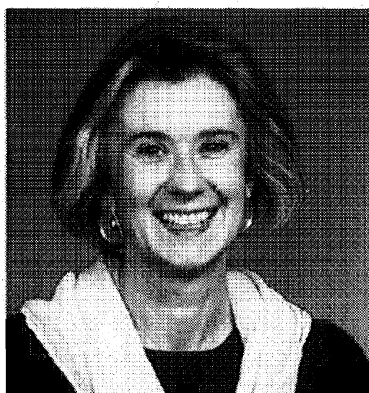

Spirituality as an Organizing Principle

Diana Whitney

Diana Whitney is an international speaker and consultant whose work focuses on organization communication, culture, and strategic change. She is founder of The Taos Institute in Taos, New Mexico, where she conducts workshops on post-modern challenges to organization development and other related subjects. She is a student and practitioner of the wisdom and ways of Lakota philosophy and ceremonies, Taoism, and meditation.



Spirituality has entered organizational discourse through the back door and is now sitting in the drawing room awaiting a proper welcome.

We are living at a time when both the benefits and limitations of the modern worldview are readily apparent to us. We see the miracles science has wrought and we also see what damage it has enabled us to create. Great strides in information and communication technologies, transportation, and health care have come packaged with great environmental destruction and the near loss of indigenous lifestyles around the world.¹ The modern focus on objectivity and the separation of science and spirituality, taken to fullness, leaves people separate from one another, separate from nature, and separate from the divine. As a people we can no longer ignore poetry and trust analysis, ignore nature and trust the sterility of the laboratory, or ignore the multiple voices we hear in the night and trust only the rules, laws, or policies written by some unknown people to guide their lives, not ours. Modern science in its flowering has given seed to the postmodern,

and with it comes a quest for spiritual relationships, meaning, and integration.

Current considerations of spirituality as it relates to business, work, and organization development can be clustered loosely into four primary conversations: Spirit as Energy, Spirit as Meaning, Spirit as Sacred, and Spirit as Epistemology.

Spirit as Energy

*When we get out of the glass bottles of our ego,
and when we escape like squirrels turning in the
cages of our personality
and get into the forests again,
we shall shiver with cold and fright
but things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves.
Cool, unlying life will rush in,
and passion will make our bodies taut with power,
we shall stamp our feet with new power
and old things will fall down,
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl up like burnt paper.*

—D.H. Lawrence²

For many people the notion of spirit in the workplace has to do with the energy or “feel” of the place. Theirs is a conversation about *Spirit as Energy*. High-technology, entrepreneurial organizations are described as spirited, while large corporate hierarchies are considered sluggish and bankrupt of spirit. In this sense spirit refers to a sense of aliveness and vibrancy, people’s ability to stamp their feet with power. As the poem by D.H. Lawrence suggests, when we stamp our feet with new power, we shall laugh and institutions will curl up like burnt paper. Consultants speaking from this perspective counsel managers to follow the path of least resistance,³ to do what they love and the money will follow,⁴ and to manage from their hearts as the means to personal and organizational excellence.

Organizational high performance and the capacity for organizational change are said to be derivative of spirit. As Harrison Owen⁵ puts it, “whatever else high performance and excellence may be based on, they would seem to have something to do with the quality of Spirit...human Spirit, our Spirit, the Spirit of our organizations.” Much of the early work in organizational transformation considered spirit as energy. Ackerman⁶ trained flow-state managers to “work on the energy flow in the system, work for harmony, alter structures to free up energy.” One conference speaker explained organizations in the language of Chinese medi-

cine. She suggested we manage energy flows for organizational health in much the same way a Chinese medicine doctor works to open energy flows and to remove stagnation, thereby promoting health within an individual. Aikido techniques became metaphoric means and methods for dealing energetically with conflict⁷. Both the purpose and process of organizational transformation were to free the spirit; to build organizations with vision, purpose, and values; and to remove the energy blocks to organizational high performance.

Spirit as Meaning

*To live content with small means,
to seek elegance rather than luxury,
and refinement rather than fashion,
to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich,
to study hard, think quietly, act frankly,
to listen to stars and birds, babes and sages, with open heart,
do all bravely,
await occasions,
hurry never—
in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious,
grow up through the common.
This is my symphony.*

—William Ellery Channing⁸

Another conversation among organization scholars and practitioners considers *Spirit as Meaning*. Shared vision and common values are said to create organization meaning and to provide the impetus for organization change. Leaders at all levels of the organization are guided to inspire (to fill with spirit) rather than to motivate. Visionary leadership, as demonstrated by the likes of Lee Iacocca, Ben Cohen, and Anita Roddick, is said to make the difference between successful and unsuccessful organization change. Visioning, or conversationally projecting the organization into the future, and creating alignment among organizational members about the desired future are essential organizing endeavors.

Spirit and meaning are said to reside in the stories told about the organization. Like a society or tribe's creation story, the organization's stories serve to create and recreate what is meaningful for the organization's members. Story telling, myth making, and the celebration of the hero's journey are taught to managers as tools to deconstruct and reconstruct the organization's sense of meaning. Organization culture can be considered the grand story of the company, the story that holds it all together.

The conscious creation of organization culture involves the careful delineation of the way things are to be done, by and with whom. It is a process of making meaningful selected patterns of daily work life, and rendering others meaningless.

Central to the Spirit as Meaning conversation is the recognition that workers in the industrialized countries, especially the United States, are wanting more from work than a paycheck.⁹ The quest for the soul in business,¹⁰ artful work,¹¹ and right livelihood is on. As William Channing's poem suggests, to live content with small means, financially, does not mean to live without a sense of elegance, worth, or wealth. To let the spiritual grow through the common is a path to meaningful living.

Early conversations about Spirit as Meaning focused on people who found their work empty and sought meaning in spiritual practice. As more and more people embarked upon the transformational life style through the commitment to a spiritual practice of some type, the conversation widened. Now, not only do people want their own lives to be full of meaning and purpose, but they also expect the same of their organizations. Awakening people want to work for organizations that care and that are consciously contributing to the planet. People want their organizations to make positive contributions to their communities and to the world, and they want work to enliven them. Empowerment has become a code word for Spirit as Meaning. People want to be involved creatively at work and they want their voices to be meaningful to those with whom they work. They want opportunities to express themselves and to know they are heard and are contributing to the social good. They want to be liberated to learn and to grow while making a meaningful contribution. The exchange of labor for dollars is no longer satisfactory. Work has become a lifestyle and people want a good life. They want to bring their whole selves—mind, body, and spirit—to work. Meaningful work engages the whole person. It is a dialogue unbounded by roles and infused with creativity, a willingness to collaborate with others, and a daily enactment of beliefs, values, and relationships within the context of our now global community.

Spirit as Sacred

*The man whose mind is rounded out to perfection
Knows full well
Truth is not cut in half
And things do not exist apart from the mind.
In the great Assembly of the Lotus all are present
Without divisions.
Grass, trees, the soil on which these grow*

*All have the same kinds of atoms.
Some are barely in motion
While others make haste along the path,
but they will all in time
Reach the Precious Island of Nirvana.
Who can really maintain
That things inanimate lack buddhahood?*

—Chan-Jan¹²

The realm of *Spirit as Sacred* is a conversation quite different from those of Spirit as Energy or Spirit as Meaning. In this arena there is an implicit understanding that all life is imbued with a divine spiritual presence, a spiritual potential awaiting discovery and emergence. Taoist, Buddhist, and Native American beliefs are drawn upon to exemplify the understanding that divine spirit is a quality of all beings. Humans, plants, animals, and rocks are all of spirit. From this perspective, spirit is not something separate from mind, body, or action but is indeed an integral quality of being. To posit spirit as separate from body or mind is to miss the point—something modern science has helped us do very well.

Conversations about Spirit as Sacred in the workplace would have us seeking the Dora Penas of the world. Dora Pena, a potter from the San Ildefonso pueblo in New Mexico whose pots are in many museum collections around the world, including the White House art collection, works in close relationship with spirit. Dora describes the way she works as an ongoing prayer. Before she gathers the clay and sand from the hills near her home, she prays and makes an offering to the spirits of the clay and sand. As she mixes water with the clay she prays to the spirit of the water; as she coils and rolls the clay into a pot she prays to invite the spirit of the pot to be present.

I know of few people other than my Native American friends who live and work in relation to spirit as an integral part of all life. Among them the examples are many—Thomas One Wolf who prays to the Creator before hunting, that he might be gifted with the life of a deer. Grandpa Pete Concha who reminds me to visit before traveling to the far east for business so he can bless me and ask Spirit to keep me safe and to bring me home safe. The pueblo women who dance, as the spirit of the corn, with gratitude before the fields are planted and after the harvest is gathered.

The people and businesses most organized around the notion of Spirit as Sacred are the many ecologists and environmentalists around the world. They are, for our time, the voice of spirit in all of life's forms. They are the voice of biodiversity as a sacred trust. They are the voice of our human dependency on nature.

Organizations are still suffering under the modern fiction of fragmentation, functionalism, and division of labor.

The value of integrity is on most companies' values lists. As such it is a code word for honesty, authenticity, and truth-telling within the organization. Discussions about the application of integrity in organizational life seldom evoke the meaning of integrated or whole. Organizations are still suffering under the modern fiction of fragmentation, functionalism, and division of labor. Spirit as Sacred acknowledges the connection of all life and all energy such that actions of the part affect the whole. "In Chinese philosophy it is said that the slightest wave of the hand moves molecules all the way to the end of the universe".¹³ As modern communication and transportation enables us to experience the world as one being, we see the reality of our connectedness. As we see the effect of local actions on global existence, we wonder if perhaps we have been connected all along and just didn't know it. Spiritual practices of peoples around the world assume this connection. It enables them to live in ways and to perform rituals and ceremonies that positively collaborate with the whole of being. I have been told that the ceremonial dances performed by the Tewa people help the sun rise each day. The belief that humans and planets are related is essential to their life and ceremonies. Theirs is a sacred ecology of life based on a sense of wholeness and relatedness.

For many Western business leaders the notion of wholeness is one of the realities of globalization still to be constructed. Globalization appeared in the conversations of my clients first as a title in search of a job, and then as a potential strategic leverage. Clients with titles such as Vice President of Global Marketing, Global Vice President of Human Resources, and Director of Strategic Globalization are asking questions: What is globalization? What are other companies doing about it? How can we take advantage of globalization? Is globalization just another business school fad or is it real? All of these questions belie an understanding of the wholeness of the world and the essential relatedness of all of life, as well as the existent opportunity to cooperate with relatives, colleagues, and business partners worldwide to infuse the notion of globalization with meaning and spirit that will sustain life for generations to come.

With this sense of wholeness and connectedness comes a deep reverence for relationships. Spirit as Sacred places relationships at the center of social organization. The Lakota Sioux draw purpose for action as well as a sense of social location from their relatives. A Lakota is credentialed not through schooling and degrees earned or by years of experience, but rather through relationships. Relationships that matter—those that give form to life and social organization—may be blood-line rela-

tionships or Hunka or chosen relationships, as well as relationships with spirit beings, and relationships given through vision. Each person's identity is in relation to the community. The community and the ongoing life of the people are enacted through relationships.

Unfortunately, one of the challenges facing organizations today are the many scars that exist from times when relationships were not honored and people were not treated as sacred. Spirit as Sacred calls for a radical relational perspective, one that not only honors all life and relationships, but also honors the multiple voices and ways of knowing of the world's people.

Spirit as Epistemology

*When the animals come to us,
asking for our help,
will we know what they are saying?*

*When the plants speak to us
in their delicate, beautiful language,
will we be able to answer them?*

*When the planet herself
sings to us in our dreams,
will we be able to wake ourselves, and act?*

—Gary Lawless¹⁴

Perhaps the greatest divide created by modern science between indigenous people and the Western world is the epistemological divide. While Western science developed methodologies and studied the world in order to control the forces of nature, indigenous people studied the world in order to cooperate with the forces of nature.¹⁵ This difference is awe-inspiring to me as I have come to realize essential differences not only in the ways of knowing but also in the knowledge gained.

For many people for whom spirit is integral to life there are realities other than the visible worlds of technology, living nature, and human beings. Within these realities reside spirit beings who on occasion make themselves and their views known. Examples include the nature Devas who guide the care of the gardens in Findhorn, Scotland, the spirit relatives who talk to Lakota people in sweat lodge ceremonies, and the many spirits who are channeled by psychics around the world. In all cases the presence of spirits depends on relationships among them and some person or group of people. Spirits are invited to come forth and communicate through ritual and ceremony. For example,

the Navajo sand paintings may be looked upon as symbolic representations of healing, but to the Dine people, "The making of the sand painting is the creation of the presence of the beings. The beings are not at all separate from what the sand looks like. Once the sand painting is there, they are there."¹⁶

Business and organizations around the world call on holy people to bless buildings, business endeavors, and the people whose work is to serve the community. But once the blessing is made, whether by a Shinto priest, a Rabbi, or a Medicine Man, what business and organizational leaders engage spirit on a daily basis for decision making, for team building, or for maintaining balance within the local community, as it relates to global well-being? All too often consultants, serving as the metaphoric ministers of organizational well-being, provide assistance based upon the scientific paradigm of control over nature. The challenge of Spirit as Epistemology is to open to the voices of spirit and to learn the ultimate lessons in cooperation: how to co-construct global communities and organizations in balance and in harmony with spirit.

Lessons for Global Organizing

Each of these ongoing conversations about spirituality as it relates to business, organization development, and work offers possibilities for global organizing. We are at a time in history when the discussions, writings, and decisions of organizational leaders, scholars, and practitioners are creating new forms and means of organizing. Globalization has created an imperative that the voices of spirituality be included in these discussions. The exclusion of spirituality would mean the exclusion of large numbers and communities of the world's people from the global conversation. Globalization holds the possibility for building bridges among people whose cultural memories may still be at war with one another. Conversations that have endured from generation to generation are in need of change. The task at hand is not easy, for there is much healing to be done. From a social constructionist view, what matters is that our conversational realities be inclusive of spirit, in any of its myriad manifestations.

Energy Flows in Form and Rhythm

No form of relating or organizing is inherently better than another, but all forms have relational consequences. They create space and give permission to some interactions and they limit others.

Globalization has created an imperative that the voices of spirituality be included in these discussions.

To evoke Spirit as Energy, experiment with forms of relatedness as well as with rhythms and timing of relatedness. Pay attention to forms of relatedness that liberate people and level the playing fields. Circles have neither beginning nor ending, neither top nor bottom, so consider circles of communication rather than lines of communication. Design work to go in circles rather than lines; hold meetings in the round. Encourage people, including yourself, to trust in the cycles of learning, living, and changing. Invite the circle of all people to be involved in whatever you do. Design work to be done by max-mix groups—mixed race, mixed gender, mixed function, and mixed generation—whenever possible.

*Design work to go
in circles rather
than lines.*

Invite people to tell their stories and the stories of their communities and organizations. Give time to stories, because the expression of stories frees energy and builds the grounds of relatedness. Collect, study, and discuss the stories of the community or organization, ask where the stories came from, who created them, and how they might be changed. Encourage people to talk in their own language and also in the language of the meeting or the project. Tell and retell stories to evoke the energy of the story and to enliven new possibilities for interaction and organization.

Meaning Comes Forth out of Relationships

Spirit as Meaning has to do with what is cherished by people in relation to one another. To invite its presence go out and rub shoulders with people, get to know them up close and personal. Experiment with processes for mutual learning and get curious about what gives life to communities, organizations, and yourself.

Bring visions, values, and voices to life. For some people, discussing visions and values is meaningful, so do it. Other people know what's important to them when they see it, so take them on bench-marking road trips to have a "look-see," as one colleague calls it. Continually ask people what they think, feel, believe. Encourage them to trust and act on their own knowing. Discourage speaking in the name of the boss, the employees, the customers, or some other non-present person or group. If someone or some group's voice is important, invite them to the meeting or project. Use dialogue processes to ensure expression and listening. Ask people what they would do differently if their vision were already reality—encourage them to just do it. Shorten the cycle time between vision and action—stop the talk and enact the vision.

Approach work and organizational life from an appreciative perspective. Conversations create realities; be a source of posi-

tive conversational possibilities. Seek the positive—the negative seems to show up uninvited. Base personal development discussions on high-performance patterns, not on feedback about deficiencies. Invite people to share what they value and respect about one another and their relationships, rather than what they want the other to change. Help people extend and apply success patterns, rather than try to overcome obstacles. Encourage organizational stories that give hope, evoke relational confidence, and challenge life-affirming potentials to prevail.

Sacred Space Expands with Practice

Inviting the sacred to work as an organizing potential is very simple: live it. Life, work, and organizations as we know them are maintained through our everyday conversations and interactions. What we include in our conversations and how we engage one another is the form, meaning, and energy of our lives.

Practice daily. Cultivate your character and your relationship with the creator through a committed set of practices, which may include meditation, contemplation of sacred texts, prayer, rituals, and ceremonies. Attend to spiritual virtues—peace, wisdom, harmony, justice, love, truth, humility, and compassion. Pay attention to your relationships, for they are the grounds upon which spirituality is enacted. Pick up the trash as you walk down the path. Whatever you walk around shows up again on the winds of change, and you or someone else has to deal with it. Create space and time for spiritual practice in work settings. Put up altars and renew them each day; dedicate a room for meditation, prayer, and silent reading; evoke virtues as decisions are being made.

Approach work with humility and a spirit of inquiry rather than with an attitude of expertise or possession of the right way. Show reverence for the smallest of life and the grandest of life—grains of sand and the environment, ants and elephants, violets and redwood trees, babies and holy ones. Recognize the limitations and the gifts of your life. What you do is but a drop of water in the vast ocean of life, and each drop in relation to others can cause a ripple around the world and possibly beyond. Encourage curiosity and conversations about the possible, rather than certainty in the impossible. Organize around inquiry rather than implementation. Inquiry is learning is change.

Demonstrate compassion rather than defensiveness. Accept the global, cultural, and relational legacies of our ancestors. Healing of collective relational wounds takes time, patience, and openness to new relational forms. Organize around opportunities for people to tell their stories to one another, over and over and over again, until in the telling new meaning emerges. Use

Pay attention to your relationships, for they are the grounds upon which spirituality is enacted.

dialogue processes to create safe space for the expression of the previously untold to occur. Compassion is a willingness to witness another's story even if you do not agree.

Epistemological Diversity Creates the Postmodern Agenda

Life in these times calls for an acceptance of technology and an acceptance of spirituality. It calls for an end to science as the primary means of influence and an opening of the pathways of influence to diverse ways of knowing. It calls for a radical relational perspective and at the same time an expansion of relational roles and responsibilities. To invite Spirit as Epistemology is to welcome and give credence to ways of knowing and creating knowledge based on spiritual relationships.

Invite epistemological diversity. Talk with people about how they know what they know. Explore how relationships influence ways of knowing. Put trust in different ways of knowing—intuition, spirits, feminism, astrology. Invite people to speak from their most sacred voice, whatever that is for them. Ask people to speak from different voices—the globe, the mountains, the children, the ill, the rich, the poor. Help people recognize the potential of honoring multiple, sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting views that emerge from different ways of knowing. Listen for that which gives life, hope, and confidence.

Include blessings, prayers, meditation, and rituals led by the elders and holy ones every step of the way. You don't need to understand it for it to work. In most cultures only a few understand the ways of spirit, the others rely on faith. Evoke the blessings of the spirit world on a daily basis through prayer, song, dance, and celebration of the divine relatedness of all life.

***Talk with people
about how they
know what they
know.***

Reflections

Spirituality as it relates to work, business, and organization development is a multifaceted conversation. The question is not whether it is relevant in the social understanding and creation of global organizations, but rather in what ways. People around the globe are giving voice to spiritual beliefs and practices while their organizations are suffering the consequences of years of spiritual estrangement. As people live more fully awakened to the spiritual life, old ways of relating and forms of organizing cannot endure. Spiritual ways of working and organizing that currently exist around the world hold potential for organizational realities that blend the best of science and technology with the best of mysticism and love. Let us have faith in the magic of conversation, relational realities, and co-creation, and let us ex-

pand beyond the realms of human interaction to include all our relations. Mitakuye oyas'in.

-
1. J. Mander, *In The Absence Of the Sacred*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991.
 2. Angelo Ravagli and C.M. Weekly, *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*. New York: Viking Penquin Books, 1964, 1971.
 3. R. Fritz, *The Path Of Least Resistance*. Salem, MA: DMA, Inc., 1984.
 4. M. Sinetar, *Do What You Love: The Money Will Follow*. New York: Dell Publishers, 1988.
 5. H. Owen, *Spirit Transformation and Development in Organizations*. Potomac, MD: Abbott Publishing, 1987.
 6. Linda S. Ackerman, "The Flow State: A New View of Organizations and Managing." In *Transforming Work*. John Adams, (Ed.) Alexandria, VA: Miles River Press, 1984.
 7. T. Crum, *The Magic Of Conflict*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
 8. Gary Lawless, in *Earth Prayers*, E. Roberts and E. Amidon, Eds. San Francisco: HarperCollins. 1991.
 9. D. Yankelovich, *New Rules*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1981.
 10. L.E. Bolman & T.E. Deal, *Leading With Soul*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985.
 11. D. Richards, *Artful Work*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1995.
 12. Fung Ya-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 2. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1953.
 13. C.K. Anthony, *A Guide To The I Ching*. Stow, MA: Anthony Publishing Company, 1988.
 14. Gary Lawless, *First Sight of Land*. Nobleboro, ME: Blackberry Books. 1990.
 15. P. Colorado, "Bridging Native and Western Science." In *Convergence*, XXI, 2/3, pp. 49-67, 1988.
 16. J. Kremer, "Perspectives On Indigenous Healing." In *Noetic Sciences Review*, No. 33, pp. 13. Sausalito, CA: Institute of Noetic Sciences, 1995.
-