

# **Spiritual *Episteme*:**

## **Sensemaking in the framework of**

### **Organizational Spirituality**

*Knowledge is in the end*

*based on acknowledgement.*

(Wittgenstein, 1969)

*Anything follows from a contradiction*

The Principle of Explosion

## ***Introduction***

One of the major threads in the recently emerging discourse of Organizational Spirituality (OS) is, unsurprisingly, the assertion that spirituality in an organizational context fulfils a specific role. There is a myriad of effects which, as we can learn from the abundant OS literature, spirituality brings about. According to Krishnakumar and Neck ‘the experience of spirit at work is linked with increased creativity, honesty, trust, and commitment in the workplace, along with an enhanced sense of personal fulfillment of employees’ (2002, p. 154). Spiritual individuals are more intelligent, wiser (Heaton, et al. 2004), more empathic (Miller, 2000), less anxious (Harung et al., 1996) and happier (Heaton et al., 2004) than their non-spiritual colleagues. They are also introspective and

authentic (Pawar, 2008), creative (DeFoore and Renesh, 1995), effective (Harung et al., 1996), committed (Garcia-Zamor, 2003), self-directed (DeFoore and Renesh, 1996), motivated (Neck and Milliman, 1994), ethically sensitive (Chakraborty, 1993), able to cope with stress (Rego and Pinha da Cunha, 2008), inspired (Dehler and Welsh, 1994), innovative (Miller, 2000), flexible (Eisler and Montouri, 2003), responsible (Pawar, 2008), morally developed (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999, in: Driscoll and McKee, 2007), likely to build consensus (*ibid.*), fulfilled (Heaton, et al. 2004) and manage anger easily (Chakraborty, 1993), to name just a few.

Among OS theorists and practitioners there seems to be an almost unanimous agreement that spirituality affects organizations and their employees in a positive manner [1]. These assertions are implicitly based on functionalist assumption, which makes it possible to claim that spirituality causes (or at least directly contributes to) all of these results. Naturally, there are specific methods such as breathing exercises, prayer, meditation, yoga, chanting and many others, which are used to attain these effects. However, they are construed as *spiritual* and the whole process in which they participate is deemed spiritual as well (Ingersoll, 2003; Hendricks and Hendricks, 2003).

If these contentions were justified, OS would become a universal solution for maladies such as absenteeism, lack of motivation, ethical concerns, and numerous issues which nowadays trouble workplaces. Given the potential for such effects an inquiry into OS claims is an indispensable task.

There are three ways in which the functionalist assertion that ‘spirituality is the cause of positive effects’ can be approached. Firstly, one could focus on the manner in which these results occur: one could scrutinize what kind of causality is assumed and

trace particular instances in which the positive results are achieved. Such extensive research cannot be undertaken here. Secondly, one could concentrate on exploring and describing the effects, which is what OS researchers usually do. However, for the reasons which will become clear as this study unfolds, outcomes of their strivings often hardly match the expectations. And yet, there is the third way: one could explore the first part of the logical inference (spirituality → positive effects) and to ask what kind of framework is considered when ‘spirituality’ is referred to in organizational context. It is the path followed in this study.

My exploration of the OS framework will involve an investigation into the meaning which is attached to the pivotal notion of ‘spirituality’ in OS (1), an attempt to examine conditions of the emergence of its key characteristics (2), and the inquiry into OS participants’ mental processes which help to sustain it (3). The intent of this research is to enable the examination of the dynamics of OS discourse sensemaking mechanisms, which embed meanings this discourse creates. Thus, the conceptual space will be explored in which organizational actors make their commitments to attain goals by spiritual means (a process which OS literature eagerly describes) and in which the alleged causal mechanisms operate [2].

Researchers suggest that the notion of spirituality in OS is vague and imprecise (Brown, 2003), that field of Organizational Spirituality is not clearly delineated (Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003) and that it is not obvious what OS actually is about (Benefiel, 2003). Therefore, an attempt to explore the insufficiently studied framework of OS in which essential claims for organization studies are formulated, is legitimate.

This paper is structured around the three stages which were mentioned above.

Many conclusions reached on the first and particularly on the third stage are based on my empirical research which is briefly characterized below. The last part (4) combines the results of theoretical and empirical inquiry into OS (1-3) by discussing rules which condition the possibility and ground the existence of knowledge in the discourse of Organizational Spirituality.