



The influence of spiritual “meaning-making” on career behavior

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497

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Abstract *This paper presents the results of a participative psycho-biographical study that investigated the effect of spirituality on career behavior. This study shows that spirituality influences career purpose, sense-making and coherence. Spirituality was found to inspire four purposes of “developing and becoming self”, “unity with others”, “expressing self”, and “serving others”. Spirituality was also found to influence an ongoing process of sense-making through discovering, prioritizing and balancing the four purposes over a lifespan, in response to ongoing tensions between “being” and “doing” as well as “self- versus other-orientation”. Spirituality furthermore influences perceived career-coherence as individuals align their careers with perceived spiritual orderings outside of themselves. The paper concludes with suggestions for practice and future research.*

Introduction

Several authors currently writing on the spirituality-work connection (Biberman and Whittey, 1997; Howard and Howard, 1997; Kahnweiler and Otte, 1997) suggest that spirituality influences work behavior, but that we have little empirical data on whether, to what extent, and how spirituality influences work behavior. This observation is reflected in a recently emerging body of career literature on spirituality, which suggest that questions of deeper meanings of life have not been adequately addressed by traditional theory and research. Bloch (1997), based on a review of traditional career development theories (Holland, 1992; Super, 1990; Krumboltz and Mitchell, 1990), suggests that although these theories are valuable in explaining various aspects of the underlying process of career choice, job satisfaction and work-motivation, as they are translated into practice they do not adequately address the deeper questions of meaning. Savickas (1993) joins Bloch (1997) in expressing a concern that career theories do not address deeper questions related to meaning-making. Savickas notes that current career theory, and the practice derived from it, rely heavily on the identification and measurement of interests, abilities and occasionally values, to help the individual develop a list of characteristics to be matched with occupations. Bloch (1997, p. 191) suggests that this does not, in itself, encourage the bringing of deeper questions of meaning into career practice as “the synthesis of decision making and action is qualitatively different from the synthesis of meaning-making”.



As a result of these career practices “development has been conceived in terms of society not self. For example, developmental tasks are social expectations; identity means recognizable by the community as well as stable; and maturity means that the future is more important than the present” (Savickas, 1993, pp. 209-10). Within the field of career it is suggested that the deeper motives of life choice are generally hidden to the external observer (Krau, 1997), while values are the most important determinant of choices and high functioning people have values that are well crystallized and prioritized (Brown, 1996). This raises questions not only about the importance of deeper life meanings in relation to career theory and practice but also about the ability of the career practitioner, be it counselor or human resource (HR) manager, to assist the individual in articulating and enacting these deeper meanings.

Definitions in the context of organizations also have in common that spirituality is defined as the process of finding meaning and purpose in our lives as well as living out one’s set of deeply held personal beliefs (Neck and Milliman, 1994). “Spirituality is the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, the contributions they are making” (Vaill, 1991, p. 218). Mitroff and Denton (1999) provided one of the few empirical examples of the influence of spirituality on work and organizations to date. They compiled several items that gave participants the most meaning and purpose in their jobs. In order of “three items checked most often” these are:

- (1) interesting work;
- (2) realizing one’s full potential as a person; and
- (3) being associated with a good and ethical organization.

These are followed by:

- (4) making money;
- (5) service to others; and
- (6) having good colleagues

The findings indicate that self-oriented meanings score high on the “meaningful work” list. This may be a reflection of the highly individualized US culture, and Savickas (1993) questions whether interesting work, in itself, is meaningful. To date there has been little research confirming Mitroff and Denton’s (1999) findings, nor is it established whether these were espoused meanings, or whether they actively influenced work and career behavior. More research is therefore needed into work meanings informed by spiritual world view.

In the broader field of organizational and individual psychology it is suggested that paying attention to questions of purpose, value or meaning is important not only to improve the quality of career theory and practice but also to enhance personal wellbeing. For the individual, the danger of objectifying career outcomes lies in internalizing objective career measures as the only

standards by which to measure the success of their working life, often resulting in a loss of meaning (Sievers, 1993), loss of self (Becker, 1973) and loss of personal wellbeing (Kofodimos, 1993). Psychologists are finding a significant positive relationship between the ability to make meaning and personal wellbeing (Wong, 1998). Mirvis and Hall (1996) discuss the importance of “psychological success” as a response to the increasingly changing career environment. They define this psychological success as “the experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual, rather than those set by parents, peers, an organization, or society” (Mirvis and Hall, 1996, p. 251). They suggest that keys to experiencing psychological success will be people’s ability to “make sense” of their constantly changing work agenda and to integrate their work experiences into a coherent self-picture.

It is, therefore, suggested that career practitioners, including HR practitioners, need to create opportunities for individuals to bring their deeper meanings into career decision making. This is, however, going to be difficult as we have so little empirical evidence on whether and how spirituality influences career behavior from which to build further theory and practice.

Literature on spirituality, and its concern with meaningful work, does not just focus on meaningful outcomes but also on the process of work over time. Career is a lifelong process including the process of making career transitions. In more traditional approaches to career transitions these have been explained as a result of the individual addressing tensions between objective present and desired end-states, such as increase in status, power, flexibility or financial reward. Engels (1995) in a review of career transition literature, noticed that there is little knowledge on the concept of career change as a lifelong phenomenon, and Stephens (1994) suggests there is very little knowledge on subjective reasons for career transition. However, several career process theories, the most prominent being that of Super (1990), are concerned with career patterns as they develop over a person’s lifespan. Super suggests that individuals go through different developmental stages and play various roles across a lifespan. Erikson (1963) suggests that meaning gradually evolves throughout a person’s lifetime where one obtains insights into particular tensions as one moves through different developmental dimensions such as (in adult years) intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus self-absorption and integrity versus despair. Fowler (1980) adds a spiritual dimension and sees the journey of life as a journey of faith, which he describes as the making, maintenance and transformation of human meaning. He views the process of meaning-making as a process of learning about faith, life and self.

Purpose of this study

The intent of this study is to explore possible influence of spirituality on career behavior. The study presented in this article sought to address the limited empirical evidence showing a relationship between spirituality and career behavior by asking the question of whether, and if so how, spirituality influences career behavior as it related to career choice and transition.

Definition of terms

The many definitions of spirituality used in relation to work (Biberman and Whittey, 1997; Cavanagh, 1999; Dale, 1991; Kahnweiler and Otte, 1997; Mitroff and Denton, 1999; Neck and Milliman, 1994) have in common that spirituality is treated as a meaning-making construct. According to Yalom (1980, p. 419), the question of meaning can take many forms: "What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of my life? What do we live for? What shall we live by? If we must die, if nothing endures, then what sense does anything make?". A concern with these questions is also evident in career literature on spirituality. For example, Savickas (1997) suggests that an individual experiences his/her spirituality as a sense of meaning that breathes life into situations and Bloch and Richmond's (1997) book *Connections Between Spirit and Work in Career Development* clearly frames questions of spirituality in the context of meaning of work and life with titles of chapters such as "The meaning of work"; "Creating one's personal meaning through the cycles of life" and "Work as worth: money or meaning". Based on my literature review I decided to focus the study on spiritual meanings given to career and how these influence career behavior.

In order to provide rigor to the study it was important to further define meaning. In reviewing psychological literature related to meaning (e.g. Becker, 1973; Frankl, 1963; Jung, 1933) I found three recurring core concepts:

- (1) purpose;
- (2) sense-making; and
- (3) coherence.

The same organizing principles were found in the work of authors (Brief and Nord, 1990; Morin, 1995) who apply meaning directly to work and career. I therefore chose to use these three constructs as the organizing principles for this inquiry, as they clarify the more vague concepts such as meaning or spirituality. In doing so I concentrate on what spirituality does, rather than on what it is, as the various definitions of what spirituality is vary depending on the particular belief of the author, whereas there is more agreement on what it does in relation to daily living and this is of more interest to career theorists and HR practitioners.

Purpose refers to what goes on in the subject's thinking process with respect to reasons for which he works and to what one intends to accomplish or realize through work (Brief and Nord, 1990). Purpose is value driven, it holds within it a belief about the purpose of existence, what ought to be done and what constitutes a worthwhile living. Because intent is central to the concept, purpose is a prospective construct.

Sense-making is "the capacity to perceive, judge, and discover the intelligibility of beings, actions, and things" (Morin, 1995, p. 44) and involves a process in which individuals form cognitive maps of their environment, including standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and

acting. Sense-making therefore concentrates on the process of meaning-making. It is a more retrospective construct that serves to evaluate past behavior but also influences future behavior (Weick, 1995).

Coherence (Yalom, 1980), harmony (Csikzentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990) or wholeness (Frankl, 1963), refers to a sense of the different elements of one's life fitting together into a coherent whole, or integrative framework, as well as one's own life being integrated into a coherent whole with that of others. It is commonly agreed that this third element of meaning serves as a kind of superordinate principle in constructing reality, which serves to order disparate elements into integrative systems (Carlsen, 1988). According to Yalom (1980) this category of meaning refers to a spiritual ordering or design outside the person.

Career transition, in this study, is defined as the individual changing roles (taking on a different objective role) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering a subjective state) (Louis, 1980).

So, in asking questions about the influence of spiritual belief on career development, I inquire into whether and how purpose, sense-making and coherence are affected by spiritual belief and how these three concepts in turn affect career behavior.

Research design

Methodology

Several career theorists including Ochberg (1988), Cochran (1990) and Young and Borgen (1990), pointed out the need to use biographical-hermeneutic approaches to the study of career development in order to access deeper career meanings. As a result I decided to do a qualitative psycho-biographical study, in which the research participants were involved in analyzing the data and subsequent conceptualization.

Human inquiry (Reason, 1994) involves doing research with, rather than on, people. There are many forms of collaboration possible. Co-researchers may study their own experience in a group of which they are all part or come together to study experience that has occurred outside the group. In this particular research project, the research was initiated by myself, but I did not analyze my own story and research participants did not become involved in each other's stories. I refer to them as research participants, indicating that they actively participated in various stages of the research project (as opposed to being "subjects") but that we were not co-researchers in that I did not share my story and they did not share their stories with each other. The research participants were involved in the analysis of their own stories and the developing of concepts, thus ensuring that the interpretations of the data by the researcher are accurate and that the interpretations of the data surpass the limited worldview of the researcher (this was considered to be particularly important to ensure the quality of qualitative analysis on issues of spirituality, as the spirituality of the researcher is different from that of the research

participants, and important interpretations could be missed if the researcher's own spirituality was used as lens or standard).

Process

The study was undertaken over three years with the first interviews taking place in 1997 and the last session with research participants taking place in November 1999. I had two meetings with the research participants of approximately two hours each as well as several interactions by correspondence and a final group meeting. In the first meeting I gathered the career histories, and these were taped and transcribed. Research participants were asked to tell their career histories. This was introduced with the following statement by the researcher: "Over the phone we briefly discussed the purpose of this research. I am interested in the interface of your spiritual and/or religious beliefs and your career. In order to find out how these are in harmony or conflict, I am asking you to tell me the story of how your career developed over time. Please start from where you feel you should start. I will not interrupt your process of telling but if at any stage you need some time to reflect, want me to turn off the tape recorder, or need a break, please let me know". In inviting individuals to tell their story, I invited them to provide me with a psycho-biographical account (narrative) of their interpretation of their lives over a period of time. The introduction was designed so as not to guide the research outcomes to any significant extent, as is appropriate for exploratory research (Tierny and Lincoln, 1997), also to get a richness of data associated with narrative (Polkinghorne, 1997), and to enable the individual through the telling of his career "story" to reflect on his deeper meanings and values in relation to career (Lax, 1996). This is appropriate also to safeguard the internal validity, which is one of the strengths of the qualitative approach (Ritchie *et al.*, 1997), and necessary to bring rigor to doing research into the subjective. A research approach which invited the individual to tell his/her career history was designed to elicit purpose, sense-making and coherence. "A life narrative brings to the fore a frame through which purpose and direction in a person's life can be made visible" (Hydén, 1995, p. 69) and "shows the unity and purpose of a human life" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 219).

Participants

Participants were 16 individuals, eight men and eight women, between 40 and 50 years of age. Two participants are Maori, one is Samoan, three are British, one is American and nine are New Zealand Caucasian. The sample was chosen in order to include the indigenous population of New Zealand, the large contingent of Polynesian immigrants, more recent immigrants as well as those born in New Zealand. The age group of 40-50 (average age 46) was chosen in order to obtain an extensive career history, while it was anticipated that research participants in this age-group were at the same time still concerned with their career future. The participants represented a wide range of spiritual affiliations both religious and non-religious including Catholic (two), Anglican

(two), Mormon (one), Buddhist (one), Quaker (one), Bahá'í (two), Jewish (one), Haahi Ringatu (a traditional Maori belief) (one), a follower of an Indian spiritual guide (one) and those who were not affiliated with any organized religion but perceived themselves to have a spiritual belief (four). This sample was chosen to represent a range of spiritual affiliations reflecting the diversity of beliefs currently present in New Zealand. The research participants, furthermore, had a wide range of occupations, including packer in a supermarket, manager of a first-aid organization, trainer, manager of a health service, oyster farmer, painter, community worker, HR manager and systems manager. They worked in a variety of commercial and not-for-profit organizations. This range was chosen to include members at different levels of organizational hierarchy over a variety of occupations and organizations. Individuals were chosen on the above mentioned criteria through word of mouth. This procedure in itself is likely to have affected the sample which may well be biased towards those who have a relatively strong spiritual belief and who are well-skilled at articulating it, as these are more likely to come to mind in a word of mouth process.

Data analysis

A five-step content analysis procedure was used to analyze the career histories. First the career history was summarized to include all career choices and transitions, the reasons for these transitions, and how various jobs were experienced, using the research participant's own words as much as possible, and to bring in temporal order. The objective of this summary was not to rewrite the story but to ascertain whether I had captured and understood the reasons for career choice and transition, to get a sense of how the individual experienced his/her career at present before entering data analysis, to obtain an agreed-upon database, and to ensure that the data analysis was manageable, which was necessary for the following step of analyzing and discussing the career histories with the research participants. The summarized career histories were sent back to the research participants who checked them for accuracy. Next, significant characteristics and themes within and across career histories were identified by the researcher and research participants. The objective was to let the themes emerge from the research rather than predetermine them. This inductive process is appropriate for exploratory research in an area where there has been little research done to date and thus few pre-defined parameters are available on which to base one's categorizing (Plummer, 1995). Whereas narrative techniques of analysis inquire into narrative structures and expressions as interests in their own right, using for example, plot reversals, subtextuals, modal constructions and character pairings, I was more in units of meaning as the unit of analysis. This is a method increasingly used in psycho-biographical data analysis which focuses on meaning and process (Cohler, 1982; Hermans, 1992; Hermans and Hermans, 1995; Kofodimos, 1993; McAdams, 1992; Ochberg, 1988). Units of meaning speak to the content and organization of self-narrative as it relates to significant aspects of the research participants' life course (Hermans and

Hermans, 1995). "The central concept, valuation, entails an active process of meaning construction. A valuation is any unit of meaning that has positive, negative or ambivalent value in the eyes of the individual. As such valuation is an open concept and includes anything people find to be of importance in telling their life stories" (Hermans, 1992, p. 363).

The emerging themes were compared in a second meeting, of approximately two hours, with those of each of the research participants, who were also asked to see whether they could find units of meaning in their own stories. Researcher and research participant would alternatively offer their interpretations and discuss these. In the few cases where there was no immediate agreement, the interpretation of the research participant was chosen above that of the researcher. This process served both to elicit and to name emerging themes.

A second form of data was collected by asking research participants to keep a diary on one week of work, with the instructions to write down work related feelings and events and evaluate these based on one's spiritual beliefs. The purpose of this second form of data collection was to ascertain whether career meanings as they came to the fore in career history, were also reflected in day-to-day career experience, thus providing an additional validity check about the effect of spirituality on career behavior. The diary content was analyzed by the researcher and research participants using a similar method to that described above.

In summary, a particular category was formed when: the theme occurred more than once in a particular story; the theme was present in all stories; the theme had an active role in shaping career behavior; the research participants confirmed its importance and articulated this in relation to their own spiritual belief (see Table I, second column). As a fourth step, the themes were compared to those emerging from the diaries and were considered to be significant if they reoccurred in both forms of data. Finally, the career history, diary and the various emergent categories as they related to their particular career history and diary were sent back to the research participants with a final request to recheck the accuracy of all interpretations of the career history and diary. At this stage the categories and sub-categories were placed next to the part of the career history that gave rise to them in order to ensure that they could be evaluated for accuracy within their appropriate context (Maxwell, 1996).

Research participants actively contributed to generating themes and the process of conceptualizing. For example, after we had arrived at a series of content themes of "developing and becoming self"; "serving others", etc., one research participant initiated another level of analysis in which he juxtaposed these themes and sub-themes, showing how they were often in tension with each other. Subsequently another round of analysis was initiated, looking at process themes in which tensions were elicited, adding themes of "self-orientation" versus "other-orientation" and "being" versus "doing".

Results

First, I present a summary overview in the form of a model in order to assist the reader in reading and evaluating the results section. Meaning becomes meaningless if it is taken out of the context of the larger whole. A discussion of purpose can potentially leave the reader with a sense of fragmentation because it is not integrated with the process of sense-making. This impression would be false as all categories of findings are interrelated and process findings are significant in relation to the influence of spirituality on career behavior. Introducing the data presentation as a whole, rather than its different parts, felt congruent with the choice to use human inquiry, which is about engaging in making human experience whole (Heron, 1992). It is also congruent with collecting data in the form of psycho-biographical accounts, which enables the researcher as well as the research participants to experience the big picture before moving to a more detailed analysis of the different parts. Introducing a data summary through a model at the outset of the data discussion could be misinterpreted. I would like to reiterate that the model is a representation of the data, not a hypothesis, that it is descriptive rather than prescriptive and arrived at through an inductive rather than deductive research process, as described in the methodology section.

The results section is organized around the three complementary organizing principles of purpose, sense-making and coherence. Under the first organizing principle of purpose it was found that spirituality as meaning-making construct influences four career purposes, which in turn influence career behavior. Under the second organizing principle of sense-making it was found that spirituality as meaning-making construct affects inter- and intra-role career transitions through an ongoing process of balancing and addressing tensions between “doing” and “being” and “self- and other-orientation”. Where tensions are not articulated and addressed in time a third sense-making category of “loss of equilibrium” resulted. Under the third organizing principle of coherence I discuss findings on spiritual ordering or design outside the person, such as what was “meant to be”, as also guiding career behavior.

Purposes

Four career purposes of “developing and becoming self”, “unity with others”, “expressing self” and “serving others”, were found to be meaningful by the research participants. Some of these categories have further sub-themes. In Table I each category, as represented in the four quadrants of the model, is printed in bold, with the subcategories below. Sample comments are provided of participants’ belief about why a particular category is meaningful. In order to show that these beliefs are not only espoused beliefs, but actively influence career behaviors, sample excerpts from career histories showing this influence have also been included.

Table I.
Result of the content
analyses for influence
of spirituality on career
purpose

Sample comments	Sample excerpts
<p><i>Developing and becoming self</i> Self-knowledge</p>	<p><i>From career histories on the effect of the purpose of developing and becoming self on career behavior</i></p> <p>"I was taught by the old people. I know who I am, where I come from and what I believe in. So in taking this job I knew what I wanted to achieve, I knew my duty was to marry our old Maori ways and European ways of doing and being for the benefit of both people. I earn less here than I did in my previous job as supervisor in a commercial organization, but I want to be here as it gives me a place to stand" (Hone, Maori, Haahi Ringatu, community center co-ordinator)</p> <p>"After leaving several organizations, I became aware that I had a problem with authority that was related to the relationship with my father. I decided to address this and started to feel happier and more effective at work" (Hans, NZ Caucasian, general spiritual belief, trainer)</p>
<p>Personal growth</p>	<p>"This is the hardest work I have ever done, I have often wanted to quit, everything just keeps rotting away almost as fast as we can build it up. But I see as see this work as a lever; it teaches me strength in the face of adversity" (Carl, NZ Caucasian, Báhá, oyster-farmer)</p> <p>"I felt I wasn't growing any more, I was standing still, and it was time to look around for another job" (Hannah, NZ Caucasian, Jewish, trainer)</p> <p>"I was being very harsh and critical of my own work and would often overcorrect. I started reading Zen philosophy and learned to accept my work as it was and would not cancel it out, my work became very much better because of that. I suppose it all boils down to the fact that I was starting to accept who I was" (Margaret, NZ Caucasian, Anglican, painter)</p>

(continued)

Sample comments	Sample excerpts
Maintaining integrity	<p>"In my previous job, I played a major role in the expansion of the company. People patted me on the back saying this is good, but the company was no longer making a positive contribution. I sat down and thought 'crap, I am not accomplishing anything any more', I realised I was just an administrator. I started to look for another job" (James, American-Caucasian, Christian, manager of an aid organization)</p>
	<p>"I don't want to be washed away by others" "It is about resisting the pressure to conform" "It is about acting out of my own values" "I don't want the self to be swallowed up by the job"</p>
Serving others	<p><i>Beliefs about the importance of serving others</i></p> <p>"I want to create an environment in which people can be whole – where people can survive, create, be happy" "It is about contributing my share to what I see as answering 'that of God' in people, I need to recognise that and build it up" "I need to know that I am involved in doing something that I can identify as being worthwhile"</p> <p><i>From career histories on the effect of the purpose of serving others on career behavior</i></p> <p>"After several years I became the representative for the union. I had a chance to move up to cashier and later perhaps to get a job working the union office, but I decided that as a packer I could best serve God and His people, it is about justice, social justice, these type of things" (Jo, British-Caucasian, Anglican, Packer in a supermarket)</p> <p>"When I reflect on the values I was raised, helping and voluntary work was very important. After having worked for non-profit organizations for a while, I am currently working for a commercial production company. I enjoy the work, the challenges and my personal learning, but I do struggle at times and wonder how to get satisfaction if I cannot serve directly. I look for opportunities to help others at work" (Hannah, NZ Caucasian, Jewish, trainer)</p> <p>"At this institute of technology they needed someone to teach Maori language of which I am a fluent speaker. There are not so many of us who were raised with our language and culture. At the time I did not really want to work outside of the home, but I knew I had something to offer and in not accepting the job I would be denying society, or at least these kids, a gift that I had to give, so I took the job" (Kahu, Maori, Catholic, Teacher).</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(continued)</i></p>

Table I.

Table I.

Sample comments	Sample excerpts
<p><i>Unity with others</i> Sharing values</p> <p><i>Beliefs about importance of unity with others</i> "I want to be able to express myself to others, and talk about the reasons why we do what we do in a more meaningful way" "Acknowledge that our behaviors or opinions are based on deeper held beliefs"</p>	<p><i>From career histories on the effect of the purpose of unity with others on career behavior</i> "I get excited when I meet people at work who share deeper values. I love engaging with these people. However today I had a day at work where I did not have any meaningful conversations with anyone, this made me feel weary and despondent" (Maria, Samoan, general spiritual belief, consultant) "The company for which I currently work went through a change process and we were encouraged to articulate our deeper values. Values which I suddenly realised that I had had for a long time but had been hiding in the context of my paid work. All of a sudden it became legitimate to express these values in the workplace and I discovered many like-minded souls, which is important to me and I now actively look for these people" (William, NZ-Caucasian, systems manager, Quaker).</p>
<p>Belonging</p> <p>"I want to be involved in building a community, and experiencing trust, compassion, honouring and caring" "Being at ease with each other" "Strong relationships form a base to stand tall"</p>	<p>"I enjoyed the time in the monastery as they were generous and warm and it was family. I loved fitting into the community" (David, British, Anglican, part-time priest/part-time counselor).</p>

(continued)

Sample comments	Sample excerpts
<p><i>Expressing self</i> Creating</p>	<p><i>Beliefs about the importance of expressing self</i> "I enjoy creating, something that has come through my own hands" "It is about leaving a mark" "The human act is creative because it is an act of will" "The inner me needs expressing and it is important to find form for that"</p>
<p>Achieving</p>	<p>"Knowing that I've done well against the standards is important. I know I am at times seduced by the professional world, but there is a worth in being recognised as being competent and capable in that world. It seems self-serving, but it depends on what I do with it" "I only have one life, I want to have a good shot at it and be the best I can be"</p> <p>"I have a sense that this job is worthwhile as I am contributing to a health organization that has the potential to become world-class" (Jeff, Catholic, New Zealand-European, HR manager) "I need to exhibit my work to test whether I still make valid statements. Valid to me, valid to others; it is important to stay in kilter with other painters. When you exhibit people look at your work, and if they are moved they ring you up, and if they weren't moved, the phone stays silent" (Margaret, Anglican, NZ-Caucasian painter) "The earlier years of setting up the oyster farm were incredibly difficult, the work is physically hard, we were strapped for finances, the children were going through their teens, and I decided I didn't really like water. However I am very proud that we hung in there, in spite of the fact that our faith was often really tested" (Cath, NZ-Caucasian, Babái, oyster farmer)</p>

(continued)

Table I.

Table I.

	Sample comments	Sample excerpts
Influencing	<p>"I see my role to liberate others to get on with what their hearts cry out to do"</p> <p>"I find it important to use my own insights, learning and abilities towards serving others"</p> <p>"It is about knowing that my life has not been in vain"</p>	<p>"I got what was later called RSI and realised that there were many others in these laboring jobs who were also suffering. So I kept it very much before the noses of the union and they became very aware. By then I had become an assertive person" (Jo, Anglican, British-Caucasian, packer in a supermarket)</p> <p>"Many of the kids who work for us have never held a job before and some are quite irresponsible. I plan to approach the government or a local MP, with some ideas about how to support employment in rural areas" (Cath, NZ-Caucasian, Bahá'í, oyster farmer)</p>

Sense-making

Balancing and addressing tensions. The tensions between different purpose-categories were summarized into two broad tensions of “being” and “doing” as well as “self-orientation” and “other-orientation” (see Figure 1). “Developing and becoming self” relates to being with self; “serving others” relates to doing for others; “unity with others” relates to being with others, and expressing self relates to “doing for self”.

After years of nursing and giving to others, I started to look for a job in which I could extend myself and where my achievements would be recognized. I have since had various management jobs. It has been a real battle regarding work because I felt my identity is so tied up with my ability to earn a wage, with that recognition from the world, it is so goal oriented, and I want to become more process oriented, I want to be able to let go and explore (Caitlin, Buddhist, NZ-Caucasian, manager health service).

Caitlin first makes a career transition from a job where she was oriented towards the needs of others (serving others) to a job that at that stage fulfils more of her own needs. Although this job fulfils the career meaning of “self expression”, she realizes that it is again not completely balanced and that she needs to concentrate less on the “doing” and somewhat more on the “being”; she

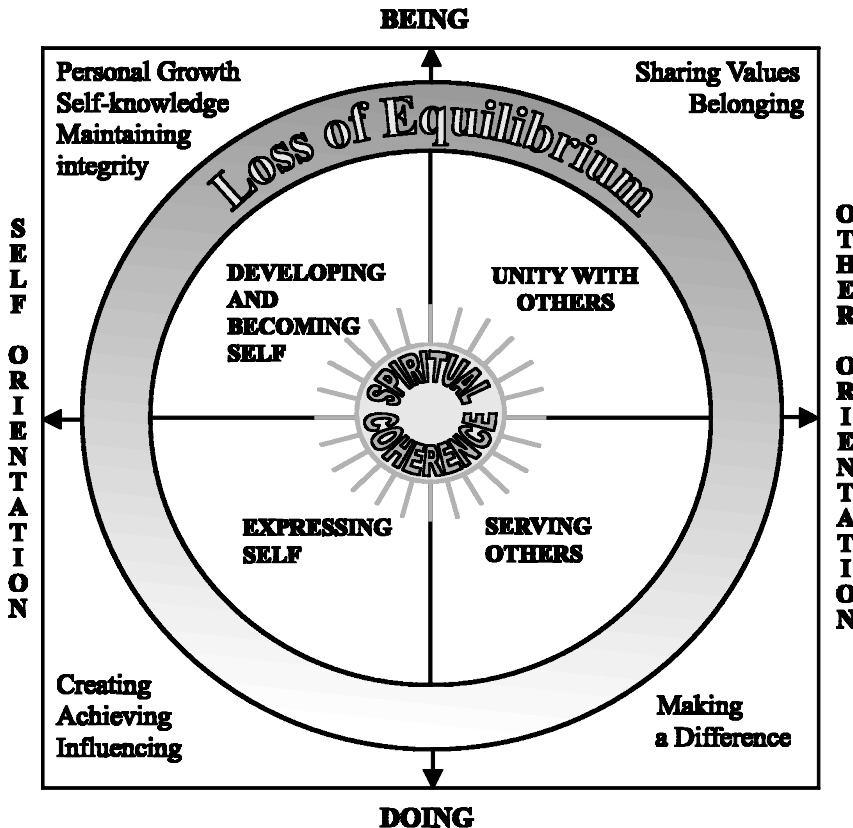


Figure 1. Summary overview of findings

may in the future decide to find another job to align her career with her need to “be with self”. Whereas Caitlin’s early career is based on serving others and later career more on the self, Margaret’s early career is based on her belief in the importance of self-development and later this is balanced with an other-orientation:

I started teaching art and it provides a sense of balance. It provides a marvellously social dimension to what would otherwise be a fairly solitary life. Also there is a feeling of responsibility for and to others. That is very good for the artist to think about because we can get very selfish, narrow minded and egotistical (Margaret, Anglican, NZ Caucasian, painter)

Discovering and evaluating the different purposes. The results show that the individual is engaged in a continuous process of re-evaluating the priority of the different purposes in his life which is an ongoing process of “learning into life” through which the individual discovers and evaluates different purposes:

You’ve got to run a successful business, you’ve got to keep the bank happy, keep people happy, hit deadlines, things can go wrong, and these are worldly worries. But I can get too caught up in these, and lose perspective and I need to reflect on what I’m doing it all for. God will not ask “were you a millionaire” but He will ask “was your living dignified, did it help mankind, did you give service?” (Bill, New Zealand Caucasian, Mormon, business owner).

This is not only important in relation to more conscious living as spiritual living implicitly holds an assumption of conscious living within it, but also because if tensions are not discovered, articulated or addressed research participants describe a process of losing equilibrium.

Avoiding loss of equilibrium. “Loss of equilibrium” is defined as a state of being where one of the purposes is influencing career behavior to the exclusion of others as shown in the sample comments:

My work is quite stressful due to the sheer volume of work and sorting through resources to do the work and sheer frustration of working in the health sector because of totally unrealistic expectations of shareholders and purchasers. So you end up carrying on regardless because of commitment, patients, staff, the community. But it goes at a personal cost and is not sustainable (Jeff, New Zealand Caucasian, Catholic, HR manager in a hospital).

I had to get out (of community service) because I was starting to get burned out. I ended up doing nothing for four months before I decided I wanted to work at creating things (William, NZ-Caucasian, Quaker, systems manager).

Jeff and William’s experience is common to that of other research participants who worked in not-for-profit organizations, where “serving others” often goes at the expense of “developing and maintaining self”. The career histories showed that research participants tried to address this by making career transitions. Jeff starts his own consulting business shortly after coming to the above realization, William stops working for four months before taking another job.

Coherence

This category refers to a spiritual ordering or design outside the person, a connection with the divine and its influence on career behavior. The previous sub-categories were present in all career histories and I therefore did not note

the number of comments. The different sub-categories in this category were not present in all career histories, this is possibly the result of the different spiritual affiliations and beliefs of the individuals (see Table II). Several sub-categories

Sub-category	Number of comments	Sample excerpts from career histories
“What is meant to be”?	10	<p>“I decide on my career but God is also testing some of these decisions and opening and closing doors” (Jeff, New Zealand Caucasian, Catholic, HR manager in a hospital)</p> <p>“Two people commented to me on an ad. they had seen advertising the job I currently have, I did not feel this was a coincidence and applied” (Maria, Samoan, consultant, general spiritual belief)</p> <p>“God wants me to remain a packer” (Jo, Anglican, British-Caucasian, packer)</p> <p>“I wanted to leave (the oyster farm) and we tried to sell it but that’s not what God wanted” (Carl, NZ-Caucasian, Bahá’ú, oyster-farmer)</p>
“Seeking guidance and strength”	10	<p>“When I have to meet new people in relation to my work I always say a prayer to bless the meeting” (Hone, Maori, Haahi Ringatu, community center co-ordinator)</p> <p>“I often found myself praying and asking for assistance as I now had this additional responsibility” (Caitlin, NZ-Caucasian, Buddhist, health manager)</p> <p>“In this job I found myself bringing God into evaluating, in talking, planning, and praying through things a lot more than I ever did” (Jeff, New Zealand Caucasian, Catholic, HR manager in a hospital)</p>
“Tests are designed for spiritual growth”	7	<p>I often wonder why my life and work have been so difficult and than I think about the skills and insights I learned and how these may benefit others” (Hans, NZ Caucasian, general spiritual belief, business owner)</p> <p>“I had to go overseas and in order to do this I had to learn a new language. This did not come easy to me, but then, all of a sudden it came and I learned to have faith” (Bill, NZ Caucasian, Mormon, business owner)</p>
“Spiritual laws”	5	<p>“I took on a job because I wanted to serve God more directly, but I was worried about my income, at that stage we had six children, however I learned that God’s work, done in God’s way, never lacks supplies” (Jeff, New Zealand Caucasian, Catholic, HR manager in a hospital)</p> <p>“While I was having a conflict with one of the staff members, who did not treat the students well and who later resigned, I did feel that sooner or later what goes around comes around” (Kahu, Maori, Catholic, teacher)</p>

Table II.
Spiritual coherence

of “what is meant to be”; “seeking guidance and strength”; “tests are designed for spiritual growth” and “spiritual laws” emerged.

Discussion

The aim of the research presented in this paper was to investigate whether, and if so how, spirituality influences career behavior. In order to “ground” the concept of spirituality it was decided to focus on “meaning” which was found in the literature to be made up of three complementary constructs of “purpose”, “sense-making” and “coherence”.

The results of this study indicate that spirituality is one of the determinants of career behavior. Spirituality influences the individual’s beliefs of what are worthwhile purposes, and these purposes in turn influence career behavior. In spite of a wide diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs, the research participants believe four purposes to be significant and meaningful: “developing and becoming self”, “unity with others”, “expressing self”, and “serving others”. Career is animated when these purposes can be expressed, and when these purposes cannot be expressed, research participants perceive that their spirituality is not aligned with their career, and ultimately make career transitions in order to address this. These purposes are deeper career meanings and as such are complementing theory on externally defined measures of career success. The study shows that research participants express these four purposes over a wide variety of occupational choices.

Four purposes emerged that may further our understanding of what is meaningful to the individual with a spiritual belief. The career meaning of “developing and becoming self” confirms that self-knowledge is central to career theory. At the same time it indicates that self-knowledge needs to be conceptualized beyond objective measures of interests or likes and dislikes, in order to address deeper questions of meaning. Personal growth is often conceptualized as outward movement in traditional career theory, rather than a process of going within and changing one’s perspective on a role already held. Maintaining integrity is usually perceived in terms of ethics, whereas it goes beyond this by individuals wanting to maintain a distinct self in the face of e.g. pressure to conform to organizational culture. Current career theory acknowledges the work meaning of “serving others”. This is however often conceptualized as particular developmental stage or as part of a particular personality type (e.g. Holland’s (1992) “social typology”), which fits a particular occupational choice such as social worker or teacher. The findings indicate that individuals with a spiritual belief want to serve at work, also when working in commercial environments and in jobs that are not directly service oriented, such as packer in a supermarket or skills-trainer in a production company. The findings furthermore indicate that from a spiritual perspective, intention matters. Thus developmental career theory in which “serving others” is only discussed as generativity – a personal need to leave something behind – does not show the whole picture of what is meaningful to the individual. Research participants, such as the packer in the supermarket, serve because of the need

they perceive in others, even if that comes at a personal cost. This purpose came strongly to the fore in all career stories and this seems somewhat at odds with the ranking of Mitroff and Denton's (1999) self-oriented meanings, perhaps indicating a cultural difference between New Zealand and the USA. There is little career theory on the effect of relationships with others within the organization on career transition and experience, apart from management theory on objective functional relationships between supervisor-subordinate, or team-coherence. The findings indicate that research participants find quality relationships at work meaningful for their own sake, and thus that relationships between employees, through the eyes of the employees, are not just participatory tools, leading to possible greater efficiency, but are strongly connected to meaningful work. The findings confirm that constructs previously defined in career theory, such as creativity, achievement and influencing, are important and that spirituality, as enacted through careers, is not devoid of agency. At the same time agency is expressed somewhat differently by the research participants. Their careers are animated not only by ways of influencing or achievements that are recognized by others, but also by those that are meaningful by their own internal standards, such as "hanging in there" and "doing something worthwhile". Agency is expressed by the individuals determining towards which purposes their creativity and influence is used. So interesting work, in itself, may not be perceived to be meaningful if it does not contribute to anything worthwhile. In summary there are deeper meanings to be discovered in, and added to, the concepts currently held in career theory.

The findings of this study signal that spirituality in relation to career expresses itself through an ongoing process of life development in which several career purposes are articulated, discovered, evaluated, prioritized and enacted through an ongoing process of sense-making whereby the individual also strives to maintain some form of equilibrium between the different career purposes. This may contribute to further development of theory on career transition and subjective influences on career transition. The resolving of tensions between self and other resemble some of Erikson's themes, such as generativity versus self-absorption and intimacy versus isolation, but research participants seem to place value on both self and other, and both doing and being throughout their career, perhaps more resembling Bakan's (1966) notion of duality of human existence. Bakan suggests that themes of agency and communion need to be balanced over a lifetime but that there will be an ongoing tension between them. The process of holding and addressing these tensions seems to affect the spiritual development of the individual as he/she is engaged in an ongoing process of learning about faith, life and self through enacting one's beliefs in one's career and reflecting on the results. This perspective complements the career perspective of "having arrived". It also reflects on current uses of what spirituality is, which is usually viewed as an answer, whereas spirituality if conceptualized in terms of what it does may be more of an ongoing process of learning, articulating and questioning. Lifespan development may therefore be seen as an ongoing journey of discovering,

articulating, enacting, prioritizing and balancing different life purposes towards individual and collective development as a result of which the individual learns about faith, life and self. These findings support Bloch's (1997) suggestions that the synthesis of decision making and action is qualitatively different from the synthesis of meaning making, and extend this by articulating stimuli and response with regard to the ongoing process of meaning making.

Perceived spiritual ordering outside of the person affects career behavior as research participants interpret career incidents in relation to something outside of themselves, whether this is "divine intervention", God opening and closing doors, living according to guidance from God or the universe, or interpreting moments when career is not going according to one's own plan. The data shows that this has, at times, influence on career choice or transition, especially on subjective career transition (a changing orientation to a role already held). These findings indicate that while, as suggested in conceptual writing and limited research on the topic, spirituality is very much concerned with purpose, its trans-rational elements also affect career behavior.

From these results we can derive some tentative ideas for career/HR practice as well as several avenues for future research.

Practical implications

Suggestions for implications are intended to be tentative, reflecting the exploratory nature and narrow sample of this research. There are possible implications for career practice.

"Career counseling that cares for the spirit seeks to identify how clients wish to spend their lives and which projects are worth their lives" (Savickas, 1997, p. 3). By identifying several meaningful purposes this research gives one perspective on "how clients wish to spend their lives and which projects are worth their lives" and relates these directly to career behavior. This may in turn assist HR practitioners as well as individuals working within organizations to address deeper work motivations. An increasing number of career theorists suggest the use of narrative in career practice (Cochran, 1997; Krieshok *et al.*, 1999) and the findings as presented in the model, if more empirical testing confirms these findings, may encourage the career practitioner to assist individuals to articulate deeper meanings complementing more criteria on which career decision have traditionally been based. This in turn may assist individuals to act out of purpose and feel more spiritually aligned with their career.

Career practice goes beyond one-to-one career assistance and also addresses career management within organizations. A possible implication of this research is for organizations to inquire into ways of enabling employees to articulate their deeper purposes at work and provide employees with opportunities to increase enactment of the purposes of "developing and becoming self", "serving others", "unity with others" and "expressing self". This can be taken one step further, by examining under which organizational

conditions the individual is best able to express deeper work meanings: for example by examining what, in the organizational culture or structure, is currently inhibiting or enhancing individuals' ability to serve others.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has been exploratory. The findings of this study and the suggestions made for practice must be treated with some caution as the study is limited by the small sample of research participants who, although they represent a wide range of diversity, are similar in that they had a well-articulated strong spiritual belief and were in the same age range. A more comprehensive study is needed to compare differences across age, ethnic culture, gender and different religious adherences. The study may however indicate some avenues for further inquiry.

This research provided one lens through which to investigate the subjective influences on the ongoing process of career transition, and it is suggested that findings about the process of articulating, discovering, prioritizing and practicing deeper career meanings and the ongoing process of making sense of self and one's environment requires further exploration. In relation to career advice I would suggest that research be done in the type of techniques that may assist individuals in discovering and articulating their spiritual work meanings. The participants in this research were chosen on their ability to articulate their deeper life meanings; the sample needs to be extended to study whether, and under what conditions, others are able to articulate what is personally meaningful in their own career histories. While this research shows strong evidence that spirituality influences life purposes, it would be very helpful to do research into the conditions under which individuals are encouraged to enact these in relation to institutions of our society such as schools and organizations. Within a collective (organizational) context, the wisdom of bringing the more trans-rational elements of spirituality to collective decision making would also need to be researched and discussed.

If further research confirms that spirituality is an important determinant of career behavior it may also be worthwhile to explore the response of the career practitioner or manager towards spirituality. I do not think the role of the career practitioner or manager should be that of "spiritual guide": it is necessary to find ways of addressing spirituality that safeguards the authenticity of the beliefs of the individual and at the same time encourages her or him to engage with spiritual belief as one of the factors influencing career choice and transition.

While this study is concerned with spiritual meaning-making, I do not intend to suggest that only those who have a spiritual worldview make meaning. It is important that other worldviews that potentially influence career behavior, for example humanism, are researched in order to extend subjective career theory.

This study shows the effect of spirituality on career behavior and, while exploratory, does indicate that research, theory and practice that do not take

spirituality into account may not be based on a complete assessment of what drives career behavior. The relationship between spirituality and career behavior therefore warrants further study.

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