

**Restorying a Culture of Ethical and Spiritual Values:  
A Role for Leader Storytelling<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

In this paper, we outline some of the connections between the literatures of organizational storytelling, spirituality in the workplace, organizational culture, and authentic leadership. We suggest that leader storytelling that integrates a moral and spiritual component can transform an organizational culture so members of the organization begin to feel connected to a larger community and a higher purpose. We specifically discuss how leader role modeling in authentic storytelling is essential in developing an ethically and spiritually based organizational culture. However, we also acknowledge a potential dark side to leader storytelling. Implications for authentic storytelling research and practice are discussed.

Key words: authenticity, ethical culture, leadership, spirituality, storytelling

Area for review: Value Based Management

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A Role for Leader Storytelling**

Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen early on recognized the public appreciation for morally- and spiritually-nourishing storytelling with their popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series. However, organizational scholars have only recently begun to explore the links between organizational storytelling and ethical and spiritual values. And even though storytelling has been used extensively by leaders throughout history, storytelling by today's organizational leaders has received little attention in the academic literature ( Forster, Cebis, Majteles, Mathur, Morgan, Preuss, et al., 1999:1117). However, there has been a recent increase in attention given to the relationship between storytelling and effective leadership among both academics and practitioners (e.g., Adamson, Pine, Van Steenhoven, and Kroupa, 2006; Denning, 2006; Fleming, 2001; and Wacker and Silverman, 2003).

Ciulla (1995) suggested that the area of leadership ethics opens up new avenues of conversation and exploration for and among researchers and practitioners. In this paper, we outline some of the connections between the literatures of organizational storytelling, spirituality in the workplace, ethical organizational culture, and authentic transformational leadership. We then provide some implications for fostering an organizational culture that promotes ethical and spiritual storytelling by leaders, and ethical and spiritual storytelling about leaders by others in the organization. In addition, we acknowledge a potential dark side to leader storytelling that integrates a moral and spiritual component. We conclude with some implications for research and practice.

**Organizational Storytelling**

It has been said that organizations are made up of many stories and competing story interpretations (Boje, 1995). The stories that are told in an organization allow researchers and practitioners a way to understand and try to bring about change in an organization's culture (Boyce, 1996). It is not surprising then that much of the storytelling work in organizational studies has direct links to the organizational culture literature (e.g. Martin, 2002; Schein, 1985). Specific applications of organizational storytelling that have been outlined in the literature include, among others, confirming shared experiences, generating commitment, renewing a sense of purpose, co-creating a vision for the organization, engaging emotions, driving strategic change, and facilitating sense-making (e.g., Adamson et al., 2006; Boyce, 1996; Fleming, 2001; Forster et al., 1999; Gabriel, 2004; McKee, 1997; Parkin, 2004). Others have considered the extent to which stories are embedded in daily conversations regarding ethical conduct (e.g., Ferrell, Fraedrich, and Ferrell, 2005). Forster et al. (1999:19) emphasize that “[t]o be truly effective, leaders should not only communicate stories, but also embody them. Inspirational leaders can make their messages even more powerful by leading by example”.

Stories told in organizations are said to consist of the narrative itself as well as the morals to the story, and they reflect deeply held assumptions (Martin, 2002). It has also been said that the images and metaphors that are used in organizational story-telling influence our individual worldview and redefine organizational values (Kaye, 1996). In other words, stories can be used to construct a new “organizational sense” (Fleming, 2001:35) . This can be done by bringing in new storytellers and by “revising the old stories” (Boje, 1995:1117). As Forster et al. (1999:14) point out, stories “...act as both mirrors and windows on the human experience, showing people either how to look at reality in a different way or suggesting alternative realities”.

It has been said that stories appeal to both the heart and the mind (McConkie and Boss, 1994). They help us to define who we are, why we are here, and what we should value. They are used to make sense of ambiguity and uncertainty (Fleming, 2001). Storytelling has an important role in most spiritual traditions, religions, and cultures. For example, most indigenous peoples of the world use oral storytelling to transfer spiritual knowledge. Notable story telling leaders throughout history have included Jesus Christ, The Buddha, Mohammed, and Martin Luther King Junior. According to Bolman and Deal (1995), stories are one of the main ways that spiritual knowledge is passed on.

Because stories are value-laden, storytelling can also be seen from a leader controlling perspective or from a participatory, freeing, co-creating perspective. As Boyce (1996) suggests, storytelling can be used in an attempt to control, dehumanize, and manipulate employees, or to develop the self potential and sense of well-being of employees. “Story researchers, managers, and practitioners can use stories and storytelling in organizations to describe and sustain the current power structure, or to nurture and fuel creativity and liberation and to develop new meaning for work and personhood by individuals and groups” (Boyce, 1996:10). According to Boje (1995), unfortunately most management stories are told without acknowledging the plurality and diversity of organizational workforces.

In the next section, we review some of the relevant work in the spirituality and work movement.

### **Spirituality in the Workplace**

Over the past decade, the topic of spirituality in the workplace has been proliferating in the popular press as well as in academic research and teaching. Interest has grown among management scholars, practitioners, and professionals, as evidenced by the establishment of the

*Academy of Management* interest group on Management, Spirituality, and Religion, the proliferation of MBA programs in the United States offering courses on this topic (Garcia-Zamor, 2003), and the more than 200 titles on spirituality and work listed on Amazon dot com (Weston, 2002). Spiritual and religious prayer groups among business people are reported to be increasing in number as well (Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002). In academia and in the popular press, there has been a recent increase in writings on leadership and spirituality (e.g., Bailey, 2001; Blanchard, Hybels, and Hodges, 1999; Dent, Higgins, and Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003; Fry and Matherly, 2006; Hicks, 2002, 2003; Moxley, 2000; Reave, 2005; Vaill, 2000) and there are numerous books and websites on stories about the corporate soul and spirituality in the workplace (e.g., Batstone, 2003; Bolman and Deal, 1995; Briskin, 1996; Brown, 2001; Canfield, Hansen, Rogerson, Rutte, and Clauss, 1996; Canfield and Miller, 1996; Pierce, 2005; Zohar and Marshall, 2004).

Although there is little consensus on the meaning of workplace spirituality, most definitions deal with a sense of “connectedness.” In their *Handbook of Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance*, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) cite some 14 different definitions of the construct, developed between 1975 and 2000. They suggest workplace spirituality is “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promote employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003:6). Gibbons (2001, p.13) defines spirituality as “the search for direction, meaning, inner wholeness and connectedness to others, to non-human creation and to a transcendent.” Similarly, Burr and Thomson (2002) emphasize the need for “the all” to be included in the psychological contract between the organization and its employees in order to

acknowledge connections to community, humanity, ecology, compassion and care, selfless work, and integrity.

Spirituality in the workplace has been linked to ethics and values (e.g., Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002; Garcia-Zamor, 2003), typically in a way that allows for people to align organizational values to their own particular philosophical or religious roots (Weston, 2002). According to Garcia-Zamor (2003), spirituality determines how people understand and interpret ethical behavior. He describes how the relationship between spirituality and work is more complex than simply considering the question of what is good ethical behavior.

When one speaks about bringing spirituality into the workplace, he or she is talking about changing organizational culture by transforming leadership and employees so that humanistic practices and policies become an integral part of an organization's day-to-day function (p.362).

He concludes that there is a need for a more fundamental exploration of deep values and inner consciousness than most formal ethics programs provide. Weston (2002:30) similarly articulates,

The escalating debate about ethics in business, also seen as a secular answer to values, particularly in what is called the post Christian west is focused on decision-making within currently accepted models of economic systems and growth. However, public interest in issues such as globalization, genetic engineering, environmental protection and work-life balance, are all examples of a more fundamental questioning of those models.

In other words, it has been suggested that the spirituality in work movement allows a way to transform organizational cultures at a more fundamental level (Mitroff and Denton, 1999).

However, like organizational storytelling, the introduction of spirituality in the workplace

has been criticized by some as being yet another method of behavioral control (e.g., Bell and Taylor, 2003; Nadesan, 1999; Pava, 2003). Others have recently critiqued an instrumental approach in the spirituality at work movement (e.g., Zhuravleva and Jones, 2006). Porth, Steingard, and McCall (2003) emphasize the critical distinction between a “total spiritual management” which views employees instrumentally and an “authentic spirituality” which holds that employees have intrinsic value above and beyond their connection to organizational productivity. 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” (Porth et al., 2003:254). It allows for a fundamental critique of economic and business models.

In the next section, we build upon the work of other scholars, outlining how ethical and spiritual organizational values are inherently connected to authentic leadership.

### **Authentic Organizational Leadership**

Over the past 25 years, the subject of leadership has attracted considerable attention from the scholarly community. Bono and Judge (2004) report that 15,000 journal articles have been written on leadership in the last 15 years alone. These articles feature various models of leadership, with transformational leadership being the most frequently used model in empirical research (Judge and Bono, 2000).

Burns (1978:20), who developed the notion of transformational and transactional leadership styles, saw transformational leadership as occurring when a leader and his or her followers interacted in such a way so as to “raise each other to higher levels of motivation and morality”, with the key being shared values and goals. He saw transformational leaders as moral agents who are capable of turning followers into leaders. They excel at telling employees who

and what they are and what they are capable of becoming (Burns, 1978). Several scholars have posited that true transformational leadership is by its very nature ethical (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999; Kanungo, 2001). This is similar to Greenleaf's (1977) concept of servant leadership, a leadership that is first and foremost about meeting and serving the needs of others (see also Batten, 1998). Like transformational leaders, servant leaders engender trust and elevate and empower their followers, helping them to grow as people (Ciulla, 1995).

For others, such as Bennis and Nanus (1997:1x), "leadership is about character" and a review of the ethical leadership literature reveals a significant emphasis on leader virtues. Leader integrity is an obvious concern, especially relative to the use of transformational leadership. More recently, scholars are advancing the notion of a transcendental leadership that appeals to the intrinsic and transcendent motivation of followers (e.g., Cardona, 2000:204).

### **Spiritual Leadership**

The emergence of spirituality in the workplace has been attributed largely to the values of the CEO (Braham, 1999; Grzeda, 2003). According to McCormick (1994), integrating spirituality and work brings leaders' deepest values to bear on their work. Covey (1989) described this as principled-centred leadership. Mitroff and Denton (1999) found that the majority of organizational leaders in the United States believe that spirituality has influenced their ability to lead. In addition, others see ethical and spiritual leadership as critical to the long term success of organizations (Fry, 2003; Fry and Matherly, 2006; Kanungo, 2001).

Neal (in progress) describes the new paradigms of leadership in which "self-organizing" and "spiritual power" approaches are gaining attention by academics and practitioners. Fairholm (1996) has begun to build a model of spiritual leadership founded on morality, stewardship, service, and community. His model is similar to some of the transformational leadership ideas

discussed in the previous section. For example, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999:193) see authentic transformational leadership as an “ideal moral type” with a spiritual dimension that “underscores not only virtuous behavior but an attitude of openness to the transcendent meaning of human existence”. They maintain authentic transformational leadership that is “grounded in values, based in trust and rooted in spirituality” creates both more moral leaders and more moral organizations (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999:191). Sanders, Hopkins, and Geroy (2003) have proposed that as leaders move along a continuum of transactional, transformational, and transcendental leadership, they also develop spiritually.

### **Leadership, Ethics, and Organizational Culture**

The relationship between leadership, ethics and organizational culture has also received considerable attention in the literature (Brien, 1998; Dickson, Smith, Grojean, and Ehrhart, 2001; Fisher and Fowler, 1995; Key, 1999; Milton-Smith, 1997; Sims, 2000). An ethical organizational culture refers to the shared perceptions of ethically acceptable behavior and the ways in which ethical issues are addressed in an organization (Victor and Cullen, 1987). At the same time, organizational culture can also convey to employees that certain unethical practices are acceptable (Sims, 2000).

It has been suggested that any approach to building an ethical culture requires the active involvement of the organizational leader (Dickson et al., 2001; Paine, 1997). In fact, research has demonstrated that ethical leadership and top management support are more important in developing an ethical culture than codes of conduct and ethics training (Jose and Thibodeaux, 1999; Paine, 1997). Formal ethics programs have also been found to be strengthened by consistency between stated policies and actions, open discussion of ethical issues in the organization and ethical leadership (Trevino, Weaver, Gibson, and Toffler, 1999), and a

significant relationship has been found between top management's commitment to ethics and integrated practices of corporate social responsibility (Weaver, Trevino, and Cochran, 1999). Along similar lines, others have emphasized the importance of consistency in communication and behavior, in other words, 'leaders needing to walk the talk', and the resulting benefits in terms of effective role modeling and perceived integrity (Gini, 1997; Kouzes and Posner, 1992; Murphy and Enderle, 1995; Oliverio, 1989; Simons, 1999; Trevino, Brown, and Hartman, 2003). Some have suggested that leader role-modeling is the most critical factor determining ethical culture (Dickson et al., 2001; Morgan, 1993; Murphy and Enderle, 1995; Nielsen, 1989; Paine, 1997; Schein, 1985; Sims and Brinkmann, 2002). Robert Jackall (1988) suggested that ethical behavior in organizations is often reduced to adulating and imitating one's superiors, and other researchers agree. Lord and Brown (2001) suggest that leaders provide a 'natural source of values' for their employees while Bandura (1977), in discussions of socialization and social learning theory, suggests employees imitate the values stemming from their leaders. Hood (2003), who looked specifically at the relationship between the CEO's leadership style, values and the ethical practices of the organization, found that leadership styles do influence ethical practices in the organization. Other researchers have demonstrated that leaders can even alter the values of their followers (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). This raises concerns about the dark side of charismatic and transformational leadership, as well as that of strong organizational culture. For example, Tourish & Vatcha (2005) describe the role of Enron's charismatic leadership and company culture in developing a corporate cult.

Once people over-align themselves with a company, and invest excessive faith in the wisdom of its leaders, they are liable to lose their original sense of identity, tolerate ethical lapses they would have previously deplored, find a new and possibly corrosive

value system taking root, and leave themselves vulnerable to manipulation by the leaders of the organization...” (p.476).

### **Discussion and Implications**

Our goal in this paper is to contribute to the understanding of how storytelling and spirituality in work, when linked to normative leadership theories, can help us to better understand how ethical and spiritual values can be infused into an organizational culture. We suggest that leader storytelling that integrates a moral and spiritual component has the potential to transform an organizational culture so organizational members can feel connected to a larger community and a higher purpose. As the literature has revealed, authentic stories, like authentic leadership, appeal to the heart and mind, to deeply held assumptions and values, and to our inner sense of being. One has to have a solid understanding of one’s own humanity in order to be a good storyteller (McKee, 1997) and also a good leader (Neal, in progress). According to Moxley (2000), when we tell stories of ourselves we are reminded of who we are and what we value. For example, integrity in business is tied to the centre of one’s being and essential to both authentic leadership and authentic storytelling. According to Gardner (1995), a leader’s effectiveness is closely related to the stories they tell about who they are, where they have come from, and where they are going. Ethics, leadership, and spirituality all encompass character.

Employees are increasingly faced with ambiguity and uncertainty tied to 24-7 accessibility, downsizing, rapidly changing technology, and other workplace stressors. At the same time, we are witnessing an ever-widening gap between the world’s rich and poor and an increasing rate of global ecological degradation. As well as being economic, social, and ecological problems, these reflect very real ethical and spiritual problems for organizations and their employees. Our organizations need restoration. Organizational members need to see their

connection to a bigger and more meaningful story, or purpose. We suggest that leader-led organizational restorying can help with the restoration of an ethical and spiritual organizational culture.

As mentioned earlier, it appears that most organizational stories are stripped of spirituality. There is also typically very little emotionality attached to day-to-day organizational discourse. After all, executives and managers in general are currently trained to be geared towards action rather than contemplation. Few dare to externalize their internal values, let alone discuss concepts like joy, compassion, humility, forgiveness, and vulnerability. Exceptions do exist where organizational leaders are openly promoting these values among management (e.g., Ouimet, 2000).

We propose that in many organizations today, stories are also stripped of morality. There is a minimalist morality in the corporate sector and a growing number of shallow Enron-style ethics programs being reported amidst recent corporate scandals. Many of the stories in business organizations are focused around themes such as ‘the customer is king’, ‘the shareholder rules’, and ‘the boss is always right’. Robert Solomon (1999) has described and argued against the prevalent use of certain metaphors in business such as battlefields, jungles, games, machines, cowboys, and greed. For example, we have to move away from telling stories about how much money there is to be made by crushing competitors.

It has been suggested that the root cause of the recent and unprecedented level of corporate unethical behavior is the prioritization of business professionals on maximizing short-term shareholder value without consideration for the impacts of their actions on other stakeholders (e.g., Kochan, 2002). This idea of maximizing return to shareholders has become the unquestioned dominant story in many business organizations. However, a focus on short-

term profit maximization creates a culture conducive to unethical behavior. In a sense, workers are prisoners to one story-line in which serfs (workers) are completely loyal to the lord of the fiefdom (corporation) and, therefore, the status quo is maintained at all costs. According to Jackall (1988), the aspirations of the individual are often overridden by the collective personality of the workplace. In other words, moral behavior and organizational virtues are defined by the 'one' organizational story. Leaders, therefore, need to restory the purpose of business organizations in society.

There are those who would disagree with us. Some would suggest that we do not need inspirational or visionary leaders telling stories, and that institutionalized codes, operating guidelines, reporting mechanisms, and training are what lead to more ethical attitudes and behaviors. However, our review of the literature reveals that an ethical organizational culture involves more than the giving and following of rules. Ethical culture has to be felt, experienced, and lived. Institutionalized or formal ethics programs are not enough.

Stuart Clegg (1989) has suggested that alternative discourses can sometimes be used in organizations as a façade that appears to change things, but in reality keeps things the same. For example, 'spirituality in work' and 'organizational storytelling' could be used solely as means to try to improve the financial bottom line with no genuine interest in the betterment of workers or society. The institutionalization of seemingly spiritually-infused story-time under the guise of spirituality in work while at the same time expecting workers to work longer hours under poor working conditions is paramount to Enron and Arthur Anderson's institutionalization of their ethics programs. Spirituality at work can be misused or adopted as a shallow, hollow management story with fad potential (Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002). Let's see - we have tried empowerment, diversity, quality management, stakeholder management, ethics, triple bottom

line - now let's try workplace spirituality or storytelling with a spiritual twist. However, there are ways to prevent such abuses.

Bowles (1989) has suggested that democratization of work has to be a part of the story. In other words, any new discourse will only change the meaning of work and behavior in organizations if there is a fundamental change in the relationships in an organization and the nature of the relationship that people have with work. Leaders can catalyze ethics and spirituality in the workplace, but workers still have to interpret the story in their own way and buy into it.

It must also be remembered that there are multiple ways of interpreting stories. Boje (1995) referred to this as a plurivocal theory of competing organizational discourses. We have acknowledged the dark side to integrating morality and spirituality into organizational storytelling. Caution has to be taken whenever there is a discussion of emotional and moral influence on followers. Whose meaning of meaningful work is being used? Whose definition of spirituality is being promoted? Whose idea of ethical behavior is being promulgated? As stories can have multiple interpretations, spirituality also has multiple meanings. However, there are themes in common to many wisdom- and faith-based traditions. Storytelling in organizations has to be a dialogue, recognizing multiple voices and diverse perspectives on spirituality and religion, continually making meaning for employees. In short, it has to be authentic.

### **Authentic storytelling**

Authentic storytelling, like a spiritually nourishing organizational culture, is hard to define. It almost has to be experienced. But stories told by organizational leaders (and others in the organization) of what an authentic leader has done or tried to do can help to bring that experience alive.

Authentic storytelling is inherently connected to ethical leadership and the creation of a more ethical culture. People reflect on well told, meaningful, stories that are told from the heart and soul. They resonate and stick with us. This, in turn, helps us with discernment, in making better decisions, more ethical decisions. In this way, authentic storytelling can allow leaders a way to communicate their vision and values, to inspire, to bring about understanding and change, and to empower.

Stories can play a significant role in leader communications; they have power and can be used as a way to build a community. By connecting what we do in organizations with the larger story, we can better see the connection between our work life and all of the world's stakeholders, from local communities to developing countries to the world's ecology. The visionary leader can use authentic stories to engage with his or her employees as well as with all of the organization's stakeholders.

Our integration of the literature bases reviewed above leads us to suggest that authentic stories have the following characteristics:

- They harness the hearts and souls of people.
- They embrace compassion, forgiveness, humility, vulnerability, tolerance, and respect.
- They reflect ethical and spiritual values.
- They help people to discover or rediscover the source of compassion and integrity
- They encourage a 'mind of reflection'.
- They help to awaken a higher consciousness that changes the way people interact with each other in organizations and with other external stakeholders.

- They incorporate individual and personal development in a time of uncertainty and ambiguity for many employees.
- They exude character.

The following is an example of a story that we think embodies many of the elements of an authentic story as outlined above. It is told by the President and CEO of a healthcare organization in Atlantic Canada that is known for its strong values-based organizational culture, its focus on leadership development, and its emphasis on the wellbeing of all its stakeholders.

We've had one strike in [the organization's] 40 odd year history, one labor disruption. It was five or six days long...seven years ago. Not a long time ago, but not yesterday. This was probably day four. I lived on-site here 24-hours a day, as did a lot of our staff. So, my job when I wasn't giving media briefings was to deliver care. So, [the] vice president washed dishes and did laundry and I helped bathe and feed people. And I was up there feeding this very frail gentleman and while I was feeding him I looked out the window and down nine stories where the 45 gallon oil drums, you know, burning with wood in them, and all the picketers, and looking at them and sort of where they were and -- as staff and what they were going through, and looking at the resident and, you know, what they were going through. The words just came to me and I've been using them every since, that really what we have here is sacred trust on all levels. And I had that reinforced as the days unfolded when we were doing our work getting back to normal again and even in talking to staff, you know. And sort of our responsibilities to them as employers and as colleagues and -- so, I think the sacred trust is in every single relationship. I didn't feel it as passionately before that strike, but I certainly felt it at that moment and onward in terms of, you know, whether you're a resident or a client or you're a staff member, we

all come to the relationship with vulnerabilities, you know...I want to stay connected to the people we serve and [those] who are doing the serving.

The story reflects the ethical and spiritual values of the organization and of this particular leader. From the way he speaks, it is evident the leader feels compassion for the striking workers and the elderly client he is caring for. There is also evidence of humility and vulnerability, with the executives taking on the day to day tasks of their striking employees. There is recognition and respect for every organizational stakeholder, and a strong sense of their interconnectedness. This is exemplified by the idea of “sacred trust in every single relationship” and the idea of “connectedness” with stakeholders. Interestingly, this links strongly to one of the organization’s six values; “We are not alone”. The leader’s act of looking out the window and reflecting upon the scene of the striking employees and the frail elderly man, and stepping into their shoes exemplifies a ‘mind of reflection’. This story seemed to represent a pivotal point in this leaders’ level of consciousness and the way that he viewed stakeholder relationships within the organization. Finally, the story deals with this leader’s personal development in a time of organizational uncertainty.

In the following two sections, we address some implications for researchers and practitioners.

### **Implications for Research**

Several research issues emerge from our literature review and discussion. First, there appears to be a greater role for the application of storytelling to the fields of spirituality in work and leadership ethics. Our discussion raises several research questions, some of which have already begun to be explored by other scholars. For example, how do the stories that non-traditional, authentic transformational leaders tell differ from more traditional, transactional

leader storytelling? An interesting research project could possibly involve asking former employees of particular organizations to recall stories that their notably not-so-authentic corporate leaders told during their realms of leadership; for example, Jeff Skilling of Enron, Bernie Ebbers of WorldCom, and Richard Scrushy of HealthSouth. What is the potential of authentic transformational leaders in cultivating a moral quality among workers through the use of authentic storytelling? How does spirituality permeate and transcend leadership, ethics, and culture in organizational stories? How do organizational stories differ in moral and spiritual dimensions among different types of organizations such as between private and public, financial and healthcare, etc? Although it has been suggested that ethics is in the heart of leadership studies, there has actually been little “sustained and systematic treatment” of ethics in the practice of leadership in the academic literature (Ciulla, 1995). What are examples of stories told by leaders in organizations today that exemplify a leader with a heart?

Although it has been suggested that the spirituality in work and authentic leadership literature does not have a strong empirical basis (Fernando, 2002), we content that positivist research tools do not work well for scholarly work in the area of spirituality and work, or organizational storytelling for that matter. An approach is needed that acknowledges the link between methods and morals, and acknowledges the subjective experiences of spirituality (e.g., Fornaciara & Lund Dean, 2001; Zhuravleva & Jones, 2006). In addition, for the most part, mainstream academic scholarship has overlooked alternative narratives and critical perspectives in the area of workplace spirituality (Forray & Stork, 2002). However, the value of a critical or postmodern philosophical approach to storytelling and spirituality in work lies in the debunking of grand narratives, for example the purpose of business being the maximization of short-term shareholder value. For example, Bell & Taylor (2003) have critiqued recent spirituality and

workplace discourse that emphasizes organizational performance and economic outcomes. A postmodern perspective considers the breaking down of one story in order to move to a more discursive dialogue (Alvesson, 2002; Boje, 1995) and in some cases, postmodern theorists have even brought back pre-modern spiritual discourses (Best and Kellner, 1991).

We have begun to outline some of the connections between the following literature bases: organizational storytelling, spirituality in the workplace, organizational culture, and leadership. We encourage our colleagues to continue to explore the relationships between these concepts, as well as others such as organizational development, organizational training and coaching, emotion in organizations, stakeholder management, and critical management.

### **Implications for practice**

Our discussion also raises several issues for organizational practitioners and leaders to consider. An increasing number of organizations are realizing that spirituality can be applied to personal, organizational, and leadership development. If storytelling is a learned skill (McKee, 1997), practice in storytelling (Kaye, 1996; Parkin, 2004; Wacker and Silverman, 2003) combined with spiritual practices such as meditation, reflection, and cultivation could potentially assist organizational leaders in developing authentic story-telling capabilities. The practice of writing in a diary or journal and reflecting upon written words can assist in both authentic leadership development and storytelling capabilities. As discussed earlier, there are also numerous books and websites full of morally and spiritually-based workplace stories.

We mentioned in the previous section that organizational leaders need to tell stories of both ethical and unethical behavior. It has been suggested that in the past, senior executives have avoided giving direction to employees on how to handle ethical issues (Jackall, 1988). However,

stories have to be told of how there is no place for unethical attitudes and behavior and non-authentic leadership in organizations.

It is also important that storytelling is not just done in written form, but also carried out through verbal, and ideally, face-to-face communication with employees. Leaders also have to be involved in authentic storytelling at all levels in the organization, as all organizational members are co-creators of the organizational story.

Most importantly, leaders have to create a climate where talk of ethical and spiritual values is safe and acceptable. People need to feel that their environment is safe to tell moral- and spiritual-based stories. Employees might feel that in an era of uncertainty regarding downsizing that it is too risky to talk about spiritual and ethical values. Therefore, an environment has to be created in which people feel safe to be able to tell stories, but equally important the leader has to ensure that this is done in a way that does not make employees feel uncomfortable in the workplace. 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.” In other words, storytelling in organizations has to balance leader and organizational values with the plurality of definitions and interpretations of spirituality in work.

### **Role Model Storytelling**

As discussed in an earlier section, role modeling is an essential aspect of ethical leadership. Similarly, we suggest that role modeling in ethical and spiritual storytelling is essential in developing an ethically and spiritually based organizational culture. However, in

many organizations, particularly large organizations, employees often do not have ample opportunity to witness leaders' actual behavior and so they might not be personally exposed to such storytelling. For this reason, we propose that role model storytelling be composed of two parts. First, stories can be told by senior leaders in an organization. Ideally this would be done face to face in small group sessions where discussion can ensue, but it can also be done in larger organization-wide meetings. Then leaders at other levels of the organization need to model this same behavior with their own employee groups relating appropriate stories during team or departmental meetings, employee orientation sessions and the like. Other avenues can also be used to share organizational stories including email, organizational newsletters, and the organization's web site.

The actual content of these stories will vary but should exemplify behaviors that reflect the organization's ethical and spiritual values. For example, an often told story about Malden Mills is that of Aaron Feuerstein, the President, who kept his staff of 3200 on payroll while the factories were being rebuilt after a fire. This was during a time when many other textile owners were increasingly moving towards offshore labor (Briskin, 1996; Cavanagh and Bandsuch, 2002). His actions were rooted in his spirituality, which in turn is rooted in ancient Jewish traditions.

Role model storytelling could also illustrate how authentic leaders have been successful in bringing about ethical and spiritual change in an organization. Leaders themselves can tell stories of authentic leaders, but they have to embody that authenticity themselves to be truly effective. In addition, authentic leaders need to tell stories about role models who have a great deal of character. It is essential to tell stories about leader heroes such as Aaron Feuerstein, but equally important to tell the stories of the villains and the reasons that successful leaders fail, as

suggested by Ludwig and Longenecker (1993). For example, the cover story of “The Economist” (May 4-10, 2002) had the title, “Fallen idols, the overthrow of celebrity CEOs”.

Boyce (1996) has highlighted the importance of listening in “storying”. Leaders also need to listen to the stories being told in their organization of ethical and unethical behavior. They should listen to and reflect on the stories told by other authentic leaders as well. For example, human rights leaders throughout history who have used spiritual engagement include Nawal El Saadawi, Victor Frankl, Paulo Freire, Mahatma Gandhi, Helen Keller, Karl Marx, Rigoberta Menchu, Kwame Nkrumah, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Mother Teresa (Parameshwar, 2002). There is a wealth of foundational sources from wisdom- and religious-based traditions which have stories, narratives, or parables that can be used to guide ethical decision making. Metaphorical stories can be used to embrace concepts like compassion, vulnerability, and humility. Leaders also need to listen to stories told by employees at all levels of the organization as well as by other stakeholders external to the organization. For example Aboriginal peoples tell stories of ‘Mother Earth’ and ‘seventh generation decision making’, adopting the metaphor of the organization being a stakeholder of Earth rather than the other way around. Like spirituality, there is a plurality of definitions and interpretations of organizational purpose. Moreover, as Enron and other corporate scandals have taught us, it is not always a good idea to squash stories of dissent and non-conformity in an organization (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

We have proposed that leader storytelling which integrates a moral and spiritual component can transform an organizational culture so that organizational members feel connected to a larger community and a higher purpose. Just as ethics can be espoused and institutionalized but never genuinely integrated into business practice, so too can story telling

and spirituality in the workplace be used for ulterior motives. Organizational leaders have to ensure that this is not simply being done in the name of exploiting higher levels of productivity or maximizing shareholder value. Spirituality and storytelling can make room for creating a picture of a better world, for the message to be truthful and sent with integrity. Spirituality involves our understanding of where our personal values come from and how those are connected to ethics in the workplace. Through authentic story-telling, leaders can influence ethical thinking, attitudes, and behavior. As managers of meaning, authentic leaders can tap into the soul of the organization, transform the organizational culture, and elevate and empower their employees. An organizational culture that embraces both ethical and spiritual values will in turn reach out to external stakeholders, thereby transforming other organizational stories as well.

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