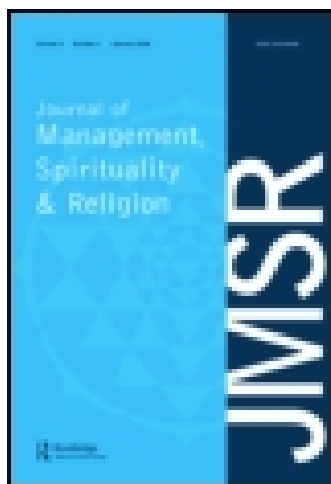


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Spirit at work in faculty and staff organizational commitment

Rhonda S. Bell-Ellis^a, Linda Jones^b, Molly Longstreth^c & Judi Neal^d

^a American Public University System, School of Management, P.O. Box 8364, Fayetteville, AR 72703, USA

^b Department of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures, J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, University of Arkansas, Kimpel Hall, 425, Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA

^c University of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 201 N. Milledge Avenue, Athens, GA 30602, USA

^d Edgewalkers International, 745 N. Sequoyah Drive, Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA

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Spirit at work in faculty and staff organizational commitment

Rhonda S. Bell-Ellis^a, Linda Jones^b, Molly Longstreth^c and Judi Neal^{d*}

^aAmerican Public University System, School of Management, P.O. Box 8364, Fayetteville, AR 72703, USA; ^bDepartment of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures, J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, University of Arkansas, Kimpel Hall, 425, Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA; ^cUniversity of Georgia, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 201 N. Milledge Avenue, Athens, GA 30602, USA; ^dEdgewalkers International, 745 N. Sequoyah Drive, Fayetteville, AR 72701, USA

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This study examines the impact of four dimensions of spirit at work on organizational commitment: (1) engaging work, (2) sense of community, (3) mystical experience, and (4) spiritual connection. Eight hundred and forty participants from two universities – one faith-based and one secular – were surveyed using the Spirit at Work Scale and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire. On average, employees at the faith-based university were significantly more committed to their institution and had higher spirit at work than did employees of the secular university ($p < 0.000$). While there have been studies on this relationship in health care settings, this is the first such study in higher education. This study adds to the literature in the workplace spirituality field, where few empirical studies on the connection between spirit at work and organizational commitment exist.

Keywords: spirit at work; organizational commitment; organizational culture; workplace spirituality; faculty; higher education

Introduction

The importance of committed employees to organizations is widely accepted by scholars and practitioners. As demonstrated in previous research, higher organizational commitment has been found to correlate with outcome variables such as lower turnover and absenteeism (Porter *et al.* 1974, Lee and Mowday 1987), higher quality and productivity (Meyer *et al.* 1989, Riketta 2002), and increased resilience in the face of change (Md Zabid *et al.* 2003). All of these variables are likely to have a positive effect on bottom line measures. Concurrently, empirical research on workplace spirituality has also demonstrated similar positive individual and organizational outcomes (cf. Giacolone and Jurkiewicz 2003, Steingard and Dufresne 2013), although this research is in its infancy. Additionally, a small number of studies have examined the

*Corresponding author. Email: judi@edgewalkers.org

relationship between spirit at work and organizational commitment in order to explore the possibility of spirit at work as an antecedent to organizational commitment (c.f. Milliman *et al.* 2003, Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2008a, Rego and Cunha 2008, Bell-Ellis 2013). Of these studies, only the research by Bell-Ellis (2013) explored the relationship between spirit at work and organizational commitment in both faith-based and secular organizational settings. Her studies were done in health care organizations and found higher levels of spirit at work and organizational commitment in the faith-based settings.

Despite the results of these various studies, additional work is needed to help scholars and practitioners to understand the motivations behind the underlying organizational commitment (Johnson *et al.* 2010). Because a gap remains in management and higher education research that studies the connection between spirit at work and organizational commitment, the purpose of this study is to address this gap and to extend previous work by comparing Spirit at Work (SAW) and Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) results in faith-based and secular higher education institutions. Our goal is to increase our understanding of the role of organizational design (faith-based vs. secular) in moderating the relationship between an individual's experience of spirituality in the workplace and their sense of organizational commitment. In addressing these issues, this research measures organizational commitment in two higher education institutions, and also explores the relationships of the four dimensions of spirit at work (engaging work, sense of community, mystical experience, and spiritual connection, Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004) on organizational commitment in these two very different organizations. If organizations that nurture spirit at work (such as faith-based and faith-friendly organizations) are also shown to engender greater levels of organizational commitment, this may argue in favor of honoring the diversity of faith and spiritual expressions in workplaces that tend to normally consider these expressions as inappropriate.

Literature review

Spirit at work

The early research on spirituality in the workplace was primarily definitional (c.f., Mitroff and Denton 1999, Gibbons 2000, Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004) and, as with the evolution of most social science fields, progressed beyond definitions to descriptive. In their meta-analysis of studies, Forniciari and Dean (2004) came to the conclusion that what was needed next in the development of the field of management, spirituality, and religion were studies that are empirical and outcome-based. Other authors called for more empirical studies as well (Strack *et al.* 2002, Benefiel 2003, Dean 2004, Duchon and Plowman 2005). The current study responds to this need and builds on recent research on spirituality in health care (Bell 2006, Bell-Ellis 2013, Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2008a) and higher education (i.e. Astin and Astin 1999, Bradley and Kauanui 2003, Bryant and Craft 2010). While this study does not measure

individual outcomes such as stress and well-being, or organizational outcomes such as profit, turnover, or customer satisfaction, numerous studies have linked the variables in this research to such concrete outcomes (e.g. Rego and Cunha 2008, Tevichapong *et al.* 2010). In particular, Tevichapong *et al.* (2010) focused on the relationships between individual spirit at work, three employee work attitudinal variables (organizational identification, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being), and three organizational outcomes (in-role performance, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), and turnover intentions).

For the purposes of this research, we use the Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004) definition of “spirit at work”, a six-dimension definition derived from a thorough review of the spirit at work literature, a study of instruments on workplace spirituality, and qualitative research with experts in the field:

Spirit at work is a distinct state that is characterized by physical, affective, cognitive, interpersonal, spiritual, and mystical dimensions. Most individuals describe the experience as including a *physical* sensation characterized by a positive state of arousal or energy; positive *affect* characterized by a profound feeling of well-being and joy; *cognitive* features involving a sense of being authentic, an awareness of alignment between one’s values and beliefs and one’s work, and a belief that one is engaged in meaningful work that has a higher purpose; an *interpersonal* dimension characterized by a sense of connection to others and common purpose; a *spiritual* presence characterized by a sense of connection to something larger than self; and a *mystical* dimension characterized by a sense of perfection, transcendence, living in the moment, and experiences that were awe-inspiring, mysterious, or sacred. (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004, p. 37)

In our methodology section, we will briefly describe how Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2004) used this definition as the basis for developing the Spirit at Work Scale (SAWS), an operationalized measure of the definition that is the instrument used in our study.

Spirituality in higher education

Research on spirituality in higher education focuses on any number of issues related to the presence of spirituality within academy members, including spirituality and leadership in higher education (Rogers and Dantley 2001, Beer 2010), the evolution of spirituality in higher education (Bradley and Kauanui 2003, Astin 2004, Murphy 2005, Poe 2005), spiritual culture on campuses (Bryant and Craft 2010), spiritual and transformative pedagogy (Duerr *et al.* 2003, Shahjahan 2004, Tolliver and Tisdell 2006, Allison and Broadus 2009) as well as the presence of spirituality in the lives of faculty (e.g. Bradley and Kauanui 2003, Astin 2004, Coburn 2005), staff (Beer 2010), and students (Shahjahan 2004, 2005). This literature review examines the nature of spirituality among faculty and staff and includes higher education’s role in supporting spirituality in institutions.

Spirituality among faculty

Examining the role of spirituality within the lives of higher education faculty, Astin and Astin (1999) conducted a qualitative study of 70 faculty members from higher educational research institutions; a “collegiate” style institution, a private religious university, and a state university. They found that most faculty were willing to speak about spirituality, its meaning or purpose; they expressed their spirituality through work but also through teaching, volunteerism, social activism, church, and child rearing. Despite such external displays, few spoke of internal activities such as prayer or meditation. They also felt a disconnect between personal and institutional values in particular where research outweighed work with students and where it was necessary to meet collegial approval rather than personal interest. Though a core value of liberal education has been “know thyself”, no one saw a connection between knowing oneself and a liberal education. Astin (2004) suggests that academia has “come to neglect our inner development – the spirit of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding” (p. 34). In short, “academia has, for far too long, encouraged us to lead fragmented and inauthentic lives ... we act either as if we are not spiritual beings, or as if our spiritual side is irrelevant to our vocation or work” (Astin 2004, p. 38).

Further highlighting this disconnect, Bradley and Kauanui (2003) studied three southern California institutions of higher education (one public, one private, one private and religious) to determine the presence of spirituality among faculty. The researchers found that faculty spirituality reflected the spiritual culture of their respective campuses. Though, in the religious institution, faculty felt that departments were warmer and more spiritual, the authors found that faculty, overall, were less happy compared with individuals in corporate America; faculty rated their departments as fairly depressing, they felt distant from peers, felt the need to hide their inner selves, worked less to resolve conflicts, and felt devalued. Despite such negative feelings, all faculty greatly enjoyed teaching. In particular, the religious college faculty felt that they made a greater difference, mattered more to their peers and brought more joy into the workplace than did faculty at the other institutions. The private secular school had the lowest percentage of faculty practicing spirituality, the private religious school the highest, while spirituality was more important than religion in all three schools.

Specific to health care education, Gray *et al.* (2004) conducted a study to explore the spirituality of nursing faculty in private Christian and state universities. Faculty at the Christian university differed significantly from their peers; they were more willing to talk about spiritual matters, more willing to forgive, and more dedicated to believing in a higher being and living a spiritual life. Despite these differences, faculty in both universities demonstrated high awareness of personal spirituality and its importance in patient care. Similar importance is suggested among employees in organizations with the integration of workplace spirituality having a positive impact on organizational commitment and performance (Rego and Cunha 2008).

Organizational commitment and spirituality

Organizational commitment is defined as a psychological relationship between an organization and its employees that decreases turnover in organizations (Meyer and Allen 1991). Organizational commitment has three dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative (Allen and Meyer 1996). The affective commitment is an individual's positive feelings toward, and willingness to be emotionally attached to an organization. Continuance commitment is associated with the performance needed to keep a job and the costs encountered by leaving it. Normative commitment involves the obligation felt toward the organization, sometimes influenced by one's beliefs and values. Affective commitment, among all forms of commitment, has been recognized to have a strong correlation with positive organizational outcomes such as performance and OCB, and positive individual outcomes such as reduced stress and reduced work-family conflict (Meyer *et al.* 2002). It is important to understand the role of personal and organizational characteristics related to workplace spirituality as antecedents of organizational commitment.

Mowday *et al.* (1979) established three types of antecedents that are significantly related to commitment: personal characteristics, job characteristics, and work experiences. Steers and Porter (1983) added organizational design as a fourth category of antecedent. Individual spirituality is reported by Pawar (2009) as a personal characteristic that is an antecedent of organizational commitment while Miller (2007) suggests that a faith-based or faith-friendly organizational design could be a parallel macro-level antecedent of organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment and workplace spirituality may be interdependent within organizations and may vary between them. Individual employees and organizations as a whole may vary with respect to the components of workplace spirituality, meaning that some employees may perceive workplace spirituality as (1) seeking meaning and purpose and full potential in work, (2) achieving goals, and/or (3) integrating ethical practices as a priority (Mitroff and Denton 1999). The integration of workplace spirituality and the degree of organizational commitment of employees can be an interdependent process.

A search of the literature exploring the relationships between organizational size and organizational commitment, as well as organizational size and commitment with relation to spirituality, did not reveal any research exploring the relationship of these variables. However, several large companies that are leaders within their industry – Southwest Airlines, IKEA, Costco, Whole Foods, Starbucks, the SAS Institute, Google, and Atlassian – demonstrate a practice of the spirituality dimension of interconnectedness (Marques 2010). This interconnectedness dimension of spirituality is closely tied to the Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008b) SAWS sense of community dimension (sense of belonging and connectedness and sharing of purpose) suggesting that organizational size is not a factor with regard to integration of spirituality in the workplace. And too, the connection to engaging work and sense of community can be

explained by Ashmos and Duchon (2000) with their research suggesting employees have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work (or engaging work) in the context of community (sense of community).

Research exploring workplace spirituality and organizational commitment suggests that employees experiencing workplace spirituality have a greater sense of attachment and feel a sense of belonging to the organization (Rego and Cunha 2008). Pawar (2009) identified a significant and positive association between measures of workplace spirituality (meaning at work, community at work, positive organizational purpose) and organizational commitment. Ahiauzu and Asawo (2009) also found that the element of hope as a measure of workplace spirituality was positively associated with worker commitment in the Nigerian manufacturing industry.

Our conclusion from reviewing this literature is that there is an individual longing for more spirituality in higher education and that most academic institutions do not meet this need. Instead, research tends to suggest that faith-based organizations do a better job of fulfilling individual needs for spirituality in the workplace, but even in these institutions, there are dilemmas regarding faith and spiritual expression.

Hypotheses

After reviewing the literature with a focus on spirituality in higher education as well as the dimensions of organizational commitment and spirituality, we present the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Spirit at work (SAWS) and organizational commitment (OCQ) scores are higher in the faith-based university as compared with the secular university.

Hypothesis 2: Faith-based university organizational commitment scores exceed those of the secular university, holding measures of spirit at work and demographic characteristics constant.

Research methods

Demographic overview

Quantitative data were used to evaluate the relationships between spirit at work and organizational commitment of staff and faculty (hereafter referred to as employees when combined) of a public, secular university and a private, faith-based university in the south central part of the United States. All employees from the smaller, faith-based university and random samples of employees from the much larger public university were invited to complete the survey on a voluntary basis; no incentives to stimulate responses were offered. The duties and responsibilities of employees at both universities are similar in nature, except that the expectations for research productivity are higher at the public university. Thus, some teaching loads are lighter at the public university compared with the private university. A total of 644 secular university and 196

faith-based university employees responded to the survey from populations of 4015 and 399, respectively. The response rate of the faculty of the faith-based university, 66.3%, exceeded that of all other groups and nearly doubled that of faculty (35.5%) and staff (34%) at the secular university. The response rate of the staff at the faith-based university, 43.1%, also exceeded those of faculty and staff at the secular university.

Instruments

The survey research center of one of the participating universities collected the data. In so doing, the center's staff contributed to the survey and questionnaire design, data analyses utilizing SPSS software (2006), and reporting. The survey was adapted slightly to pertain to each of the subpopulations (faculty and staff) and comprises five instruments: (1) SAWS (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2008b), (2) organizational commitment (Mowday *et al.* 1979), (3) job satisfaction (Spector 1985), (4) optimism (Shifren and Hooker 1995), and (5) organizational culture (Glaser *et al.* 1987). Demographic data were also collected, including a basic measure of spirituality. Administered via the web, as many as four invitations were issued through email to encourage employees to complete the survey. Only the results of the first two instruments are reported in this study due to the large amount of data gathered and continuing analysis of the remaining results. The two instruments utilized are described as follows while demographic information provided by participants was also employed in these analyses.

The SAWS is a relatively new measure of spirituality in the workplace. It is an 18-item questionnaire that assesses the experience of spirit at work across four dimensions: engaging work (belief that one is engaged in meaningful work), sense of community (feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness and sharing a sense of purpose at work), mystical experience (a positive energy felt at work with a sense of quality of work), and spiritual connection (a sense of connecting to a Higher Power, one larger than self) (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2008b). Items are measured on a 6-point Likert scale as follows: 1 – completely disagree, 2 – mostly disagree, 3 – somewhat disagree, 4 – somewhat agree, 5 – mostly agree, and 6 – completely agree. The instrument has high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$).

The SAWS instrument was developed from an initial pool of 65 items based on interviews of respondents' experiences with spirituality in the workplace (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004), and was generated to reflect the six dimensions described in the definition of SAWS at the beginning of this study. Next, 25 instruments of related constructs were reviewed and additional questions were added to the pool which was subsequently checked for content validity with experts. The final instrument of 102 items was tested in a large sample of employees, and the results submitted to factor analysis. Four factors were found, and the questionnaire was reduced to 18 items maintaining

validity and reliability. Several published studies have used this instrument since its original development, generally upholding the four factors of engaging work, sense of community, mystical experience, and spiritual connection. The first two factors have secular correlates, for example, Gallup's (2013) concept of employee engagement, and Sarason's (1988) concept of psychological sense of community; these should not be confused with the spiritual definitions in Kinjerski and Skrypnik (2008b). The second two factors are more obviously defined in spiritual terms. In many of the definitions of spirituality in the workplace, the primary construct is connection – connection to work, connection to others, and connection to the transcendent (Neal 2013).

Engaging work, as operationalized in the SAWS instrument is related to the spiritual construct of sense of calling. Items in the engaging work measure include as follows:

- I am fulfilling my calling through my work.
- My spiritual/religious beliefs play an important role in everyday decisions that I make at work.
- I have a sense of personal mission in life, which my work helps me to fulfill.

Sense of community at work is related to the spiritual construct of being connected to something greater than oneself, to a sense of oneness. Items in the sense of community measure include as follows:

- I experience a real sense of trust and personal connection with my coworkers/colleagues.
- I feel like I am part of “a community” at work.

While it could be argued that some of these items could be interpreted in a secular manner, it is important to remember that they were derived from interviews, literature, and other related instruments that were explicitly spiritual in content.

The OCQ measures the affective, normative, and continuance commitment dimensions of organizational commitment including emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization (Mowday *et al.* 1979). Items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. This instrument also has high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$).

Participants were also asked to select one of the following categories to describe themselves: (1) religious but not spiritual, (2) spiritual but not religious, (3) religious and spiritual, or (4) neither religious nor spiritual. This question was based on the “four orientations toward religion and spirituality” utilized in the Mitroff and Denton research (1999, p. 40).

Findings

Descriptions of respondents

Universities, positions, gender, education, and experience. Of the 840 study participants, 76.7% work at the public, secular university; 23.3% at the private, faith-based university (Table 1). Participants are nearly evenly divided into the types of positions they hold at the secular university (52.8% faculty, 47.2% staff), whereas staff outnumber faculty respondents at the private, faith-based university about two to one – 64.8% vs. 35.2%, respectively. Although respondents at each university and across universities are nearly evenly split between men and women, faculty are much more likely to be men and staff women, regardless of university.

On average, faculty members at the secular university hold doctorates; faculty at the faith-based university, master's degrees and doctorates, and staff at each university undergraduate degrees. Educational levels of faculty, but not staff, at the two universities differ significantly ($p \leq 0.002$).

When viewed as a whole, employees have worked an average of 12 years and a median of 10 years at their respective universities (Table 1). Employees at the secular university have significantly longer tenure and more years of teaching experience than their counterparts at the faith-based university.

Table 1. Demographic variables.

	Secular university		Faith-based university		Total	
	Faculty	Staff	Faculty	Staff	Secular	Faith-based
Number of participants	340	304	69	127	644	196
% of participants	52.8	47.2	35.2	64.8	76.7	23.3
% Male	59.8	42.5	69.7	36.5	51.5	47.9
% with doctoral degree	76.7	10.7	50.7	4.8	45.5	20.7*
Median years worked at this university	12	10	7	6.0	10	6*
Median years taught anywhere	15	11.5	10	10	15	10
% Protestant	42.0	53.3	90.9	79.2	47.5	83.2*
% Catholic	15.6	10.5	0.0	0.8	13.1	0.50
% Other Christian	4.9	9.4	9.1	19.2	7.1	15.7
% Atheistic or Agnostic	17.0	7.3	0.0	0.0	12.2	0
% Unaffiliated	13.5	13.4	0.0	0.8	13.5	0.5
% Other religions	6.8	6.2	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
% Born again	34.0	57.1	97.0	99.2	46.4	98.4*
% Religious and spiritual	42.4	54.5	78.5	63.7	48.4	68.8*
% Religious but not spiritual	5.8	1.5	4.5	0.0	5.1	0.5
% Spiritual but not religious	33.5	20.0	30.6	34.7	32.1	29.6
% Neither religious nor spiritual	18.3	0.0	10.4	1.6	14.5	1.1

*Difference is significant at $p \leq 0.05$.

Spiritual and religious characteristics. While the secular university's employees espouse various religious and non-religious traditions and two-thirds describe themselves as Christian, all but one of their counterparts at the private, faith-based university describe themselves as Christian, a significant difference ($p \leq 0.001$). Even at the public, secular school, members of religions other than Christianity tend to be underrepresented compared with their proportions in the population, though atheists (6.9%), agnostics (5.3%), and unaffiliated (13.5%) employees of the public, secular university, are overrepresented when combined – 25.7% vs. 16.1%, respectively (Table 1, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, p. 10).

Approximately 65% of employees characterizing themselves as some form of Christian describe themselves as being “born again”; the proportions at each university differ significantly ($p \leq 0.0001$) (Table 1).

To obtain yet another perspective of their perceptions of their spiritual lives, all respondents were asked to characterize themselves along a continuum of belief and practice based on the Mitroff and Denton (1999) “four orientations toward religion and spirituality” mentioned above. The largest groups of employees, regardless of university, contend that they are both religious and spiritual; the second largest groups describe themselves as relatively more spiritual than religious. The universities differ significantly with respect to their employees' descriptions of their spiritual and/or religious beliefs and practices, individually and collectively ($p \leq 0.001$).

Spirit at work and organizational commitment

Hypothesis 1 proposed that the spirit at work and organizational commitment scores would be higher in the faith-based university compared with the secular university. This hypothesis was confirmed for each of the following four dimensions of spirit at work (Table 2).

Engaging work. Employees of the two universities “mostly agree” that they are engaged in meaningful work (secular, $M = 4.73$; faith-based, $M = 5.26$) (Table 2). Overall, this opinion was 11.2% higher at the faith-based university as compared with the secular university. Differences between the universities and their employees are significant ($p \leq 0.01$).

Mystical experience. The weakest aggregate agreement, “somewhat agree”, is reserved for “mystical experience”: the idea that employees sometimes have spiritual glimpses and/or experiences at work (overall mean = 4.2). Employees at the faith-based university “somewhat” to “mostly agree” ($M = 4.49$) that they sometimes have spiritual glimpses and/or experiences at work, but their counterparts at the secular university only “somewhat agree” ($M = 4.05$). The average agreement that employees experience the mystical at work is about 11% stronger at the faith-based than the secular university. Mean differences between universities and their employees are significant ($p \leq 0.01$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Means of measures of spirit-at-work and organizational commitment by university and position.

Column University	1			2			3			4			5			6			7			8			9					
	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation			
	Respondent's university																													
Engaging work	329	4.85*	0.826	304	4.61 [†]	0.876	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865	644	4.73 [‡]	0.865
	Faculty																													
	Staff																													
	All																													
Mystical experience	69	5.38	0.59	127	5.19	0.796	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735	196	5.26	0.735
	Faculty																													
	Staff																													
	All																													
Spiritual connection	329	4.57	0.895	127	4.44	0.971	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945	196	4.49	0.945
	Faculty																													
	Staff																													
	All																													
Sense of community	69	5.56	1.685	304	4.49 [†]	1.414	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584	644	4.17 [‡]	1.584
	Faculty																													
	Staff																													
	All																													
Organizational commitment	329	4.20*	0.666	127	5.61	0.59	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616	196	5.59	0.616
	Faculty																													
	Staff																													
	All																													

Notes: Std. deviation abbreviates Standard Deviation; *, [†], [‡]Differences are significant at $p \leq 0.000$.
 **Differences are significant at $p \leq 0.01$.

Spiritual connection. Employees at the secular university “somewhat agree” ($M = 4.17$) that their spiritual beliefs and connection with God affect their work. Employees at the faith-based university agree with this idea much more strongly than do their counterparts at the secular school ($M = 5.59$); they “completely agree”. These results differ significantly ($p \leq 0.0001$); the faith-based university’s mean exceeds that of the secular by 34%.

Sense of community. Employees at the secular university “somewhat agree” ($M = 4.38$) that they feel a sense of community at work. However, their peers at the faith-based institution “mostly agree” ($M = 5.11$) that they feel a sense of community at work. As with the previous findings, the difference is significant ($p \leq 0.01$).

Organizational commitment. On average, employees of the faith-based university “strongly agree” that they are committed to their institution ($M = 5.94$). Employees of the secular university “mostly agree” about their commitment ($M = 5.23$) (Table 2). The differences between levels of organizational commitment by university are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.0001$). On average, employees at the faith-based institution are significantly more committed to their university than those at the secular university, a difference of about 14% (Table 2).

Regression analyses

With Hypothesis 1 confirmed, we next conducted regression analyses in order to better understand the role of the four dimensions of spirit at work (SAW) and the role of demographic characteristics as antecedents of organizational commitment. Hypothesis 2 proposed that faith-based university organizational commitment scores would exceed those of the secular university, holding measures of spirituality and demographic characteristics constant. Based on the findings, the hypothesis was partially confirmed.

To explain the organizational commitment of employees of the two universities, a measure of organizational commitment was regressed onto the four dimensions of spirit at work and the respondents’ demographic characteristics (Table 3). All four dimensions of SAW are significantly correlated with organizational commitment among employees ($p \leq 0.000$).¹ Due to multicollinearity, however, mystical experience was eliminated from further analysis. Organizational commitment is also correlated with demographic measures of religious beliefs including “born again” and with the four spiritual orientations (religious not spiritual, spiritual not religious, etc.) from Mitroff and Denton (1999).

Initially, a model containing the remaining three SAWS measures, born again, and the four spiritual orientations, was analyzed with the demographic variables and race in Table 3. The results pared the model to include the variables in Equation 1 (Table 3). Because the results of the t -tests and Chi square analyses reported in Tables 1 and 2 show differences between positions that

Table 3. Results of regression analysis predicting organizational commitment.

Equation	1		2		3	
F statistic	42.271 [†]	66.505 [†]	104.64 [†]			
Adjusted R2	0.496	0.474	0.476			
Parameter	B	Partial Eta squared	B	Partial Eta squared	B	Partial Eta squared
Intercept	3.17 [†]	0.149	3.194 [†]	0.093	3.158 [†]	.179
Sense of Community	0.287 [†]	0.036	0.291 [†]	0.078	0.300 [†]	.079
Sense of Community × Position	-0.036	.000	0.02	.000		
Engaging Work	0.326 [†]	0.04	0.307 [†]	0.092	0.305 [†]	.046
Engaging Work × Position	0.198 [*]	0.007	0.138 [^]	0.003	0.147 [†]	.008
Position (Faculty = 1)	-1.105 [^]	0.005	-0.922	0.003	-0.960 [†]	.014
University (Secular = 1)	-0.23 [†]	0.01	-0.22 [†]	0.011	-0.216 [†]	.013
Education	-0.038	0.003	-0.031	0.002	-0.035	.003
Gender (M = 1)	-0.136 [^]	0.004	-0.131 [^]	0.002	-0.073	.002
Religious and Spiritual	0.216	0.001				
Religious, Not Spiritual	0.023	.000				
Spiritual, Not Religious	-0.033	.000				
Education × Position	-0.029	.000	-0.024	.000		
Religious & Spiritual × Position	0.000	.000				
Religious Not Spiritual × Position	0.045	.000				
Spiritual Not Religious × Position	0.325 [^]	0.004				
Gender (1) × Position	0.068	.000	0.125	0.002		
University (1) × Position	0.129	0.001	0.029	.000		

[^] $p \leq 0.10$.
^{*} $p \leq 0.05$.
[†] $p \leq 0.01$.
[‡] $p \leq 0.001$.

employees hold (faculty vs. staff), such differences are explored in the regression analyses with interactions between position and the other independent variables. The full model (Equation 1) explains 50% of the variance in faculty's organizational commitment (Table 3). Because the spiritual orientations variable contributes little to the explanation, it was removed from further analyses. In Equation 2, organizational position interacts with the remaining independent variables; except for its interaction with engaging work, the interactions are not statistically significant. Therefore, the most parsimonious model, Equation 3, will be the focus of these findings.

Equation 3 explains 48% of the variance in organizational commitment. The SAWS measures – sense of community at work and engaging work – positively and significantly affect organizational commitment. These two measures also have the strongest effects on organizational commitment of the seven explanatory variables, as the squared partial Eta coefficients of 0.079 and 0.046 show.² The stronger their perceived sense of community at work, the more committed these employees are to their respective universities, holding the remaining measure of faith and demographic characteristics, including position, constant. Although the relationship is statistically significant, the level of change effected by a one unit change in the score on sense of community at work would be approximately 0.3 on a 7-point scale, a modest difference.

The more engaging these respondents find their work to be, the more committed they feel to their respective universities. This effect, however, varies by the position held. The differences in means in Table 2 indicate that, on average, faculty have higher levels of work engagement, regardless of university, than do staff. The regression estimates, including the interaction term, imply the same. Holding all else constant, the employee's organizational commitment increases as their degree of work engagement increases; separately, the rate of increase of faculty exceeds that of staff – 0.452 vs. 0.305 (Table 3).

As a result of the influence of both measures of SAWS on organizational commitment, Hypothesis 2 is partially accepted. Organizational commitment rises as a function of two of the four dimensions of spirit at work – engaging work and sense of community at work – holding demographic variables and university constant. The effect of meaningful work is mitigated by position, however.

The third most important influence on organizational commitment is position. Staff are significantly more committed to their university, regardless of university, gender, level of education, their sense of community at work, and work engagement as compared with faculty. Additionally, organizational commitment does vary by university; it is stronger at the faith-based university than at the public, secular institution, regardless of sense of community at work, the engaging nature of the work, position, education, and gender. In Equation 3, university (secular vs. faith-based) has the fourth most power to explain organizational commitment, but the order of its effect is very similar to that of position. Finally, neither level of education nor gender influences orga-

nizational commitment when accounting for the effects of the spiritual, other demographic variables, and university.

This study provided a larger population ($N = 840$) than previous studies: Bell-Ellis (2013) $N = 90$; Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008a) $N = 24, 34$; Pawar (2009) $N = 171$; and Rego and Cunha (2008) $N = 361$. The increased number of participants with the two larger studies yielded a stronger correlation of the common variables – sense of community and organizational commitment. In addition, this study offers an original examination of position level and the relationship between SAW and OCQ, furthering its foundational position in the higher education industry with regard to spirit at work and organizational commitment. Thus, the importance of this study is paramount to preserve the self-giving contributions of those in higher education who value engaging work in a supportive environment.

Discussion

In the two organizations that were the focus of this study, the individual characteristics of sense of community, engaging work, and position had an impact on organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment is one of the most researched constructs in the management field, and the research in this area is quite mature. Spirit at work, on the other hand, is a relatively new construct, and empirical research in this area is in its infancy. Until recently, spirit at work was not even considered as an antecedent of organizational commitment. Since organizational commitment is predictive of a large number of positive individual and organizational outcomes, it is important to learn that some dimensions of spirit at work may increase organizational commitment.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this empirical study adds to the growing workplace spirituality literature, which until recently has been primarily definitional and theoretical. This quantitative study offers new insight into workplace spirituality through the use of a large sample size from two organizations using valid and reliable instruments.

Second, this study extends the work of Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008a) and Bell-Ellis (2013) that measured organizational commitment and spirit at work in health care settings. It is worthwhile to replicate previous studies but to do so in different settings as we have done with higher education. As the number of studies increases, researchers will be able to see if the predicted relationship between organizational commitment and spirit at work holds up in different types of organizations.

Third, this is the first study to compare a measure of spirit at work to organizational commitment in higher education. Colleges and universities play a significant role in preparing individuals for their careers, and it would seem desirable to receive one's education and related services from people who were committed to the organizational goals of providing a quality education. If dimensions of spirit at work contribute to that organizational commitment, then

university administrators and faculty might want to consider ways of increasing employee's experience of spirit at work in meaningful ways.

Higher education is essentially a service industry, and in the United States and other industrialized nations, the service sector of the economy is the major driver of economic growth. Heermann (2004), in fact, states that a sense of service is at the heart of workplace spirituality, and we think that it follows that a desire to be of service would be an important employee characteristic in service industry organizations. Therefore, it is valuable to understand factors that may increase the effectiveness of organizations in the service sector, especially since it will be the main source of employment and output between 2008 and 2018. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics projections, employment in the service sector will increase over 12% during this 10-year span (US Department of Labor 2009).

As a result of this study, higher education administrators, managers, coaches, and human resource professionals have additional information that they may use to help determine why they have the level of organizational commitment they do. Leaders and change agents could be trained to analyze their current situations through the use of SAW and OCQ measures. Results could be interpreted and discussed, with interventions designed to increase the sense of spirit at work in order to improve organizational commitment. By facilitating a greater sense of community and engaging work, it is predicted that turnover rates would decline and organizational commitment increase. And too, there are several other questions for academic administrators to explore with regard to spirit at work in higher education. What is the role of spirituality in an academic institution? How does an institution address the interest in the elements of spirituality at work: (1) spiritual connection; (2) sense of community; (3) engaging work; and (4) mystical experience? What are the challenges and opportunities in addressing this interest, and how might they differ in faith-based organizations and secular organizations? Under what conditions is it beneficial to consciously attempt to increase the level of spirit at work, and under what conditions might that cause more harm than good?

In the university context, one such quandary has to do with perceived and historical implications of interactions between faith and inquiry. In an educational and/or research organization, many of the most influential members view religiosity and/or spirituality as a threat to the conduct of their work and the integrity of their work in general. While opposition to any expression of religious or spiritual thought may have the intended consequence of freeing the pursuit of knowledge and its transmission unfettered by myth and/or faith-related norms, it may likewise have the unintended consequence of stifling scientific and educational productivity because characteristics such as creativity have been shown to be related to spirituality (Mitroff and Denton 1999).

One final implication of this research is that it supports the growing organizational focus on workforce diversity. When the field of workforce diversity was emerging, the primary diversity characteristics that were of interest were race and gender. Over time, and with the increasing emphasis of EEOC,

additional diversity characteristics such as age, differing abilities, and sexual orientation were included (Thomas 2010). More recently, a small but growing number of organizations are becoming interested in faith and spirituality as another important diversity characteristic. This study may help to support this trend by helping organizational leaders to understand that employees who feel that their unique expressions of spirituality in the workplace are valued are then more likely to have higher levels of commitment to the organization.

Limitations of this study

This study has several limitations and the findings cannot be generalizable beyond the two organizations studied. Both organizations are located in the south central part of the United States, an area often referred to as the “Bible belt.” This area has a strong conservative Christian culture and tends not to be diverse, although the secular university is a little more diverse than the faith-based institution. However, the findings of this study are consistent with similar studies of employees at faith-based and secular institutions in other parts of the US (Bradley and Kauanui 2003, Beer 2010, Bryant and Craft 2010).

There are other factors that could account for the different levels of organizational commitment in the two universities, including size and source of funding. However, as mentioned in our literature review, previous research has not found size to be a factor in the relationship between spirit at work and organizational commitment (Marques 2010). Nonetheless, size is still an important factor to consider in future studies. The differences in sources of funding could also possibly have an impact on the relationship between SAW and OCQ. The secular university is state-funded and people may be concerned about the separation of church and state. The faith-based university is church-funded, and a focus on living one’s faith daily is financially supported as well as morally supported. Source of funding is an area for future research.

Moral commitment could explain the higher organizational commitment in the faith-based organization. A more spiritually workplace is likely to have a higher level of agreement about shared values. A more spiritually based organization is less likely to promote ego-centeredness and selfishness, and therefore, may have lower instrumental commitment. In addition, a more faith-based organization is more likely to focus on interpersonal connection thus enhancing the sense of community, one of the variables of spirit at work most highly correlated with organizational commitment in this study. Exploring the homogeneity and heterogeneity of religious beliefs in both universities as it relates to organizational commitment would be a study of future research.

Future research

This study raises interesting questions for future research. First of all, spirituality in the workplace has a strong relationship with organizational commitment in these two organizations centered in the Bible belt. Future research needs to

be expanded to other parts of the US, and also outside of the US. For example, what would be the relationship between these two variables if we were to compare universities in secular Europe with universities in a country like India that tends to embrace spirituality? Are there differences in this relationship if you compare the east coast of the United States with the west coast, the Midwest and the deep South? And too, with the findings of this study suggesting a relationship between sense of community and organizational commitment, online universities need to be included in future research. The online environment of higher education, with the lack of face-to-face contact while working remotely away from a physical campus, creates a feeling of isolation (Eib and Miller 2006, Lorenzetti 2006). The feeling of isolation may prohibit the sense of community, thus having effects on organizational commitment of faculty and students. Research could lend insights to retention challenges of both faculty and students in the online environment of higher education.

Additionally, the faith-based university in this study was evangelical Christian. It would be valuable to study faith-based universities from non-Christian religions as well. Another possible expansion of this study would be to explore the relationship between spirituality at work and commitment in K-12 education.

It would also be worthwhile to conduct a similar study in for-profit organizations. For instance, there are organizations such as Tyson Foods and DaySpring Cards that are very open about being faith-friendly organizations. It would be interesting to compare Tyson Foods and DaySpring Cards on SAWS and organizational commitment to other companies in their industry that are purely secular. At this point, we know that the faith-based organizational design is important in health care (Bell-Ellis 2013) and in higher education, but that relationship may not extend to for-profit organizations, or the relationship may be confounded by too many other variables.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, data were collected on five scales. This paper examined the relationship between two of those five scales; spirit at work and organizational commitment. Future research will report on the relationships between variables in all five scales. This study was primarily questionnaire-based, and future studies should incorporate more triangulation, including qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observation.

While spirituality in the workplace (SAWS) does not provide the majority of the explanation of organizational commitment, it, along with a small set of demographic variables, does explain almost 50% of the variance. This is an important finding, since most previous studies of organizational commitment have not looked at measures of spirit at work.

Notes on contributors

Rhonda S. Bell-Ellis is a professor of management at American Public University System. Her research interests include organizational spirituality, organizational commit-

ment, organizational culture and leadership. Her publications can be found in the reference section of this article.

Linda Jones is an associate professor in the Department of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Arkansas. Her research interests include spirituality in higher education, New France and French Mississippi archival studies, missionaries of the lower Mississippi Valley, second-language learning and technology. Her publications can be found in the reference section of this article and also include “Interaction in Google Wave sends chat rooms out with the tide,” in *Computer-enhanced and mobile-assisted language learning* (ed. F. Zhang, 2012).

Molly Longstreth is a public service assistant at Carl Vinson Institute of Government, The University of Georgia. Her research interests include spirituality in higher education. Her publications include “Faith-related determinants of organizational commitment,” in *Handbook for faith and spirituality in the workplace: emerging trends in research and practice* (ed. Judi Neal 2012).

Judi Neal is the founder of Edgewalkers International. Her research interests include workplace spirituality, spiritual leadership and integral change. Her publications include four books – *Edgewalkers*, *The Spirit of Project Management*, *The Handbook of Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace*, and *Creating Enlightened Organizations* – and numerous journal articles.

Notes

1. Correlation tables are available from the authors by request.
2. In general linear models, the partial Eta coefficient is equivalent to the β in regression analysis. The Eta reports a set of normalized estimates. Because Eta and β estimates have been converted to the same scale, the estimates show order of effect.

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