SPIRITUALITY AS A HUMAN RESOURCE ATTRIBUTE TO FACILITATE
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

by
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Abstract

TITLE: Spirituality as a Human Resource Attribute to Facilitate Employee Engagement and Retention

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Spirituality as an important component of American workplace success is a phenomenon only better understood during the past two decades. Until now, little research has been done to understand workplace spirituality in the human resource context of employee retention and engagement. The pioneering study with a focus on workplace spirituality led by Mitroff and Denton (1999a) signaled a theoretical and empirical convergence highlighting spiritual practice influence on organizational outcomes (Benefiel, Fry, & Geigle, 2014). The inclusion of spirituality in the workplace is an avenue to more fully engage workers who wish to express themselves at work, resulting in their deeper investment in work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a). The theoretical frameworks of human capital theory (Becker, 1993) and organizational commitment theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991) formed the foundation of the study. Multiple case study analysis (Stake, 2006) was utilized to study 13 employees across three for-profit Central Florida workplaces. Findings indicated commonality in workplace spirituality experiences positively affecting outcomes, with key results concerning (1) Engagement, retention and spirituality, (2) Ethical core as an integral component, (3) Camaraderie and interpersonal connection, (4) Customer care and commitment, and (5) Community involvement.
Keywords: workplace spirituality, employee engagement, employee retention, human capital theory, organizational commitment theory
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my lovely bride, Rachael, and our beautiful twin children, Sarah Grace and Jonah. Without your love, support, and sacrifice over the past three years, I could not have done this. In truth, we did this. Rachael, my true love and my best friend, we are a great team—always have been—and for that, I am eternally grateful. Sarah Grace and Jonah, I hope you never forget that your education is worth fighting for, worth sacrificing for, worth working hard for. No dream is too big for you to achieve, by the grace of God above and with your dedication and determination. You can do anything.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

Spirituality as an important component of American workplace success is a phenomenon only better understood during the past two decades. The pioneering study with a focus on workplace spirituality led by Mitroff and Denton (1999a) signaled a theoretical and empirical convergence highlighting spiritual practice influence on organizational outcomes (Benefiel, Fry, & Geigle, 2014). The inclusion of spirituality in the workplace is an avenue to more fully engage workers who wish to express themselves at work, resulting in their deeper investment in work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a). This deeper investment has the potential for intriguing workplace ramifications.

Meanwhile, employee retention and engagement are longstanding, critical topics in the contemporary workplace that only worsen as societal mobility increases (Prugh, 1998; Mawdsley & Somaya, 2016). Once thought incompatible, spirituality and management are increasingly intersecting as advantage is sought (Benefiel, 2003a). There is growing scholarly attention concerning how spirituality affects the workplace, with studies in recent years conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (2008) and an evolving interest group of academicians created within the Academy of Management (Benefiel, 2004; Neal, 2013). If embracing spirituality can inspire employees to more deeply invest in their workplace responsibilities (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a), then the implications
for employee retention and engagement need to be understood. This study sought to better understand the complexities of this phenomenon as manifested at work.

**Background and Rationale of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to better understand the employee retention and engagement implications that workplace spirituality brings to for-profit workplaces. Employee retention and engagement were examined through a human resource lens by exploring individual employee experiences. The concept of spirituality is rooted in the idea that spiritually grounded organizations, or organizations that foster spirituality expression for their employees, have better overall performance and better enrich their stakeholders (Benefiel, 2005b). These businesses achieve a range of positive results, including sustained profits and overall success (Benefiel, 2005b; Fernando & Jackson, 2006; Quatro, 2002). Indeed, “there is mounting proof that a spiritual workplace is not only more productive but also more flexible and creative, and that it is a source of sustainable competitive advantage,” (Fry & Nisiewicz, 2013, p. 6). The literature indicates that values found to be associated with spirituality in the workplace include honesty, respectfulness, caring, and connectedness (Crossman, 2015). Ultimately, how spirituality is conceptualized in the workplace impacts its operationalization.

**Statement of the Problem**

As of 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) found that on average, a typical American worker changes employers 11.7 times by
age 48. About a quarter changed companies at least 15 times. While job duration was often longer the older a worker was when starting the job, the baby boomers who participated in this longitudinal study had large numbers of jobs that were short in duration. Among jobs begun by workers 40 to 48 years old, 32% ended in less than a year, while 69% ended in fewer than five years (BLS, 2015).

This level of worker mobility has tangible impact on business performance, creating daunting challenges for employers:

Implementing workplace policies that benefit workers and help boost employee retention is not simply a “nice” thing for businesses to do for their employees. Maintaining a stable workforce by reducing employee turnover through better benefits and flexible workplace policies also makes good business sense, as it can result in significant cost savings to employers.

(Boushey & Glynn, 2012, p. 1)

A meta-analysis of 30 case studies across 11 relevant research papers found three key factors impacting the costs of employee replacement “because of the productivity losses when someone leaves a job, the costs of hiring and training a new employee, and the slower productivity until the new employee gets up to speed in the new job,” (Boushey & Glynn, 2012, p. 1). It typically costs a company about one-fifth of an employee’s salary to replace that employee. While it usually costs businesses more to replace employees who are the highest paid, costs are not typically less significant for replacing low-earning employees. For workers who earn less than $50,000 a year, which includes three-quarters of all U.S. workers, a
typical turnover cost is 20% of the worker’s salary (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). These costs can accumulate quickly, especially for smaller businesses. This reality has long-term implications for business profitability.

Additionally, business sustainability is also impacted by employee mobility. It is at this juncture where business sustainability and workplace spirituality intersect. A business study by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) found that “Religious and spirituality diversity should not be just about human resource policies and practices. An organization’s ability to recognize, embrace and function in a religious and spiritually diverse world is critical to its sustainability strategy,” (SHRM, 2008, p. 3). In other words, contemporary workplaces must be more flexible in their approach to employee spirituality to remain sustainable.

This call to embrace such diversity comes at a time in the United States when religiosity is dropping. Americans who are religiously unaffiliated account for 23% of the adult population, up from 16% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2015). While the number of people in America who identify with an organized religion has decreased, this does not mean that related feelings of connectedness to something larger are also in decline. Religion and spirituality are separate issues for an increasing number of Americans.

In fact, spirituality is on the rise:

The study also suggests that in some ways Americans are becoming more spiritual. About six-in-ten adults now say they regularly feel a deep sense of
“spiritual peace and well-being,” up seven percentage points since 2007.
And 46 percent of Americans say they experience a deep sense of “wonder
about the universe” at least once a week, also up seven points over the same
period. (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 6)
The notion that spirituality is increasing in American workplaces makes
understanding its implications in the workplace even more important for business
practitioners. It is occurring against the chaotic backdrop of a post-secular society
searching for “immaterial sources of happiness and well-being” (Baker, 2012, p. 7).
Baker (2012) noted that “this re-enchantment is partly occurring as a response to
concerns about the environmental, cultural and social impact of unbridled
materialism and consumerism,” (p. 7). Baker (2012) further argued that global
distrust of political and economic institutions is fueling anxiety and resulting in a
search for spiritual meaning. Witnessing this uncertainty being experienced by
workers, deeper themes begin to emerge when considering the maximization of
workplace functionality.

According to the literature, the nature of the firm is best understood by
examining the people within to more clearly assess human capital value and its role
(Tomer, 1999). People are yearning for purpose surpassing a paycheck, as
“workers in our organizations are seeking more than merely economic rewards on
the job. They are redefining work to include satisfaction of their inner needs for
spiritual identity and satisfaction,” (Fairholm, 1996, p. 11). This meaning may be
found in workplaces where spirituality is embraced or otherwise encouraged.
Research has chronicled many of the implications for this spirituality movement (Benefiel et al., 2014), including theories of spiritual leadership at work (Fry, 2003; Kriger & Seng, 2005). Workplace spirituality has even been quantified in a context transcending religiousness (Liu, 2011). However, scant attention has been given to the implications that a spiritually-centered workplace has for employee engagement and retention. Embracing spirituality in the workplace to positively address these human resources challenges has been insufficiently explored. This appears to be a gap in the literature, presenting an interesting entry point for this phenomenological study. Clarity brought through a deeper understanding may inspire improvements.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study was designed to better understand how spirituality may function as a human resource attribute to better facilitate employee engagement and retention. By utilizing human capital theory and organizational commitment theory as theoretical frameworks, this qualitative multiple case study sought to bring clarity to the complexities of how spirituality is manifested in the workplace. Through individual interviews with business owners, human resources managers, and employees at three for-profit Central Florida businesses, the role of spirituality as a workplace component was further explored. The goal was to uncover information that may be useful to business practitioners as they seek to positively address employee engagement and retention in connection to workplace spirituality, and give them useful, contextual examples of this phenomenon.
Questions that Guide the Research

This research adhered to a qualitative, multicase study design approach as outlined by Stake (2006). Stake stated that “the case researcher needs to generate a picture of the case and then produce a portrayal of the case for others to see,” (p. 3). This picture materialized as employees participating in workplace spirituality were interviewed in relation to their experiences.

The personal nature of spirituality required careful consideration for the way in which it was examined. A phenomenological research design was most appropriate for this study of spirituality in the workplace to understand “the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating ‘what’ they have experienced and ‘how’ they experienced it,” (Creswell, p. 79). The essence of the lived experience is what most intrigued this researcher.

Additionally, designing this qualitative inquiry through multiple case study analysis was most appropriate as “qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its contexts and in its particular situation,” (Stake, 2006, p. 2). Understanding cases as integrated systems required examining the interaction of entities within entities and across entities, “to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations,” (Stake, 2006, p. 3). Complex social phenomena are most appropriate for case study (Yin, 2014). The individual nature of workplace spirituality made it well suited for this approach.

Data collection took place in Summer and Fall, 2017. The following research questions informed the inquiry:
1. How do spirituality components, as a human resources attribute of for-profit Central Florida workplaces with fewer than 100 employees, impact employee engagement?
   a. From the perspective of human resources managers, is employee engagement improved or hindered in connection with spirituality in the workplace?

2. Considering retention, why do employees choose to remain at workplaces with a spiritual component?
   a. What factors play a role in employee retention at workplaces where a spirituality component is incorporated?

**Definition of Terms**

The term “spirituality” is derived from the Latin word spiritus. It refers to a sense of, or belief in, something bigger than, beyond, or outside one’s self (Schlosser, Brock-Murray, & Hamilton, 2008). Personal spirituality can be viewed as linking one’s self, others, and something that transcends all (Schlosser et al., 2008). It is further articulated as “the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b, p. 83).

This definition of spirituality places the individual’s role into the context of a larger world. It is not religion, often viewed as an inappropriate form of expression and topic of discussion for the workplace, and expands the conversation to a broader context (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b). For the purposes of this study, I refer to the term “spirituality” within this wider scope, without concern for any particular
religion or specific set of beliefs. This approach is particularly appropriate in the current societal context, as a growing number of Americans say they do not subscribe to any organized faith (Pew Research Center, 2015).

The term “attribute” within the context of this study refers to an aspect of a person that is meaningful in relation to social behavior (Lewin, 1951; MacNab, Brislin, & Worthley, 2012). Understanding an employee’s individual attributes is valuable from a human resources perspective for the modern, socially complex workplace to be successfully navigated (MacNab et al., 2012). An attribute is an aspect of something larger, with the potential to impact its ultimate functionality.

The term “spirituality components in the workplace” may be manifested in a variety of forms, including, but not limited to: freedom of religious expression, including prayer; allowance of and encouragement of employees having conversations of a spiritual nature with customers; and participation in service activities within the business, generated from a spiritual impetus (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b; Benefiel, 2005a). The presence of any or all of these components informs the status of the workplace as being spiritual.

The term “employee engagement” (EE) describes the degree to which employees are involved with, dedicated to, enthusiastic, and passionate about their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008), and reflects “the common practitioner understanding is that EE involves employee enthusiasm for the organization and the job beyond what might normally be expected,” (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013, p. 2693). We understand from the literature that the benefits of employee engagement
include improved organizational culture, increased employee and customer loyalty, and increased profits (Attridge, 2009). In this study, employees were full or part-time, but all were employed by the business for at least one year.

The term “employee retention” can be considered either as a result of employee behavior or as a goal of management (Frey, Bayon, & Totzek, 2013). Employee retention is impacted by a range of factors, most significantly employee mobility (Mawdsley & Somaya, 2016). The literature indicates that “leadership practices, workplace environment, and development of self, impact employee perceptions of retention and morale,” (Murrell-Jones, 2012, p. 9). I define employee retention as the intent to remain with a company for the mid or long term (Frey et al., 2013). Specifically, an employee would express no intention to leave the company’s employment in the immediate future.

**Significance of the Study**

While a review of the literature finds multiple discussions and analyses of spirituality in the workplace during the past 20 years, there is no significant discussion of spirituality through the human resources lens as a means for understanding spirituality as a human resource attribute influencing employee engagement and retention. Researchers and practitioners have struggled to better understand the workplace spirituality phenomenon since Mitroff and Denton (1999b) first addressed the topic to widespread attention, and concluded that “we need to integrate spirituality into management. No organization can survive for long without spirituality and soul,” (p. 91). This holistic view of workplace
spirituality and its interconnectedness with management practice would have repercussions on the field for years to come, culminating in the state of today’s research. This study adds to the body of knowledge from this initial kernel of an idea from nearly 20 years ago.

An additional significance of this study is its potential to help business practitioners better understand the rise of spirituality’s importance in Americans and contemplate these implications for the employee base (Pew Research Center, 2015). The personal nature of spirituality and its role in the workplace may be found to be generalizable in meaningful ways that could guide business owners and managers as they seek to employ human resources strategies that maximize employee engagement and retention.

Another significance of this study is the potential information that may be gained to impact ultimate profitability. Past research has clearly discovered that spirituality affects profits, when asking the question of why organizations should integrate spirituality into their operations:

Perhaps the most significant finding of all was that those organizations that were perceived as “more spiritual” or “had a greater spiritual orientation” were also perceived as being significantly more profitable. Not only did such organizations allow their employees to bring more of their total selves to work, but, as a result, both employees and their organizations were able to “develop ethically” to a much greater degree. In short, spirituality was
perceived as the only true and lasting competitive advantage. (Mitroff, 2003, p. 377)

Understanding the valuable human component has the potential to better connect spirituality to profitability. Therefore, examining the workplace spirituality phenomenon and its connections to the human experience has the potential to improve business.

Becker’s (1993) approach to human capital theory presented a useful theoretical context through which to view this phenomenon. His exploration of the consequences of investing in an individual’s knowledge and skills, similar to business investments in equipment, helped to change the way that the business world viewed workers as a resource (Becker, 1993). If these human resources-related aspects of employee engagement and retention can be qualitatively better understood through this lens of employee investment, then there are potential opportunities for business owners and managers to make ongoing improvements. Further, if employee knowledge is at the core of a firm’s human capital, then maintaining it through human resource management is critically important (Buta, 2015). The human capital is at the core of the workplace’s resources, with potential connections to any manifestations of workplace spirituality.

Organizational commitment theory offers another useful lens through which to view workplace spirituality. As generally defined, organizational commitment reflects an employee’s attachment and loyalty to the employer (Cohen, 2013). Attitudes and intentions inform it, with connections to performance and turnover
(Cohen, 2013). Meyer and Allen’s (1991) conceptualization of organizational commitment examines a desire, a need, and an obligation to maintain employment. Relating these three factors to help achieve a better understanding of workplace spirituality was informative within the context of this study. The ultimate significance of this study is the exploration of employee engagement and retention and its relationship to spirituality for the eventual benefit of business practitioners who are interested in improving their workplaces.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter one provides an overview, including the background and rationale of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, questions that guide the research, definition of terms, and the significance of the study. Chapter two provides a literature review and includes relevant models, theories, and frameworks as they pertain to this research. Chapter three includes my worldview, research design, and an overview of the research approach used in the study. It also includes population and sample, selection of participants, and instrumentation. Procedures for data collection and data analysis are outlined, along with ethical considerations, researcher positionality, and information regarding validity and trustworthiness. Chapter four presents findings, including workplace spirituality employee profiles. Chapter five outlines conclusions and recommendations, with implications for practice, policy, theory, and limitations, as well as suggestions for future research.
Spirituality as a human resource attribute to facilitate employee engagement and retention was the focus of this study, and it was designed as an extension of the scholarly research conducted to date. Researchers have identified the need for additional inquiry that captures the experience (Benefiel et al., 2014). Indeed, the connection between engagement and retention has been insufficiently examined to provide practitioners with any best practices frameworks to reference. The research questions for the study were designed to help the researcher understand the essence of the workplace spirituality experience as a human resource attribute and qualitatively explore its linkages to employee engagement and retention. Through exploration of the responses to these questions, a better understanding of the lived experience began to emerge.

1. How do spirituality components, as a human resources attribute of for-profit Central Florida workplaces with fewer than 100 employees, impact employee engagement?
   a. From the perspective of human resources managers, is employee engagement improved or hindered in connection with spirituality in the workplace?
2. Considering retention, why do employees choose to remain at workplaces with a spiritual component?

a. What factors play a role in employee retention at workplaces where a spirituality component is incorporated?

**Defining Spirituality**

Usage of the term “spirituality” in contemporary society is transcending commonly held ideas of its definition (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b). Returning to its origins, the term “spirituality” derives from the Latin word spiritus, and refers to a sense of, or belief in, something bigger than, beyond, or outside one’s self (Schlosser et al., 2008). This definition of spirituality goes beyond linkages to any particular religious tradition.

The concept of a personal spirituality can be viewed as linking one’s self, others, and something that transcends all (Schlosser et al., 2008). In the context of this research study, it may be described as “the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe,” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b, p. 83). This definition of spirituality is most appropriate and applicable across the literature review that follows, as it positions the individual’s role into the context of a larger world.

Spirituality in this context is not religion, often viewed as an inappropriate form of expression and topic of discussion for the workplace, and expands the conversation to a broader context (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a). This study framed the term “spirituality” within this wider scope, without concern for any specific
religion or set of beliefs. Given that a growing number of Americans say they do not subscribe to any organized faith structure (Pew Research Center, 2015), this framing is most useful. Scholars of this phenomenon write of a 21st century society with “a new vocabulary by which one might begin to understand the new religio-secular landscape of civil society and public governance,” (Baker, 2012, p. 15).

**Historical Development of Spirituality in the Workplace**

Increasing numbers of scholarly studies of spirituality in the workplace have emerged during the past 20 years, many building from foundational work done by Mitroff and Denton (1999a). In fact, more than 70 books on spirituality related to management and organizational life were published throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Benefiel, 2003a). As evidenced throughout this literature review, a range of journal articles and other academic materials have been published in more recent years (Benefiel, 2003a). However, there is still much to learn regarding workplace spirituality as an attribute of human resources and its related implications for employee engagement and retention.

Previous studies related to workplace spirituality have added detail to the discourse (Benefiel, 2003b; Benefiel et al., 2014). Key studies have demonstrated positive relationships between spirituality in the workplace and employee outcomes including: commitment and job satisfaction (Fry & Slocum, 2008; Bodla & Ali, 2012); altruism and conscientiousness (Chen & Yang, 2012); work unit performance (Duchon & Plowman, 2005); sales growth (Fry & Slocum, 2008); and
loyalty (Rego, Cunha, & Souto, 2008). The authors almost universally acknowledge that more inquiry is needed to understand the phenomenon.

Mitroff and Denton’s (1999a) study that separated spirituality from religion in the workplace is viewed as the nexus point for the scores of more mainstream studies that have followed (Benefiel et al., 2014). Mitroff and Denton (1999a) conducted a systematic study of more than 90 interviews with highly-placed managers and executives. Surveys were also conducted, and both qualitative and quantitative data were assessed. Key findings included: contrary to conventional thinking, study participants did not have widely varying definitions of spirituality; people wanted wholeness in life, not compartmentalization; respondents strongly differentiated between religion and spirituality; and that only a small number of models existed for practicing spirituality responsibly in the workplace (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a).

Subsequent researchers have undertaken research into this area under the umbrella of management (Neal, 2013). Business-oriented spirituality studies have sprouted in numerous areas, including a trending eco-spirituality field of study argued as an integral component of ecological sustainability (Dhiman & Marques, 2016). As noted by Mitroff (2016), who led foundational studies into workplace spirituality, spirituality itself is a prime component in seeking to understand a range of societal challenges, including the environment. This is simply one more example of how spirituality concepts are informing current thinking in business
theory. The entire topic area is fertile ground for fresh discovery to advance business management, because the interest in improving competitiveness is great.

**Spirituality in America**

Longitudinal data indicates that the U.S. public is becoming less religious, or identifying with a particular, organized religious tradition, over time. U.S. Religious Landscape Study survey data from 35,071 adults reflected a modest drop in overall belief rates, but religiously affiliated Americans remained as observant as a decade before (Pew Research Center, 2015). The number of U.S. adults who say they believe in God has declined from approximately 92% to 89% since 2007. The portion of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” that God exists has declined from 71% in 2007 to 63% in 2014. Additionally, the numbers of U.S. adults who say that they pray daily, regularly attend religious services, and consider religion to be very important in their lives has also decreased by small margins (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Meanwhile, 77% of adult Americans continued to identify with some religious faith. Approximately four-in-ten adults who are affiliated religiously reported relying mainly on their beliefs for guidance in matters of right and wrong, an increase of 7% in seven years (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Perhaps most relevant for the purposes of this study, Americans appear to be trending toward a more spiritual outlook even as their religiosity declines: About six-in-ten adults now say they regularly feel a deep sense of “spiritual peace and well-being,” up 7 percentage points since 2007. And
46 percent of Americans say they experience a deep sense of “wonder about the universe” at least once a week, also up 7 points over the same period. (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 6)

The survey results indicated that almost two-thirds of adults who are religiously affiliated report a deep sense of spiritual peace at least once a week, compared with four-in-ten Americans who are not religiously affiliated, known as “nones,” “but there is little difference between the religiously affiliated and religious ‘nones’ on the question about feelings of wonder about the universe,” (Pew Research Center, 2015, p. 26). This “wonder” is translating into a phenomenon that can be qualitatively examined to be better understood.

A study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2008) regarding religion and corporate America found a growing number of employees are bringing their religion and spirituality to work. The Faith at Work Survey followed similar studies by SHRM from 1997 and 2001. Among its key findings, “employee morale and employee retention are most affected by having a workplace that provides religious accommodation for its employees.” (SHRM, 2008, p. 3). Spiritually-related diversity of organizations was found to be notable, with 64% reporting some degree of religious/spiritual diversity among their employees. Medium and large organizations were more likely to report higher levels of religious/spiritual diversity among employees when compared with small organizations. The study recorded that 98% of respondents indicated that religiously diverse employees work cooperatively or very cooperatively.
Interestingly in the context of this study, only 9% indicated that they allowed on-site religion-based affinity groups (SHRM, 2008). It is unclear to this investigator whether the inclusion of the word “religion” in the aforementioned study may have conveyed to the respondents some organized religious group—perhaps a particular denomination—rather than a more spiritually oriented group as defined in this study.

Based on these data, the study also recommended that “religion and spirituality education efforts in the workplace need to shift from minimizing differences to strengthening, respecting and valuing those differences to help drive an organization’s business results,” (SHRM, 2008, p. 3). Further, “religious and spirituality diversity should not be just about human resource policies and practices. An organization’s ability to recognize, embrace and function in a religious and spiritually diverse world is critical to its sustainability strategy,” (p. 3). This is echoed across elements of the academic literature.

**Spirituality in the Workplace: Case Studies**

The topic of workplace spirituality is timely and important to business improvement strategies being sought by practitioners. This has the potential to improve their employee retention and engagement. Industry-leading organizations including Hewlett-Packard, Ford Motor Company, the World Bank, AT&T, DuPont, and Apple Computer have all created programs that incorporated spirituality in the workplace (Petchsawang & Duchon, 2012). Others at smaller companies, more relevant to this study, are most pertinent to explore.
**Reell Precision Manufacturing.** The direction statement of this Midwestern manufacturer of hinges and clutches reads in part “We are committed to do what is right even when it does not seem to be profitable, expedient or conventional,” (Benefiel, 2005b, p. 21). While counterintuitive to common business thinking, the approach has led the company to expand from three employees in 1970 to 225 employees by 2005 (Benefiel, 2005b). Limiting executive pay, putting front-line employees first, and other similar tactics have built positive relationships with both workers and customers to the benefit of the company’s sustainability.

**HealthEast.** This Minnesota healthcare group was created in 1985 after the merger of four hospitals (Benefiel, 2005b). The group now stretches across two states and includes four hospitals, 11 clinics, five assisted-living programs, and various related services (Benefiel, 2005b). The company’s focus on holistic health care and compassionate approaches “are examples of how a sustained commitment to organizational soul can avoid the stereotypical soulless bureaucracy which can emerge when institutions merge out of necessity,” (Benefiel, 2005b, p. 24). The “soul” referenced here connects with workplace spirituality, and seeking workplace practices that go beyond traditional approaches.

**Greyston Foundation.** Founded in 1982 at the Greyston Bakery and headquartered in Yonkers, New York, the for-profit enterprise’s goal was to “create an environment demonstrating the interdependence of life...The big question was how to bring spirituality—an awareness of the oneness of life—to the
marketplace,” (Benefiel, 2005b, p. 22). A commitment to spiritually-based social engagement has helped grow the organization with a continued focus on the “interdependence of life,” (Benefiel, 2005b, p. 23). This case indicates how a commitment to spirituality can permeate all aspects of a business’s interactions, from how it treats employees to how it interacts with customers or clients.

**Common Problems**

There are a range of practical concerns regarding workplace spirituality that are highlighted throughout the literature. Those concerns include the traditional separation of religious-related life aspects and business (SHRM, 2008); sensitivities concerning the etiquette of religion and spirituality in public (Sullivan, 2013); and legal ramifications of workplace spirituality (Sullivan, 2013; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017). However, as the subsequent literature review will indicate, these concerns have not prevented practitioners from successfully integrating spirituality components into their workplaces. Further, researchers have had success in studying the phenomena.

The core problem for business practitioners that the literature reflected upon and that this researcher wished to understand is the need to positively impact employee engagement and retention via workplace spirituality components accessible by all employees as a human resource attribute (Meyer & Allen, 1991). However, while there is a growing body of literature on workplace spirituality, there is limited information on its implications for employee engagement and retention, and that was the basis for this research. This literature review seeks to
present a balanced view of the current state of the research, and its most useful implications for this study.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

In the following section I introduce the theoretical frameworks that informed the study. For this research I chose to incorporate human capital theory and organizational commitment theory. This section will discuss the history, tenets, and finally the purpose and significance of human capital theory and organizational commitment theory as they related to this study.

**Human capital theory.** As advanced by Becker (1993) with its core tenet that economic value can be the product of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, human capital theory relates well to the individual-centered nature of spirituality and was a logical choice for this study. Additionally, utilizing this theoretical framework assisted in placing this study squarely in the field of business management, which is where the researcher intends and hopes it will be most useful.

The fundamental importance of investment in human capital has been an evolving area of study during the past 50 years, since first widely discussed by Schultz (1961). This evolution has crystalized around associated components including the value of education, the role of tacit knowledge, and the role of soft characteristics such as spirit, leadership, morals, and ethics (Buta, 2015). As mentioned, the prevailing understanding of human capital theory dates to the 1960s
work of Theodore Schultz, and was quickly supplemented by the 1964 efforts of Gary Becker, deemed the “locus classicus” of the subject (Blaug, 1976).

There are discernible linkages between the concepts of human capital and workplace spirituality as an attribute of human resources. According to the literature, human capital theory posits that economic value can be produced via a stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, embodied in labor (Becker, 1993). Becker’s (1993) perspective concerning investment in a person’s knowledge and skills makes for a useful theoretical framework when exploring spirituality in the workplace, as his research acknowledges the “spiritual capital” component of human capital theory (Malloch, 2008). Capital that is linked to spiritual life has value.

The primary proposition of the human capital theory is that a human employee is a form of capital (Aliaga, 2001). The idea has persisted through the development of the theory that “a wide range of apparently disconnected phenomena in the world are the outcome of a definite pattern of individual decisions, having in common the features of forgoing present gains for the prospect of future ones,” (Blaug, 1976, pp. 849-850). This perspective on human capital theory acknowledges the inherent future-facing nature of the theory, and the understanding that individualism is at its core. This individualism relates well to the concept of workplace spirituality, given the personal nature of the experience.

Investment in individuals is a founding component of the theory: “Much of what we call consumption constitutes investment in human capital. Direct
expenditures on education, health, and internal migration to take advantage of better job opportunities are clear examples,” (Schultz, 1961, p. 1). Understanding that this investment can foster a return is also fundamental to the theory. However, it would be difficult to see how this return can be achieved if the employees are not adequately retained or engaged. This is why the workplace spirituality component is important to explore.

Extensions of Schultz (1961) and Becker’s (1993) earlier works have further refined the return on investment (Malloch, 2013). According to Davenport (1999), a combination of ability, behavior, effort, and time investment produces performance. Human capital leveraged strategically through human resource management has been aimed at impacting competitive advantage and organizational strategy, with superior performance as the goal (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). Again, this research posits that superior performance cannot be adequately sustained without employee engagement and retention.

As stated earlier, scholars studying business-related spirituality have identified an extension of human capital they call spiritual capital (Malloch, 2013). This is a particularly important extension as it relates to this study. Spiritual capital is defined as “the fund of beliefs, examples and commitments that are transmitted from generation to generation through a religious tradition, and which attach people to the transcendental source of human happiness,” (Malloch, 2008, p. 18). The concept maintains that spiritual capital is linked to the human condition: “The creation of wealth requires capital investment, and the most essential part of that
investment is arguably the spiritual capital with which enterprise begins, then flowers and bears fruit—talents creating and sustaining still more talents, and all of us thriving in a vital spiritual bond,” (Malloch, 2013, p. 304). Becker acknowledged spiritual capital as an element of human capital theory, and its relevance is important to this study.

**Organizational commitment theory.** In addition to human capital theory, organizational commitment theory is a useful lens through which to view workplace spirituality as a human resources component of employee engagement and retention. Organizational commitment is the traditional concept through which researchers have sought to better understand employee turnover (Cohen, 1993). Organizational commitment deals with the attachment and loyalty an employee associates with the work organization, and is framed by the employee’s attitudes and intentions (Cohen, 2013). This commitment is foundational to what workplace spirituality may influence.

Scholars began formally conceptualizing organizational commitment in the 1960s (Cohen, 2013). Two fundamental approaches have evolved, known as the calculative approach and the attitudinal approach (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). The calculative approach is based on the idea that what an employee has invested in an organization would be worthless if the employee left, while the attitudinal approach posits that an employee feels committed to the organization because of shared values and goals (Cohen, 2013). A third more all-encompassing form, known as
the multidimensional approach (Cohen 2013), and advanced by scholars including Meyer and Allen (1991), was the approach most applicable to this study.

The multidimensional approach is today the dominant approach in organizational commitment studies (Cohen, 2013). It has been further refined to better understand the antecedents, correlates, and consequences of an employee’s commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). This evolution of the theory now posits that organizational commitment is composed of “(a) a desire (affective commitment), (b) a need (continuance commitment), and (c) an obligation (normative commitment) to maintain employment in an organization,” (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 61). The ways in which workplace spirituality may influence possible outcomes are well-informed by this theory.

Meyer and Allen (1991) noted that future research utilizing the three-component, or multidimensional, approach to organizational commitment “should consider other effects that efforts to increase commitment might have on employees, including their personal well-being and willingness to work toward the attainment of organizational goals,” (p. 83). Indeed, that is in part what this study sought to understand, particularly how personal concepts of spirituality inform employee willingness to remain engaged and subsequently be retained.

**Two theories, one goal.** As previously discussed, both human capital theory (Becker, 1993) and organizational commitment theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991) bring important dimensions to the workplace spirituality discussion. Application of these theories helps address a gap in the knowledge about this topic.
Human capital theory fundamentally asserts that people have worth; organizational commitment theory outlines the conditions necessary for aspects like employee retention and engagement to be possible. Each has value when seeking to understand the human resources-related components of employee engagement and retention in workplace spirituality. That is why these two theoretical frameworks were chosen for inclusion as I studied spirituality in the workplace as a human resource attribute to facilitate employee engagement and retention.

**Synthesis**

Several areas of literature were reviewed in efforts to understand the previously researched linkages between topics including workplace spirituality, human resource management, human capital theory, organizational commitment theory, spiritual leadership theory, employee engagement, and employee retention. Interesting streams of thought emerged, some highly compartmentalized and deeply related to religion, but others connecting fruitfully to better illustrate a more all-inclusive, secular story of workplace spirituality. Those more broad-based examples of literature will primarily be explored here.

Efforts to quantitatively analyze spiritual capital have been rooted in the notion that spiritual capital “could be considered as a cultural aspect of the organization, which includes shared motives, common behavior, and joint attitudes,” (Yazdi, 2015, p. 470). Further, organizations that had undertaken major change projects might have benefited from their investment in spiritual capital. A
two-phase integrated algorithm of principal component analysis and fuzzy clustering has shown promise for quantifying spiritual capital (Yazdi, 2015).

**Individuality of spirituality.** Spirituality and religion sometimes share common elements, but are not the same (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b). One notable example of spirituality witnessed in non-church settings is seen in the Fresh Expressions movement of the last decade (Collins, 2015). The movement is grounded in the idea that a jaded culture of modern-day workers would prefer spirituality on their own terms. Fresh Expressions is designed to foster spiritual experiences outside of the traditional church environment: “A fresh expression of church is…attentive to a subculture, a particular population group—i.e., a group of people who share a similar interest, hobby, need, community, or work,” (p. 7). While the Fresh Expressions case has linkages to traditional religion, it is an example of how spirituality is finding societal footing beyond the confines of church, and intersecting with the world of work.

As academic progress has been made to understand the workplace spirituality phenomenon, limited work has been published relating to its application as a human resource attribute to address employee engagement and retention. While not the whole problem, this is an important missing component. Perhaps this is due in part to the high degree of individual eclecticism and dynamism found in employee experiences of spirituality (Crossman, 2015). In the long tradition of some scholarly pursuit, the relative newness of this area of inquiry lends itself to exploration of this nature, especially given the trend of management theory and
practice “now expanding to incorporate a more holistic and integral view of the human being at work,” (Neal, 2013, p. 6). Human resource management connections to workplace spirituality are a logical area to explore, as human resources practitioners are “legally and morally obligated to respect their employees’ religious practices (whether formal and organized or not) and accommodate them when possible...this topic is ripe with opportunities to conduct research that truly matters to practitioners,” (McCormick, 2013, pp. 719-720).

Evolving workplaces. However, there are no ready recipes for how leaders can create spiritually friendly workplaces that foster engagement and retention. Modern organizations are quite different than those of the past, with the contemporary world seeming to reward adaptability. Duchon and Plowman (2005) assert that “leaders will need to be comfortable with a much more fluid, dynamic work environment which means that what constitutes ‘meaningful work’ will itself change,” (p. 827). Managers must be flexible in changing with the trends.

Better understanding the phenomenon of spirituality in the workplace is useful, as managers can more effectively address associated issues to maximize their business outcomes while creating safe and nurturing environments for their employees’ professional development (Pawar, 2016). Evidence exists that workplace spirituality may provide insight into organizational effectiveness (Krahnke, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Numerous qualitative as well as quantitative studies over the past two decades have begun to chronicle this area (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003; Siengthai, 2014). The literature
indicates that “organizations that have long been viewed as rational systems are considering making room for the spiritual dimension, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 134). This is another indicator of how the 21st century workplace is evolving to incorporate spirituality components.

**Workplace spirituality worldwide.** The ramifications of this reality for the modern workplace are intriguing and far-reaching, and are not confined to the American experience. Spirituality in the workplace has recently been examined beyond the United States, in wide-ranging arenas of the business world, from healthcare in South Africa (de la Porte, 2016) to Israeli social services departments—including correlation between spirituality and work attitudes (Freund, Yahav, & Gilboa-Arama, 2016). Similarities in worker attitudes and reactions regarding workplace spirituality have transcended geopolitical boundaries, kinds of work, and types of businesses.

As seen in the literature, workplace spirituality is understood to have three dimensions: cultivation of inner life at work, meaningful work, and sense of community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). This understanding of workplace spirituality has permeated much of the subsequent study. A recent study in the sales arena has validated the importance of these components: “These dimensions ultimately result in positive organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment, salesperson performance and customer orientation,” (Chawla, 2016, p. 505). This has positive implications for organizational success.
Indeed, spirituality in the workplace is largely seen as a remedy for a work world accelerating in terms of expectations:

Changes in the global economy, such as restructuring, globalization, diversity, competition, downsizing, re-engineering, ageing populations, as well as environmental pollution, have led to the realization at the organizational level that current structures and policies are no longer appropriate in the 21st century. Workers have become demoralized, alienated and unable to cope with the compartmentalized nature of their work and non-work lives. The community structures given to employees formerly provided them with a source of meaning, but are now viewed by some as less relevant. (van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014, p. 379)

Corporate America’s growing interest in workplace spirituality can be linked to these trends (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Finding solutions to complex 21st century problems may be a motivating factor.

The literature has other examples of workplace spirituality seen as a prescription to deal with the perceived difficulties and incongruities of the modern workplace:

The necessity of managing a diverse workforce has also found its way into the workplace spirituality discourse. Beyond simply building upon the human relations attention to employee needs and well-being, workplace spirituality is constructed in our corpus as a vehicle for the accommodation of an increasing diversity of needs, values and interests. This connection is
in part made as a reaction to the changing demographics of the workforce, particularly along the lines of age and culture. Globalization is attributed with introducing a plurality of religious beliefs and practices into the workplace. (Long & Driscoll, 2015, p. 955)

However, the literature has little information about the successful integration of spirituality components for the improvement of employee engagement and retention. This is a practical need for business managers.

**Human resources connections.** Human capital has been further conceptualized as being “important because it is a source of innovation and strategic renewal,” (Bontis, 1996, p. 43). Human resource development is intrinsically linked to human capital theory, most clearly through the concepts of education and training (Aliaga, 2001). Workforce development through an investment in training and education is a basic tenet of human resource development (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004).

The human capital sector of modern economies relies on skilled and trained labor (Becker, Murphy, & Tamura, 1990). As the knowledge economy has emerged, organizations are increasingly harnessing their expertise and experience to foster competitive advantage (Bontis, 1996). Human capital in addition to earnings means that the real output of the individual is increased (Ben-Porath, 1967), with implications for “the economic mechanism that underlies the cultural evolution of mankind,” (Mincer, 1997, p. S44). There is a measurement case to be made for viewing the employee as a human asset (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich,
Quantifying the human component of the workplace can assist in understanding their monetary value to the business enterprise.

The literature reflects findings that, while human resource managers themselves are grappling with the methods and practices to help improve employee engagement and retention, they themselves are dealing with existential issues. Abbas, Murad, Yazdani, and Asghar (2014) explored the existential meaningfulness of human resources managers’ work in Pakistan. Data were collected qualitatively including observation, self-reflection, and in-depth interviews. Dimensions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability were reviewed. They concluded that leaders “can improve the performance and productivity of the work force by addressing and responding to their cognitive, emotional and psychological needs,” (Abbas et al., 2014, p. 21). Human resource management practices can reinforce spiritual values, including selecting employees based on values and attitudes instead of technical expertise, highly flexible job descriptions, developing boundary-spanning positions, etc. (Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett, & Condemi, 1999). This is evidence of the fundamental connections between human resources and workplace spirituality.

Legal concerns surrounding spirituality in the workplace. The separation of church and state in the United States (U.S. Const. amend. I) and the previous, prevailing attitude that religion and the secular workplace are fundamentally incongruent (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a) raises the legitimate question of the legality of spirituality in the workplace. These notions historically
formed the guiding principles underlying how most U.S. corporations operate (SHRM, 2008). Courts have typically upheld employee requests for accommodations like prayer, as long as burdensome disruptions may be avoided (Farah v. Whirlpool Corp., 2004). This gives credence to the idea of coexistence between spiritual and traditional workplace conventions.

When considering this historical legacy, it is important to note the guiding legal tenets in the United States:

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals because of their religion (or lack of religious belief) in hiring, firing, or any other terms and conditions of employment. The law also prohibits job segregation based on religion, such as assigning an employee to a non-customer contact position because of actual or feared customer preference. In addition, the Act requires employers to reasonably accommodate the religious beliefs and practices of applicants and employees, unless doing so would cause more than a minimal burden on the operation of the employer's business. A reasonable religious accommodation is any adjustment to the work environment that will allow the employee to practice his religion. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017a)

Charges filed and resolved under Title VII alleging religion-based discrimination increased to 3,825 in fiscal year 2016, up from 3,502 in fiscal year 2015. That
compares to 2,541 in fiscal year 2006, representing an increase of 50.5% in a decade (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017b).

A closer examination of the legal implications for workplace spirituality reveals that “laws administered by the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) need not be a major inhibitor to the practice of spirit at work,” (Sullivan, 2013, p. 19). Rather, Sullivan argued that EEOC laws designed to protect against religious discrimination at work can foster spirituality in the workplace, with the inherent protections that the law provides.

**Spiritual leadership in the workplace.** Regardless of the legal implications that could be viewed as an impediment to workplace spirituality initiatives, workplace spirituality case studies have provided some insight into the successful manifestation of the phenomenon. An ex post observation of Hewlett-Packard’s Volume Systems Division shut down posited that workplace spirituality “provides potential levers, beyond common organization concepts, for employee engagement and performance,” (Major, 2013, p. 532). A case study of DaySpring Cards, Inc., a successful Christian greeting card company, indicated that a spiritual core to the enterprise has been positive for business and leader development (Akin, 2013).

The idea behind such success is that those in charge must fully embrace the spiritual nature of the workplace and foster its development among the employees. Spiritual leadership theory has evolved as an avenue to better understand this experience:
1. Creating a transcendent vision of service to others whereby one experiences a sense of calling so that one’s life has purpose and meaning and makes a difference.

2. Establishing or reinforcing an organizational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby one has a sense of membership, feels understood and appreciated, and has genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others. (Benefiel et al., 2014, p. 178)

The application of spiritual leadership is seen as integral to the successful creation of a workplace that embraces spiritual components.

It is clear that many questions about how to quantify workplace spirituality exist: “Spirit(uality) at work is something like love; we all know what it is but find it difficult to define and even harder to measure. Yet, measuring the most difficult things is often vital because of the potential impact,” (Kinjerski, 2013, p. 383). Tools like Kinjerski’s the Spirit at Work Scale (2013, 2015), Miller and Ewest’s The Integration Box (2013), and the Faith at Work Scale (Lynn, Naughton, & VanderVeen, 2013), are examples of efforts to develop psychometric analysis tools to address workplace spirituality.

Other efforts to conceptualize and measure spirituality in the workplace have taken various forms, but the nascent nature of this area of study remains clear. Studies that are more integrative of the fields of psychology of religion and spirituality are lacking (Benefiel et al., 2014).
The groundbreaking work of Mitroff and Denton (1999a) is viewed as a pivotal work in understanding workplace spirituality. Their empirical study interviewed senior executives and utilized questionnaires sent to human resources executives and managers. They asked interviewees “what gave them the most meaning and purpose in their jobs,” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b, p. 85). Their findings, in ranked order, would influence the direction of future courses of inquiry:

1. The ability to realize my full potential as a person.
2. Being associated with a good organization or an ethical organization.
3. Interesting work.
5. Having good colleagues; serving humankind.
6. Service to future generations.
7. Service to my immediate community. (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b, p. 85)

Realizing otherwise untapped potential is a fundamental theme in workplace spirituality literature: “After recognizing a spiritual element in employees, the expression of spirituality at work requires acceptance that employees want to be involved in work that gives meaning to their lives,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 136). Further, understanding that spirituality at work includes “the notion that spiritual beings not only express inner life needs by seeking meaningful work but that part of being alive is living in connection to other human beings,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 136). Without that connection to others, then there is no larger
sense of purpose. “Feeling part of a community is an essential element of spiritual development,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 137). It is those workplace spiritual communities that this research sought to better understand.

Like human capital theory, workplace spirituality must begin with the individual, given that “at the most basic and individual level, workplace spirituality can be viewed as the incorporation of one’s own spiritual ideals and values in the work setting,” (Kolodinsky, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2008, p. 466). Relatedly, studies have found that business entrepreneurs are often motivated by factors beyond profits, including a need to give back to their community or their customers (Balog, Baker, & Walker, 2014). This is additional incentive for practitioners to explore the possibilities of spirituality for their workplaces.

This conversation within a workplace might begin with the understanding that workplace spirituality can also refer to a more macro view of the organization’s spiritual culture, “whereas ‘personal spirituality’ encompasses the individual values brought to the workplace, we view ‘organizational spirituality’ as reflecting an individual’s perception of the spiritual values within an organizational setting,” (Kolodinsky et al., 2008, pp. 466-467). Both are important elements to reflect upon when addressing issues of a spiritual workplace.

**Studies of spirituality in the workplace.** The debate surrounding whether spirituality in organizations is most appropriately studied qualitatively, quantitatively, or with a mixed methods approach has continued since the earliest days when the area of study began to attract scholars (Benefiel, 2003b). The
“quantitative trail” has been more concerned with spirituality’s impact on organizational performance, while a deeper “how and why” trail seeks “to discover how spirituality gets manifested throughout an organization, and second, to discover the impact a spiritual organization has both on individuals and on organizational performance,” (Benefiel, 2003b, p. 369).

Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle (2014) explored 15 empirical studies of spirituality and religion in the workplace, all with results published between 2003 and 2012. The types of statistical procedures used include coefficient alpha reliabilities, confirmatory factor analysis, hierarchical linear regression, and structure equation modeling. In the following section, I examine in greater detail some of the more salient findings among these studies.

Empirical study has indicated that spirituality in the workplace is linked to inner life, community, and meaningful work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Chawla (2016) found that these three dimensions positively impact how salespeople are oriented to their customers and their selling levels.

The literature regarding the facilitation of workplace spirituality has evolved into two basic models: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach (Chawla, 2016). Models of workplace spirituality to impact sales performances include structural factors like managerial practices, control systems with significant levels of autonomy and responsibility, and reward systems with both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits (Chawla, 2016).
Organizational spirituality has been found to be “positively related to job involvement, organizational identification, and work rewards satisfaction,” (Kolodinsky et al., 2008, p. 465). Meanwhile, personal spirituality was “positively related to intrinsic, extrinsic, and total work rewards satisfaction,” (Kolodinsky et al., 2008, p. 465). Personal spirituality as a mitigating factor between organizational spirituality, and worker consequences like job involvement, organizational identification, organizational frustration, and work reward satisfaction are impacted (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Personal spirituality as a mitigating factor. Adapted from “Workplace Values and Outcomes: Exploring Personal, Organizational, and Interactive Workplace Spirituality,” by R. W. Kolodinsky, R. A. Giacalone, and C.L. Jurkiewicz, 2008, Journal of Business Ethics, 81, p. 466. Copyright Springer.

Bodla and Ali (2012) studied eight variables including vision, hope/faith, altruistic love, calling, membership, organizational commitment, productivity, and job satisfaction among banking executives in Pakistan. Among the findings, the research indicated that vision and altruistic love positively affects aspects of a
follower’s need for spiritual survival/well-being. A direct relationship was found between vision and altruistic love and job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational commitment (Bodla & Ali, 2012).

Chen and Yang (2012) studied workers in the Taiwanese retailing-service industry and the financial-service industry. Their multi-sample analysis findings indicated that spiritual leaders’ values, attitudes, and behaviors facilitate employees to exhibit excellent organizational citizenship behaviors. Altruism when dealing with colleagues and conscientiousness toward the organization was also found (Chen & Yang, 2012). Meanwhile, inner-self aspects of spirituality were found to impact organizational outcomes and productivity (Chen, Yang, & Li, 2012).

Duchon and Plowman (2005) explored spirituality’s impact on hospital workers. They found that work units with a sense of meaningful work that attends to the needs of the spirit performed better than those that were less spirit-friendly. They contend that spirit-friendly work units are facilitated by leaders who are spirit-friendly (Duchon & Plowman, 2005).

Fry and Slocum (2008) state that “spiritual leadership involves motivating and inspiring workers through a transcendent vision and a corporate culture based on altruistic values to produce a highly motivated, committed and productive workforce,” (p. 90). Their study of workers in the wholesale distributorship field found that spiritual leadership positively and significantly influenced employee and organizational performance.
Fry, Vitucci, and Cedillo (2005) sampled soldiers in a U.S. Army helicopter attack squadron. Spiritual leadership, organizational commitment, and productivity were among the aspects measured and offered strong initial support for the causal model of spiritual leadership.

Hall, Oates, Anderson, and Willingham (2012) found that the higher sanctification of work, with sanctification defined as “a psychological process through which aspects of life are perceived by people as having divine character and significance,” (p. 72), is related to higher work-related satisfaction.

Petchsawang and Duchon (2012) found that meditation was a mediating component of the relationship between workplace spirituality and workplace performance. Succinctly, it found “empirical evidence of a significant, positive relationship between spirituality and actual work outcomes; not attitudes about work, not attitudes about commitment or job satisfaction, but work performance as it is measured by the organization,” (p. 203).

Rego, Cunha, and Souto (2008) studied employees in Brazil and Portugal. Quantitatively, organizational tenure related positively to some spirituality dimensions, and those perceiving a stronger spirituality climate self-reported higher levels of performance. The research concluded that the spirituality components are important considerations for managers as they consider productivity issues.

These aforementioned quantitative studies share an overall theme not only of workplace spirituality research, but also demonstrate positive connections between spirituality and workplace factors like commitment, productivity, job
satisfaction, conscientiousness, sales growth, and loyalty. This lends credence to the need for qualitative analyses that will seek to better understand the essence of the workplace spirituality experience.

**Why spirituality in the workplace?** Religion and closely related issues were once considered inappropriate for polite conversation, as “etiquette guides for decades, if not centuries, suggested not talking about religion in public gatherings outside one’s own religious community because it was just too volatile an issue,” (Sullivan, 2013, p. 29). The possibility for misunderstanding, offense, or other social awkwardness led many business leaders to avoid the issue. That’s why “models of workplace spirituality aligned with particular religious expression would rightly be rejected by industry. Therefore, any resulting juxtaposition must allow the field to speak of spirituality without speaking about religion,” (Phipps & Benefiel, 2013, p. 37). The literature confirms that organizations that have addressed spirituality in the workplace have often done so with no overt connection to a particular religious denomination.

A fundamental question explored in some of the literature reviewed is critical to answer from the perspective of practitioners who may have concerns related to legalities, a fear of being perceived as “too religious” by customers, or other associated concerns. The reason some organizations embrace spiritual components is viewed as much simpler than the execution of those components: “Just as with individual spirituality, an organization often embraces spirituality because it needs help,” (Benefiel, 2005b, p. 137).
Benefiel argued that many organizations begin spiritual journeys for enlightened self-interest and self-preservation, and that the journey has high and low points (Figure 2). The journey for an organization to embrace spirituality is characterized by two halves. The first half begins with awareness, but may soon stall. A new period of transformation begins the second half, which may encounter difficulties, but will ultimately resolve in new meaning and positive transformation. She said, “rather than worrying about organizations starting on the spiritual path for the ‘wrong’ reason, that is, to enhance organizational performance, leaders need to recognize this as a natural starting point for a spiritual journey,” (2005b, p. 144).

![Figure 2. The spiritual journey. Adapted from “The Second Half of the Journey: Spiritual Leadership for Organizational Transformation,” by M. Benefiel, 2005, The Leadership Quarterly, 16, p. 736. Copyright Elsevier Inc.](image-url)
**Employee engagement.** Employee engagement is an integral and commonplace phrase of the vocabulary of today’s human resource management discourse, but an explicit focus on its study and implications for human resource management has been rare (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). Since the 1970s, human resource management has struggled to mature as a field in ways that have innovated (Guest & King, 2004; Guest, 2011), perhaps exacerbating this situation. Kahn (1990) is credited with bringing attention to the employee engagement term in the nomenclature, as he explored “the conditions at work in which people personally engage, or express and employ their personal selves, and disengage, or withdraw and defend their personal selves,” (p. 692). From that point, study of the phenomenon has expanded in new and interesting ways.

The motives and commitment of the workforce affecting engagement remains an under-theorized area in human resource management (King, 2011). The literature indicates, however, that this situation is slowly changing:

As companies across industries strive to survive and rise above the stiff competition, physical and mental well-being of employees will be one of the important aspects that HR managers need to tend to focus on. Hence, employee engagement is today seen as a powerful source of competitive advantage in the turbulent times. (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014, p. 106)

A convergence appears to be occurring to this researcher, as three factors are in play in the modern workplace: 1) a societal decline in religiosity coupled with a rise in spirituality; 2) a workforce seeking deeper meaning in work, and
increasingly bringing that to the workplace; 3) an opportunity on the part of business managers to leverage the aforementioned factors for the benefit of employee engagement.

This reality of competition in the contemporary world of work presented an interesting opportunity for this study. Engagement in business can be generally defined as a blend of three concepts: (1) job satisfaction; (2) commitment to the organization; and (3) extra-role behavior, or effort beyond the job description (Schaufeli, 2013). Employee engagement describes the degree to which employees are involved with, dedicated to, enthusiastic, and passionate about their work (Macey & Schneider, 2008), and reflects the practitioner perspective that employee engagement is witnessed as employees enthusiastic about the organization in ways that go beyond their normal job responsibilities (Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013). The benefits of such employee engagement include improved organizational culture, increased employee and customer loyalty, and increased profits (Attridge, 2009). Qualitatively exploring employee engagement as an attribute of human resource management presented a fascinating opportunity to expand understanding of this highly relevant topic.

**Employee retention.** Findings from the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 found that the average person born in the latter years of the baby boom (1957-1964) changed employers 11.7 times by age 48 (2015). About a quarter changed companies at least 15 times. The survey reflects 9,964 men and women who were ages 14 to 22.
when first interviewed in 1979 and ages 47 to 56 when interviewed again in 2012-2013. The respondents were interviewed annually from 1979 to 1994 and biennially since 1994. While job duration was often longer the older a worker was when starting the job, the baby boomers who participated in this longitudinal study had large numbers of jobs that were short in duration. Among jobs begun by workers 40 to 48 years old, 32% ended in less than a year, while 69% ended in fewer than five years (BLS, 2015).

Attracting and retaining the best employee talent necessitates “a work culture and environment that recognize the needs and challenges of employees and also build on employee engagement,” (SHRM, 2008, p. 11). The literature indicates that employee retention can be considered as a result of either employee behavior or a goal of management (Frey, Bayon, & Totzek, 2013). Employee retention is impacted by a number of elements, most significantly employee mobility (Mawdsley & Somaya, 2016). Accordingly, a range of factors impact employee perceptions of retention, including leadership, the workplace environment, and personal self-development, (Murrell-Jones, 2012). In this study, employee retention was conceptualized as the intent to remain with a company for the mid or long term (Frey et al., 2013). This definition was constructed upon the notion that the employee would express no intention to leave the company’s employment in the immediate future.

As workers move on, costs rise for employers (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). It typically costs a company about one-fifth of an employee’s salary to replace that
employee. While it usually costs businesses more to replace employees who are the highest paid, costs are not typically less significant for replacing low-earning employees (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). This retention reality affects core business components, particularly the cost of doing business.

This can lead to employee mobility adversely impacting business sustainability. Through the lens of this study, it is at this nexus point where business sustainability and workplace spirituality affect one another. There is professional practitioner advocacy for better understanding and subsequent implementation of spirituality concepts. A business study by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) encouraged business practitioners to embrace a spiritually diverse world to maintain business sustainability (SHRM, 2008).

Conclusion

Workplace spirituality literature reflects the need for more study, connected with related areas of interest to more fully explore the phenomenon. Krahnke et al. (2003) posit that Western objective/analytical paradigm can be integrated with the Eastern subjective/interpretive paradigm to form a more comprehensive worldview in understanding workplace spirituality:

In pursuing knowledge, we can learn to be more patient in the process…the only way to really know what we are looking at is to see through both subjective and objective lenses, with all our senses and levels of
consciousness, and with humility. Humility will open new doors of understanding. (p. 402)

Broadening the field to be more inclusive of integrated approaches is advocated by some leaders in the field of study, with the idea that integration will bring deeper understanding to the topic (Benefiel, 2007).

My goal was to bring humility, curiosity, and appropriate inquiry to this phenomenon and subsequent multiple case study analysis of workplace spirituality. The next section of this dissertation outlines my philosophical worldview and details the study methodology.
Chapter 3
Methodology
Overview

The methodological approach of this study was informed by the research purpose and research questions. This phenomenological study was based on human capital theory as outlined by Becker (1993) and organizational commitment theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The study’s purpose was to more fully understand workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute with implications for employment retention and engagement. Utilizing multiple case study analysis, the goal was to better understand the workplace spirituality experience as expressed by the employees and human resource managers who participated. Interviews of participating employees, along with interviews of business owners and human resource managers, were utilized. In this chapter I will present my worldview, discuss the methodology for the study, ethical considerations, and my researcher positionality.

Worldview

The epistemology, or philosophical worldview, to which I subscribe is social constructivism. To understand the world around them, individuals “develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). In other words, social meanings are socially constructed, and researchers seek to understand the meaning. According to Creswell (2013), the social constructivism worldview leads the researcher to
examine the complexity of views instead of narrow meanings into limited
categories, and in this way the participants’ views of a situation inform the
research. As social constructivism is rooted in the individual experience, the
linkages to Becker’s human capital theory (1993), where individuals bring value to
the firm, is clearer to see. The linkage to organizational commitment theory
(Meyer & Allen, 1991) is also important to review, as organizational theory
describes the conditions under which employees are more likely to remain engaged
with the organization. Subsequently, the individual experience of spirituality is
brought into the collective environment of the workplace and can be evaluated
through the personal experiences to better understand relationships to employee
engagement and retention. The social constructivist approach focuses on “the
specific contexts in which people live and work to understand the historical and
cultural settings of the participants,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Thus, understanding
the context of workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute is necessary to
gain a clearer understanding of the value it may bring to an organization and the
impact it may have on employee retention and engagement. Ultimately, aligning
myself as a researcher to the social constructivist framework allowed me to
holistically understand individual components of larger phenomena.

**Organization of the Remainder of this Chapter**

The design of the study is described in the sections that comprise this
chapter. The first section of the chapter presents research questions and research
sub-questions. The second section of this chapter presents the research design
which includes an overview of phenomenological multiple case study analysis research, and the rationale for selecting phenomenological multiple case study analysis. The third section provides the rationale for selecting the participants for the study. The fourth section delineates the methods used for data collection, including the interview questions. The fifth section consists of how the data were analyzed.

**Research Questions and Research Sub-Questions**

The research questions for this study were designed to help the researcher understand the essence of the workplace spirituality experience as a human resource attribute and qualitatively explore its linkages to employee engagement and retention. The research questions to be explored were as follows:

1. How do spirituality components, as a human resources attribute of for-profit Central Florida workplaces with fewer than 100 employees, impact employee engagement?
   a. From the perspective of human resources managers, is employee engagement improved or hindered in connection with spirituality in the workplace?

2. Considering retention, why do employees choose to remain at workplaces with a spiritual component?
   a. What factors play a role in employee retention at workplaces where a spirituality component is incorporated?
The following section will further outline the methodology to explore the phenomenon of workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute.

**Methodology**

As researchers seek to better understand problems, they have many research methods that they may consider, each with its own logic and procedural requirements (Yin, 2014). Social sciences research frequently uses a range of research forms, including surveys, histories, economic modeling, and case studies, just to name a few. Yin (2014) described these as choices to be made, based on the particular needs of the research to be conducted. The development of a research study requires that the researcher must begin by identifying the relevant situation and then thinking carefully about a design (Yin, 2014). As highlighted in the previous section, workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute is connected to and impacts employee engagement and retention. The care taken in these initial steps was foundational to the next steps in the methodology, as careful attention was paid to how data were collected, analyzed, and summarized.

I chose to conduct a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach. Results are presented descriptively, reporting what participants shared during the interview process. Creswell (2013) metaphorically considers qualitative research as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of material,” (p. 42). Interpretative frameworks and generalized assumptions give cohesion to qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). This is necessary, given the flexible designs inherent to qualitative research (Maxwell,
2013). Maxwell (2013) stated “to design a qualitative study, you can’t just develop (or borrow) a logical strategy in advance and then implement it faithfully,” (2013, p. 3). Rather, the research design must be constructed and reconstructed, within an interactive model of goals, conceptual framework, methods, and validity, all simultaneously informed by and informing the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). A qualitative approach was particularly useful with regard to this study of workplace spirituality, as qualitative research addresses social and/or human problems (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) stated that this qualitative approach can include “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes,” (p. 44). The personal nature of workplace spirituality, and its implications for component parts to collectively affect the larger organization, further indicated that a qualitative approach would be most useful in understanding the workplace spirituality phenomenon in relation to employee engagement and retention.

**Research Design**

This study adhered to an embedded multiple case study design reflecting a multiple/collective approach to data collection and analysis. Stake (2006) defined a quintain as “an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied—a target, but not a bull’s eye. In multicase study, it is the target collection,” (p. 6). For this study, the quintain was identified as the workplace spirituality phenomenon, as experienced through 13 employee participants who contributed to the data. As
outlined in the following section, the objective was to understand the essence of those experiences, to bring clarity to the phenomenon’s manifestation. The quintain encompassed the overall phenomenon of workplace spirituality, of which the embedded cases featured as individual elements that were studied.

This embedded multicase study included subunit analysis, which in this context is the workplace spirituality experience of employees, and the activities associated with that experience (Yin, 2014). Embedded case studies focus on individuals’ actions as cases, and examines their roles. Here, the cases were the employees and the embedded cases were the human resource managers and owners. Given this, understanding the relational parts of a case in connection to its social context leads to an understanding of the whole (Stoecker, 1991). How individual employees participating in the spiritual components of the workplace influence and interact with the larger organization was important to ascertain as information was gathered concerning retention and engagement from a human resources perspective.

Sample

According to Stake (2006) “cases” can be defined as individual people. Thus, this study, according to the conceptualization of “cases” as put forth by Stake (2006), identified employees who participate in workplace spirituality components as “cases.” Given the phenomenon the research sought to explore, the researcher implemented data collection from two sets of population: (1) Employees who are currently or have participated in spirituality components of the workplace; (2)
Human resource managers/owners. Employees participating in the study met the following criteria: (1) employed by the business for at least one year, full or part-time; (2) actively participating in the spiritual components of the workplace; (3) at least 18 years old. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the employer and employees, and usually conducted at the workplace. The employee interviews were guided by the interview protocol (Appendix A). To better understand the embedded cases, there was a separate interview protocol for human resource managers and business owners (Appendix B). The sites were three for-profit businesses in Central Florida with fewer than approximately 100 employees each. The sample was employees from each business, 13 total, including one human resources manager/owner from each company. Additional employees who volunteered to be a part of the study were not turned away.

Sites

Three sites were explored, all in Central Florida: a seafood restaurant, a wealth management office, and a funeral home. Originally, a barbecue restaurant was considered for the study, but the owners were unresponsive to initial requests to participate. Therefore, the funeral home site was included instead, as it met the parameters of the study design. Pseudo names were used to protect confidentiality, and citations are intentionally omitted.

Southern Seafood. This Titusville, Florida based restaurant has been serving seafood since 1983. In fact, “The menu features the very best local shrimp and fish from Port Canaveral, Florida and ranges from low cost sandwiches and
baskets to high end seafood combos.” Family owned and operated, the business’s owners have been civically active in the community for decades, including supporting other non-profit activities, like church and school functions. Southern Seafood’s employee base fluctuates seasonally, but averages approximately 100 employees, both full and part-time.

Southern Seafood’s environment is that of a traditional, sit-down restaurant, with nautical décor and simple, wooden booths for much of the seating. Large windows look out upon a fish pond stocked with native fish and a covered, wooden walkway leads to the parking lot. Fish nets and paintings of the ocean and sea life adorn the walls. There are no overt symbols of spirituality represented in the restaurant dining area for patrons to observe.

**Bobby Bentley and Associates.** This private wealth advisory practice has been serving the Titusville, Florida area for more than 30 years. The practice focuses on retirement investments, life insurance, and estate planning strategies. Beneficiaries of the business’s civic engagement include Parrish Medical Center, Community Service Council, Titusville Area Chamber of Commerce, St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Masonic Lodge and Kiwanis Club. The practice has seven employees and operates one office based in Titusville, Florida.

The office environment of Bobby Bentley and Associates is that of a typical financial planning office, with understated, appealing décor and some wildlife paintings on the walls. The office is a former bank branch location, and the walk-in vault remains in the building, with the reception area adjacent to the vault. There
are no religious artifacts or other spirituality indicators visible in the office environment.

**Eternal Rest Funeral Home.** Founded in 1973, this locally-managed community funeral home serves eastern Central Florida and is the only local funeral home with a crematory on premises. It also operates a cemetery as part of the business. The funeral home’s mission is, in part, to offer “a comforting and inviting place to gather in remembrance and celebration of lives lived well.” The business has 30 employees.

The funeral home physical environment features numerous smaller reception areas for families and friends to gather for funerals or memorial services. The décor is like that of a private residence’s parlor of the early 20th century. Flowers adorn various tables and corners of the rooms. Spiritual artifacts are visible, but not overtly stated. There are no crosses or crucifixes, for example. Bibles are available, and art that fosters serenity and calm is also visible.

**Recruitment and Procedures**

Cases were selected on a volunteer basis. Criteria included current full and part-time employees who have been employed with the business for at least one year. “Selection of interview participants requires purposive and iterative strategies,” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 137). This is important as experience is the unit of analysis in qualitative research, not groups or individuals (Polkinghorne, 2005). Participants must be chosen with purpose, so that the researcher can maximize what they learn about the experience. Further, the process is iterative, as
it moves from data collection to analysis and back until a comprehensive
description may be constructed (Polkinghorne, 2005). Only employees who were
active participants in the spirituality components of the organization, and the
human resources managers/owners who oversee these workplace spirituality
elements, were the relevant participants to this study.

Data Collection

Criteria for selecting a case include (1) relevance to the quintain; (2)
diversity across contexts; (3) opportunity to better understand the complexity and
contexts (Stake, 2006). This was the core criteria informing my decision-making
related to the case selection.

At each of the three businesses I conducted individual interviews with the
employees, including one human resources manager or owner. Each was pre-
screened to determine fit with the study parameters, including involvement in
workplace spirituality components (Appendix C). Interviews were no longer than
one hour each. Follow-up interviews were available, but unneeded. After
receiving approval from Florida Tech’s Institutional Review Board, I sought
approval to conduct research from each of three business owners. I contacted
potential study participants via email and phone. Sample letters that were shared
with employees and human resource managers/owners are attached (Appendix D
and E). I introduced myself and described the purpose and objectives of the study.
Individual interviews with each of the 13 participants across the three businesses,
including one human resources manager/owner at each business, provided the data to be qualitatively coded and assessed.

**Employees.** The business employees were interviewed at a time convenient for them, at their place of work. No interview took longer than one hour. The employee interview protocol (Appendix A) was followed with supplemental questions added, if the situation warranted. Any additional information that the interviewee volunteers wished to share was also reviewed.

**Human Resources Managers/Owners.** The human resources managers and owners were interviewed at a time convenient for them, at their place of work. No interview took longer than one hour. The human resources manager/owner interview protocol (Appendix B) was followed with supplemental questions added, if the situation warranted. Any additional information that the interviewee volunteers wished to share was also reviewed.

**Data Analysis**

Effectively organizing data is critical to quality case study analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). I did not utilize data analysis software, rather, I closely followed the Stake (2006) guidelines to organize my data in hard copy form. This organization allowed better understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2006). My systematic organization of the data provided the basis for cross-case analysis, as further discussed in the next section.

The methodology I used for data analysis was multiple case study cross-case analysis. Stake (2006) described cross-case analysis as seeking the
understanding of the aggregate: “Given the binding concept—a theme, issue, phenomenon, or functional relationship that strings the cases together—the researchers have an obligation to provide interpretation across the cases,” (Stake, 2006, p. 39). The similarities of participants in this study, those engaging in work in a spiritually centered workplace, provided the phenomenon that strings the cases together.

This strategy necessitated careful review of details provided by the study participants, followed by data analysis for issues and themes. After the data were collected and transcribed by me, each case was read and an initial manual code was performed. The manual coding was not a formalized process, rather a process by which I reviewed the transcripts and manually highlight concepts, ideas, and themes that related to the research questions. I then reread the transcripts and the cases were assigned a number and by using the case studies cross-case analysis strategy, I maintained the case findings and situationality (Stake, 2006). The purpose for utilizing cross-case analysis was to determine, given the research questions, common themes across the cases pertaining to workplace spirituality.

After the data were initially coded and reread for confirmation of initial coding, I assigned pseudo names to each participant. It was after these steps had been completed that I began the process of multiple case study cross-case analysis. Stake (2006) provides several worksheets for multiple case study cross-case analysis. These templates can be modified for particular researcher scenarios (Stake, 2006). The worksheets (Appendices F-K) that I utilized, as developed by
Stake (2006), were as follows: (1) The Themes (Research Questions) of the Multicase Study; (2) Analyst’s Notes While Reading a Case Report; (3) Ratings of Expected Utility of Each Case for Each Theme; (4) A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions from Case Findings Rated Important; (5) Multicase Assertions for the Final Report; and (6) Planning the Multicase Final Report (Stake, 2006, pp. 43, 45, 49, 51, 73, 80).

The first worksheet “The Themes (Research Questions)” centers on theme identification. According to Stake (2006), the themes for this worksheet are the study proposal’s research questions. This worksheet helped the researcher to have the research questions in close proximity as the data were read. It was recommended that this particular worksheet remain at the side of the researcher at all times during the data analysis process (Stake, 2006).

The second worksheet, “Analyst’s Notes While Reading a Case Report,” emphasizes themes as related to cases. This worksheet assisted in case findings, theme findings, and unique aspects of each case (Stake, 2006). A separate worksheet was completed for each case. Findings specified in the case reports were identified here, and any situational constraints were noted (Stake, 2006). The commentary section of this worksheet was particularly important, functioning as a directory that could be revisited at a later time (Stake, 2006).

The third worksheet, “Ratings of Expected Utility of Each Case for Each Theme,” was utilized to record the rating given on the previous worksheet and
estimate theme utility (Stake, 2006). I then scanned the ratings and note the “highly relevant cases for each theme,” (Stake 2006, p. 48).

The fourth worksheet, “A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions from Case Findings Rated Important” assisted in beginning to visualize the multicase study as a whole (Stake, 2006). Individual cases were broken into findings, with themes assessed across the findings. Rating assignments of “H” for high importance, “M” for middling importance, and “L” for low importance were utilized (Stake, 2006, p. 51). This process informed later assertions to be made.

At this point, as recommended by Stake (2006), finding strips were utilized to sort findings (Figure 3). The finding strip data were modified to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to better manage analysis.

*Figure 3. Example: Findings strip.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Case ID</th>
<th>Finding(s)</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fifth worksheet, “Multicase Assertions for the Final Report” utilized transferred information from the previous worksheet. Assertions were listed in numerical order on the worksheet, with the objective to discover which findings fed into which themes (Stake, 2006, p. 54). Assertions were ranked. I reviewed the finding strips as they related to each theme to accomplish this. Each theme was sorted based on ranking, in keeping with how well it adds to the understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2006). I then composed assertions designed to help understand each theme. A “bypass” label (BYP) was applied to each with an assertion to be
included, and moved to the next worksheet (Stake, 2006). Tentative assertions were then made, based on a theme. I next inserted assertions and assigned assertions with numbers, CCA (cross-case assertions), and BYP (bypass) (Stake, 2006, p. 55).

After these five worksheets were completed, I began to evaluate cross-case assertions. Some researchers would say that you evaluate and notate data throughout the process, not just at this point. Stake (2006) referred to this step in the process as requiring interpretation to better understand the quintain (2006). Given this, I reviewed the previous worksheet to determine if more assertions needed to be added, and if so, from which case. I also ranked the assertions based on importance to the quintain. This assisted in preparation for the final worksheet and the final report development.

The primary strength of utilizing cross-case analysis is to find similarities among the cases (Stake, 2006). The aforementioned process was designed to thematically trace any linkages between the cases as they related to workplace spirituality. This qualitatively provided a clearer picture of the phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

It is incumbent upon researchers to take appropriate steps to ensure ethical behavior in research (Creswell, 2013). Procedures involving informed consent, avoiding deceptive activities, and maintain confidentiality are key considerations to address in the data collection phase of research (Creswell, 2013). Further, “a qualitative researcher conveys to participants that they are participating in a study,
explains the purpose of the study, and does not engage in deception about the
nature of the study,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 174). As outlined in this chapter, steps
were taken to provide informed consent. No deceptive tactics were utilized, as the
nature and scope of the study was explained to each participant. Further,
confidentiality was ensured as pseudo names were employed.

**Researcher Positionality**

I was raised in a Christian home and have been a Christian my entire life. My wife and I are active in the United Methodist Church, and are raising our twin children, now 13 years old, in a Christian home. My spiritual journey as a Christian has taught me thus far that there are many disagreements and misunderstandings regarding people of faith. Chief among those misunderstandings is the perspective that some non-church goers have that all Christians are judgmental, hypocritical, and cliquish. While some Christians may behave in this way on occasion, these are not the tenets of Christianity. Christians are human, and fully capable of human fallacy.

My impression is that there is also a growing distrust, and in some cases disdain, for organized religion. The church has failed over the course of the last generation to attract and engage with young adults. If organized religion is to survive, it must adapt, and attempt to demonstrate relevance to a generation that doesn’t feel organized religion adds value to daily life. As a member of the so-called generation x, sandwiched between the millennials and the baby boomers, this trend is concerning.
As a follower of Jesus, my personal spirituality is rooted in Christian teachings. However, throughout my adult years, I have been blessed with warm experiences as I have interacted with people of differing beliefs. This has taught me that there are many perspectives of spirituality that are deeply felt and personally meaningful. Indeed, the personal nature of spirituality means that it must come from within, and then connect to something larger, whatever that something may be. That concept of connectedness intrigues me, and was one of the primary reasons that I wished to explore this line of inquiry.

**Validity**

A pilot study is a smaller version of a planned, larger study, and often helps guide the research plan’s development (Sampson, 2004). The pilot study helps to determine if the methods detailed in the larger study will work in practice (Sampson, 2004). I contacted two colleagues who agreed to answer workplace spirituality questions. The pilot included a practice of the employee interview protocol and resulted in two practice interviews. Conducting these pilot study interviews assisted me with interview time management, the conversational flow of the interview protocol, and allowed me to receive interviewee feedback regarding the utility of the questions. I reflected upon the practice interviews in my research journal, but did not use their results for data analysis.

**Researcher Credibility, Rapport and Trustworthiness**

Upon completion of data collection, I followed up with participants via email to see if they had questions or wished to provide additional information. This
member-checking was an additional step to seek relevant input from the study participants. I provided my contact information to the employers, and employees who participated, should questions arise later. Additionally, as it related to rapport and trustworthiness, I was flexible with participants. I sought to provide a comfortable and confidential experience as they participated in this study.

**Chapter Summary**

Given the increase of spirituality in America, the high costs of retaining quality employees, and the importance of effective employee engagement, the importance of the type of research conducted here becomes easier to understand. Better understanding the workplace spirituality experience through a case study design has possibilities of adding clarity to an area of inquiry that is still in its early days. Indeed, “case studies are typically carried out in close interaction with practitioners, and they deal with real management situations,” (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008, p. 1465). The opportunity to bring insight into a complex issue for practitioners was a privilege.

I was further mindful of the sensitivity of the topic, and the importance of faithfully representing the perspectives I encountered through this multiple case study methodology:

The research methods we often employ in contemporary case study research provide a moral obligation to focus enough of our attention on the case to inform those who are living it. The moral obligation results from the nuisance we make of ourselves and the time we take up asking questions.
and interviewing. We should be able to provide something in return. By employing effective case study technique, we also cannot help having an impact on those who live the case and it behooves us to make our impact conscious and helpful. (Stoecker, 1991, p. 100)

The goal was for this work to be impactful and helpful to practitioners. The opportunity to offer a contribution made the effort and energy required even more worthwhile.
Chapter 4
Findings
Overview

The findings from this research contribute to a more thorough understanding of the employee retention and engagement implications that workplace spirituality brings to for-profit workplaces, with relevance for human resources managers and business owners. Findings indicated that the participants, while working in three distinctly different types of businesses, demonstrated commonality of thought and practice in matters of workplace spirituality. Even as there are differing work expectations and conventions in a seafood restaurant, a wealth management office, and a funeral home, there are shared aspects when viewed through a workplace spirituality lens. Inherent in the findings of this study are lessons for controlling personnel costs and positively impacting profitability. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these findings and explore the shared aspects in greater detail.

Though deeply personal to each individual, the common components of employees’ workplace spirituality experiences present intriguing examples of the phenomenon. Shared themes of co-worker camaraderie, community partnership, and customer respect were expressed. Further, a willingness to “go above and beyond” in the workplace as well as an inclination to not leave the employer for other opportunities were indicated. These findings offer valuable perspective to
human resources managers considering workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute, as well as to business owners concerned about improving profitability.

This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) participant profiles, and (2) findings from the multiple cross-case analysis. The first section presents a brief description of the workplace spirituality participants in profile. These profiles highlight the aspects of spirituality in the workplace that are personally meaningful for each of them, while also exploring the common themes that emerged across the work sites and individual cases. The second section focuses on the cross-case analysis among the participants. The goal of utilizing cross case analysis was to better explore any commonalities among the employees interviewed. As the aggregate data is interpreted across the cases, I demonstrate its relationship to the quintain, the workplace spirituality phenomenon.

**Spirituality in the Workplace Profiles**

Multiple case study analysis provides a useful framework for this study as it respects the qualitative nature of the experience and the context within which it occurs (Stake, 2006). Participant profiles emerged from the methodology that included cold coding of interviews, transcript analysis, and individual case report development and review as part of the multiple case study analysis process (Stake, 2006). This methodology created multiple entry points for immersion in the data.

Before I delve into the cross-case analysis and the workplace spirituality-related insights that were revealed, it is important to better understand the personal perspectives and contexts of each of the study participants. The highly personal
nature of workplace spirituality makes this useful, and allows individual voices to be distinctly heard. The following section presents these perspectives in the form of participant profiles, to better understand how each individual enters the discussion of workplace spirituality. With the inclusion of direct quotations, participant voices are represented in their own words to add context and useful anecdotes.

Betty Sue (E100)

Profile. Betty Sue is the retired founder of the Southern Seafood restaurant and a lifelong member of her community and local church. Her Central Florida dining establishment opened to serve seafood in 1983, and is regionally famous for its rock shrimp. Betty Sue founded the restaurant with her husband, now deceased, as a 48-seat café with a fish market, and the business remains family-run by her daughter, Leigh. Now, the restaurant is 465 seats and employs as many as approximately 120-130 workers depending on the season, predominately part-time. Over the past four decades, the business has remained actively involved in the local community, regularly sponsoring student and teacher gift certificate programs for local schools. Betty Sue said that, for several years, the restaurant was open on Thanksgiving and offered free meals for the needy, until local churches stepped in to provide this holiday outreach. “All the staff was always so willing to help with that and be a part of it,” she said. Restaurant employees willingly signed up to work on this holiday to serve these meals, even when it meant they had to be away from their own families on Thanksgiving, an indication of the workplace culture
that the family sought to foster. Betty Sue described herself as a spiritual person, and indicated that the family business was founded from that perspective, without seeking to artificially impose the family’s spiritual convictions on anyone who might be adverse, whether they be employee or customer. “We just lived with our beliefs,” she said, “And never pushed religion or anything on anybody. We just were there to try to do the right thing and be an example.”

Betty Sue was interviewed with her daughter, Leigh, at her home, where her back room had served for many years as a personnel office for the family restaurant. She expressed satisfaction that Southern Seafood had remained a spiritually-minded business example in the community, and pride that her daughter, Leigh, was continuing that tradition and expanding it in new ways.

Leigh (E107)

Profile. Leigh is the owner/operator of the Southern Seafood restaurant that was started by her parents 34 years ago. She acknowledged a continuation of her parents’ philosophy from when they originally founded the business. While she did not indicate an overtly spiritual approach to her personal management of the restaurant, she did affirm her commitment to ecological outreach in the community, sponsored by the restaurant. For example, she discussed the seagrass restoration effort that the restaurant was funding for the local lagoon, in collaboration with the community zoo and the local university. She highlighted that the restaurant had purchased all-terrain vehicles for seashore park rangers so they could better monitor sea turtle nesting. Leigh discussed a birding festival backed by the
restaurant for several years that is designed to increase the appreciation for the nearby natural habitat. She is also active on national advisory groups as an advocate for sustainable fishing practices. These “creation care” commitments demonstrate an environmental stewardship role for the business that transcends the day-to-day functioning of the restaurant and its for-profit mission, and aligns with commitment to a deeper purpose beyond the typical for-profit business model. “You always want to try to do the right thing and the community supports the restaurant, they come and eat and spend their money there, so we want to be able to give back to the community,” Leigh said.

Leigh further expressed that she felt the restaurant’s approach to community engagement and the work environment it fostered was attractive to prospective employees, and an enticement for existing employees to stay. “It just spills over into our philosophy,” Leigh said. “Our servers are really proud that we support sustainable fisheries.”

Louise (E111)

Profile. Louise has worked as a server at the Southern Seafood restaurant for 25 years. She described the staff as a big family, and remained at the restaurant even when her ex-husband encouraged her to “get a real job.” “I have a real job,” she told him, happy with the flexibility that working at the restaurant provided her, allowing her to be available for functions at her children’s school. Additionally, she discussed how the restaurant’s owner encouraged her to expand her
professional skills, by loaning her the money to go to dental assistant school when she couldn’t afford the tuition.

“[The owner] gave me the money right there,” she said. “And he said, ‘you need to go do that.’” He allowed Louise to repay the loan at $10 and $20 a week. “And so I went,” she said. “It doesn't get any better than that.”

Louise described herself as a spiritual person who believes “What you give out, you get back,” and “If you do good, you get good…You kind of stay on the straight and narrow ‘cause every action has a reaction,” she added. “You just do what you're supposed to do.”

Louise acknowledged that she felt her colleagues had a spiritual component as well, and highlighted the camaraderie that they shared in working together to do whatever restaurant tasks needed to be accomplished. From washing dishes to cleaning toilets, Louise said the owners modeled that sense of teamwork.

Marsha (E117)

Profile. Marsha has managed human resources functions for Southern Seafood for more than 20 years, and is preparing to retire. She ascribed the spiritual components of the workplace to being rooted in an intuitive fairness and a family-like atmosphere. Marsha also noted camaraderie as a key component to the workplace’s retention, noting that many of the employees could trace their employment back five, 10 or 15-plus years.

Marsha highlighted the community involvement element of the restaurant’s business as integral to employee engagement and retention. The annual
Thanksgiving dinner that the restaurant served to the needy was an example of this important involvement. “[We employees] put off our Thanksgiving because that’s what you do, you help those that need the help, and in need,” She said. “And it was just intuitive to reach out. They never complained that they were here at nine in the morning, getting tables set, and so forth. That’s just the way.” Marsha said that she felt the community reacted positively to this attitude, too. “I think a lot of people are attracted to the [the ownership family] in that area, they know this has happened in the past.”

Marsha said that the fairness and equality modeled by the management was an important part of the restaurant’s staffing philosophy. “I think staff live by example, too,” she said. “They see your heart’s in it, and you’re working hard.” She said that ethic translated into better engagement for employees.

Kristin (E123)

Profile. Kristin assists in the human resources office for Southern Seafood. Having started as a server, she is a younger member of the team, a millennial, working at the restaurant for five years. He family has known the restaurant’s founding family for many years. When discussing the spiritual culture of the workplace, Kristin pointed to the fairness that was attractive to prospective employees, earned by a good reputation in the community. “So not just from the advertising standpoint, they also know people that have worked here and the people have said good things about it and they want a job here, too,” she said. Further, she said the flexibility that the restaurant managers exercised when scheduling younger
workers who were still in school was an attractive aspect of working at the restaurant, and was a definite attraction to employees in her age group.

Kristin also indicated that she had a sense of pride in the environmental stewardship role that the restaurant’s owner, Leigh, plays in the community, and how that reflects on the workplace. The environmental efforts the she’s proud of include the restaurant sponsoring activities to restore the nearby lagoon as well as partnering with the local university to study the lagoon’s ecology. “It instills a sense of pride,” she said. “I am glad I work here. I'm glad I work around such people that are giving back. It's awesome.”

**Bobby (E140)**

**Profile.** Bobby has led the wealth advising office of Bobby Bentley and Associates for 23 years. He has been in town all his life, his family previously owning a furniture store in the community. Bobby employs eight staff who deliver a range of services, from clerical support to investment advising for clients. Given the small size of Bobby’s office, he also serves as the de facto human resources manager. “The Golden Rule is the primary objective here,” Bobby said. “It has to flow from the top down. Lead by example.”

To those ends, Bobby is very involved in his local church assisting youth, while also serving as a mentor and supporter of people experiencing homelessness in the community. “What a man does for himself dies with him,” Bobby said. “What a man does for his community lives forever.” Bobby’s perspective is that there are always opportunities to do more for those in need, but people do not
consistently avail themselves of opportunity to help. He personally challenges himself to do more for others daily, as inspired by her personal spiritual beliefs.

Bobby has lunch catered into his office every day, as an opportunity for fellowship and engagement among his employees. A prayer for the meal is usually shared, and it is an opportunity for the staff to connect on a more personal level.

“We eat as a family—meals on a daily basis,” he said. “Retention, camaraderie, that is the key. When you are sharing and breaking bread with somebody on a daily basis, you know their thoughts,” he said. Bobby said those discussions form the core of camaraderie that can assist in employee engagement and retention.

“And that’s what builds a true workplace environment,” he said. “You know, eating bread with someone, discussing their hardships, that is why we have a team here.”

Laurel (E145)

Profile. Laurel has worked full-time as an associate at the Bobby Bentley and Associates wealth advising office for 18 years. She is currently the office manager, and worked with Bobby in his previous business. Laurel said that her sense of spirituality is uplifting to her, and deeply felt. Laurel said that she has appreciated during her time working for Bobby that he brings a spiritual core to the workplace, but also appreciates that he does not force his beliefs on others. “It's just very personal. I don't like to get into battles with people over religion,” Laurel said. “I have never been confrontational with anyone about it, because I feel like everyone has their own personal journey and that's the way I perceive it.”
Laurel noted that the daily, catered lunches for staff were a good example of the quiet, spiritual approach that Bobby takes to supporting the spiritual core of the office, giving the employees an important time of fellowship during a hectic work day, keeping them engaged with one another and their responsibilities. Further, she explained that the spiritual component to the workplace also engendered a sense of comfort that she felt translated positively to the customers, and enhanced their experiences with the office staff.

Laurel said that the undercurrent of a spiritual tone in the workplace did make her more likely to remain in Bobby’s employ, creating a positive office climate. “I can't imagine working somewhere else right now,” she said. “I can imagine what it must be like out there.”

**Todd (E147)**

**Profile.** Todd has worked part-time at the Bobby Bentley and Associates wealth advising office for 14 years, coordinating the internal financial operations of the business. He spent many years in the health care industry prior to retiring as a hospital administrator. He began working with Bobby after that retirement, to keep busy and contribute to the work environment. He indicates he works because he enjoys it. Bobby had previously been Todd’s financial advisor when he was working full-time at the hospital, and Todd appreciated Bobby’s ethics and approach to business.

Todd indicated that his view of spirituality encompassed a broader definition linked to personal growth and development. “Some examples of
spirituality that are nonreligious include finding strength, peace, or a sense of vitality in nature,” Todd said. “I certainly do that.” He did not necessarily equate spirituality with religion.

Todd indicated that Bobby, his business, and his employees demonstrate the spiritual component evident in their workplace in the way that they treat their clients. He said that Bobby’s ethical treatment of clients, and his commitment to his community, demonstrates his spirituality in tangible ways. Todd said these ways can be good for business. “I think the fact that [Bobby] is as successful as he is, I think has a lot to do with the employees helping him,” Todd said. “Yeah, he's a good salesman…[but] he can't do it alone. And he knows that.”

Roger (E152)

Profile. Roger has worked full-time at the Bobby Bentley and Associates financial planning office as a financial advisor for one year. He previously had a 20-year career as a construction contractor, and returned to school to become a financial advisor after Bobby offered him a job. Roger identified himself as a strongly spiritual person, rooted in his religious belief in a higher power. “It's the whole reason you get up every morning,” Roger said. “It's the whole reason that you can take those opportunities that are presented to you and have some anchor knowing that there's something that's going to work out on the other end. It's that ability to step out with not really knowing.”

Roger said that the spiritual tone set by Bobby for the workplace was good for business, and good for its clients. “In this particular business, you have a lot of
opportunities,” he said. “You can exploit those opportunities or you can look more towards what's better for the client. And so…every advisor here makes that choice every time they make a decision for the client. ‘Do I do what's best for me or do I do what's best for the client?’ And so, having that spiritual component involved hopefully we're always making the choice that's better for the other person.” Roger said that the tone set by Bobby was one that he enjoyed and related to in his first year of working as part of the practice, and inspired him to want to stay.

Tommy (E161)

Profile. Tommy has worked at Eternal Rest Funeral Home for 15 years, and currently is the managing partner of the operation. He supervises 30 employees, and manages all of the on-site human resources functions for the business, including hiring and employee coaching. Tommy said that his spirituality is important to him because it gives him a sense of direction as he makes difficult business decisions every day. He said that the sense of spirituality that permeates his workplace is integral, given the nature of his business. “I would say when somebody comes to us hurting because they’ve just lost someone, our funeral director, no matter what their own personal spirituality is, they have to have an understanding and empathy for everyone’s spirituality and be able to gauge why they think certain ways and be able to make recommendations to them,” Tommy said. He further indicated that the nature of his business, in his view, attracts prospective employees who already have a spiritual component to their lives.
Tommy said that the spiritual nature of his workplace enhances employee engagement and retention. He indicated that it was particularly useful given the almost daily interactions with clergy, as funeral services are planned and conducted. “[Our workplace spiritual core] helps me to recognize when [employees are] doing the right things or the wrong things, and to coach to that,” he said. “And I can just be careful with my words, knowing that whatever I see or don’t see, or if we need change, knowing that their spiritual background would support it.” He added: “There’s a way that I can present it, completely legal, HR and otherwise, that I know they will understand, and they will know that I understand that it’ll kind of put us on the same level playing field.”

Karen (E168)

Profile. Karen has worked part-time with Eternal Rest Funeral Home for 18 years, providing subcontracted floral services. Her position was unique among the other participants because she is both a part-time, contracted employee with the funeral home while also owning and operating her own floral shop. Karen said that her personal sense of spirituality improves her ability to deliver services to her funeral home clients, and self-identifies as deeply religious. She has, in the past, led Bible study in her floral shop for her employees.

“I feel like I probably have a different take on funerals than most florists do, because I am a Christian,” she said. “I’m ministry-minded so it’s a little bit of a ministry for me that I can talk to that family—especially if I know that they are
Christians—and remind them of that blessed hope that we have, and while I’m doing that I feel like it is a bit of a testimony to my employees.”

Karen said that the sense of spirituality at the funeral home positively impacts its clients. “It’s a different place than the average funeral home where it’s all just cut and dry business,” she said. “You feel the connection that they have with you when you go in there.” She added: “There are some, you know funeral homes, that are not Christians and it’s very obvious to me in the differences of their work ethic and whether you can hold them at their word and that is not always true and with [this funeral home].”

Roy (E172)

Profile. Roy has worked part-time at Eternal Rest Funeral Home for three years, serving primarily as a family liaison during funeral services. A retired Baptist minister, he brings more than three decades of pastoral care experience to the position. He gains fulfillment from the pastoral-type role he plays at the funeral home, greeting families during evening visitations and helping to provide hospitality and support during that time of grieving. He said the spiritual nature of this business it intuitive. “Well it’s about death, so there’s your spiritual component,” he said. “It’s built in. Someone who is in the business can ignore that, but I don’t think that would make it as good of a business.”

Roy said the spiritual tone set by the funeral home leaders is good for the business and its clients. “Several of the key employees, the funeral directors, are devout believers and they are also of long experience in this business so they have
the necessary tact and restraint,” Roy said. “They are not evangelists but they have something in common with almost every pastor I’ve ever met. They are smart men and they could do well in any endeavor but they wanted to do this because they wanted to help people.”

Roy noted that compassion, and a willingness to offer comfort with a caring attitude, were integral to the business’s practice. He said that this employee outreach to clients improves employee engagement. “Communication is a big part of it,” he said. “They are able to show their empathy. It’s freedom. They don’t worry about somebody looking over their shoulder. If you can’t be compassionate in this business, you don’t have any business in this business.”

Samantha (E181)

Profile. Samantha has worked at Eternal Rest Funeral Home for four years, serving as the full-time office manager for the cemetery grounds that are also owned by the funeral home. Self-described as a spiritual person, Samantha previously worked in the corporate environment, but felt she was not allowed to express that side of her life in her workplace. “I worked for a huge corporation and we had a little prayer group that would get together,” she said. “And then it got cut off by corporate because we were using emails back and forth to [send] Psalms.” This previous work experience was a source of frustration for her, and has led to an added sense of appreciation for the more spiritually-accepting environment of the funeral home.
Working with the funeral home, she said she is supported in demonstrating her spirituality, particularly when she is dealing with families whose loved ones have recently died. She said that the compassion and empathy that her business demonstrates is one of the key ways that spirituality is expressed. “I try to just encourage them,” Samantha said. “Listen to what they have to say.” She said that this practice of encouragement also encouraged her, and made her more likely to remain employed at the business.

Samantha described her role at the funeral home’s cemetery as often being one of counselor, and a good fit for her empathetic nature. She said remaining compassionate remains key through the grieving process. “I try to just encourage them,” she said. “Encourage. Listen to what they have to say. Like a counselor.”

The participant profiles provided useful insight into the individual perspectives of employees across the three businesses that were part of the study. Each participant contributed to the findings as they shared their thoughts on workplace spirituality. The purpose of developing these profiles was to illuminate the unique viewpoints of each participant in relation to spirituality in the workplace. With these profiles established, I move next to identification and examination of commonalities existing in their workplace spirituality experiences.

**Cross-Case Analysis**

Multiple findings emerged from the cross-case analysis. Four important extensions to current literature were noted, providing a clearer understanding of how spirituality in the workplace can impact employee engagement and retention.
First, the cross-case analysis highlighted an ethical core as a key component. Second, camaraderie and interpersonal connections emerged as important elements. Third, customer care and commitment were revealed as elemental to the spiritual workplace experience. Fourth, community involvement was described as an important component. The following section reviews these findings in detail and discusses individual perspectives of workplace spirituality as a lived experience, impacting employee engagement and retention.

**Engagement, Retention, and Spirituality**

All the study participants expressed some level of connection between workplace spirituality components and employee engagement and retention. The degree to which each participant felt this connection varied from person to person and workplace to workplace, but common themes emerged. Human resources managers and business owners most often articulated this connection from a managerial standpoint. As each participant described their personal experiences, they shared their perspectives on where the connections were most strongly felt by them.

Karen at Eternal Rest Funeral Home said her engagement was strongly tied to her personal spirituality. “A lot of people call it a good work ethic but I think it is beyond that,” she said. “I think it is a part of their [spiritual] testimony.”

Laurel at Bobby Bentley and Associates wealth management office said her supervisor’s spiritual approach to management was key to her retainment. “If he had not been that way, I don't know that I could've stayed that long,” she said. “If
he had not had his strong beliefs and the way that he takes care of people, not just clients, people. I wouldn't have wanted to stay. Yes, that definitely keeps me here...” Roger, also employed by Bobby Bentley and Associates, agreed that spirituality evidenced in his workplace affected his retention and engagement at the wealth management office, stating:

You can't help but be affected by that. You can't help but be encouraged by that. I mean, in the absence of light there's darkness. And I would think it would be the other way around in a non-spiritual workplace environment. Then, what's there to incentivize or to encourage you other than numbers? Roger continued: “If you are spiritual then you're called to live out your spirituality. I mean, that goes back to the basics,” he said. “If you truly believe it, then you live it. If you live it, then you can't turn it off when you walk through the office doors.”

Louise at the Southern Seafood restaurant said that retention is noticed by restaurant customers, usually coming to light after compliments are paid for good service:

It's a hard job, but it's a great place and you wouldn't hear me say one bad thing about anything. When we do have people, I'll have customers and they're like, “Oh, you're really good,” and I'm like, “Oh, I’ve been here a long time,” and so they usually always ask how long. And when I say, “Like 25 years,” they’re like, “Wow, must be a good place to work.” And
I’m like, “It is.” And like I said, for a lot of us that have worked here that long, it says something.

Betty Sue, who founded the seafood restaurant, said that when you invest in people, it benefits their engagement with the business. “They’re going to work a little bit harder and do a better job,” she said. “Have more pride in it.”

Tommy, who manages the funeral home, including its human resources functions, said that the spiritual core at his business aids him in directing employee actions. He reported this as a benefit to employee engagement and retention:

[Our workplace spiritual core] helps me to recognize when [employees are] doing the right things or the wrong things, and to coach to that. And I can just be careful with my words, knowing that whatever I see or don’t see, or if we need change, knowing that their spiritual background would support it. There’s a way that I can present it, completely legal, HR and otherwise, that I know they will understand, and they will know that I understand that it’ll kind of put us on the same level playing field.

Roy said employee engagement and retention at the funeral home were closely related to the freedom given to express their spirituality without fear of reprisal:

They are able to show their empathy. It’s freedom. They don’t worry about somebody looking over their shoulder. If you can’t be compassionate in this business, you don’t have any business in this business. And who are the most compassionate people? It’s faith people. And the employees here tend to be long term…
These findings indicated that a spiritual workplace impacts employee engagement and retention on multiple levels. These sentiments were expressed by business owners, human resources managers, and employees. From belief in a higher power that equates to a strong work ethic, to customer recognition of higher quality service, to a freedom to express a spiritually-centered empathy with clients, all were identified as relating to the workplace spirituality experience. I will now explore related components in greater detail, to better understand the nuances of that experience and implications for employee engagement and retention that ultimately impact profitability.

**Ethical Core as an Integral Component**

Employees in each workplace identified an ethical core as a central component to how spirituality was expressed in daily business dealings. A reference to a commonly known Biblical teaching was most often used as an example of this: “Do to others what you want them to do to you…This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets” (Matthew 7:12, The New Century Version). When study participants referenced this Bible passage, they expressed it as a guiding principle.

“The Golden Rule is the primary objective here,” Bobby said of his work leading the Bobby Bentley and Associates wealth management office. “It has to flow from the top down. Lead by example,” he said. As he sets the tone for his workplace and manages the human resources functions, Bobby said he is careful to
be respectful of individual spiritual perspectives, while also holding dear his own personal convictions. He stated:

All in my opinion comes from the Lord. Everything you are, blessed by Him. One of the problems I see in the workplace is that we have to walk a very fine line. As far as when I am working with my employees, they have to sense my values. I cannot openly discuss religion or spirituality because of constraints but they have to see the value is inside me to do the right thing. And after 23 years, a majority of my employees have been here for a long time, you begin to grow and know the values system.

Laurel, having worked for Bobby at the wealth management office for 18 years, said that ethical component permeates all the office activities. “I think most clients that come in, especially the ones that have been here for a very long time, I feel like they know that [Bobby] comes from a religious background,” she said. “And he doesn't again have to say anything to people. He definitely lives by example.” Laurel added that these ethical values are integral to how the wealth management office functions:

I can honestly sit here and tell any client about how this office is based upon honesty. That's huge in this business. That we will always try to do the right thing by you. And I tell them that about [Bobby]. He is made of a different cloth from most advisors. Yes, you may not like what he says when he plays “Father [Bobby],” he may tell [clients] “You know you can’t afford to get a new car, you shouldn't.” My gosh, how many people can tell
you that? How many people can tell you no? Most people want to say yes to you so that they have your business. He's not that way.

Laurel said that Bobby Bentley and Associates has become known and celebrated for this ethical attitude after two decades of business, making it one of the affiliates with the largest client bases for an office of its size. This impacts the business’s profitability.

At the Eternal Rest Funeral Home, spirituality also contributes to an ethical core that informs interactions with clients as well as employees. Tommy, who is managing partner of the funeral home, stated:

My spirituality, it gives me kind of a set of guidelines that I can follow that helps me and I’m—in a way, my only job, you know we all have job titles and things like that, but my job is very, very much based on making decisions. And so, everyone has a different way of making decisions, but I think that’s something that in my job I have to—I can always no matter what the situation try to pull myself out of it, try to pull the people involved out of it, and think of why we’re here, what we’re doing and the right direction to go in any—and I just do that 20 times a day.

Tommy added that this ethical approach to business is difficult to precisely define, but acknowledged that it is closely linked to the spiritual basis upon which the funeral home operates. Without it, he said, employees are not retained or engaged with their work in ways that benefit the business’ longevity:
Doing the right thing and saying the right thing are some of the most important key factors of when I hire somebody. So, when I hire somebody that’s maybe recently out of high school or a college kid or something like that, and I have to think about how they’re going to be when they were woken up at 3 o’clock in the morning and had to drive out to a residence where somebody had passed away, and they’re speaking to the 80-year-old wife or husband, before the funeral directors even were woken up or knew that it happened. So when I’m hiring, or when we’re looking at who we’re going to bring on, kind of their person, or that thing that you can’t really put your finger on of what it is.

Tommy said he believes this intangible element is rooted in a spiritual connection, something that comes from outside one’s self. With it, he said, employees perform at a higher level, and are more inclined to engage with clients in meaningful ways that are both courteous and deeply meaningful. He stated:

One specific example sticks out, is I had a—he doesn’t work for us anymore—he was a great guy, very young kid, just out of high school and then college age. Whenever he saw a little old lady by herself, he walked her wherever she was going. If it was down to the seat at the front of the chapel, he would leave the front door for her and go do that. Somebody taught him how to do that. It wasn’t us, but that’s the kind of example of “Hey, that’s the thing I can’t teach,” or “This guy’s got the thing I can’t teach.”
Karen, who has worked with other funeral homes in her role as a subcontracted florist, said the ethical difference between Eternal Rest Funeral Home and others is easy to see for employees and clients. She said that an ethical core is clearly displayed:

There are some, you know funeral homes, that are not Christians and it’s very obvious to me in the differences of their work ethic and whether you can hold them at their word and that is not always true and with [this funeral home] I’ve never had them lie to me that I am aware of, if they say they are going to do something I take them at their word and I know that I can believe them.

While Karen ascribes a Christian attachment to the funeral home’s ethical component, Roy, having worked part-time at the funeral home for three years, acknowledged that the root of the attitude could come from a wider spiritual perspective:

That’s just a thing they want to do and for some people it comes out of a deep faith, for other people it’s something they picked up somewhere. They may not have a deep faith or their faith isn’t formalized, they’re not regular at church or synagogue or at the mosque but they have picked that up and they want to help people. It makes a difference, it really does.

Similarly, the management and staff of the Southern Seafood restaurant saw an ethical core as central to any spiritual description of their interactions and motivations. Louise, a longtime server at the restaurant, described herself as a
spiritual person who believes “What you give out, you get back,” and “If you do good, you get good…You kind of stay on the straight and narrow ‘cause every action has a reaction,” she added. “You just do what you're supposed to do.”

The founder of the restaurant, Betty Sue, said this ethical core shared throughout the staff was not necessarily developed to advance any singular religious perspective. Rather, the idea was treat employees and customers alike fairly and be an ethical example for all. “We just lived with our beliefs,” Betty Sue said, “And never pushed religion or anything on anybody. We just were there to try to do the right thing and be an example.”

Betty Sue’s daughter, Leigh, the current owner and operator of the seafood restaurant, agreed that the concept of treating others fairly was the best description of the business’s approach to all its activities, and was the lens through which it should be judged. She said the restaurant’s founding family has long been concerned about much more than simply running a successful restaurant, with many years of actively seeking to improve the marine environment:

It just spills over into our philosophy. Our servers are really proud that we support sustainable fisheries, and that we support American fishermen and we don’t serve imported pond-grown shrimp, and that we work with the National Marine Fisheries Service and NOAA, on the committees that my sister and her son are on, all the work—it started with Dad, he was on the original Deep Water Shrimp Advisory Panel, which I sit on now in his place. We were—my parents, Mom and Dad went to tons of meetings in
the 1990’s and led the rock shrimp industry to create the first fisheries
management plan that the fishermen actually participated in for the rock
shrimp industry when overfishing was occurring and we were having some
destruction of the off-shore reef. They made some enemies at the time, but
it’s turned out that they were right. Again, it goes back to doing what’s
right. You shouldn’t be dragging chains through a coral reef. Which is
what the scallopers were doing. You do what’s right.

The ethical core of the spiritual workplace appears to be inextricably linked
to understanding the phenomenon. The idea of treating others as one would like to
be treated, doing what’s right, or otherwise treating people with an empathetic
attitude clearly permeated conversations at all three workplaces. This concept
consistently arose relating to the discussion of employee engagement and retention,
very much as an overarching ideal that was central to the conversation with
tangible implications for human resources managers seeking to better manage
personnel turnover costs.

Camaraderie and Interpersonal Connection

The relational nature of spiritual workplaces was another commonality that
provides insight into understanding the experience. In each business studied,
relationships with co-workers as well as clients or customers was described as
important to understanding employee engagement and retention. Words like
“camaraderie” and “family” were repeatedly used to describe this aspect of the
workplace, and were typically discussed in positive terms.
At Eternal Rest Funeral Home, Tommy, the managing partner and manager of the business’s human resources function, said the nature of his business can attract a type of employee that naturally gravitates toward a position that requires good, interpersonal connection skills. From that basis, is in an easier job to build camaraderie and teamwork:

I actually think the spirituality part of my job actually attracts the right people, or attracts people that are spiritual. My job—I can’t imagine my job not being spiritual, because it would be very depressing. And a lot of people—when I find people that aren’t spiritual, people assume my job is very depressing. My job is not depressing. My job is absolutely one of the most fulfilling things I’ve ever—I mean, one of the most fulfilling parts of my life has been my job. And, for that reason I have on my staff I have two retired pastors. And, they are the best employees I have, because they know, and they do something that might seem very simple. They work at night and do visitations. They open the door for folks, show them where the restroom is, make coffee for them and make them comfortable during visitations. But they’re so perfect for that job. They have people coming in that are hurting, and coming to say goodbye to somebody they love. They’re the perfect person for that job. And they come to me. It was not something I went out to seek. They came in looking for work. And I think it was the spiritual component that they knew was part of the funeral business that brought them to the job.
The two other businesses participating in this study described other strategies, post-recruitment, to build the important component of camaraderie. At Bobby Bentley Wealth Management, the owner, Bobby, provides a catered lunch every workday for the entire staff. Each of the employees interviewed indicated that this act of sharing a meal together daily enriched the office environment and was always an opportunity for fellowship, sometimes within a spiritual context. Laurel, the wealth management office manager, sees it as an important time of their day:

We all like to [eat lunch] at the same time. We've never really wanted to split that up. So even though there may not hardly be any space left at that little table in there we all cram in there. We don't want to take different lunch hours. We all want to because we work so hard in the morning, we want some down time and we want to talk to each other. I mean like I said we don't always have to agree on things but, you know, we have fun. Bobby typically offers a prayer for the meal, and then it is an opportunity for fellowship and team-building. He said that this approach is meant to more subtly demonstrate his style of leadership by example. He also views the practice as an opportunity to enhance employee retention. He stated:

Retention, camaraderie, that is the key. When you are sharing and breaking bread with somebody on a daily basis, you know their thoughts. The discussions will be on what was on [TV] last night, to what’s going on in the world, to my sprinkler system is not running. And that’s what builds a
true workplace environment. You know, eating bread with someone, discussing their hardships, that is why we have a team here.

Roger said the wealth management office staff is never intrusive with spirituality, either with themselves or with their clients. What starts with the lunches is carried over into other parts of the day. He said that the team is strengthened by this subtle approach, and that subtly strengthens its effectiveness:

It's not a banner that we wave. It's not something we throw in everybody's face. But I think that there are opportunities that are presented. I know I've already had opportunities to since I've been here. Well I just noticed, a coworker struggling, or something, just take that opportunity to say a prayer with them. To pray with them. To encourage them. To maybe look at it, look at their circumstance from a spiritual perspective. Those kinds of things. I'm always a little leery of that in your face kind of hit-over-the-head with the Bible kind of thing. I never really subscribe to that.

Todd, the longtime hospital administrator who now works for Bobby part time in the wealth management office, sees this camaraderie as having tangibly positive business implications, from Bobby’s approach with catered, daily lunches to encouraging those interpersonal connections among the employees. He stated:

I think the fact that [Bobby] is as successful as he is, I think has a lot to do with the employees helping him. Yeah, he's a good salesman, but a lot of the work gets done that affects…the client [is done by the staff]. So he can't do it alone. And he knows that. So you put all that together, so then he's
more successful, he's been more successful every year since I've been here. Every year's incrementally better. So the employees generally do better. So I think you put all that together.

Todd said the potential for the business to be more profitable was enhanced by this shared effort.

While camaraderie builds employee engagement and retention at the wealth management office with activities like daily catered lunches, the Southern Seafood restaurant has built what employees describe as a “family” atmosphere rooted in shared hard work and a generous helping hand to employees. “I think it's wonderful [to work here],” said Louise, a server at the restaurant for 25 years. “A lot of people have been here for a long time…We always like to call it a big, dysfunctional family. That's what we are.”

Louise told the story of how she had wanted to go back to dental school, but did not have the money for tuition:

I was so excited I remember telling my manager here at the time I got accepted. Now how are you gonna pay for it, you know? So then a couple weeks, she's like oh how it's going? I'm like well I'm not going to do it 'cause there's no money. Probably a few days later [the owner] calls me into the office. He calls me into the office and he's like I hear you got accepted into the dental assistant program. I'm like yeah. But you're not going to go? I'm like well not because I don't want to, it's just not the right time. I can't afford it. And he goes how much is it? So I told him. He
gave me the money right there. And he said you need to go do that. He
goes you pay it back like on your paycheck $10 a week or $20 a week,
whatever. Pay it back. And so I went. It doesn't get any better than that.

Leigh, the owner, said that had always been the restaurant’s approach. Building
camaraderie, or family, was foundational:

[My parents] put a lot of kids through college. You know, when we were
small, [my parents] would buy all the books for all of the students that were
going to college. We don’t do that anymore, but Mom and Dad did that for
a long time. We work with our employees to make sure that they’ve got—
family comes first. That’s our philosophy.

Marsha, who has managed human resources functions for the restaurant,
said that the fairness and equality modeled by the management was an important
part of the restaurant’s teamwork philosophy:

I think staff live by example, too. [Employees] see your heart’s in it, and
you’re working hard. I washed dishes back here one time with [the
owner’s] brother. He and I did on a Friday night. You know, that type of
stuff. When [other employees] see that you’re involved that way, it makes a
difference with them. They say “Well, I can do a little bit more myself.”

Louise said that the willingness of the restaurant management to set that type of
example is important to front-line employees’ willingness to be engaged:

[The owners], they’ll be right there cleaning the toilets. They're right there
helping us, doing dishes, scrubbing. If we say we are in the weeds, and
can't get caught up, whatever. They're right there, ‘What do you need,’ not sitting behind a desk and just watching the money roll in, or something like that. They're right there… I think that's a big thing.

Kristin, who assists in the human resources office at the restaurant, said that equality among the staff solidifies the feeling of familial camaraderie:

I mean yeah, you do have a job and you work as a team and I think that's really what it boils down to. I mean, like, you see managers going, you see [Marsha] in the accounting office going back and dishwashing. You have a job to do. Whether you're on the bottom of the totem pole or on the top of the totem pole you are there to help out wherever it needs help because it has to get done.

Louise said familial unity engages employees on a very personal level. She said she thinks that performance is improved:

I think how I said before we are like one big dysfunctional family and all of us have different personalities and all that stuff but at the end of the day every single one of us is there for the other person. Always willing to lend a hand, help, or do whatever it takes to get the job done and there's no question asked. Nobody’s above or better than the other person.

After 34 years in the restaurant business, where the owners and managers have sought to lead by positive example, their personal spiritual beliefs on display but not forced on anyone, founder Betty Sue sums it up simply: “Well, if you have a happy server, you’re going to have a more satisfied customer, and that satisfied
customer is going to go out and talk about you to their friends or whoever.’’

Through this idea, the possibilities for improved business profitability are
experienced.

**Customer Care and Commitment**

How the employees of workplaces with a spiritual component interacted
with customers or clients emerged as an interesting element of employee
engagement. Each of the three workplaces studied described high-quality customer
care—often exemplified going beyond what was minimally required—as a
foundational expression of the spiritual ethos. The expectation expressed most
often was that employee engagement to a higher standard of excellence was the
goal.

In the restaurant business, expectations for service are predicated on ideas
like quality, friendliness and personal attention. At Southern Seafood, where
Louise has been a server for 25 years, that is reflected in the positive comments she
receives from customers. When customers comment on her good service, she tells
them, “Oh, I’ve been here a long time.”

Customer care and commitment is more complicated in Bobby Bentley’s
wealth management office. “In this particular business, you have a lot of
opportunities,” Roger said, speaking of his interaction with clients while working at
the wealth management office. “You can exploit those opportunities or you can
look more towards what’s better for the client. And so…every advisor here makes
that choice every time they make a decision for the client,” he said. “‘Do I do
what's best for me or do I do what's best for the client?’ And so, having that
spiritual component involved, hopefully we're always making the choice that's
better for the other person.”

Bobby agreed that his expectation of his investment advisors was exactly
that—to consider the client first and remain committed to what is best for them,
regardless of if the advisor could have led the client to a decision that was more
profitable for the office. “There is something inside a person that if you were to
mislead a person there is an internal core that won’t let you do that if you do what
you do right,” Bobby said. “And I think from a spiritual aspect the guidance comes
from above, because if you advise someone incorrectly it weighs on you,” he
added. “It’s not worth it. You just tell them what they need to do and if they like
it, great.”

Roger further expressed that he felt his spirituality kept him actively
engaged with wealth management clients, deepening that commitment. “I think
[spirituality] does help keep you focused. If you are focused on numbers or how
much you make, then…that becomes the center of what you're dealing with,” he
said. “If you are continually reminded that it's more about your relationships, and
how you can positively affect the lives of the people that you deal with, then it
becomes more about that.”

Laurel said that care extends to extra services for clients not traditionally
offered by a wealth management office. She said that the tone Bobby sets for the
staff is to find ways extend their outreach, informed by that spiritual core:
We always take it the next step. We're helping that person. I can't tell you how many people we’ve gone out to their homes and we've done different things even if it was just to deliver or if I was picking up something for somebody at their home that was in the rehab center. I can't tell you how many times we've done things like that for our clients. Which I think is a little unusual—that's not the norm.

“You lead not only your employees by example, but you try to lead your clients by example,” Bobby said, concerning his feelings on employee engagement with clients. Sometimes, he said, living that spiritual component means interactions with clients that transcend the scope of wealth management and occasionally leads to spiritual conversations:

A gentleman came in yesterday and shared with me that his daughter had just passed and he was hurt but he knew it was the right thing because she had had some substance abuse issues. And you know, I asked, “What can we do for you?” I couldn’t sense a spiritual feel but he said she is in a better place. You don’t question what is the better place. But then he said, well she’s out of pain. But you could never tell his position. So those are the hard ones. But then today clients came in and we prayed together. He is going to have some surgeries, they’ve been very blessed, and they prayed for me and it was great.

Todd said that the client care and commitment demonstrated by Bobby and the rest of the wealth management staff doesn’t mean they are running a charity,
rather, they are running a for-profit business that engenders trust. “I mean he doesn't give too many things away, he negotiates hard for different things, but once he says something, it's good,” Todd said. “I mean it's not a deal where you have to come back and say, ‘Wait a minute, you said this.’”

Roger said that kind of client care that Bobby offers, rooted in his spirituality, is a far better business investment than traditional marketing could provide. Further, it is a longer-term investment in the client base. He stated:

I don't care whatever business you are in it’s never about the advertising. You've got a sign on your vehicle or you got your name in what used to be the phone book…[or] you are the top search on Google. I mean in my business even before that, it's always been based on the relationships that you build with the people as you go along. Because everybody—and I don't care what business you're in—word-of-mouth is your best advertisement.

Roger said he strongly believes that Bobby sets a tone of customer care and employee engagement that is rooted in a spiritual core, but that the relationships that are built are more complicated than that:

It's funny but, you don't sit down and say well are you spiritual, and they say no, and you say well I'm sorry but—we only accept people that are. I mean you know, you take all comers. I mean, but, the thing about this business, like any other business, is that as you build that relationship with the people that come here, coworkers, clients, whoever it is—you can't have
a relationship with somebody and not get to know them. And so pretty much everybody knows that, you know, [Bobby] is who he is.

Eternal Rest Funeral Home employees indicated that their relationships with clients are also strongly tied customer care and commitment, and that the spiritual core of the business often informs that engagement. “It’s a different place than the average funeral home where it’s all just cut and dry business,” Karen said. “You feel the connection that they have with you when you go in there.”

That connection, or commitment to engagement, is rooted in a larger sense of support, according to Roy. “[The funeral directors] are smart men and they could do well in any endeavor but they wanted to do this because they wanted to help people,” Roy said.

Tommy, the funeral home managing partner, agreed that employee engagement manifested by an empathetic customer care, was a critical component of his business’s success. Further, that commitment extends to interactions with clients when things go smoothly, as well as when things go wrong:

I know for a fact, that there’s certain customers will come to our firm because they know who we are…it’s basically just like any other business where you want recommendations, and you want those to be meaningful. If somebody else had a good experience, or bad experience, or otherwise, I expect both of those things to come out of the other end us looking well, and that we did the right thing. No matter if something went perfect—that’s what we all want, of course—but, sometimes it’s when things go bad and
probably the closest, one of the most spiritual things in my component is when things do go bad, or when something is wrong. And that’s where, anytime where it would be easier to just kind of brush something under the rug, or to not have full disclosure with a family of something that went wrong. In fact, that’s most of the coaching that I have to do with my employees, where people would say, “Well, you know, what you don’t know doesn’t hurt you,” but if it were you and it was your mother, would you want to know? It’s a hard thing to do, but doing the right thing—I’ve been on the other side of that table a lot, and it’s not for the faint of heart.

Roy, the retired pastor who works at the funeral home, indicated that sense of client care comes from a spiritual core. “Several of the key employees, the funeral directors are devout believers and they are also of long experience in this business so they have the necessary tact and restraint,” he said. “They are not evangelists but they have something in common with almost every pastor I’ve ever met.”

Samantha, who manages the office for the funeral home’s cemetery, said she tries to take every client interaction as it comes, respectful of their grief. “I think our compassion for the families is there,” she said. “You have to be able to turn it off also. Because it is a business. But you are human and your inner self has that compassion for that person, knowing what they’re going through.” She added:

I don't think that anyone wants to have to deal with death. So that's a negative thing. And we have to be that comforter, that everything's going to
be okay. I think with me with my faith base, I try to put myself in their situation and just—I don't want to say they're in a better place. You don't ever want to say that. But I try to make sure the family is taken care of, where they have that sense of relief.

Samantha said remaining compassionate remains key through the process, even as business is being transacted. “I try to just encourage them,” she said. “Encourage. Listen to what they have to say. Like a counselor.” Samantha said this demonstration compassion was usually well-received by the clients, and often intermingled with the business transactions being completed.

**Community Involvement**

The final, key component of workplace spirituality that was evidenced across the three businesses studied was the concept of community involvement as an element of employee engagement and retention. This component was mentioned by business owners, human resources managers, and employees alike. This community engagement took different forms, based on the workplace, but was consistently identified as integral to the lived experience. In each case, a relationship with the spiritual core of the workplace can be connected.

At Bobby Bentley and Associates wealth management office, Todd said that he feels the owner, Bobby, is often able to form connections with clients on a level that transcends the routine, due to his spiritual nature and the fact that he is personally invested in the community. He stated:
[Bobby] is here for the community, he is here because it's his town, it's his home etc., etc. So he's not a commuter, and I think that's good for a client base. So if [Bobby] had been recruited out of say San Francisco and he plans to go back there or he's going to retire in Montana, and a couple years, there is a difference. People that are doing that can still be fair and honest and spiritualistic but I think that when you have got a commitment to a place, I think using these definitions of spirituality, I think it more goes with it. So I think that helps [Bobby] maintain clients. He's been here, he's going to be here.

“What a man does for himself dies with him,” Bobby said, in explaining this approach. “What a man does for his community lives forever.”

That attitude was similarly expressed at the Eternal Rest Funeral Home. Even when surrounded by grief and sadness, managing partner Tommy said the sense of community was a comfort. Remaining visibly engaged in the community is important:

Since I grew up in this town, most of the people that I see that I haven’t seen in a long time, I see them at their loved one’s funeral. And so that’s kind of how you get to be known, as the guy that was there when—so I get kind of associated with a sad, or sometimes traumatic time for a lot of folks, which is difficult. And then, the flip side of that is some people are just super glad that I’m able to take care of them, and that’s what keeps you going.
Roy said that the funeral home’s sense of community involvement extends to those who may have difficulty affording funerals, or otherwise be in need. “They do a lot of charity work and it’s all under the blanket,” he said. “They don’t make hay out of it. They cut people breaks. I thought when [new owners] took over, I thought that part would come to an end, but it hasn’t. It’s just a different atmosphere.”

Employee engagement witnessed through community involvement to benefit the needy was also reported at the Southern Seafood restaurant. In addition to the local school fundraisers that the restaurant supported through the decades, and the numerous environmental causes that the restaurant champions, another key example of this community involvement was a Thanksgiving dinner that the restaurant employees staged for the needy for several years. Restaurant owner Leigh stated:

We did that for quite a while until so many churches started doing it. We started out feeding like 400 or 500 people at the beginning. And at the last meal that we served, we served less than 150. And so we thought that you know, the pie of people who needed Thanksgiving dinners was getting divided up by all the churches that were involved so we said “We’ll let the churches have it,” and we’ll give that day off for our employees. And so even the ones that had helped us on Thanksgiving they were all really glad to be able to spend that day with their families. But when we started it there
was a need for it in town. And over the years, the churches started getting more involved and picked it up.

Marsha, the restaurant’s human resources manager, agreed that it was important for the restaurant staff to personally give of their time:

[We employees] put off our Thanksgiving because that’s what you do, you help those that need the help, and in need. And it was just intuitive to reach out. They never complained that they were here at nine in the morning, getting tables set, and so forth. That’s just the way. I think a lot of people are attracted stay attracted to the [the ownership family] in that area, they know this has happened in the past.

“It instills a sense of pride,” Kristin added. “I am glad I work here. I'm glad I work around such people that are giving back. It's awesome.”

Louise said that being a good community citizen has helped the business grow, with impacts for profitability:

I think all the good comes back because if you look at [this town], for as long as we've been around, that says a lot. I always think like what makes a restaurant or what makes something stay in business here. What does it? This goes out, this goes in. And since this has been open since 1983, and everything, that's a long time in [this town’s] time and I think it's the good. All the stuff that they do and we do, I think it all comes full circle.
Restaurant owner/operator Leigh said that community engagement is simply the right thing to do, without necessarily considering profitability as a motivating factor in the daily operations of the business. In her view, the basis for investing in community engagement should be broader. “You always want to try to do the right thing and the community supports the restaurant, they come and eat and spend their money there, so we want to be able to give back to the community,” she said. “It just spills over into our philosophy.”

Other Findings

In addition to the key findings of an ethical core, camaraderie and interpersonal connection, customer care and commitment, and community involvement discussed in this chapter, two additional concepts emerged from the cross-case analysis. I believe that acknowledging these concepts contributes to a richer understanding of the lived experience, and how it relates to employee engagement and retention.

Importance of individualism. Each of the participants at all three businesses related the idea that, while their workplace may have a spiritual core, spirituality is individualistic, and is best understood when this is remembered. This finding extends the literature’s view, “whereas ‘personal spirituality’ encompasses the individual values brought to the workplace, we view ‘organizational spirituality’ as reflecting an individual’s perception of the spiritual values within an organizational setting,” (Kolodinsky et al., 2008, pp. 466-467). Laurel, office manager at the wealth management office, summarized it best:
I think it's personal for each person. Of course, I believe in God. I've always believed in God. I was raised that way. Loved being in church and still do. It's just a very personal. I don't like to get into battles with people over religion. I have never been confrontational with anyone about it. Because I feel like everyone has their own personal journey and that's the way I perceive it.

To varying degrees, participants at all the businesses shared this sentiment of respect for individual spiritual beliefs. This finding is particularly relevant for human resources managers considering spirituality components as any part of an employee management framework.

**Practicality in business.** The practicality of embracing a spiritual core in a for-profit workplace experience was a significant concept embedded in this study from its earliest conceptualization. For the three workplaces examined in this study, spirituality is not a new construct for their operations, having been embraced for decades in each case. The advice offered from these participants to other business owners reinforces the components of ethical core, camaraderie and interpersonal connection, customer care and commitment, and community involvement that were explored earlier.

Bobby, owner of the wealth management office, sees it as elemental to business success:

Other business owners, you’ve got to give to get. You’ve got to give to get.

You’ve got to give to get. They don’t get the giving part. I’m not just
talking about my advisors. I go through the Southeast they use me as a consultant to advise others because of what I do with my efficiencies and team and everything else but the problem is most of these advisors want it the quick, fast way. They don’t want it the slow, methodical way. They don’t want to hear the story that you’ve got to give to get. I’ll sit there and answer somebody’s questions and go well what are you going to charge me? I’m like nothing. Just go do what you need to do and come back and we will deal with it. Well aren’t you going to? No, go do what you need to do and then we’ll take care of it. Most of them would charge them up front…no. Let’s get it right.

Leigh, owner/operator at the restaurant, would also recommend this business model. “Absolutely, yeah,” she said. “Everybody should do what’s right. That’s basically the whole ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’” But she added: “We don’t approach this as a way that’s going to increase business. We don’t look at it that way. We’re just trying to do what’s right.”

Tommy, managing partner of the funeral home, also agreed, particularly when considering the human resources function. He said that building employee retention and engagement are benefited by the spiritual workplace approach, and would be a good model for other business owners to consider. He stated:

I think if you have any type of relationship-based selling, whatever we’re doing we’re selling something, whether it’s services, merchandise, and if you expect your employees to do that, by building relationships, that you
expect them to come back to you, I think—your business is going to draw the right people, but also they’re going to be in it for the long haul, because they have more than just you to answer to. They have their own selves, they have their friends and family and everything, it’s bigger than me or my company, or anything like that.

Karen, the florist for the funeral home, said that her personal convictions inspired her to keep spirituality at the center of her business dealings:

So to any business person of faith, my suggestion would be don’t just put Christ over there in the corner. Center your business around Him and around your faith and if you can’t do that, then don’t go get the license.

And I don’t just say that, that is really how I feel.

**Summary**

Employee engagement and retention in workplaces with a spiritual core is a nuanced phenomenon varying individualistically, but with several common components across the lived experience worthy of note by business owners and human resources managers. The primary contribution from this study is a better understanding of those common components, and how they relate to employee engagement and retention with potential impact for business profitability. All the study participants contributed to more fully understanding engagement and retention and some related implications for the business. First, the cross-case analysis found an ethical core as a key component. Second, camaraderie and interpersonal connections emerged as important elements. Third, customer care
and commitment were revealed as elemental to the spiritual workplace experience. Fourth, community involvement was described as an important component. As they described their workplace spirituality experiences, participants highlighted their personal spiritual convictions and how those fit into the spiritual core of the business. They further described how these convictions affected their interactions with fellow employees, as well as clients and customers. In each workplace, the spiritual core of the business approach originated at the top of the organizational structure and filtered through the employee ranks. The employees interviewed responded to that spiritual core positively, and integrated its components with their own personal definitions of spirituality.

Additional findings focused on the importance of individualism in the workplace spirituality experience. Each participant filtered their workplace experience through their personal ideas of spirituality. The participants in this study were all well-aligned with the workplace’s approach, some connecting their personal spirituality with a religion, others ascribing their personal beliefs to a more generalized “do good to get good” philosophy. Lastly, the practicality of embracing a spiritual core in a for-profit workplace experience was addressed. The study participants generally agreed that spirituality was good for business, if it was respectful of others and done for more altruistic reasons than simple monetary gain. The relational aspect of the spiritual workplace was highlighted, leading to improved connections with co-workers as well as clients and customers. The next section of the paper will discuss conclusions of the study, as well as implications of
these findings as they relate to practice, policy, and theory. Workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute will be reviewed. The findings will be placed into context for employee engagement and retention.
Chapter 5
Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

This study explored workplace spirituality across three for-profit businesses identified as having a spiritual component: a seafood restaurant, a funeral home, and a wealth management office. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to better understand the employee retention and engagement implications that workplace spirituality brings to these businesses through interviews with owners, human resources managers, and other employees. The research questions guiding this study focused on how spirituality components, as a human resource attribute, impacted employee engagement and retention. Implications for reducing personnel costs and positively impacting profitability are also highlighted.

I begin this chapter by first discussing the conclusions related to the workplace spirituality experience. This section focuses on the key findings established in chapter four: (1) Engagement, retention and spirituality, (2) Ethical core as an integral component, (3) Camaraderie and interpersonal connection, (4) Customer care and commitment, and (5) Community involvement. In the next section of this chapter I discuss the implications of these findings as they relate to practice, policy, and theory.

Engagement, Retention, and Spirituality

The foundational finding that resulted from this study suggests that employee engagement and retention are positively impacted by workplaces that
demonstrate a spiritual component. Potential, positive ramifications for reducing personnel costs and improving profitability are also indicated. The details of the impact vary from employee to employee and workplace to workplace, as spirituality is a uniquely personal experience. However, commonalities to the experience did emerge across three different business types, a useful finding and partly how this study extends the literature in this interest area. A better understanding of these commonalities is an important step in reducing personnel costs and enhancing profitability.

Several participants indicated that their engagement in workplace activities was strongly tied to their personal spirituality. Their spirituality motivated them to invest extra effort in their duties and remain diligent in their commitments to their co-workers and their customers. In some instances, this engagement took the form of prayer with clients. In other instances, it meant taking extra time and effort to provide customer service.

Personal beliefs were often discussed as being well-aligned with the spiritual components of the workplace, aiding in this personal investment. Further, numerous participants indicated that customers and clients appeared to notice this engagement, manifested as quality service, and acknowledged it. The participants felt this engagement contributed to improved business outcomes, including repeat customers and positive customer referrals, impacting profitability.

Multiple study participants said that the supervisor’s spiritual approach to management was key to retention. Employees interviewed had tenures ranging
from one year to 25 years. According to them, the tone set by the owner or supervisor filters through the organization to the employees, particularly those who have a strong sense of personal spirituality. This sense makes them more inclined to remain employed in their workplaces, with the implication being a reduction in the personnel costs traditionally attributed to employee turnover.

In one workplace, this leadership by the supervisor took the form of prayer at a daily lunch. In another workplace, this spiritual component was experienced through the coaching process for performance improvement. Several employees indicated that they could not imagine their workplaces without this spiritual component, and if it was to be removed, doubted they would remain employed there.

The literature indicates that it typically costs a company about one-fifth of an employee’s salary to replace that employee (Boushey & Glynn, 2012). These costs can quickly accumulate, especially for small business owners. The findings of this study address this business concern. The inclusion of spirituality in the workplace is a path to more fully engage employees who wish to express themselves at work, and this can result in their deeper investment in work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999a). According to the literature, values found to be associated with workplace spirituality include honesty, respectfulness, caring, and connectedness (Crossman, 2015). Participants in this study expressed this deeper investment and sense of commitment. Further, they identified similar values to honesty, caring, and connectedness as being integral to the spiritual workplace setting. However, a
range of other elements were expressed as being important to their engagement and retention in the spiritual workplace environment: ethical core, camaraderie and interpersonal connection, customer care and commitment, and community involvement were key findings that will be additionally detailed here. Each of these elements could potentially contribute to reducing employee turnover costs while improving profitability.

**Ethical Core as an Integral Component**

Examples of an ethical core or ethical code related to the spirituality components of the workplace were found across all three workplaces that took part in this study. Participants identified this ethical core as integral to how spirituality was demonstrated in the daily activities. Further, most of the interviewees said this ethical component was key to their engagement as an employee, inspiring them to be more diligent in their duties. Additionally, this ethical core usually was identified as a reason for their intention to remain employed with the business.

Association with an ethical organization gives employees meaning and purpose in their jobs (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b). Research shows that “...expression of spirituality at work requires acceptance that employees want to be involved in work that gives meaning to their lives,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 136). This study extends the idea this spirituality relates to employee engagement and retention, finding evidence that there are implications for these human resources aspects. With the acknowledgement of the spiritual component of the workplace, and the indication that the ethical core was linked to this spiritual
component, implications for employee engagement and retention are witnessed. Examples include enhanced sense of loyalty, a willingness to give extra effort, a trust in the ethical direction of the business, and a commitment to continue that ethical direction in the individual employee’s daily duties.

Ethics have been discussed as an extension of human capital theory (Buta, 2015). Human capital is the center of the workplace’s resources. As workplace spirituality is manifested through this ethical core, a clearer picture begins to emerge of the linkages between the investment in human capital and the expression of a spiritual workplace through ethical behaviors. These behaviors have real implications for the profitability of the business, its longevity, its community reputation, and prospects for the future.

**Camaraderie and Interpersonal Connection**

Findings indicated that camaraderie and interpersonal connection were important components of the workplace spirituality experience, leading to enhanced employee engagement and retention. These findings are particularly noteworthy for human resources managers tasked with addressing personnel turnover costs. The relationships developed between co-workers, as well as between employees and their clients or customers, were consistently reported as an elemental aspect of the spiritual workplace. Study participants assigned terms like “camaraderie” and “family” to describe this aspect of the workplace, usually in positive terms. Participants gave examples of this interpersonal connection including: eating lunch together as an office team, often where a prayer was offered; taking on extra duties
to assist co-workers who were overwhelmed; praying with customers; and other acts of extra compassion with customers, in ways that extend beyond the routine responsibilities.

The literature notes that “the notion that spiritual beings not only express inner life needs by seeking meaningful work but that part of being alive is living in connection to other human beings,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 136). The importance of this connection to other human beings was reported consistently across the three workplaces of this study. Further, findings indicated that this connection was a reason that employees were more engaged with their work assignments, and more likely to remain retained in the workplace for the near term. This connection was viewed as an attractive reason to not seek other employment, with positive implications for reducing personnel turnover costs.

Customer Care and Commitment

How the employees of workplaces with a spiritual component interacted with customers or clients included important findings related to employee engagement. Employees at each of the three workplaces studied talked about customer care and commitment in terms of the workplace’s spiritual component, and their likelihood to be more engaged with customers in relation to it. Employees discussed examples including: friendliness and personal attention to customer needs; fairness in not “overselling” clients services they did not need; delivering important paperwork to older clients who were unable to come to the office; prayer with clients who were having a difficult time personally; and
empathy with clients who were grieving. Each of these scenarios provided examples of a commitment to a higher level of customer care and a more personally invested level of engagement.

Meyer and Allen’s (1991) conceptualization of organizational commitment examines a desire, a need, and an obligation to maintain employment. This study found indications that an employee’s organizational commitment was related to a concept of customer care and commitment, linked through the elements of a spiritual workplace. When employees described the spiritually-related elements of their workplaces, the importance of caring for customers and demonstrating a commitment to customer needs were given as examples of how the employees remained engaged in their daily duties. This finding leads to a clearer understanding of the connection between employee engagement and workplace spirituality, with the outcome being a focus on customer care that may positively impact profitability.

**Community Involvement**

Most of the study participants indicated that their business’s community involvement was important to their personal engagement and retention. This community involvement was experienced through the concept of workplace spirituality, as that spirituality component gave impetus and context to the involvement. The literature indicates that businesses are often motivated by factors beyond profits, including a desire to give back to their community or their customers (Balog et al., 2014). Findings of this study indicated that this
community involvement takes many forms, just as personal as the spirituality experience itself. At the seafood restaurant, beyond providing Thanksgiving meals for needy community members, environmental issues were a priority. Sponsorship of lagoon research and marine sustainability were important, too. At the wealth management office, examples included being involved in community activities, like supporting local churches and mentoring young people. The funeral home valued community engagement through local church and community activities as well, including working with financially disadvantaged residents to provide funeral services.

Study participants indicated that these types of community involvement demonstrated by the business gave them a sense of pride and fulfillment. Additionally, they often pointed to these activities as a reason for business longevity or success. This personal pride and sense of business success was often connected to their personal sense of engagement with the business. It was usually stated as a reason for why the employee was more likely to remain employed there.

According to the literature, “organizations that have long been viewed as rational systems are considering making room for the spiritual dimension, a dimension that has less to do with rules and order and more to do with meaning, purpose, and a sense of community,” (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000, p. 134). Findings from this study indicate that this sense of community expands from within the organization to impact the surrounding community. Decisions made by the business owners and executed by the human resources managers and other
employees facilitate this idea. This continuation of community appears to positively impact employee engagement and retention in ways that may lead to reduced personnel turnover costs and increased profitability. The following section discusses how practitioners might consider workplace spirituality as a viable framework for their businesses, addressing common concerns and integrating the relevant findings from this study. Potential impacts for employee engagement and retention are explored. The relevance to profitability is examined.

Implications for Practice

Spirituality in the workplace is a phenomenon that has only begun to be studied in earnest during the past 20 years. As competition grows, and smaller businesses seek advantage within narrowing marketplaces, business practitioners need additional strategies for improving profitability. Meanwhile, increased employee mobility is also a critical consideration for business leaders, as the high costs of employee turnover negatively impact profits. Workplace spirituality can potentially help address these important issues.

The timing for this strategy may never have been better. Modern society is experiencing radical changes, with implications for business owners concerned about employee engagement and retention. Americans who identify as religiously unaffiliated make up 23% of the adult population, up from 16% in 2007 (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, religion and spirituality are increasingly separate issues for Americans, and spirituality is on the rise (Pew Research Center, 2015). People are seeking deeper connections in their personal lives, as well as
their work lives. For business practitioners concerned about employee engagement and retention, workplace spirituality provides a new perspective from which to address these issues.

The critical aspect of this study was a better understanding of the personal spirituality experience of each employee and each business to discover the implications for employee engagement and retention. According to the literature, “leadership practices, workplace environment, and development of self, impact employee perceptions of retention and morale,” (Murrell-Jones, 2012, p. 9). For the three businesses participating in this study, workplace spirituality is a very familiar concept, foundational to each business operation for at least 20 years. The feedback provided from the study participants warrants examination from other human resources managers and business owners. The components of ethical core, camaraderie and interpersonal connection, customer care and commitment, and community involvement are all findings that appear to impact positive business outcomes. Replicating this success would be worthy of exploration.

Based upon this research, there are several recommendations I would make to business practitioners who may wish to consider integrating workplace spirituality to enhance employee engagement and retention. First, I would suggest that they examine their personal convictions regarding spirituality, and determine if the idea of its incorporation in the workplace aligns with their own internal beliefs. Second, I would recommend that the business owner review the complexion of his or her workforce, and determine if workplace spirituality would align with the
culture of the staff. Third, I would advise the owner and the human resources manager to carefully familiarize themselves with all applicable laws related to expressions of workplace spirituality. Finally, if the owner decides to pursue a workplace spirituality model for the workplace, I recommend that ethical core, camaraderie and interpersonal connection, customer care and commitment, and community involvement form the foundation of the effort.

**Policy Implications**

A study by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) concluded that “An organization’s ability to recognize, embrace and function in a religious and spiritually diverse world is critical to its sustainability strategy,” (SHRM, 2008, p. 3). In other words, human resources managers and business owners who are more open to embracing spiritual components in their workplaces could make their businesses more likely to survive the perils of the modern business world. The findings of this study align well with this idea. Weathering, and perhaps even thriving, during difficult economic types requires creative solutions that unite employees behind common concepts. Spirituality can provide this commonality when shared across a workplace, even as individual concepts of spirituality remain highly personal.

A concern traditionally cited when considering workplace spirituality is the legality of the concept (Sullivan, 2013; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2017). There are sometimes fears of forcing beliefs on employees or customers, in ways that would not only be bad for business, but might result in
legal action and associated human resources liabilities. Findings of this study indicated a healthy respect for this traditional concern among business owners, human resources managers, and employees, but also highlighted approaches that respect the inherent personal nature of spirituality. For example, no workplace studied had mandatory practices like prayer, nor did any workplace require that employees, clients, or customers subscribe to any specific spiritual belief. Rather, all employees interviewed indicated that personal freedom and respect were components of their workplace spirituality experiences. They reported that the benefit of workplace spirituality was more often focused on the commonalities of the experience, as differences were minimized.

For private business owners and human resources managers who may wish to establish workplace spirituality components, being mindful of relevant laws is naturally advisable and always prudent. However, as the literature indicates and as the findings of this study support, fears of establishing workplace spirituality practices for legal reasons should not be paramount. Approaches that respect individual rights and perspectives while still providing a framework for ethical and caring business practices are viable. Considering factors like the nature of the business, and respecting the individuality of the employees and the customers, provides a foundation to begin the exploration of whether embracing a spiritual component for a workplace might be appropriate.

While workplace spirituality appears to have favorable ramifications for reducing personnel turnover costs and potentially improving profitability, it should
be noted that the findings of this study found no participant suggesting that a business owner should pursue workplace spirituality purely for financial gain. The participants discussed their highly personal reasons for workplace spirituality, some religious, some altruistic, some simply based on personal ethics. None suggested that workplace spirituality deployed simply for business reasons was advisable ethically, nor did they feel it would be viable without some deeper, personal investment. All said that some other reasoning for the approach was preferable.

**Theoretical Implications**

The concept of workplace spirituality is rooted in the notion that individual spirituality is deeply personal. Findings from this research have indicated that employee engagement and retention are positively impacted by workplaces that maintain a spiritual component, with implications for reducing employee turnover costs and increasing profitability. The details of this impact vary from employee to employee and workplace to workplace, remembering that spirituality is distinctly personal. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of this phenomenon by providing additional detail concerning the lived experience of workplace spirituality.

Theoretically we must carefully explore the concept of workplace spirituality through qualitative research. Anecdotes, impressions, personal stories, and reflections all have implications for deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Without the personal explorations witnessed through this dialogue, we lose sight of
the larger ramifications. This helps us understand the “how” and “why” of the experience.

The theoretical frameworks of human capital theory (Becker, 1993) and organizational commitment theory (Meyer & Allen, 1991) provided the foundation for this study. Becker’s (1993) examination of the results of investing in an individual’s knowledge and skills, not unlike investments in equipment, were keenly focused on individual workers. This study’s findings aligned well with his framework, demonstrating that an investment in the individual nature of personal spirituality harnessed for the collective good could impact an employee positively. In these findings, the indications were inclination toward increased employee engagement and retention.

Meyer and Allen’s (1991) conceptualization of organizational commitment encompasses a desire, a need, and an obligation to maintain employment. In this study, workers affirmed that the components of their workplace spirituality enhanced their desire to remain employed at the business. Most of the employees interviewed were longer-term workers, acknowledging that the spiritual components of their workplaces positively impacted their desires to serve the business. Again, the details that emerged through these findings give richer context to this organizational commitment theory, and provide valuable insight into the lived experience.
Suggestions for Future Research

Workplace spirituality and its implications for employee engagement and retention is a study area that would benefit from additional inquiry. This remains a relatively new area of business research, warranting more attention. The highly personal nature of spirituality is one of the key reasons that additional research would be useful in better understanding the lived experience as a phenomenon. If we can understand it as “the basic feeling of being connected with one’s complete self, others, and the entire universe” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999b, p. 83), then we may further understand that those connections require additional study to more fully appreciate them.

The human resources aspects of workplace spirituality, particularly in the focus areas of this study regarding employee engagement and retention, will only become more important to the business community over time, as competition increases and markets shrink. Future research that explores these aspects within specific business sectors could be useful. For example, the concept of workplace spirituality within the wealth management industry might be particularly intriguing. This for-profit business sector is traditionally thought of as being highly profit driven. A workplace spirituality overlay on wealth management offices, studied across multiple sites, could provide useful information. Extending some of the observations of this study, which indicated that profit need not be the primary motivator for business success, could prove fruitful. Quantitatively analyzing the implications of this idea would help understand the practical impacts to
profitability, and could demonstrate any possible utility of replicating this practice in the wealth management sector.

Additionally, further longitudinal research projects focused on workplace spiritually are warranted. More specifically, this study looked at employee retention in the near-term. What are the workplace spirituality employee retention implications for the longer term? Are there significant numbers of employees who remain with spiritually-centered workplaces for 30 years or more, perhaps the entire length of their working careers? Given the trends regarding increased worker mobility that have been previously discussed, better understanding these long-term outcomes could provide useful information for business practitioners focused on succession planning and personnel turnover costs.

**Limitations**

This study had limitations, as the findings are limited to the context of the study. The first limitation was personal bias. I am a Christian, as discussed in the positionality section. I endeavored to ensure that I did not let my bias interfere with the voices I sought to hear in this study. My intention was for this study to reflect their stories, not my own.

Second, this research was geographically limited to Central Florida. This study might take on a different complexion if it were replicated in a large metropolitan area, or a rural region of the United States. It may also look very different if it was replicated in a different country or culture as well. These factors need to be remembered when considering the results.
A third limitation was the relatively small sample size. While the size was in keeping with accepted practices for case study research (Stake, 2006), generalizability could be impacted by the sample size that was manageable for this study. Were participants to be added, it would be advisable to explore a different methodology better able to capture the richness of the data from a large sample size. The weaknesses of case study research include challenges in generalizing results (Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998). These findings may or may not be broadly generalizable.

Summary

Daunting challenges exist for business owners and human resources managers who strive to improve their employee retention and engagement. Higher levels of employee mobility mean increased costs to replace employees. Meanwhile, workers are grasping for deeper meaning in their day-to-day work lives, and searching for reasons to stay engaged. Human resources solutions must be found, particularly for small businesses, if for-profit enterprises are to maintain their viability.

The focus of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to better understand the employee retention and engagement implications that workplace spirituality brings to for-profit businesses. Employee retention and engagement were examined through a human resources lens by exploring individual employee experiences, and through that exploration, a richly detailed portrait of the phenomenon emerged. Individual stories coalesced to describe the experience in a
way unlikely to be achieved through any other type of methodology. The findings from this study showed commonality in workplace spirituality experiences across three very different for-profit businesses, and highlighted where these similarities might be informative for other business practitioners interested in workplace spirituality. Key results emerged concerning (1) Engagement, retention and spirituality, (2) Ethical core as an integral component, (3) Camaraderie and interpersonal connection, (4) Customer care and commitment, and (5) Community involvement.

While no single formula was found for workplace spirituality success concerning employee engagement and retention, a clearer picture emerged of the shared themes that help us understand the lived experience. This, in turn, provides business practitioners with important information that they can evaluate for implementation. Ethics were described as central to the experience. Camaraderie and interpersonal connection among the employees were found to be important. Customer care and commitment were repeatedly reported as integral to the experience. Community involvement was described as a meaningful way to demonstrate the underpinnings of workplace spirituality outside of the workplace.

Whether a business practitioner is exploring improved employee engagement and retention strategies for cost reduction and profitability reasons, or simply feels called to run a business differently due to personal convictions, workplace spirituality provides a fascinating backdrop for this discussion. The benefits for owners, employees, and customers translate into business returns that
go beyond the bottom line. The results of this research present potential solutions as these challenges are thoughtfully considered. Workplace spirituality as a human resource attribute for employee engagement and retention offers promise for improving the workplace experience in ways that we are only beginning to fully understand, and stands to benefit business practitioners in ways that cannot be calculated.
References


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U.S. Const. amend. I.


Appendix A

Employee Interview Protocol

Employee subjects’ participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. Employee subjects can cease involvement at any time during the study with no adverse impact.

1. Tell me a little bit about your workplace experience here. How would you describe it?
   a. How long have you worked here?
   b. Full or part-time?
   c. Why did you choose to work here?

2. Would you identify yourself as a spiritual person?
   a. What does spirituality mean to you?
   b. Why is spirituality important to you?

3. Your workplace self-identifies as having a spiritual component to its day to day operations. What is your impression of that?
   a. What are some ways (examples) that you feel identify your workplace in this way?
   b. Do you feel that you are surrounded by spiritual colleagues?

4. In what way do the spirituality components of your workplace align with your own spirituality?

5. How is your personal spirituality enhanced by the spirituality components of your workplace?

6. Do you think that customers sense or otherwise know that there is a spiritual component to this workplace?
   a. If yes, how?
7. Do you feel that the spirituality components of your workplace help you do your job better?
   
   a. Do you think it improves the performance of your co-workers?
   b. Why do you believe performance is improved?
   c. How do you believe performance is improved?

8. How do the spirituality components of your workplace keep you engaged in the work?

9. How do you the spiritual components of your workplace make you more likely to choose to remain employed here?

10. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the spirituality components of your workplace?

11. I will be conducting individual interviews with other employees to discuss their impressions of workplace spirituality. Are there other employees that you suggest I speak with concerning this topic?

Notes

Gender: female/male
Working: FT/PT
Length of time with company
Appendix B

Human Resource Manager Interview Protocol

*Human Resource manager subjects’ participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. Subjects can cease involvement at any time during the study with no adverse impact.*

1. Tell me a little bit about the workplace experience here. How would you describe it?
   a. How long have you worked here?
   b. Full or part-time?
   c. Why did you choose to work here?

2. Would you identify yourself as a spiritual person?
   a. What does spirituality mean to you?
   b. Why is spirituality important to you?

3. Your workplace self-identifies as having a spiritual component to its day to day operations. Does Human Resources help facilitate this component, and if so, how?
   a. What are some ways (examples) that you feel identify your workplace in this way?
   b. Why is it important to the business to be identified in this way?
   c. Are there specific examples of HR-related practices undertaken by the business that add to this spirituality component?

4. How do the spirituality components of your workplace align well with the HR goals for the business?

5. In what ways are employee performance enhanced by the spirituality components of your workplace?

6. Do you think that customers sense or otherwise know that there is a spiritual component to this workplace?
   a. If yes, how?
7. Please describe any challenges associated with integrating workplace spirituality.

8. How do you feel that the spirituality components of your workplace keep employees better engaged in their work?
   a. What if any, other associated benefits are there?
   b. What, if any, negative impacts have been observed?

9. In what ways has the spiritual components of the workplace made employees more likely to choose to remain employed here?

10. Would you recommend a workplace spirituality approach be considered by other businesses? Please describe.

11. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the spirituality components of your workplace?

12. I will be conducting individual interviews with other employees to discuss their impressions of workplace spirituality. Are there other supervisors/managers that you suggest I speak with concerning this topic?

Notes

Gender: female/male
Working: FT/PT
Length of time with company
Appendix C

Pre-Interview Screening Protocol

Employee subjects’ participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. Employee subjects can cease involvement at any time during the study with no adverse impact.

1) Are you currently employed by Company A?

2) Do you participate in the spiritual components of your workplace?

Would you be willing to participate in an academic study exploring these components of your workplace?
Appendix D

Employee Information Letter

Study Title: Spirituality as a Human Resource Attribute to Facilitate Employee Engagement and Retention

Principal Investigator: Wesley D. Sumner

This form describes a research study that Wesley D. Sumner, Principal Investigator from the Nathan Bisk College of Business at the Florida Institute of Technology, is conducting in order to better understand workplace spirituality and its implications for employee engagement and retention. More specifically, the goal is to understand the impact of workplace spirituality components on the business environment.

The study involves employee interviews (no more than one hour each). The interview may involve personal questions related to your spiritual life. The PI would like you to complete the whole interview, but you may skip any questions you prefer not to answer. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy of data. Audio recordings are for transcription and analysis only and will not be released in any publication or report; they will be destroyed once the analysis is complete. Only the investigator will have access to your individual responses. All the information received from you, including your name and any other identifying information will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. You will not be identified nor will any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you be used in any presentation or written reports about this study. Only summarized data will be presented at meetings or in any publications. You will remain anonymous for the purposes of the study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty or impact to relating to your employment.

For more information about this research you should contact: Wesley D. Sumner – FL – United States, 321-258-1518.

Please contact the Florida Institute of Technology Institutional Review at 150 W. University Blvd., Melbourne, FL 32901, Telephone 321-674-8960 for the following reasons:

You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff about your rights as a research subject; To voice concerns about the research; To provide input concerning the research process; In the event the study staff could not be reached.
Appendix E

Employee Information Letter

Study Title: Spirituality as a Human Resource Attribute to Facilitate Employee Engagement and Retention

Principal Investigator: Wesley D. Sumner

This form describes a research study that Wesley D. Sumner, Principal Investigator from the Nathan Bisk College of Business at the Florida Institute of Technology, is conducting in order to better understand workplace spirituality and its implications for employee engagement and retention. More specifically, the goal is to understand the impact of workplace spirituality components on the business environment.

The study involves employee interviews (no more than one hour each). The interview may involve personal questions related to your spiritual life. The PI would like you to complete the whole interview, but you may skip any questions you prefer not to answer. The interview will be audio-recorded for accuracy of data. Audio recordings are for transcription and analysis only and will not be released in any publication or report; they will be destroyed once the analysis is complete. Only the investigator will have access to your individual responses. All the information received from you, including your name and any other identifying information will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. You will not be identified nor will any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you be used in any presentation or written reports about this study. Only summarized data will be presented at meetings or in any publications. You will remain anonymous for the purposes of the study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty or impact to relating to your employment.

For more information about this research you should contact: Wesley D. Sumner – FL – United States, 321-258-1518.

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You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff about your rights as a research subject; To voice concerns about the research; To provide input concerning the research process; In the event the study staff could not be reached.
Appendix F

Worksheet 1. The Themes (Research Questions) of the Multicase Study

These Themes indicate primary information about the Quintain that the researchers seek.

| Theme 1: How do spirituality components, as a human resources attribute of for-profit Central Florida workplaces with fewer than 100 employees, impact employee engagement? |
| Theme 2: From the perspective of human resources managers, is employee engagement improved or hindered in connection with spirituality in the workplace? |
| Theme 3: Considering retention, why do employees choose to remain at workplaces with a spiritual component? |
| Theme 4: What factors play a role in employee retention at workplaces where a spirituality component is incorporated? |

Adapted from *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, by Robert E. Stake. Copyright 2006 by The Guilford Press.
Appendix G

Worksheet 2. Analyst’s Notes While Reading a Case Report

Code Letters for This Case: _____

Case Study Report Title:

________________________________________________________

Author(s):

Analyst’s Synopsis (possibly identifying

the case,
the sites,
the activity,
key information sources and
context information):

Situational Constraints:

Uniqueness among Other Cases:

Prominence of Theme 1 in This Case:
Prominence of Theme 2 in This Case:
Prominence of Theme 3 in This Case:

Expected Utility of This Case for Developing Theme 1:
Expected Utility of This Case for Developing Theme 2:
Expected Utility of This Case for Developing Theme 3:

Findings:
I.
II.
III.
IV.

Possible Excerpts for the Multicase Report (noting case report page number):

Commentary (sometimes noting case report page number):

Adapted from Multiple Case Study Analysis, by Robert E. Stake. Copyright 2006 by The Guilford Press.
Appendix H

Worksheet 3. Ratings of Expected Utility of Each Case for Each Theme

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<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirituality in the workplace?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Considering retention, why do employees choose to remain at workplaces with a spiritual component?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 4: What factors play a role in employee retention at workplaces where a spirituality component is incorporated?</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H = high utility; M = middling utility; L = low utility. High utility means that the Case appears to be one of the most useful for developing this Theme.

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### Appendix I

**Worksheet 4. A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case E100</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Community partnership</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Ethical core</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Happy employee results in happy customers</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case E107</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Community partnership</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Community supports business, business supports community</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Do what’s right philosophy</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Case E111</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Ethics, do good, get good</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding II: Camaraderie</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Customer respect, trust</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding IV: Sense of family</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding V: Job satisfaction</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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H = high importance; M = middling importance; L = low importance. A high mark means that for this Theme, the Case Finding is of high importance.
### A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions (continued)

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Finding I: Sense of fairness</td>
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<td>Finding II: Sense of camaraderie and family</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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<td>Finding III: Pride in community partnership</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding IV: Customers sense/appreciate</td>
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<td>Finding I: Camaraderie</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Community partnership</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Sense of fairness</td>
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<td>Finding I: Golden Rule, do the right thing</td>
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<td>Finding II: Build relationships/trust with clients</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding III: Community giving back</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding IV: Giving to get</td>
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<td>Finding V: Camaraderie</td>
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<td>Case E145</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Camaraderie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Client trust, respect</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Sense of ethics, honesty</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding IV: Loyalty</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Customer respect/trust</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Camaraderie</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Ethics</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Finding I: Customer respect, trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding II: Ethical core</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Camaraderie</td>
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A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions (continued)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Ethical direction</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding II: Aids in recruitment of right people</td>
<td>H</td>
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</table>

| Finding III: Community partnership | H | H | H | H |
| Finding IV: Customer reputation | M | M | M | M |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case E168</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Camaraderie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Ethics</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Customer connection</td>
<td>H</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case E172</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Treating people with care</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding II: Customer respect/trust</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Communication</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding IV: Community help</td>
<td>M</td>
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### A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case E181</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding I: Ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding II: Job satisfaction</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding III: Positivity</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding IV: Customer relationships</td>
<td>H</td>
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</table>
## Appendix J

**Worksheet 5. Multicase Assertions for the Final Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertions</th>
<th>Related to which themes or factors?</th>
<th>Evidence, persuasions, reference in which cases?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement, retention and spirituality are phenomenologically linked.</td>
<td>Engagement, Retention</td>
<td>E100, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical core is an integral component to the workplace spirituality experience.</td>
<td>Engagement, Retention</td>
<td>E100, E107, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camaraderie and interpersonal connection are highly valued components of the workplace spirituality experience.</td>
<td>Engagement, Retention</td>
<td>E100, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer care and commitment are consistently expressed as important in workplace spirituality environments.</td>
<td>Engagement, Retention</td>
<td>E100, E107, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E147, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community involvement is a valued component of the workplace spirituality experience.</td>
<td>Engagement, Retention</td>
<td>E100, E107, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E161, E172, E181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Main topics (Sections)

| Assertion 1: Engagement, retention and spirituality are phenomenologically linked. | E100, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181 | High |
| Assertion 2: Ethical core is an integral component to the workplace spirituality experience. | E100, E107, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181 | High |
| Assertion 3: Camaraderie and interpersonal connection are highly valued components of the workplace spirituality experience. | E100, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181 | High |
| Assertion 4: Customer care and commitment are consistently expressed as important in workplace spirituality environments. | E100, E107, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E147, E152, E161, E168, E172, E181 | High |
| Assertion 5: Community involvement is a valued component of the workplace spirituality experience. | E100, E107, E111, E117, E123, E140, E145, E161, E172, E181 | High |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Single-Mention Topics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Integrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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