

Guest editorial

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Exploring spirituality and social responsibility

Introduction

Globalization and technological advancement have created abundant material wealth in the name of making human life more comfortable. Unfortunately, this trajectory has also created a distribution of wealth that has been extremely skewed, favoring a few. Such discriminatory distribution has been justified by the economic man as “survival of the fittest”, without actually providing a holistic definition of fitness. Consequently, there have been increased discussions about justice, fairness, empathy, altruism and related virtues of human existence among all sections of society. These have naturally spilled over into the management literature questioning unbridled profiteering and reinforcing the idea of social responsibility of business. Debate among academics and management executives have fueled various definitions of a more humane, ethical and transparent mode of conducting business ([van Marrewijk, 2003](#)). Keeping this in view, we believed that a special issue evaluating spirituality and social responsibility would help to open up new vistas of understanding social responsibility.

Spirituality encompasses the virtues of human existence because all definitions of spirituality revolve around the idea of going beyond the self, a quest for meaning in life, seeking inner peace and fulfillment. Self-transcendent positive emotion which is a key component of spirituality is closely related to altruism ([Krebs, 1991](#); [Kristeller and Johnson, 2005](#)). Therefore, the main thrust for this special issue was to provide a platform for spirituality and social responsibility dialog.

Overview of the theme

Spirituality and associated themes are gaining increased acknowledgment in mainstream management literature. This growth, among other factors, is perhaps in response to the increasingly complex and dynamic manner in which organizations and activities interact in business, government and civil society domains. There is a ubiquitous need to sustain the hope for a better future – spirituality provides a bridge between this hope and the opportunity to create such a future.

Despite recognition of the importance of good governance and the social responsibility of business, we still see evidence of important systems failing in our society. Compliance with conventional rules and ensuring good governance has not prevented many recent breeches such as the Tesco Accounting Scandal, Olympus Corporation's 13-year fraud, Volkswagen's rigging scandal or the FIFA corruption case to name a few. Although these issues have received increasing academic attention, contemporary management has not provided us with necessary answers. We need to probe deeper into rethinking business values. Can spirituality, however defined or articulated, offer direction in the pursuit of responsible business practice? How can spirituality help to create practical solutions to counter the deficiency of accountability and responsibilities?

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Extant literature examining the connection between spirituality and contemporary business has been slowly evolving. The emerging integration of spirituality and business can be traced as far back as the 1950s to the work of Max Weber who viewed the protestant work ethic as an integral force in the rise of modern day Western capitalism. Despite decades of flirting with the topic, our understanding of what spirituality is and how spirituality might be integrated into the business environment continues to be hindered by the complex landscape within which we function. It is essential that we examine the similarities and differences in spiritual orientation of various cultures to arrive at sustainable delivery of social responsibility. We still struggle in defining what constitutes socially responsible business – and the link between spirituality and corporate social responsibility remains under examined.

Although the movement toward integrating spirit into contemporary business is a more current debate than the social responsibilities of business, both continue to raise significant questions. How and why are spirituality and social responsibility similar or different in purpose? How does spirituality inform social responsibility? This special issue of *Social Responsibility Journal* “exploring spirituality and social responsibility” allows us to consider questions associated with the integration of spirituality into contemporary business practice and what, if any, role it has. As such, this issue will be of interest to both scholars and practitioners.

A central aim of this special issue is to further the dialog on spirituality and social responsibility in a meaningful way, through both theoretical development and empirical testing. As we reach the end of our journey and have the special issue “in hand”, we believe it indeed addresses new directions, raises important questions and adds knowledge to the field. As special issue guest editors, we were encouraged by the robust turnout of submissions, and we are pleased to present the ten articles contained in this special issue that comprise an eclectic and valuable set of perspectives on spirituality and social responsibility. While the papers are not grouped thematically, what we see is a natural progression from a focus on the individual and issues of consumption to consideration of spirituality within an organizational context. Below, we provide a brief summary of those ten articles.

The first paper in our special issue, *Spirituality, stewardship and consumption: new ways of living in a material world*, provides a timely exploration of how spirituality impacts the consumption choices of consumers who are pursuing a sustainable lifestyle. The paper highlights that when ideology is merged with consumption even mundane purchases become acts of meaning and purpose. The authors suggest that little attention has been given to understanding spirituality in the context of lifestyle consumption (Carson and Langer, 2006). They argue that consumers who believe that they are “conscious”, “aware” and “mindful” about the impact of their purchases are actually expressing spiritual practice through mindfulness and are in harmony with the environment. Most importantly, the authors challenge the concept that mindful consumption relates to austerity and rejection of consumption, suggesting instead that businesses that ignore this trend would not be able to reap the benefits of this emerging large market. The authors propose a reframing of the understanding of spiritually driven consumers as those who want to experience a positive impact on themselves and leave a similar impact on their community through their consumption patterns. We see this as an important contribution.

The second paper on *Mindfulness and gender differences in ethical beliefs* offers an interesting insight into gender sensitivity with regard to mindfulness and the ethical beliefs of consumers. The authors test the extent to which gender differences in ethical judgments are because of differing levels of mindfulness. Their findings suggest that “mindfulness is not only a predictor of ethical beliefs but also a mediator of the relationship between gender and ethical beliefs”. It was observed in the study that mindfulness led to better acceptance and a more lenient view of the ethical judgments and behavior. The use of mindfulness as a personality trait to arrive at gender-based beliefs regarding unethical consumer behavior

highlighted that men were more mindful and, therefore, lenient in their ethical judgment, while women were found to experience more stress and tended to make rule-based rigid ethical judgment. According to the authors, those individuals who are mindful are more attentive observers of unethical activities and do not arrive at judgment of right or wrong based on universal and objective ethical standards. The authors propose that, based on their findings, further in-depth qualitative research can help organizations to understand consumer behavior and reduce unethical practices among consumers, sellers and marketers.

The third paper in this special issue investigates spiritual value in the context of health-care services. *Exploring consumers' experiences of spiritual value in health-care services* examines consumer experiences of spiritual value and examines how it is distinct from ethical value. The authors distinguish between consumers' experiences of spiritual value and ethical value to offer a consumer-centered perspective on corporate social responsibility (CSR). One of the key findings from a consumer perspective is that "participants talked about spiritual value predominantly in reactive terms (apprehending, appreciating, admiring or responding), whereas ethical value was referred to as active (taking action)". We believe that this is a significant contribution that warrants in-depth understanding and analysis to design appropriate corporate social responsibility practices.

Our fourth paper is *Consumer ethics, religiosity, and consumer social responsibility: Are they related?* This paper attempts to address the relationship between consumer ethics, religiosity and corporate social responsibility through a study of the level of importance of consumers' ethical beliefs and social responsibilities (CnSR) and the impact of consumers' religiosity and ethical beliefs on CnSR. According to the authors, consumers value social responsibilities differently – therefore, all dimensions are not equally important and consumer ethical beliefs and religiosity also have a significant influence CnSR. The importance of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity is used to explain the behavior of the consumer. The intrinsically motivated consumer tends to live his/her day-to-day life as per one's religious beliefs, whereas the extrinsically motivated person seeks solace in other social determinants and participates in religious activities to meet personal or social goals. It is suggested that intrinsic religiosity influences consumer perception about various social responsibility activities except the environment domain. An organization needs to understand this aspect of consumer perception and implement just sales practices, fair prices and ensure quality standard, before developing other CSR activities. The study also makes an important contribution by examining social responsibility in Indonesia – an under-examined context.

The fifth paper harnesses a Buddhist skillful means approach to spirituality and CSR. The intent of *Skillful means – A Buddhist approach to social responsibility* is to explore critical issues of CSR, justify the relationship of spirituality and Buddhism to CSR, introduce Buddhist approaches to CSR and propose a practical and skillful means approach to CSR practice. According to the author, various vested motives such as individual and organizational interest or institutional goals have often veered the focus of CSR from salient context. The continuum of past, present and future outlined in Buddhism is used to explain how tomorrow's consequences are born in today's actions. The author proposes that "[...] the Middle Path of Buddhism reflects on avoiding anything which is too extreme. It gives equal weight to ethical principles and practical outcomes in a critical reflection that may appear extreme or unethical at first, but is necessary for the longer term (Midgley and Shen, 2007)". It is further argued in the paper that the concept of non-attachment is not synonymous with non-connectedness. In fact, the author strongly suggests that Buddhist culture is collectivist and encourages individual exploration of mind and promotes a willingness to learn and accept. They conclude that the skillful means approach to CSR offers the contextualization of CSR and the wisdom of adopting "non-extreme, sustainable, skillful, mindful, compassionate and egoless approaches".

Our sixth paper *Invitational discourse: Towards a spirituality of communication* is an attempt “to explore invitational discourse as a modality underpinning socially responsible enterprises seeking to become spiritually alert by focusing on the rich symbolic environment within which organizations operate”. This paper explores a fifteenth-century icon to understand how organizations can create open environments characterized by free exchange of information and the absence of silo-based communication. A global organization in crisis, the dairy cooperative Fonterra, is used to explain this concept. The process defined by the authors centers around spiritually alert communication that creates a synergy between the symbolic and the rational. This creates engaged employees who would contribute positively to the organization both during good and tough times. The inherent symbolism of a historic icon, Rublev's *Trinity*, which is an expression of mutuality in the Holy Trinity, is used to frame discussion of the desired form of communication that leads beyond the silo culture and creates a spiritually sensitive community which becomes part of the organization's socially responsible outreach. According to the authors, as communication draws on humans' spiritual as well as cognitive and emotional resources, their suggested process would define how messages are developed and conveyed. This in turn would lead to better and enabling organizational culture that would facilitate socially responsible behavior in the community.

The seventh paper in this special issue is *Corporate values from a personal perspective*. In their work, the authors attempt to address the challenge of producing value-oriented leaders and ensuring the integration of these values at all levels. It is suggested that no amount of legislation can guarantee goodness and exoneration from human frailty. Therefore, effectiveness of rules lies in their being in sync with life in general and understanding that business is neither amoral nor impersonal. According to the study, the bigger challenge today is offering meaning and purpose to the new younger workforce. The effort of the authors was to understand individual behavior how employees learn about and relate to corporate values. To get an insight into this perspective, the authors have drawn a distinction between values and norms. They suggest that values should be institutionalized and embedded instead of reinforcing norms in working culture. They promote open discussion to transition from norms to values as well as to mitigate conflict between values. The authors suggest that leaders “should reflect, listen and engage widely in discussion in order to understand the current realities of lived values across their organizations”.

Our eighth paper, *Religiosity and corporate social responsibility practices: Evidence from an emerging economy*, examines local expressions of CSR and attempts to contextualize the social, economic, political and cultural realities in developing countries. According to the authors, as developing countries are plagued by weak institutional and legal frameworks, religiosity can be a very potent driver for CSR in these contexts. The authors build a conceptual framework based on Islamic religious parameters, including *Riba*, *Zakat* and *Mafsadah* and include their impact on firm CSR practices. The framework is tested using Pakistan Stock Exchange-listed firms using structural equation modeling. According to the authors, strong religious involvement is part of the socio-cultural fabric of Pakistan; therefore, understanding the role of religion in promoting best practices of CSR in Pakistani firms becomes relevant. The uniqueness of the paper lies in the fact that it is one of the few studies to propose a comprehensive conceptual Islamic religiosity model to evaluate the influence of a firm's Islamic religiosity on CSR and how it interfaces with Western models of CSR. In doing so, they suggest that religiosity can be an alternate governance mechanism to promote socially responsible behavior of firms in Islamic developing countries, especially in countries with weak legal and institutional framework.

The authors of our ninth paper, *How spirituality, climate, and compensation affect job performance*, explore dimensions of workplace spirituality (engaging work, spiritual

connection, mystical experiences and sense of community), corresponding with workplace climate and compensation on employee perceived job performance. The study is based in a Vietnamese hospital and closely relates to the local context. The authors have attempted to explore the complex relations between workplace climate, compensation and perceived job performance from both monetary and non-monetary aspects to arrive at employees' performance and propose a comprehensive conceptual framework. The findings of the study suggest employee engagement can be achieved by designing meaningful job characteristics, thoughtfully examining work-life balance and examining employee needs and expectations. Here, the authors introduce the interesting concept of contemplative breaks, spiritual discussions and designated places for reflection and silence to enhance engagement of employees. The paper highlights the often-debated idea of flexible work timings and creative scheduling to allow employees more spare time to engage in activities they are passionate about and enjoy.

Our final paper is *The relationship between workplace spirituality, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors – An empirical study*. The author (s) uses job satisfaction as a mediator to examine the relationship between workplace spirituality and organizational citizenship behavior. The study also emphasizes the role of age, gender and tenure as moderators. According to the author (s), there are three components of workplace spirituality that are taken into account – meaning and purpose in work, recognition of an inner life or spirit and interconnectedness with organizational citizenship behaviors, mediated by job satisfaction experienced by the employees. The empirical context of India provides some interesting insights into the relationship between job satisfaction, organizational citizenship and spirituality in the workplace – and more importantly how employers might encourage a positive relationship.

Conclusion

Today, more than ever there, is a need to increase awareness about human-centered education that emphasizes the impact that individual action and decision can and does have on other individuals within a “community”. A human-centered educational approach (Giacalone and Thompson, 2006) highlights quality of life, moral, spiritual, ethical, environmental and other stakeholder-oriented issues. This perspective inspired us as editors to attempt to create a deeper consciousness about the importance of spiritual insight required to deliver relevant social responsibility. In a business environment that is continually challenged by stakeholder sensitivities and requirement, we believed this special issue would certainly add value to the process of transformation to a more humane management.

As guest editors of this special issue on spirituality and social responsibility, we continue to be positive about the future of the field and believe that many interesting questions remain to be addressed within this domain – studies that will provide rich contributions for both the theory and practice of social responsibility. Whatever the future may bring in terms of topics, we trust that knowledge, rigor and relevance will drive responses to the questions that remain unanswered.

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