

## The Impact of an Individual's Spirituality on Communication in the Workplace

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**Abstract:** This study investigates how individuals practice spirituality in the workplace. Ethnographies are conducted of 20 full-time employees in a college who follow a religious or spiritual practice. Results illustrate individuals' belief in and desire for connection. Participants believe that one's religion or spirituality is central to one's life, serving as a moral compass for behavior that impacts relationships with others and one's relationship with a higher power or "source." Participants' spontaneous communication in the workplace is not always informed by their religiosity or spirituality, though they desire that it would be. More often than not, participants' communication is mediated by a conscious decision to pause, reflect, and then respond. This mindful behavior directly relates to individuals' desire for connection with other human beings through positive, open, nonjudgmental, and interpersonal communication. A model of spiritually-informed communication in the workplace is established based on the results. Limitations and directions for future research are also discussed. [China Media Research. 2013; 9(3): 99-110]

**Keywords:** Spirituality, interpersonal communication, workplace

Adults in most countries spend at least eight hours per day at work, and many put in far more than that in leadership, management, and other creative positions. Untold numbers of men and women work more than one job in today's economy, and for many individuals, working multiple jobs to make ends meet has been a matter for decades. Further, many find that workplace issues occupy mental activity outside of work, thereby extending the workday. Therefore, the greater part of our waking life is lived in or occupied with the workplace.

Given that we come into contact with people of different cultures, those with different communication and language skills; individuals with different communication styles and those with varying personal values; and those with varying personal agendas, how then, do we communicate with these individuals within the context of workplace? How are others communicating with us? Do we merely act and react? Or do we go deeper within ourselves to bypass the ego's propensity to react, that is, to turn around and give back what we just received? If we do reach within to draw upon a deeper well, the spiritual (i.e., our search for or connection with a purpose larger than ourselves), then what is our internal process and how do we translate our spiritual intrapersonal communication into communication with others, or interpersonal communication? This study attempts to learn how individuals practice spirituality in the workplace. That is, what intrapersonal communication is taking place as people think about and act upon their spirituality and how demonstration of the individual's spirituality through interpersonal communication affects his or her communication in the workplace.

### Review of Literature

Since the last decade of the 20th century, a number of scholars have addressed the topic of spirituality in the

workplace. Yet, the literature reveals that there is still great potential for scholars to explore spirituality from different perspectives, such as examining the effects of spirituality and communication in the workplace. For the purpose of this study spiritual communication refers to two principles specified by the Spiritual Communication Division of National Communication Association, namely, "(1) spirituality represents a harmonious interconnectedness amongst self, other, and nature, and (b) spirituality is both embodied and transcendent, exemplifying an inner knowing (i.e., a source of inner strength), the potentiality of higher consciousness, and living in creative harmony with the divine" (NCA Website).

Sass (2000) posited that the topic in the 1990s was dealt with in a "vague way," not addressing how people experienced the "sacred" or "the Beyond" (p. 196). Scholarly essays, research or books focused on the organization, along such themes, for example, as "team spirit" or "inspired action," organizational transformation, business ethics and work/life balance, or how steps taken in decision making can be inspired by archetypes and imaginative thinking. Sass further indicated that research on spirituality in organizations falls into three areas: value alignment, relationship based organizing, and personal spirituality.

There are exceptions to Sass's lament regarding the dearth of material on spirituality at work. For instance, Bolman and Deal (1995) believed that managers who bring a spiritual grounding into how they view workplace interactions will become future leaders. They mentioned that people often substitute the words "soul" and "spirit," one for the other, but that there is a vital difference. The authors viewed soul as unique to each individual, whereas spirit references the universal connectedness of all through a higher source or power.

Yet, Bolman and Deal asserted that soul and spirit are entwined in a reciprocal relationship and that leaders of organizations who possess soul convey spirit within their companies. They do so by offering their knowledge and wisdom as gifts to those with whom they work.

Moreover, Mitroff and Denton (1999) studied 100 managers and executives in U.S. companies about their views and practices of spirituality and its relevance in their workplaces and stated that reasons for the lack of empirical research on the topic are that spirituality has been too soft or lacking a cogent definition to which the rigors of academic inquiry could be applied, and a good deal of recent treatment of spirituality as a topic cannot be taken as a serious scholarly pursuit. They found that people need a means by which to express themselves as whole persons at work, as spiritual beings, not compartmentalized; and that being able to do so ultimately allows them to produce their best work and contribute to their company's product or service excellence. Indeed, these scholars argued that organizations with a deficit of soul and spirituality at their core will not have a long lifespan; and that researchers must look at management holistically, not compartmentalizing spirituality from the balance of management issues.

Kale (2003) believed that the common element shared by all the peoples of the planet is the human spirit. He asserted that our essence being spirit provides a platform upon which "a universal code of ethics in intercultural communication" can be created (p. 468). He put forth that communicating in a manner that violates or injures an individual's self-concept or the value of one's spirit is unethical. Clair (2001) further dealt with the aesthetic and spirituality. She indicated that through creativity we give material form to spirituality. In her discussion on narrative theory she stated, "Reality is a creation and we are the artists" and that "Heidegger... suggests that our very being relied on language" (p.76). In short, Clair claimed that storytelling is an activity directly tied to one's spirit and soul. However, as Krone (2001) pointed out, communication studies scholars traditionally have sidestepped the topic of spirit as elemental to human life and energy as academics perform research and build theory, thus, those researching organizational communication have delved almost entirely into issues related to the paid work that people perform, ignoring the relationship between individuals' interior work and the functions of their jobs that can be observed.

In order to improve this problem Buzzanell (2001) investigated how individuals working in the U.S. over the span of recent decades found meaning in success, career and work. She found that social, political and economic changes have left people feeling unstable, particularly in regard to work, and that one result is a turn to spirituality. She believed that humility,

compassion, and simplicity are the cornerstones of spirituality and that these have been absent from standard approaches to career theory and practice. Buzzanell indicated that it is important to consider how scholars can treat career theory and its application with human spirituality as holistic, not just treating the topic of spirituality as an afterthought or attachment. Pokora (2001) further discussed several views of spirituality. She argued that we must first explore these different views before delving into theory about spirituality and organizations. She called for spirituality to be treated as communication and posited that scholars have drawn too small a border around what constitutes communicative experiences. If we dismiss "undeniably communicative experiences that are sensed, felt, or mediated by the ineffable" (p. 134) by turning attention to only that which can be observed, then a basic element of the human experience has been ignored.

Delving deeper into the topic, Mitroff (2003) discussed Wilbur's fourfold framework bringing together "human development, spirituality, and systems" (pp. 486-487), and can be associated with the personality system of Jung/Myers-Briggs. This frame relates to humans' inner experience and well as outer experience of the spiritual. Further, integrating both Eastern and Western approaches, Wilbur (2000) has delineated a minimum of four models of spirituality. Mitroff called these Commonality, Union, Identity, and No-Distinction. The Commonality Model is synonymous with Nature Mysticism and cites Emerson as an example of an adherent. In this model spirit is made manifest through nature. In the Union Model, the ultimate is to unite with God, not to become God, but to experience the death of the ego where the boundaries separating all in the universe are broken through. In the Identity Model, the individual realizes that God has been residing within oneself the whole time, that God and self are embodied together holistically. In what Mitroff called the "most radical of all," the No-Distinction Model represents the falling away of all distinctions. Like the circle, there is no beginning and no end. Yet unlike the circle, which has form, the No-Distinction Model posits that all reality exists in a formless state of being in the universe where there is no time nor space.

Long (2001) crystallized the role of human communication today, stating that it "has emerged as the defining element in our modern age" (p. 38). She believed that communication scholars' research over the next millennium will be essential to society, particularly in the arenas of ethics, education and culture, as people go about their daily lives. Long cited the philosopher Heidegger in the belief that spirituality and creative thought and action are part and parcel to culture. Long encouraged communication research that reaches beyond the traditional view of communication as merely a transmission of messaging from one to the other, but

rather, seeing communication as behavior that can encompass a rich and deep understanding of or inquiry into human relationships as well as one's relationship with oneself.

The preceding has approached spirituality and communication from the scholarly point of view. Yet, what does it mean to an individual to be a "spiritual person"? Couchman (2005) commented that in today's world fewer people are going to church and more are claiming to be spiritual rather than religious. Many researchers and essayists cited how others have expressed spirituality in their lives. For instance, Black (2005) "stumbled" upon the spiritual as the result of her research during a listening and dialogue employee-training workshop at a large manufacturing firm. She reported that many of the interviewees described the workshop having transcendent, almost mystical properties. Some of them explicitly mentioned spirit or spirituality; others described the experience as deep. Many referenced similarities between what they experienced in the workshop and experiences they had in spiritual settings such as meditation retreats and religious events; and several mentioned transformational experiences. A workshop designer talked about dialogue as "holding sacred space." The other designer spoke of reverential listening, meaning more than merely attentive and respectful listening, but imbuing the act with meaning and a sense of holiness. Several instructors described their experiences in the workshop by comparing them to spiritual experiences such as meditation, yoga and silent retreats.

Other ways in which the experience of the spiritual has been described are articulated by Leibrich (2002). She discussed her experience of spirituality as space within her heart, beingness, breath of life, among other explanations, and that spirituality is meaning itself. Brock (2005) surveyed Amazon Books for those treating spiritual communication and found 259 titles, evidencing the interest among the public represented in the popular press. Brock shared a lesson in which spirituality is demonstrated by behaving toward all people, consistently, with "kindness, caring, love and forgiveness, without judgment, in every situation" (p. 97). The author asserted that by practicing meditation and affirmations, which are positive statements akin to short prayers, one can create a way to live that is like one's own sanctuary. In addition, Native American culture and particularly the insights of Native American women are shared by Mankiller (2004). She interviewed scores of women with roots in Native American tribes. One described her spiritual viewpoint as a giant wheel of Creation with the Creator at the hub. All humanity forms a single spoke in the wheel in which there is no hierarchical order. Mankiller went on to say that among the 500-plus individual tribes in the USA, all share a basic understanding that every element of the earth is

related and that everything that lives is integral in maintaining balance. Though each tribal community claims its own particular identity, practices, and rituals, these are created from a well of shared values and knowledge, as well as narratives and individuals' connection to each other and to nature.

Finally, the themes of prayer and meditation are likely to emerge when people describe their spiritual practices or activities. Such is indicated in Baesler's (2009) description of his prayer life, particularly in his discussion of how he experiences the prayer of St. Chrysostom. "Prayer is an all-efficient panoply, a treasure undiminished, a mine that is never exhausted, a sky unobscured by clouds, a heaven unruffled by the storm. It is the root, the fountain, the mother of a thousand blessings" (p. 15). Meditation has been an integral part of spiritual practice in the East for thousands of years. Buddhists believe that it provides access to the entire realm of human consciousness and the potential therein (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness is central to Buddhist meditation, according to Kabat-Zinn. It is the practice of purposeful attention, nurturing a daily, on-going awareness of oneself and one's surroundings, in-the-moment without judgment. Mindfulness leads to a true wakefulness and clear perspective of the here-and-now. In many meditation practices, and in mindfulness, the individual focuses on the breath. According to Tolle (2005), awareness of each breath allows one to turn from the mind's ceaseless thinking and creates space for holding oneself in pure consciousness. In other words, consciousness exists as "the unmanifested," and focusing on the breath provides a portal for consciousness to be fully experienced.

Based on the above literature review, this study aimed to learn how individuals practice spirituality in the workplace. That is, what intrapersonal communication is taking place as people think about and act upon their spirituality and how demonstration of the individual's spirituality through interpersonal communication affects his or her communication in the workplace.

### **Method**

In-depth interviews, as employed by Mitroff and Denton (1999), were conducted of 20 full-time employees who follow a religious or spiritual practice in a public university located in the New England area of the USA. "Practice" in this study was defined as participating in a ritual, routine, tradition or other mode of focused attention to the nonmaterial aspect of human experience. Such included, but was not limited to, group participation in a religious or spiritually conscious community; sole practice of meditation, prayer, yoga or other means by which the individual experiences inner peace or an experience of one's own higher consciousness or connection with that which can be described as beyond people's daily waking life; and

experiencing connectedness to others in a sense that goes beyond day-to-day human relationships; and that which can be described as experiencing the presence or force of a power greater than oneself and all that inhabits the earth.

### Participants

Individuals were chosen to reflect diversity in gender, age, job category, ethnicity, and religious or spiritual practice. Tables 1 and 2 show the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. Participant gender, ethnicity, and age ranges

Gender			Ethnicity (self-identified)		Age Range	
Female 7	13	Male	African American	3	23-29	(2)
			Arab/Non-Caucasian	1	32-38	(2)
			Indian (Asia)	1	45-49	(3)
			Caucasian	13	50-59	(8)
			Chinese	1	60-69	(5)
			Hispanic/African	1		

Table 2. Participant work place position by type and participant current religious or spiritual affiliation

Position		Religious or Spiritual Affiliation	
Administrative support	1	Baptist	3
Clergy	1	Brahma Kumaris	1
Faculty	5	Catholic	4
Physician	1	Episcopal	1
Professional	9	Evangelical Protestant	1
Research	2	Madonna Ministry/Church without Walls	1
Top administration	1	Metaphysician	1
		Muslim	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	No affiliation	6
		Self-Realization Fellowship/Paramahansa Yogananda	1
		<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

### Procedure

Interviews were conducted face-to-face with the interviewee selecting the location. Eighteen took place in a private office or conference room; two were conducted in the cafeteria of the Student Union with the interviewee choosing where in the room to sit. In addition to the 10 scripted questions, follow up questions were asked to clarify any responses needing to be revisited. Interviewees were also asked if they wished to add any further comments at the end of the interview that they felt might be important to share, as ideas or memories might have arisen as a result of the interview. Sessions ranged from 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours. The average interview was about 45 minutes.

### Instrument and Analysis

Recurring themes were identified from the data collected. Participants were asked 10 questions; the

first five questions were drawn from Mitroff and Denton (1999) and the rest pertains to spiritual practice in workplace. The following is the list of the questions:

1. What gives you the most meaning and purpose in your work?
2. Do you believe in God or a higher power, and if so, how do you define or describe it?
3. What meaning does religion have for you and how important is it in your life?
4. What meaning does spirituality have for you and how important is it in your life?
5. Do you see a difference between religion and spirituality, and if so, what is the difference?
6. During your work day, do you engage in inner spiritual activities, such as prayer, moments of quiet reflection or short meditation? If so, then please describe.
7. During your work day, do you engage in spiritual activities such as reading sacred or spiritual

literature either in book form or on the Internet, for instance? If you do, then please describe.

8. How does your spiritually-conscious inner communication contribute to outer communication with others at work? In other words, when someone says something to you, does your spirituality naturally and spontaneously inform your response, or do you need to take moment and reach within your "spiritual well" before you speak?

9. Would you like for your workplace to provide a space (such as a "quiet room," chapel, etc.) where employees can go for quiet reflection during the day? Explain why or why not.

10. Would you like for your workplace to provide opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, etc. for employees to actively express their spirituality at work? Explain why or why not.

### Results and Discussion

Participants' responses were analyzed for common word usage, similar ideas, and shared meanings to discern emerging themes. Overall, the results of data analyses reveal that a primary theme is individuals' belief in and desire for relationship, close association, and linking. Across the board, respondents agree that one needs to consciously connect with a common or universal energy, force, consciousness, or God; that all people are connected through this force; and that people seek connection to one another. Participants also believe that one's religion or spirituality is central to one's life, serving as a moral compass for behavior that impacts relationships with others and one's relationship with a higher power or "source." Participants' spontaneous communication in the workplace is not always informed by their religiosity or spirituality, though they desire that it would be. More often than not, participants' communication is mediated by a conscious decision to pause, reflect, and then respond. This mindful behavior directly relates to individuals' desire for connection with other human beings through positive, open, nonjudgmental, and interpersonal communication. Such conscious behavior also relates to participants' belief that God or source is a positive force and that connection to such is the commitment to behave in a manner that is positive, loving, respectful, and inclusive of others. In seeking connection with others, individuals wish for greater understanding of others' religious or spiritual beliefs and practices. Yet, they feel uncomfortable initiating such dialogue.

The first question in this study asked interviewees to talk about what gave them meaning and purpose in their work. Right away participants began to establish what would result in this study's overall theme: Connection. Such corresponds to Mitroff and Denton (1999) who cited "interconnectedness" as a major theme in their study. A word search within each transcribed

interview revealed that participants in this study used either the words "connect," "connected," or "connection" collectively for a total of 60 mentions. Use of these terms was unprompted in any way, as none of the interviewing questions included them. Indeed, the word search found that 12 participants mentioned either "connect," or its derivatives. Sometimes, the mention was only once, in contrast to one interviewee who referenced connect or its derivatives 13 times.

If one considers that "relationship" and "community" speak of connection, then we can look to 12 interviewees who, though not referencing connection, collectively used the word "relationship" seven times, and seven participants who collectively referenced "community" in 27 instances for a total of 51 mentions. Therefore, extending the view of connection to include community and relationships, we see a total word use of 111. An example of how connection and community correspond is stated by Interviewee 20, citing a reciprocal relationship between individuals and the community of worshippers that they comprise. Individuals within that community working collectively for a common purpose also provide one-on-one support to group members for personal or spiritual needs.

Participants spoke about "spirit" or its derivative "spirituality" with all 20 individuals referencing one or the other of these words a total of 166 times. Since the term "spirituality" is central to this study and included in several questions, it stands to reason that participants would use the word in their responses. However, it appears to have struck a chord with respondents, ranging in use, for example, from only two mentions by one individual, 12 mentions by three, and 13 mentions by three persons. Interviewee 12 summed up the topic as, "Spirituality is the one-on-one connection to God or a supreme being." Interviewee 7 cited spirituality as human beings' essence, and according to Interviewee 11, all people are part of the same "oneness," with spirituality providing cohesiveness.

Bolman and Deal (1995) posited that people often substitute the words "soul" and "spirit," one for the other. They acknowledged that soul and spirit are entwined in a reciprocal relationship, viewing soul as unique to each individual and spirit as the universal connectedness of all through a higher source or power. Kale (2003) believed that the common element shared by all the peoples of the planet is the human spirit. "Soul" was used by only three participants for a total of eight mentions. Interviewee 18 serves as an example of how soul and spirit are often used interchangeably, explaining that when someone dies the soul or self leaves the body behind. The same interviewee also referenced spirit, calling it humans' essence and citing belief in "the power of the spirit." This participant spoke about spirituality coming into play as a "soul-to-soul, spirit-to-spirit connection" when listening and

responding to others' worries or concerns. This was described as a spontaneous feeling of compassion and understanding, not something consciously reached for within, but "just a way of being."

Only three participants made no reference either to connection, relationship or community. Yet, it can be argued that even if a participant did not use the words "connection," "community" or "relationship," the individual could still demonstrate concern for connection by other remarks he or she made. Comments by Interviewee 4, for instance, spoke of concern for the way we treat one another. If one cares about how one treats another person, then one can extend such a concept to that of caring about connection. Rodriguez (2001) argued that taking a spiritual view of communication focuses on what human beings share in common. Clearly, connection referenced by participants

in a variety of ways is a value shared by all of them.

If spirituality is viewed as something deep, personal, and individual, then religion is considered by most as a human construct, framework or organization for understanding and developing one's spirituality. Because the word "religion" was stated more than once in the interviewing questions, it is reasonable to assume that people would claim the word in their responses. Religion was referenced by participants a total of 136 times, ranging in use from once by one interviewee, to 18 times by another, and 15, 12, and 10 times, respectively, by other individuals. Such repeated use of the word, it could be argued, again demonstrates its resonance for the participants. Table 1 delineates interviewees' use of the words religion or religiosity; spirit, spiritual, or spirituality; connect, connected, or connection; community; and relationship(s).

Table 1. Incidence of certain words used by interviewees

Interviewee	Religion Religiosity	Spirit Spiritual Spirituality	Connect(ion)	Community	Relationship(s)
1	18	12	2	3	1
2	5	6	13	1	4
3	8	13	0	0	1
4	3	2	0	0	0
5	15	13	2	4	4
6	6	8	0	0	0
7	1	13	2	0	1
8	10	2	0	0	1
9	3	10	0	0	4
10	3	5	0	0	0
11	6	7	5	0	0
12	4	5	2	0	0
13	4	6	9	2	3
14	10	9	0	0	1
15	4	2	1	0	0
16	5	12	1	4	2
17	12	10	7	0	1
18	8	11	8	0	0
19	8	12	8	4	0
20	3	8	0	9	1
Total	136	166	60	27	24
Total of the above three words combined: 111					

The heart of this study lives in participants' descriptions of "if and how" their spirituality mediates communication response to others in the workplace. Long (2001) saw communication as behavior that can encompass a rich and deep understanding of or inquiry into human relationships as well as one's relationship with oneself. Krone (2001) was interested in what happens to the human soul or spirit while at work and noted that those researching organizational communication have delved almost entirely into issues related to the paid work that people perform, ignoring the relationship between individuals' interior work and the functions of their jobs that can be observed. Further, Pokora (2001) called for spirituality to be treated as communication and that if we dismiss "undeniably communicative experiences that are sensed, felt, or mediated by the ineffable" (p. 134) by turning attention to only that which can be observed, then a basic element of the human experience has been ignored.

Results of this study directly address these issues. Regardless of whether individuals follow an organized religion, alternative practice or create a spiritual orientation to life from a variety of experience, interviewees expressed deep desire to practice positive, productive and respectful communication. And though they were not always successful, participants spoke about the ideal of mediating communication in the workplace through their concept of God, higher power, or a force or energy of that which is greater than oneself and always positive; or turning to their spirituality or religiosity to calm themselves when feeling angry, nervous or afraid, particularly important when the situation is challenging or potentially or directly negative.

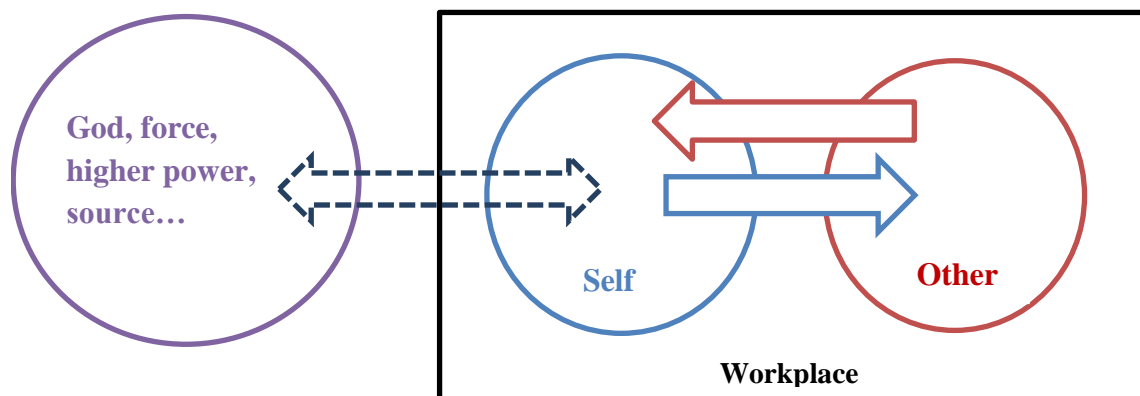
Pause and reflect was commonly reported by participants. Interviewee 2 said that it is important to consider how to respond in a way that does not "push up against a person" while also doing what needs to be done at work. Interviewee 12 said that taking a moment before responding is grounding and offers the chance to consciously connect with God, and "I try my best to not

just shoot from the hip." Citing people who think that they should reciprocate negativity with negativity, Interviewee 10 said that is not desirable. Instead, it is important to not react immediately, though not always easy, and give the situation some space. Interviewee 13 questioned the outcome of reacting impulsively without integrating one's spirituality in the situation. Rather, one needs to be aware of one's triggers and let the other person know that some time is needed for a response, even getting back to that person much later. Said this interviewee, "Then I can go away and integrate the stuff that really matters to me, and if it really matters in the life I want to live, then this is how I would like to respond."

Sensitive to the impact of their communication on others in the workplace, then, most interviewees aspired to spontaneously respond to people in a positive, productive manner to establish, maintain or nurture connection with others and to behave in accordance with their religious or spiritual beliefs and practices. Though most report that they are not always successful, they continue to strive for that ideal. Pause and reflect before responding is the action that most interviewees report that they take. Again, doing so exemplifies the wish for connection between themselves and the power or energy that guides their lives and connection to other human beings.

Figure 1, based on the results of this study, illustrates a model of spiritually-informed communication in the workplace. The rectangle represents the workplace in which two individuals are depicted by circles, Self (left) and Other (right). The two-way arrow made up of broken lines indicates the relationship between God or higher power and Self. The arrow from Other indicates message sent, and Self's response to Other is indicated by the arrow made up of solid lines. The Self's connection to God or force greater than oneself is the desired mediating factor in Self's response to Other, indicated by the broken-line arrow entering within the solid-line arrow.

Figure 1. A Model of Spiritually-Informed Communication in the Workplace



In addition, participants provided rich responses to interview questions, sometimes pulling in other work-related themes. For instance, different situations likely will get different responses, according to Interviewee 5, and they are informed by multiple factors, such as the interaction, role expectations and relationships. In an interpersonal exchange, as contrasted to communicating in a small group, this interviewee reported being much more mindful of "listening with a spiritual ear." Professionalism also plays a role in communication response. Said Interviewee 17, who tries to make the best decisions possible and behave professionally, accessing spirituality or religiosity provides a moral compass. Here spirituality may help, also, according to this participant, as in facing situations fraught with nervousness or fear.

Interestingly, findings in this study also surfaced a paradox. Despite the United States' guarantee of freedom of religion and freedom of speech, several participants noted discomfort speaking about religious or spiritual issues at work. Reasons cited were concern about offending others, fear of being labeled, and fear of others' misinterpretation or misunderstanding of one's religion or spirituality. Indeed, the sole Muslim interviewee said that since the attacks of September 11, 2001, Muslims on campus keep quiet about their faith. In fact, the Islamic Center, just a few blocks from the campus, does not have a sign outside the small strip mall in which it is located. Two Christian participants mentioned how Christianity often "gets a bad name." One cited negative stereotypes like "Christians are pushy, and they just want to make you convert to their religion," labels like "bigot" and "homophobic" and anti-intellectual attitudes. Said Interviewee 19, "There is the idea that to be a person of faith you just blindly follow this religion and not think with your brain, and there is no room for science. Therefore you're not intellectually credible." This participant said that such, of course, is not true for everyone on campus. But those attitudes are why this interviewee would support the idea of educational sessions on religious and spiritual matters offered for everyone at the university. One participant lamented that certain things can't be spoken of at work, probably because people extend the argument of separation of church and state to the public university.

On the topic of whether participants would like for the workplace to have a space set aside for quiet reflection, one interviewee expressed more of an interest in a setting to encourage dialogue than one set aside for silence. This individual cited occasions when attending a lecture or a meeting where, although the topics were not explicitly spiritual, "it was almost like having a spiritual experience" from the mere act of people sharing their experiences and points of view. Such correlates to Black (2005) who "stumbled" upon the spiritual as the result of her research during a listening

and dialogue employee-training workshop at a large manufacturing firm. Black's (2005) study was based in part on Bohm's and Buber's work on dialogue. Bohm (2004) argued that discussion and dialogue are different. Discussion focuses on exchanges that are competitive, such as challenging ideas, and that they often proceed like a game – one side wins and the other loses. Dialogue, according to Bohm, contrasted with discussion by focusing on a shared interest in mutual participation for understanding, where all are winners. Buber's (1958) philosophy on dialogue is rooted in what he calls the "I-Thou" relationship, recognizing that although people may be very different from one another, they are fully human. For Buber, the goal of dialogue is understanding brought about by individuals being authentic, fully present and open to each other despite differences. Buber contrasts this approach to "I-It," where people treat each other not as human beings but as objects.

Finally, the study has several limitations and implications. First, taking place at an institution of higher learning presupposes that participants will have reached a higher level of education than those working in a non-education related setting. Higher education, then, likely contributes to participants' being accustomed to choosing one's words, or being "politically correct." Moreover, the majority of participants were Caucasian, female, and of Christian faith, and a minority of individuals were under age 40. Future research in this line of study may explore the possible impact caused by the differences of participants' education, religious belief, and age. Furthermore, the results of this study also provide possible implications for future study on how one's spirituality impacts communication in the workplace. For instance, it would be instructive to take such a study into a corporate or large business setting with potential for greater ethnic and educational diversity. It also would be enlightening to investigate the impact of individuals' cultural and familial influences on religious/spiritual beliefs and attitudes and how these affect communication at work, as well as looking at individuals' perceptions about others' religious/spiritual beliefs and practices and persons' reasons for those views. As respondents in this study all cited finding meaning in helping others, one area of inquiry into spirituality and communication at work might focus on whether those who identify as religious/spiritual are drawn to certain helping professions. Additionally, the religious/spiritual beliefs of persons in the workplace between ages 18 to 39 and such impact on communication at work could also provide great opportunity for research.

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**Appendix A.** Common themes and sample answers of the 10 questions.

**Q1:** What gives you meaning and purpose in your work?

1. Helping others
  - “Hoping that I’m helping to educate some students, those who wouldn’t be able to get an education otherwise – underprivileged students of color on a predominately white campus.” (Interviewee 15)
  - “The nature of the work itself. Education is so important to individuals, society, globally. So the chance to help people to get what they need in order to fulfill their own dreams and hopes is very fulfilling.” (Interviewee 20)
2. Connection with others
  - “The common element that I love about my job is being able to connect with students, build a relationship with them, and positively impact them as people.” (Interviewee 2)
  - I love to work with the students. I became a physician because I love to relate to other human beings in a very deep, connected way.” (Interviewee 18)

**Q2:** Do you believe in God or a higher power?

1. A power greater than oneself
  - “I try to get away from the idea that God is an old man with a white beard. I think of God as a power and love.” (Interviewee 1)
  - I don’t see God as a person but as an energy or higher power, something out there that is ‘greater than thou’.” (Interviewee 3)
2. Undefined
  - “I believe in a higher being, but I don’t have a specific description. There is design in the universe so there has to be a designer.” (Interviewee 17)
  - “When I try to define God as some ‘thing’ that can be believed in, I stop because I think that’s kind of shrinking God down somewhat. I think of God as something that exists beyond our ability to define it.” (Interviewee 6)
3. Christian belief
  - “I believe in the God of the King James version of the Bible.” (Interviewee 15)
  - “I would describe God as a classical Christian orthodoxy, God as a trinity. In terms of the day-to-day walk through work, it is the idea of the spirit of God at work in your life.” (Interviewee 20)

**Q3:** What meaning does religion have for you and how important is it in your life?

1. Pivotal in life
  - “To be religious and a Christian is the most important belief in my life.” (Interviewee 8)
  - “It is out there every minute of every day, a constant. In my best moments I’m keeping it in mind and its informing my every action.” (Interviewee 1)
  - “It gives me a framework, a compass, a code of ethics and morals that I abide by.” (Interviewee 2)
2. Insignificant
  - “When I think of religion, I think of organized religion, like Catholic or Jewish. I’m not a believer in any of those faiths. I believe that there is a common spirituality behind organized religion, and I have more of an interest and belief in that.” (Interviewee 10)
  - It has virtually no meaning. I have not found it satisfactory or fulfilling, no answers, and traditions and rituals which have no substance whatsoever at this point.” (Interviewee 7)

**Q4:** What meaning does spirituality have for you and how important is it in your life?

1. Positive impact
  - “It plays a huge role in everything that I do, my interaction with people and how I view myself. That has an impact on every minute of my day.” (Interviewee 10)

- “Spirituality is just a positive environment all around, believing there is a higher power and trusting your instincts, knowing no matter how bad things are something good is going to happen. It is seeing the positive in everything.” (Interviewee 14)
- 2. Connection
  - “It is the constant striving to connect with the ‘all that is,’ to keep remembering that within me is that spark of the divine. I am part of it. It is part of me. We are all part of one another.” (Interviewee 11)
  - “I’m always seeking a centeredness, and I kind of practice, not strongly, some Buddhist philosophies and practices that we are all connected. Even a simple thing like before I eat I think about the steps this food had to go through before it got to my table and all the people who were actually connected to that process so I could eat that meal.” (Interviewee 13)
- 3. Being a personal experience
  - “It is very personal. I think that everything is spiritual. I believe that the Christian faith is a reality to be experienced, not a set of mental checklist things that you need to assent to in order to go somewhere when you die.” (Interviewee 19)
  - “I see spirituality as the individual impact of your faith, how it works out in your individual life in the classic Christian view that is reflected in the work of the spirit of God in your life interacting with your own spirit. That has a lot of personal ramifications for behavior, decisions and choices.” (Interviewee 20)

**Q5:** Do you see a difference between religion and spirituality?

1. No difference
  - “My religion encompasses my spirituality.” (Interviewee 1)
  - “Not for me, but other people do.” (Interviewee 15)
2. With difference
  - “Spirituality is different from religious belief. It can be personal choice or a different way of life. Religious belief is about faith, sacrifice, dedication of the soul. It is not just a way of life. It is THE way of life to people with strong faith.” (Interviewee 8)
  - “Religion is more formal, a codification. Spirituality is the supportive framework around my relationship with God: I practice meditation as part of my spirituality and volunteer to provide Reiki treatments to hospice patients. By giving to others I am giving to God.” (Interviewee 9)

**Q6:** During your work day do you engage in inner spiritual activities such as prayer, moments of quiet reflection or short meditation?

The answers show that prayer, meditation, and reflection range from regular to spontaneous practice. For example:

- “I lift up people in prayer who I encounter as part of my way of responding to the events of my day.” (Interviewee 5)
- “All the time, especially at meetings! I don’t call it prayer, but mindfulness, reflection, where I try to reconnect to my values. I move fast, so I have to pace myself, take a deep breath, connect with the meaning of what I’m doing right now and the importance of the relationships I’m building and the need to nourish the people I’m working with.” (Interviewee 13)
- “I regularly need time to myself in which I try to put things in perspective, and it is more than just thinking about an issue. It’s ‘Ok, let’s sit back and see where you are in all of this.’ If you mean by prayer speaking to God, then, no, I don’t do that.” (Interviewee 4)

**Q7:** During your work day do you engage in inner spiritual activities such as reading sacred, spiritual or inspirational literature in printed form or on the Internet?

The answers range from none, to occasionally reading the Bible or inspirational materials and using the Internet, to placing artifacts in office such as printed material with affirmations/motivational quotes, picture of guru on desk, and listening to gospel CDs or calming music.

**Q8:** How does your spiritually-conscious inner communication contribute to outer communication with others at work? In other words, when someone says something to you, does your spirituality naturally and spontaneously inform your response, or do you need to take a moment and reach within your "spiritual well" before you speak?

1. Spiritually-informed spontaneous response often a challenge
  - "I can't say that I always mediate that instant response through my higher being, though I wish I could. I would be surprised if anybody would not be ambushed by their own emotions in a moment when an interaction happens that you didn't see coming or that is really painful." (Interviewee 5)
  - "Having my spirituality automatically inform the way I behave is like reaching the Kingdom of Heaven. I'm not there. So it's not until later in quiet reflection or I'm feeling guilty that I will be reaching into the well of my spirituality to figure out what I can do to make this better, make amends or handle it so that we all come away feeling like we all are children of God." (Interviewee 1)
2. Spiritually-informed response easier in a positive communication
  - "I tend to consciously activate a spiritual energy when I'm working with someone and will often become aware of the idea that I want to give over to them some energy other than the just the words or ideas that we are sharing back and forth – love – because I feel it would be helpful for them to feel that." (Interviewee 6)
3. Pause and reflect
  - "Most of the time I try to reflect first because you should treat people well. If I didn't treat someone well I would be very embarrassed and be ashamed of myself. In some cases my spirituality might naturally come up, but I don't think I'm that good! So I have to think of how I would want to be treated and how Christ would want me to treat other people and try to do it that way. I'm not always successful." (Interviewee 9)
  - "The more likely scenario is that I need to reflect to kind of gather myself and my thoughts. I do take time to reflect on my ultimate goal which is integrated with my desire for good connections, good relationships and kind of calm, centered, respectful responses." (Interviewee 13)

**Q9:** Would you like for your workplace to provide a space (such as a quiet room or chapel, etc.) where employees can go for quiet reflection during the day?

1. A good idea
  - "We live in a very stressful society. To be able to stop for a little bit and regroup would bring the stress level down, and when we bring the stress level down you bring your health up, your consciousness level up and are able to handle situations on a much more even keel." (Interviewee 7)
  - "I think that would be good for the institution. It probably would improve employees' experience at work and their performance, and it probably would lower the stress and improve the working conditions." (Interviewee 20)
2. Concerns
  - "I think that there would need to be a more openness to spirituality in the workplace that I don't think is here. If there was more openness, then I think it would be a good idea." (Interviewee 10)

**Q10:** Would you like for your workplace to provide opportunities, such as workshops, etc. for employees to actively express their spirituality at work?

1. A good idea
  - "I think any time that you can encourage people to grow and to look at life differently is helping that person and the organization. So I would endorse that." (Interviewee 12)
  - "I think that there is this unwritten, 'We can't talk about spiritual things, or if we do, we all sit around and try not to offend each other.' We don't really have any honest dialogue about anything spiritual. I don't see faith and spirituality and academia as things that are in conflict." (Interviewee 19)
2. Concerns
  - "If it can be done in such a way that everybody can feel included. I think it would be very tricky. I like the idea of incorporating spirituality into a workplace, but I think you'd have to be so careful about who was leading it, what that person was saying and what kinds of things got expressed." (Interviewee 1)
  - "I think that people would fear workshops on spirituality at work because religion gets a negative connotation at work." (Interviewee 14)

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