in this way: (1) spiritual identity and identity development in the fields of developmental psychology, social psychology, and sociology; (2) religious role-identity from the symbolic interactionist perspective.

#### *Spiritual Identity, Identity Development, and Identification*

This view has been developed within in the disciplines of developmental psychology, social psychology, and sociology (Benson et al., 2003; Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, & Colwell, 2006; King, 2003; Pedersen, 2000; Poll & Smith, 2003), and is built largely on the work of James (1981/1890), Mead (1934), and Erikson (1950, 1968, 1980), all of whom recognized the role of spirituality and religion in identity. In particular, Erikson described the individual quest for an identity as a search for ontological “wholeness”—which he defined as “a sound, organic, progressive mutuality between diversified...parts” (1964, p. 92). Erikson and others included a religious component among those “diversified parts” and “recognized religion’s potential in identity development” (King, 2003, p. 198).

Although it still comprises a small percentage of the developmental psychology literature (Benson et al., 2003), an emerging research stream asserts that spiritual identity development is a “powerful resource for positive human development” and well-being in children and adolescents (Benson et al., 2003, p. 210) as well as adults (Kiesling et al., 2006). One example (there are many) of a definition of individual *spiritual identity* is “a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual’s core values” (Kiesling et al., 2006, p. 1270).

A related construct to identity development is that of organizational identity and identification. Organizational identity provides a “cognitive or emotional foundation” (Schultz, Hatch & Larsen, 2000, p. 16) upon which members can build attachments (or identification) with the organization. Identification with various aspects of an organization’s multiple identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), one of which can be its spiritual identity, can thus serve to define at least partially our individual identity. This occurs in two ways. First, we tend to “declare our essence, our uniqueness” in terms of “our affiliations or identifications with organized groups” (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, p. 4). Second, an organization’s identity and its “attendant goals, values, beliefs, and norms...provide potential *spiritual hooks* [italics added] for the individual, particularly for connection and growth” (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003, p. 96). With this two-way operation of the organization’s identity as both a point of attachment (the “spiritual hook”) and a shaper of individual/social identity perceptions, one’s identification with spiritual aspects of the organization can be an indicator of a spiritual component of one’s individual identity.

### *Religious Role-Identity*

A second theoretical stream in which spirituality (or religiosity) is seen as a subset of individual identity is based in the symbolic interactionist perspective and argues that spiritual identities are one role-related aspect of an individual's identity (Kiesling et al, 2006; Weaver & Agle, 2002; Wimberly, 1989). As with all role-related theories of identity, the key issue is role-salience, or more specifically the salience of an individual's spirituality or spiritual identity. Affecting this salience are contextual factors in the social setting, such as the number of other like-minded religious people with whom one has interpersonal contact. Weaver and Agle (2002) propose that, if the interpersonal context is harmonious with one's individual religious role expectations, it is more likely that ethical behavior commensurate with those expectations will occur. Thus, from this perspective the relative salience of the religious component of identity (as role expectations inhering in that identity) affects the likelihood of individual ethical behaviors in an organizational context.

Interestingly, the use of the word "religious" or "religiosity" vis-à-vis "spiritual" or "spirituality" in the literatures of most disciplines is the topic of some controversy and may cause some confusion. Thus, we attempt to clarify our position here. With few exceptions, spirituality is not usually defined explicitly as precluding religion, but it is considered by many (but not all) researchers to be a more inclusive term (see Benson, et al., 2003, p. 209, for a typical discussion). By contrast, several articles explore the "valuable role" of institutionalized religion/religious beliefs as ideological, social, and spiritual contexts for individual identity development (King, 2003, p. 201). We follow the position articulated by Hicks (2002, p. 379), who asserts that defining religion and spirituality in oppositional terms is problematic, believing instead that they are in a "complex interrelationship," and that organizational leaders should create a "culture in which leaders and followers can respectfully negotiate religious and spiritual diversity." We would also agree with others who have cautioned that viewing spirituality as incompatible with institutionalized religion is neither theoretically productive nor academically thorough (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Hill, et al., 2000; Quatro, 2004).

### **Identity and Spirituality as Aspects of "The Self"**

In the third perspective, identity and spirituality are seen as conceptually distinct but also as essentially serving the same purpose—that of defining and maintaining the self. Here, identity and spirituality, while having different definitions and literatures, are seen as approaching the same issue from slightly different perspectives. In this view, spirituality and identity may substitute for one another as perspectives of the self, but they are not seen as necessarily interrelated. Thus, it is possible to articulate a coherent view of subjectivity in terms of identity formation that does not necessarily take spirituality into account in any sense. Likewise, it would be possible to theorize the self in terms of spirituality (or religion)—e.g., theological explanations of the mind, body, and soul—without any necessary reference to a particularized self-identity.

However, that being said, the two constructs are inherently connected by virtue of the fact that they are aspects of the self and seek to address similar fundamental issues related to the self. Specifically, both identity and spirituality conceptually aim to connect the self to its broader context. Identity consists of those cognitive devices which help the individual define "who they are" with respect to the social order around them (Mead, 1934; Burke, 1937). In a similar way, spirituality consists of a set of beliefs, values, norms, etc. which provide meaning to the self and transcend the self, connecting it to something greater or beyond oneself. Although different, both constructs serve to define, situate, and provide meaning to the self. Thus, the two may be connected in the sense that they both may be seen to address fundamental needs of individuals in the workplace (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003; Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Mirvis, 1997).

### **Identity and Spirituality as Distinct Constructs**

In this view, the two constructs are conceptually distinct from one another, with neither being a subset of the other nor a mutual subset of a larger construct. Instead, the two are related to one another as individual-level social constructs, and one may affect the other. Specifically, identity and spirituality may have their own independent direct effects on outcome variables, but they may also relate in some ways to

produce interaction effects or explain common variance in outcome variables. They may also relate causally to one another in some respects.

In such cases, other aspects of an individual's identity might predispose that individual to a certain orientation toward spirituality (e.g., an ordained priest might have a different posture toward spirituality than a devoted positivist researcher *because of* or as a function of their respective identities). Similarly, spirituality in the form of spiritual proclivities or assumptions (e.g., having a predominantly theistic versus materialistic worldview) might predispose different individuals to categorize themselves in very different ways. The variance in groups with whom individuals would identify and the identity categories that they would invoke would be explained significantly by spiritual differences among individuals.

Thus, outcomes of this perspective are the mutual effects of spirituality and identity on each other, as well as the interaction effects they may have on other outcome variables (which have yet to be theorized). Individual identity may impact one's orientation toward spiritual involvement and expression, and one's spiritual orientation may impact one's choices or hierarchical ordering of components of identity.

## INTEGRATING IDENTITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

### **From Individual to Organization: Organizations as Social Actors**

When looking at similar constructs across levels, some rationale by which multiple levels may be traversed is in order. For example, Cheney and Tompkins (1987, p. 4) noted, "To capture the individual-organizational relationship *as a process* [italics in original] is a formidable theoretical challenge." Yet, they also observed that, regarding identity, "one slides easily from 'I' to 'we' and 'we' to 'I'" (1987, p. 4). We have naturally come to think of identity in personified terms. When dealing with the question of how *organizations* are like people (an anthropomorphic analogue), Czarniawska (2000, p. 272) puts it this way: "Organization theory, more often than not, treats organizations as super-persons, and therefore ascribes to them many anthropomorphic properties. Organizations make decisions, behave, learn, fail, and, of course, 'have' and 'exhibit' identities."

Further, Gioia (1998) lays out a plausible framework by which the path from individual to organizational identity can be traversed. First describing attributes of individual identity (e.g., core to a person's being, formed through social interaction, multiplicity, complexity), he shows how individual-level features of identity can "supply the basis for extension of the notion to the organization" (1998, p. 20). For example, like individuals, organizations "can be viewed as subsuming a multiplicity of identities" and "maintain identity through interaction" (1998, p. 21).

Whetten (2006, p. 221) further justifies how this leap in levels can occur without conceptual fallacies. Building upon Morgeson and Hoffman's (1999) approach to cross-level theorizing, Whetten asserts that "organizational constructs borrowed from the individual level of analysis need not have the same structures, only the same functions (i.e., comparable effects or consequences)." He points to the example of memory, serving similar functions for both individuals and organizations, but taking a quite different form at micro- and macro-levels.

We thus proceed from an individual typology of identity-spirituality relationships to an organization-level one based on the above assumptions that organizations are collectives of individuals, and as such, can exhibit many anthropomorphic properties. Thus, individual-level features of the identity-spirituality relationship may be analogously extrapolated to the organizational level in their functional relationships. However, while all of that sounds intuitive, we recognize that there is still considerable debate among scholars as to how identity is to be operationalized at the organizational level (cf. Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006; Pratt, 2003; Ravasi & van Rekom, 2003; Whetten, 2006).

In the following discussion, we identify four perspectives, analogous to the prior individual-level views, which connect the concepts of spirituality and identity at the organizational level (See Figure 1 and Table 2). Two of these reflect these operational uncertainties. Our first perspective is based on the shared beliefs of institutionalized practices; the second is based upon an assumption of aggregation.

**TABLE 2**  
**ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL TYPOLOGY OF IDENTITY-SPIRITUALITY RELATIONSHIPS**

Perspective	Assumptions/Description	Literature examples	Examples of (Proposed) Outcomes
<b>Imputation:</b> Identities that are fundamentally spiritual	Some organizations have institutionally-derived or imposed identities that are fundamentally spiritual. The organization's identity is imputed to be spiritual because of its organizational field or institutional context.	Cheney, 1991*; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006*; Sani & Reicher, 1999*	management of communication in organizations*; "identity work" of optimal balance between personal and social identities*; organizational consensus versus schism*
<b>Aggregation:</b> Organizations as aggregates of individuals	Organizations have spiritual components (along with other components) of their identities. The "spiritual identity" of the organization may be viewed as an aggregate of those individual identities.	Weaver & Agle, 2002; Schneider, 1987	salience of spiritual component of organizational identity; ethical behavior of organizations in an interorganizational environment
<b>Substitution:</b> Identity and spirituality as subsets of the organization	Identity and spirituality, as subsets of the larger construct of the organization, can substitute for one another. As social actors, some organizations have identities which are so strong that they become <i>like</i> a religion to those within.	Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Olins, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Bell & Taylor, 2003; cf. Kunda, 1992*	transformation of utilitarian organizations into normative ones; organizations as "secular religions"; normative control*; brands with "spiritual power"; "pastoral power" of organizations; "respectful pluralism" in organizations; person-organization fit issues
<b>Orientation:</b> Identity and spirituality interact with one another	The identity-spirituality relationship takes the form of an identity orientation toward spirituality. Organizations can be described in terms of the different ways in which they orient themselves or act towards spiritual issues.	Ashforth & Pratt, 2003; cf. Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Krisof, 1996; Mitroff & Denton, 1999*	Organizational identity as an enabling, partnering, or directing orientation toward spirituality; varying person-organization fit from a needs-supplies perspective; organizations characterized as "more spiritual" or "less spiritual" by members*

\*denotes empirical studies or supported outcomes

### **Imputation Argument: Institutionally-Derived Identities**

Some organizations are "by definition" religious or spiritual organizations. That is, they have institutionally-derived or imposed identities which are fundamentally spiritual. Thus, their identity is *essentially* a spiritual or religious one. Institutionalization is defined by Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 341) as "processes by which social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action." These "rule-like" processes define different organizational forms that constrain the possibilities for what counts as legitimate social processes and structures within an organization of that type (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Polos, Hannan, & Carroll, 2002; Ruef, 2000).

Of course, some of these forms are predominantly religious or spiritual in nature. Local religious organizations (such as parishes or congregations) or spiritual communities (such as monasteries or kibbutzim) are usually local instantiations of a more global institutionalized form (as a legitimated system or philosophy of belief and practice). For example, there are institutional norms that constrain what it means "legitimately" to be a Catholic parish, a Jewish synagogue, a Buddhist temple, or Taoist monastery. These constrain identity at the organizational level of the spiritual/religious organization.

We refer to this perspective as an *imputation argument* for the identity-spirituality relationship. The organization's identity is imputed to be religious or spiritual because of its organizational field or

institutional context. A church, monastery, or mission agency is in essence a spiritual organization, no matter how one defines its identity otherwise.

This perspective is analogous to the first perspective of individual identity in that the organization's identity is derived from its embeddedness in a spiritual context or field. Organizational identity processes and conflicts have been studied in such organizations as the Roman Catholic Church (Cheney, 1991), the Episcopal Church (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006), and the global Anglican Communion (Sani & Reicher, 1999). The individual and organizational outcomes of these studies have respectively included the effective management of communication and rhetoric in organizations, the "identity work" of striving toward optimal balance between personal and social identities, and the possibilities for organizational consensus versus schism.

### **Aggregation Argument: Organizations as Aggregates of Identities**

The second organizational-level perspective is analogous to the second individual perspective—i.e., that organizations, like individuals, may be said to have spiritual components (along with other components) of their identities. This argument is based on the logic of the initial assumptions given earlier in the paper. That is, people within organizations have spiritual, role-identities of varying salience, and these identities affect their attitudes, relationships, and ethical behaviors in organizations (Weaver & Agle, 2002; Wimberly, 1989). As such, organizations are affected by individual spiritual identities, and the "spiritual identity" of the organization may be viewed as an aggregate of those individual identities.

If this is the case, then the salience and context of the religiosity component of an organization's identity might determine how ethically the organization as a whole operates in an interorganizational environment. To borrow from Schneider's (1987) well-known title, "the people make the place." Schneider's main thesis was that organizations are "what they are" (identity) because of "the people behaving in them" (1987, p. 438). Thus, if individual religious role-identity (with its attendant expectations) impacts ethical behavior in organizations (Weaver & Agle, 2002), then aggregates of those behaviors logically mean that "ethical people make an ethical place."

A second conclusion from the aggregation argument is that the possibility exists of organizations varying significantly in the salience of their spiritual/religious component of identity just as the aggregate of the individuals that comprise them varies. In this sense, an organization may have multiple identities or dimensions of its identity, and part of members' characterizations of the organization's identity would include its religious component (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Recent research on multiple identity organizations has demonstrated the value-added of exploring the relative salience and impact of different identities (Brickson, 2005; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Glynn, 2000; Voss, Cable, & Voss, 2006).

### **Substitution Argument: Identity and Spirituality as Organizational Characteristics**

The third perspective, also analogous to the third individual-level perspective, is that identity and spirituality are subsets of the larger construct of the organization (and can therefore substitute for one another). Specifically, as social actors, some organizations have identities which are so strong that they become *like* a religion to those within it. Identity acts in such a way that it can be seen as an analogue to an organization's "soul" or "spirit." For example, Ashforth and Mael (1996, p. 21) are emphatic in their definition of identity as "unfolding and stylized narratives about the "soul" or essence of the organization." Moreover, they "liken a compelling identity to the "soul" or "spirit" of the organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985), the latter defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as 'the vital animating essence'" (1996, p. 28). They also argue that "identities that embody a cosmology that resonates with the personal needs of prospective members can effectively transform utilitarian organizations into normative ones."

Indeed, there are examples of this decidedly "religious" or cult-like quality in organizations that are not religious or spiritual in the sense given in the first perspective above. These are utilitarian, or for-profit business, organizations that have somehow morphed into quasi-religions in the ways they relate to their members (and their members to them). For example, Olins (2000:63) explains how brand identities such as Nike are attributed with a "spiritual power" that may even serve as a "replacement for or

supplement to religious belief.” Or work is re-imagined in consumer-oriented organizations as “an activity through which people produce their identities” in which “market-based forms of social regulation operate through the ‘soul’” (du Gay, 2000, pp. 71-72).

Perhaps nowhere is this “spiritualization” of a work organization more evident than in direct-selling organizations such as Amway, where the lines between “secular” and “sacred” were purposefully blurred as a means of motivation and control (Pratt, 2000). Ashforth and Vaidyanath (2002, p. 359) discuss at length the problematic phenomena when organizations become “secular religions.” Founders emerge metaphorically as deity, key insiders as clergy, jobs as callings, institutionalized processes as rituals, and failings as sins. The ethical dilemma is whether individual rights are violated to exploit the power of this “religious” devotion as instrumental leverage for economic gain. Potentially, both spirituality and identity can be excessively managed, manipulated, and co-opted as forms of normative control to “regulate employees’ ‘insides’—their self-image, their feelings, and identifications” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 622; Kunda, 1992).

Of course, this “dark side” application is not inevitable. A religious organizational identity can potentially be applied in a fair and ethical way, just as any other component of identity. Several examples exist in the literature. Hicks (2002, p. 392) proposed a “respectful pluralism” approach to spirituality and religiosity in organizations in which employees are given a “significant degree” of freedom of all types of expression and commitments (spiritual, religious, political, cultural, and so on) in the workplace. This is similar, in philosophical intent at least, to the person-organization fit approach suggested by Sheep (2006) in which the underlying principle of workplace spirituality becomes not a matter of hegemonic or managerial imposition but a process of matching individual spiritual preferences with an organization’s capacity to supply that type of spiritual environment (identity) preferred by the member.

### **Interaction Argument: Identity and Spirituality Interact within Organizations**

The fourth and final perspective of organizational identity vis-à-vis workplace spirituality assumes that spirituality and identity, while separate and distinct concepts, may overlap or intersect with one another and may affect or interact with each other. As in its individual-level analogue described earlier, the interaction at the organizational level takes the form of an identity orientation toward spirituality. Organizations can be described in terms of the different ways in which they orient themselves or act towards spiritual issues at the organizational level of policy and management of those issues. Ashforth and Pratt (2003, p. 96) have argued that “organizations can be arrayed on a continuum of approaches to spirituality,” thus “approximating spirituality” at the organizational level—i.e., “how organizations facilitate spiritual strivings within the constraints imposed by the institutional setting.” Thus, if one meaningful function of organizational identity is its orientation toward spiritual issues, then spirituality matters.

One way organizations can be perceived by members as “more spiritual” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p. 83) is in their practices or policies that might enable or constrain the expression of personal spirituality in the workplace. Ashforth and Pratt (2003) suggest a three-way typology of organizational spiritual orientations: enabling, partnering, or directing organizations. These organizational types are varied along a continuum of increasing degrees of spiritual *control* of members by managers. The *enabling* organization serves as a passive facilitator for individual spiritual strivings, and individuals retain control of their spiritual lives. Organizations with more proactive approaches would be characterized as *partnering* organizations (in which organizational spirituality is a negotiated process of social construction) or *directing* organizations (in which a preferred belief system is imposed on employees).

These differing organizational identity types related to spiritual orientation bring up the question of how an organization adopting one of these orientations might impact members’ organizational identification as well as person-organization fit (P-O fit). When approaching identity-spirituality from this fourth perspective, wherein identity and spirituality intersect and interact with one another, we suggest that many of the outcomes that have been proposed as direct effects of spirituality in the workplace (e.g., improved organizational performance, more satisfied employees, reduced turnover, increased creativity

and innovation, commitment) are actually mediated by the degree of P-O fit related to the spiritual orientation identity of the organization (Chatman, 1989; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Kristof, 1996).

For example, if an individual who preferred a spiritual work environment that would be categorized as an enabling (passively facilitating) organization, yet accepted a job where there was a more proactive approach to spirituality (partnering or directing organization), that individual may experience incongruence—predicting higher levels of stress, lower job satisfaction, and other unfavorable outcomes. Certainly, it could not be said that partnering or direction organizations are not spiritual (e.g., ServiceMaster ® and one of its founding objectives “to honor God in all we do”; Pollard, 1996), but rather that there is poor fit between the individual preference for less directivity and the organizational supply of more than is desired.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR A RESEARCH AGENDA**

Returning to our opening illustrations of spirituality as an underlying energy for other human states and processes, we have proposed four individual-level and four analogous organization-level typologies for relating identity and spirituality. The typologies suggest alternative research agendas that can advance our understanding of how this underlying energy—as conceptualized in social science literatures as human spirituality—matters to the study of identity (and vice versa), as well as how both might interact to affect other outcomes of interest. Tables 1 and 2 summarize each of the perspectives, their varying assumptions, and outcomes that have either been proposed for or supported in research.

Taking this summary into account, we propose: (1) that relationships proposed in the cited literature that have not been empirically demonstrated should be operationalized and tested; and (2) that the relationships in each of the models in our typologies should be operationalized and tested to determine which of the models emerge as having stronger or weaker empirical support. We next discuss each of these in more detail.

### **Testing Proposed Relationships Extant in the Literature**

At the individual level of analysis, one of the more promising avenues for empirical research is that proposed by Weaver and Agle (2002, p. 77): that “role expectations, internalized as a religious self-identity, can influence ethical behavior” as “moderated by religious identity salience and religious motivational orientation.” Thus, a clear model has been proposed for testing and, if supported, would demonstrate the importance of individual religious-identity salience in producing behavioral outcomes that impact organizational identity. Such affected behaviors could have strong bearing on whether the organization is characterized as “ethical” by its own employees and other stakeholder groups. Thus, religious role-identity may have implications for organizational image and reputation (cf. Brown, et al., 2006). Given the maturity of role-identity theory and the wealth of empirical research in this area, it would seem that a spiritual role-identity research agenda would hold strong promise.

Another promising stream of empirical research may derive from this role-related identity theory perspective as well—whether and how the spiritual component of self-identity may impact key variables in role-identity theory, such as level of organizational identification and perceptions of P-O fit. Whether and how it does so would be of interest to organizations, especially since identification and P-O fit have been shown to impact a wide array of outcomes (e.g., performance, commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, and lower turnover intent [Chatman, 1989; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004]).

At the organizational level, questions remain as to whether an oft-made claim for workplace spirituality is supportable: that a “more spiritual” workplace (i.e., where spirituality is a more salient component of organizational identity) produces benefits for the “bottom line,” or organizational performance in general. Some studies have indicated initial support for pursuing a more aggressive research agenda that investigates the relationship between an organization-level spiritual identity and various measures of organizational performance (e.g., Mitroff and Denton, 1999). Giacalone and Jurkiewicz argued that (in a point-counterpoint article with Keiko Krahnke): “organizations need conclusive evidence connecting workplace spirituality with bottom line performance; anything less would

bring into question their fiduciary responsibility to stockholders and their moral responsibility to stakeholders” (Krahnke, Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 398).

Recent work by Voss et al (2006) has shown a link between identity congruence or consistency and firm-level performance. Perhaps research could explore similar kinds of linkages involving spiritual identity in organizations. Thus, there are theoretical as well as very practical implications of understanding the impact of the identity-spirituality connection in organizations.

### **Comparing the Perspective Models**

As different paradigms operate on different assumptions and yield different types of information and understanding (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), so also do the different perspectives of how identity and spirituality might relate. A comparative research agenda would involve operationalizing and testing (to the extent possible) the relationships in each of the models of the typologies we have proposed. Some models may emerge as having stronger or weaker empirical support and/or theoretical potential to explain/predict outcomes of interest, and thus promise for fruitful streams of research. Strengths and weaknesses of each perspective could then be more credibly articulated than they could in the abstract.

However, some strengths and limitations are foreshadowed from what we currently know. For example, the second individual perspective (spirituality as a subset of identity) could arguably be said to have a stronger empirical base, with multiple studies in developmental and social psychology. Moreover, this perspective is perhaps the most theorized conceptually as models for testing have been clearly specified and proposed (e.g., Weaver & Agle, 2002). However, weaknesses of this perspective are that it does not account for possibilities incorporated in the other three: (1) that identity may be a subcomponent of spirituality as human essence; (2) that identity and spirituality are not necessarily embedded in one another but can be relatively independent constructions of “the self”; or (3) that identity may have a causal relationship to spiritual orientations and vice versa, but that they are not nested constructs.

Similarly, at the organizational level, similar advantages could be cited for the aggregation argument of identity-spirituality. Aggregation is a commonly accepted technique for cross-level studies, and Schneider’s (1987) macro-level theory of attraction-selection-retention (“the people make the place”) is a very plausible way to understand that individual behaviors can aggregate into organizational ones. Furthermore, Pratt and Foreman’s (2000) aggregation response to multiple organizational identities can be logically extended to include spiritual aspects of an organization’s identity. However, an empirical study is needed to demonstrate that religious or spiritual identities of individuals or groups aggregate to impact not only individual ethical behaviors but also the ways organizations behave or are perceived ethically by various stakeholder groups.

Recognizing the obvious advantage of the aggregation approach, the other three organization-level perspectives also have strengths of: (1) having a strong (institutional) theoretical foundation and well-developed empirical literature (imputation argument); (2) providing an explanation for how predominantly utilitarian organizations can morph into normative ones (“secular religions”) (substitution argument); and (3) accounting for how different orientations of organizations toward spirituality might impact individual attitudes and behavior as well as organizational performance (intersection argument).

Regarding this third strength (of the intersection argument), operationalizing the typology of enabling, partnering, and directing organizations (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003) would allow the exploration of how variance in those identity types might explain other organizational outcomes. For example, it would appear intuitively that most people would prefer (and thus perceive greater P-O fit with) enabling organizations due to widespread preferences—particularly in Western cultures—for self-determination and autonomy (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003, p. 103). However, this conclusion lacks empirical support. Moreover, we do not know the impact of explicitly spiritual or religious forms of normative control (in varying degrees in partnering and directing organizations) upon organizational performance/effectiveness. It would seem to be of value to organizations to know which of these orientations toward spirituality (that would be instantiated as policies and/or rules) would be most positively related to individual and organizational creativity or greater bottom line performance.

### **Limitation: Measurement of Identity and Spirituality**

A limitation for all of the above suggestions for research is a relative lack of conceptual consensus for the constructs, particularly for that of workplace spirituality. Of course, if conceptualization is a contested issue, operationalization would be even more so. However, it is not an insurmountable problem. Albert and Whetten (1985, p. 264) originally conceived organizational identity as a construct that would be “clear, distinctive, important, useful, and measurable.” Certainly, there are extant studies of organizational identity in which identity has been measured along a continuum between the two major categories of identity (utilitarian versus normative) (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Categorizing organizational identities from a more institutional or ecological perspective, several dimensional classifications have been proposed. For example, Baron (2004) proposed a three-way dimensionalizing of organizational identity according to its (1) sharpness and resonance; (2) focus; and (3) authenticity. Organizations scoring high on all three of these dimensions were said to have “strong” identities.

Scales for spirituality are also multiple. In the psychology discipline, MacDonald’s (2000) scale is often used. In the management discipline, there is an early scale by Ashmos & Duchon (2000) that demonstrated mixed validity across levels. Sheep (2004) pilot tested a four-dimensional scale designed to measure spiritual P-O fit. An entire edited volume has been published of earlier scales of spirituality and religiosity (Hill & Hood, 1999). Thus, while consensus would be difficult to obtain as to which scale would be “best” or “standard,” validated scales for both identity and spirituality are available for the research agenda that we have suggested.

### **CONCLUSION**

We thus conclude where we began. We have proposed that spirituality and identity indeed matter to the research of organizations and to the individuals that comprise them. Our basic contention is that the construct of identity provides the most logical and therefore most promising vehicle through which scholars can explore the role of spirituality in organizations. The empirical evidence amassed to date is far from conclusive, but it suggests that the constructs of identity and spirituality cannot be dismissed in organizational studies as long as “whole persons” report for work. We have thus proposed typologies at the individual and organizational levels to account for different ways that identity and spirituality can and do relate to each other, and we have reviewed support that currently exists in the literature applying to each.

Based both in extant proposals that yet lack empirical support and proposals of our own, we have suggested a specific research agenda that, if carried through, has the potential to explain variance in outcomes that matter to managers and employees—e.g., organizational performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, reduced turnover intent, creativity and innovation, and citizenship behaviors. There are also certain intangible outcomes that inhere in our conceptualizations of identity and spirituality: meaning and purpose in work, transcendence of self to participate in organizational community, and integration of one’s inner “self” and one’s work. What for many decades has been “undiscussable in objectivist science” (Vaill, 1998, p. 28)—the spiritual component of humankind—is now being recognized by increasing numbers of scholars in multiple disciplines as a means by which both individual and organizational interests can be better served.

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