


# Religion, an obstacle to workplace spirituality and employee wellness?



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A desperate need for employee wellness is echoed in work-related stories. Workplace spirituality is presented as an integral part of achieving and maintaining employee wellness. However, there is an observed gap of spirituality in employee wellness programmes and in the absence of the workplace spiritual helper in multidisciplinary wellness teams. Using a postfoundational notion of practical theology, I have explored one of the reasons for this gap, namely workplace spirituality's association to religion. When spirituality is viewed through the lens of religion, it is overlooked as a vehicle of help. This is a consequence of the obstacles of the taboo of religious discussion, the complexity of religious plurality, the dominant voice of secularism and unhelpful religiosity. A proposal is made for a definition of spirituality that describes the relationship between spirituality and religion that overcomes the religion-related obstacles to the development of workplace spirituality and so enable spirituality's contribution in wellness.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The research includes an interdisciplinary collaboration with a Human Resource (HR) manager, social worker, arts therapist, clinical pastoral counsellor, medical practitioner, psychologist, businessperson and two psychiatrists that underscores the collaborative effort in wellness. There is an intradisciplinary challenge to those who restrict the view of spirituality to the experience of religion.

## Introduction

This research explores the themes of workplace spirituality and employee wellness. In observing a spirituality gap<sup>1</sup> within employee wellness programmes, it is acknowledged in repeated comments by the 12 co-researchers<sup>2</sup> and a team of 9 interdisciplinary research respondents<sup>3</sup> that religion-related obstacles may result in a spirituality gap within workplace wellness programmes. When an understanding of spirituality is restricted to an association to religion, spirituality including the appointment of workplace spiritual helpers onto multidisciplinary wellness teams is overlooked as a means of employee wellness. As will be discussed, these religion-related obstacles are linked to where there is a taboo of religious discussion, the complexity of religious plurality, the perceived dominant voice of secularism and unhelpful religiosity.

The research methodology is postfoundational. Postfoundationalism relies on a theory of rationality developed by Wentzel van Huyssteen, whose writings build on the work of Larry Laudan and Calvin Schrag (Koster 2009:34; Van Huyssteen 2015:208). The postfoundational method begins in the local context of interpreted experience and tradition. The method then points beyond the community of the local context by means of transversality towards cross-contextual and interdisciplinary discourses towards new alternate preferred realities (Van Huyssteen 1999:113). With regard to a postfoundational practical theology, Müller (2005:78) offers five minimum requirements: (1) be locally contextual, (2) be socially constructed, (3) be directed

1. The term 'spirituality gap' refers to the disregard of spirituality within the described context.

2. In the conduct of interviews, this qualitative research regards each of the persons interviewed as co-researchers. The term 'co-researcher' is used in the context of the work of David Epston (2004:31) in which the persons interviewed and the interviewer work together for the 'co-production of knowledge'. The following co-researchers participated in the research: Marion (alias), an employee medically boarded; Nelson (alias), a police chaplain; George (alias), a prison chaplain; Matthew (alias), a school chaplain; Henk, a corporate chaplain; Warren, the CEO of Hospice, Pietermaritzburg; Vezzi, a corporate life coach; three wellness provider executives: Jeanette, Anupama (alias) and Michelle (alias); Shirley, a registered clinical consultant; and Michael (alias), a clinical psychologist and mental health hospital manager. I have used aliases for those co-researchers who requested not to be identified by name.

3. The interdisciplinary research respondents are the participants in the transversal dialogue of the research that speak into the acknowledgement, discussion and response stages of the research. The research respondents include Wendy, a medical practitioner; Sylvia (alias), an HR manager; André, a clinical pastoral counsellor; Linda, a social worker; Patrick (alias), a businessperson; Carol, an arts therapist; Kate (alias), a clinical psychologist; Carl (alias) and Lennart who are both psychiatrists. I have used aliases for those research respondents who requested not to be identified by name.

**Note:** This research article arises from the PhD thesis of Alan Bester titled, 'Corporate chaplaincy, spirituality and wellness: A postfoundational practical theological exploration' in the Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria, with Prof Julian C. Müller (Emeritus Professor of Practical Theology and Senior Research Fellow of the Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship) as the promoter.

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by tradition, (4) explore interdisciplinary meaning and (5) points beyond the local. In the implementation of postfoundationalism for a postfoundational practical theology, I have utilised three concepts: acknowledgement, discussion and response. The first stage is to acknowledge the context of this research and more importantly the people and co-researchers within the context. This stage meets within the postfoundational understanding of contextuality (Van Huyssteen 2014:213). The second stage is to discuss what is acknowledged. It meets within the postfoundational understanding of transversality (Van Huyssteen 2014:213). The third stage is to develop and explore a preferred alternative reality for, and possibly beyond, the local context. This stage meets within the postfoundational understanding of 'problem-solving'<sup>4</sup> (Van Huyssteen 2014:226).

Using a postfoundational notion of practical theology, the acknowledgement of this postfoundational research describes the relationship between workplace spirituality and employee wellness. The discussion explores the consequence of viewing spirituality through the lens of religion. In the response, I will propose using a definition for spirituality that describes spirituality's relationship to religion with the aim of overcoming the obstacle of viewing spirituality through a religious lens that prevents the development of workplace spirituality within workplace wellness programmes.

## Acknowledgement: The context of spirituality within employee wellness

### Defining spirituality and workplace spirituality

Within biblical testimony, 'spiritual' may, as a basic definition, be described as a reference to 'someone within whom the Spirit of God dwelt or who lived under the influence of the Spirit of God' (Sheldrake 2007:3). Yet, there are definitions of spirituality, especially in a contemporary secular context, that increasingly view spirituality outside the domain of religious experience and the Bible (Janse van Rensburg et al. 2014:401; Koenig, King & Carson 2012:37–38; Lepherd 2015:568; Roof 2015:587). Even within the Christian context, there is the acknowledgement that:

Spirituality is a term whose meaning has changed radically in the past fifty years, and no one definition is generally accepted either by practitioners of the spiritual life or by scholars who study the subject ... Today the term spirituality is not necessarily religious in meaning, much less Christian, and often has little or nothing to do with the divine Spirit. (Schneiders 2009:366)

The topic of spirituality has a prominent place in literature, with books that include a more traditional stance of the association between spirituality and religion, such as in the series 'World spirituality: an encyclopaedic history of the religious quest' (Cousins 1985) to a more contemporary

<sup>4</sup>The use of the term 'problem-solving' is not in the positivistic sense of providing solutions on behalf of others, but rather in postfoundationalism's ability to open the way for new possibilities in response to a local context's 'problem' (Van Huyssteen 2014:226).

view, in which spirituality is not necessarily dependent on religious experience such as 'Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion' (Carrette & King 2005). The seminal work of Koenig, McCollough and Larson (2001), 'Handbook of religion and health', considers more than 1200 studies and 400 reviews to explore the relationship between religion, spirituality and health.

Carrette and King (2005:1) indicate that their book emerges out of a 'frustration with the lack of clarity and critical discussion of the concept of spirituality'. They use as a departure point the notion that there 'is no essence or definitive meaning to terms like spirituality or religion' (Carrette & King 2005:3). For Gross-Schaefer (2009:27) the term spirituality 'has become an overused and abused term that has been applied to so many situations and concepts that it has ceased to have any precise meaning'. For example, the co-researcher, Anupama (interview, 04 March 2015), a wellness provider executive, refers to spirituality as something which has become 'warm and fuzzy'.

The classic work of Mitroff and Denton (1999:83) offers a definition of 'spirituality' as 'the basic feeling of being connected with one's complete self, others, and the entire universe' with the emphasis on 'interconnectedness'. In the local African context, this 'being connected' may be identified with an African spirituality in which 'life is viewed and experienced as one indivisible whole, a single unit in which all components work in unison' (Manala 2005:53). In bringing wellness and interconnectedness together, Magezi (2008:268) indicates that the 'environment where well-being flourishes is in the context of relationships'.

A dominant theme in the discussion with the research respondents is workplace spirituality's relationship to religion. The interdisciplinary team member, Lennart (interview, 07 March), a consultant psychiatrist and convenor of the South African Society of Psychiatrists Spirituality and Religion Special Interest Group, shares a presentation that offers a definition of spirituality as the 'experiential side of religion'. Within this understanding, the significance of spirituality's relationship to religion is particularly relevant in the South African context with the presentation indicating that, in 2007, only 8.08% of South Africans expressed a 'non-religious' positioning (Nelson Mandela Medical School, 03 April 2017). André (interview, 27 October 2016), a pastoral counsellor, understands religion as a 'subsection or whatever of spirituality'. This prioritises the place of spirituality and does not diminish it to a religious-only experience.

There are also those who view spirituality as being something other than religion (Janse van Rensburg et al. 2014:401; Koenig et al. 2012:37–38; Lepherd 2015:568; Roof 2015:587). In their study, Mitroff and Denton (1999:86, 89–90) identify divergent attitudes towards religion and spirituality with a significant 60% who held a negative view of religion but a positive view of spirituality with one respondent commenting:

Not only do you not have to be religious in order to be spiritual, but it probably helps if you are not religious, especially if you want your spirituality to grow and be a basic part of your life. (p. 87)

Certain authors such as Harris (2014) would even seek a definition and practice of spirituality outside of religious experience as his book's subtitle reveals, 'A guide to spirituality without religion'. It is increasingly observed that while in many parts of the world, participation in organised religion is in decline, there is a growing interest in spiritual experiences (Culliford 2002:1434). This is partly as a result of a postmodern culture in which spirituality 'has come to mean whatever people wish and has wide applicability and appreciation in this age of individualism' (Koenig et al. 2012:38). However, while there is growing support for a spirituality that is not embedded in religion, it cannot be overlooked that 'the overwhelming spiritual experience in the world is aligned with religion' (Roof 2015:588).

With regard to spirituality in the workplace, Pawar (2009:375) simply describes 'workplace spirituality' as a reference to 'employee experiences of spirituality at workplace'. For Nooralizad, Ghorchian and Jaafari (2011:14), it is the 'spiritual side of the organization' and the view of humanity 'as a spiritual being'. I value the summary of Gupta, Kumar and Singh (2014:79,84) who consider workplace spirituality under four 'dimensions of spirituality': (1) 'meaningful work' that 'provides opportunities for creativity, leading to happiness and joy that will ultimately increase employee's level of job satisfaction', (2) 'sense of community' and the resulting 'harmony derived from working for a common cause', (3) 'organizational values' which 'are the most important spiritual factor for satisfaction' and (4) 'compassion' leading to satisfaction as people demonstrate a desire to lessen suffering in others. They indicate that spirituality in the workplace 'is about people who have a common connection, magnetism, and togetherness with each other in their work unit and about the organization as a whole' (Gupta et al. 2014:80).

While researchers debate on the definitions of spirituality, what is clearer is the relationship between spirituality and wellness.

### The relationship between spirituality and wellness

The desperate need for employee wellness is echoed in the stories. The respondent, Patrick (interview, 01 November 2016), a business person, reflects that:

... we recognise that people are increasingly taking strain. Financially, I think that they're concerned from a world perspective what's going on, they're concerned from our country perspective what's going, people are feeling marginalised. Financially, pressures are huge on people. So, there's massive struggles. And I know people are coming to work with a burden that is so huge it definitely is having an impact on their work. (Respondent 5, Male, Businessperson)

Sylvia (interview, 14 November 2016), an HR manager, highlights the desperate place that employees find themselves in and notes an increase in the number of employees being prescribed anti-depressants. She also refers to the harsh corporate environment of 'do more with less people' that leads to the further breakdown of employees. Marion's story (interview, 14 January 2016) is a personal account of being unwell in the workplace and the struggle for wellness, to which Carl, a psychiatrist (written response, 11 December 2016), reports is a 'common scenario' for many employees.

In response, workplace spirituality is one means towards achieving and maintaining wellness. Lepherd (2015:566) comments that 'holistic health care consists of four domains: physical, social, psychological and spiritual' with the view that spirituality 'is an important part of the care of an ill person's well-being as it concerns the integrity or the wholeness of a person'. In their extensive review of 'spirituality and religiosity and its role in health and diseases', Mishra et al. (2017) conclude:

Ultimately, the role of spirituality for an individual plays a vital, although still mysterious, role in health care, often used as a medium through which one's physiological health is improved. (p. 1296)

In a review of 140 articles Karakas (2010:92) refers to workplace spirituality wellness outcomes as falling into three categories: (1) 'Human resources perspective: Spirituality enhances employee well-being and quality of life', (2) 'Philosophical perspective: Spirituality provides employees a sense of purpose and meaning at work' and (3) 'Interpersonal perspective: Spirituality provides employees a sense of interconnectedness and community'.

Building upon the thought that spirituality is a component in wellness is that the absence of spirituality is also a factor in being unwell. Grant et al. (2004:372) make the observation that while 'spiritual beliefs influence clinical outcomes', what they refer to as 'spiritual distress', as a result of unmet spiritual needs or the struggle to find meaning and purpose, is a 'factor in depression, demoralization, and end-of-life despair'.

As an employee, the co-researcher Marion (interview, 14 January 2016) expresses the place that spirituality fulfilled during a number of life crises and most especially during her illness and medical boarding process. Speaking from within a wellness provider organisation, the co-researcher, Anupama (interview, 04 March 2015), confirmed that spirituality is a 'spoke' in the 'wheel' of wellness. The co-researcher, Shirley (interview, 25 August 2015), shares that among wellness providers, there is the general acceptance of the value and contribution of spirituality in the care and wellness of employees but also notes that wellness providers seldom consider the role of spirituality in wellness.

The interdisciplinary team of respondents offer significant feedback on their understanding of the relationship between spirituality and wellness. Carl (written response,

11 December 2016) shares 'that within Psychiatry over the past 10 years there has been a strong movement in spirituality' and confirms that 'mental wellbeing is greatly affected by spiritual wellbeing'. Carl emphasises a holistic multidisciplinary approach with 'physical, mental, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions'. He also offers the challenge for multidisciplinary team members to not see the different disciplines as only practising alongside one another with mutual respect, but rather as an interrelated means of achieving wellness. Using the example of omitting spiritual care, Carl suggests that 'only part of the problem' is addressed with the possible outcome of also diminishing social, psychological and physical well-being. For total wellness, there is a need for the interrelated contribution of each discipline. Consequently, a neglect of any one area of care diminishes the other areas as well.

Before concluding this section, it is necessary to note that there have also been those proponents seeking to demonstrate that spirituality itself, and not just the absence of spirituality, and in particular religion, has had a negative effect on health and well-being (Koenig 2000:388). However, the overwhelming support remains with the positive outcome of spirituality on wellness (Koenig et al. 2012:xi).

### The obstacle of religion for spirituality and wellness

Van Tonder and Ramdass (2009:1) state that among the obstacles to developing workplace spirituality is the scepticism that arises out of the lack of a definition of what spirituality is and spirituality's complex relationship to religion. It is my view that this obstacle can be overcome when spirituality is differentiated from religion. This is not to say that religious experiences cannot be spiritual. However, it does emphasise that spirituality which is either synonymous with religion or viewed through a religious-only lens may create obstacles for the development and implementation of a workplace spirituality.

The co-researcher stories confirm the need to differentiate spirituality from religion. In many instances, the two terms were used interchangeably with the result that the reasons for not allowing religious-based forms of help into the workplace were applied to spirituality as well. However, some of the co-researchers did express the need to make the differentiation. Anupama (interview, 04 March 2015), a wellness provider executive, affirms that spirituality is an important part of the wheel of wellness, but shares the misunderstanding of what spirituality is, including confusing spirituality with religion. Jeanette (interview, 06 March 2015), a wellness provider executive, shares that when the terms are synonymous and tensions arise because of religion, spirituality with religion is repudiated as a form of help. Warren (interview, 17 April 2015), a former Anglican priest and CEO of Hospice Pietermaritzburg, indicates that there is the need to differentiate spirituality from religion, with 'ritualised' religion being an obstacle to spiritual care. For Warren, this is exacerbated in a society of religious plurality where religious workers may feel compelled to

proselytise in the workplace. However, even within the wellness industry there are unhelpful associations of spirituality to religion. For example, the wellness provider executive Michelle (interview, 04 November 2015) expresses that in her understanding, spirituality is a 'compromise' of a person's 'own belief system' which she associates with 'astrology or something like that'. The interdisciplinary respondent, Lennart (interview, 18 April 2017), a consultant psychiatrist, summarises:

Most people, whether they're spiritual or religious, will, in this country, want to express their spirituality/religiousness with their relationship to God ... Most people don't actually understand what the term spirituality means. They don't. Religion they see as church. Religion is church, or the mosque, or whatever the case may be. Most people haven't got a clue about the actual, and here on the one side you can be academic, an academic definition of spirituality, and then you can be on the other side, and say, it's just something that has to grow in me, but they're very vague about it. (Respondent 9, Male, Psychiatrist)

As diverse are the expressions of spirituality's relationship to religion, what is clear is the observation that failing to differentiate spirituality from religion means that the challenges of religion in the workplace results in spirituality being potentially overlooked as a means of workplace wellness.

## Discussion: Religion-related obstacles for the implementation of workplace spirituality

In the co-researcher stories and the interdisciplinary team's feedback, the following obstacles linked to religion and by association to spirituality were highlighted: the taboo of religious discussions, the complexity of religious plurality, the dominance of secularism and the problems posed by unhelpful religiosity.

### The taboo of religious discussion or expression

The complexity that religion adds to the discussion is in part linked to the centuries-old adage of, 'Never discuss religion or politics with those who hold opinions different to yours; they are subjects that heat in handling, until they burn your fingers', which may be traced back to a publication in 1839 (Willis & Porter 1839:774). This adage reveals the response in which some things are deemed better to avoid than to deal with. The co-researcher and unwell employee, Marion (interview, 14 January 2016), reflects on this adage from her own experience:

... there's the kind of two general laws, we don't talk politics, we don't talk religion, because as soon as we bring those two elements into the conversation or the workplace, we're going to divide, and ... and there's going to be problems. (Co-researcher 1, Female, Medically boarded employee)

Sadly, the relationships between religious groups have fuelled the motivation to hold on to this adage. Bentley (2012b) offers the observation that:



... we must also admit that religion per se has had its muscles flexed in recent history, many times for the wrong reasons, but nevertheless, the battle (often physical) between for instance Islam and Christianity as well as Islam and Judaism has left a dark impression of the place of religion in society. It should come as no surprise that there is a growing voice asking whether the world wouldn't be a better place without religion. (p. 89)

When spirituality is viewed through this religious lens, this adage is also applied to spirituality with the result that the development of a workplace spirituality is overlooked. Mitroff and Denton (1999:83) express the concern that while most people interviewed wished they could express their spirituality in the workplace, 'most were extremely hesitant to do so because they had strong fears and doubts that they could do so without offending their peers'. Lips-Wiersma and Mills (2002:183, 200) refer to 'personal vulnerability' with the 'risk of being different' and the perceived 'lack of safety in expressing spirituality in workplace settings'. Bruce (2000:469) indicates that while 75% of the respondents in her study indicated that personal spirituality values are important in the workplace, 66% held the view that 'it is not appropriate to discuss either spiritual experiences or religious beliefs at work'. There was also the overwhelming fear of 74% of the respondents that if spirituality was brought into the workplace, others would 'try to force contradictory beliefs on them' (Bruce 2000:469). This stands in contrast to 85% of the respondents who indicated that 'they would never try to force their beliefs on another' (Bruce 2000:470). These concerns reach into the themes of religious pluralism, secularism and an unhelpful religiosity, which are discussed below.

An observation from the co-researcher stories is from those helpers who are religious but feel constrained not to be overtly spiritual or religious. This raises the question of whether this response from the helpers is because of how they perceive their help will be received or an experience of a reaction against overtly spiritual help. Regardless of that answer, the obstacle remains that because of this adage, 'never discuss religion', in which some things are deemed better to avoid than to deal with, and the association of spirituality to religion, the development of workplace spirituality is impeded.

Why does the religious aspect of this adage continue to persist? The answer may be found in the complexity of religious plurality, secularism and an unhelpful religiosity.

### Religious plurality

A dominant theme from the co-researcher stories as an obstacle for developing workplace spirituality arises from religious plurality within the workplace. The co-researcher Michelle (interview, 04 November 2015), a wellness provider executive, highlights the potential obstacle for developing workplace spirituality through a spiritual helper when that

helper is seen through the religious organisation they represent. Vezi (interview, 16 March 2015), a corporate life coach, highlights the possible tensions that may arise from religious groupings different to that represented by the spiritual helpers. Jeanette (interview, 06 March 2015), a wellness provider executive, and Matthew (interview, 14 January 2016), a school chaplain, ask the question whether employees would voluntarily meet with a spiritual helper knowing that the helper did not represent their own religious affiliation, and vice versa.

While André (interview, 27 October 2016), a clinical pastoral counsellor, confirms that a focus on spirituality may overcome the boundaries between people that may be erected by religion, he asks whether in practice this will possible to achieve. This is not to say that there cannot be a learning of different traditions, but the question is asked, can a person be truly respecting, without any prejudice, of those practices that are not one's own?

Carol (interview, 27 October 2016), an arts therapist, offers another perspective in asking whether the all-encompassing helper may be a hindrance for some employees seeking help:

If I'm a person who's only known very conservative, say a very conservative Christian upbringing, and I'm here, I'm working in this environment, and I have a desire to, you know, have spiritual support, I'm unlikely to go and seek support from somebody who I now regard as being completely open to everything ... Any kind of conservative groupings who would say I want to see a psychologist that is a Jew, or I want to see a psychologist that's a Christian, I'm not prepared to see anyone else. (Respondent 8, Female, Arts Therapist)

Related to religious plurality and speaking from the background of when wellness providers did previously include religious practitioners on their provider lists, Jeanette (interview, 06 March 2015) clarified that there was a gradual move to exclude religious practitioners until no 'spiritual leader' was included. Exploring the reasons for this shift, Jeanette explained that the prominence of Christianity in society in previous decades made it easier and more acceptable to refer employees to church ministers in their area. But with the growing awareness of religious plurality, it became increasingly difficult to match employees to religious practitioners, especially among those not represented within mainstream religious organisations.

The co-researcher Anupama (interview, 04 March 2015) shares a further difficulty in the discussion on religious plurality. Noting that many spiritual helpers will be associated with religious organisations, not all religious organisations have the same qualification criteria which will complicate the appointment of spiritual helpers to wellness teams. This stands in contrast to other helping professions such as nursing, psychology and social work, in which there is an expectation regarding the level of qualification and competency. Anupama indicates that while one religious group may have a criterion of a higher degree, other groups

may have spiritual leaders without any formal training and refers to the training of certain spiritual and religious leaders as 'fuzzy'. Michelle (interview, 04 November 2015) comments that while some religious practitioners may require several years of intensive training, others may simply have had a 'bush training for 2 days, or whatever, and say, "I'm a pastor" because we get that'.

A final question within this section needs to be asked: why is religious plurality a dominant story in a context in which Christianity is by far (86.0%) the most well-represented religion of all South Africans (Statistics South Africa 2016:3)? Is it because of our broken South African past that a 'political correctness' no longer allows Christianity to speak up? Is there something else at work that endeavours to hear the voice of the minority? Is the minority just more vocal, or in more influential positions? Or, in the post-apartheid South Africa, has the church just lost its prophetic voice? Writing within the context of the Christian church, Bentley (2012a) wrestles with the question of new voices competing against the traditional dominant voice of the church:

Coming from a past where the Church held a dominant position in society – both in the promotion of and in the resistance [sic] to the apartheid system – the Church now finds itself in a new context, a constitutional democracy. All of a sudden its voice has to compete with other voices, its power limited to the understanding that it is but one role-player in a society which is trying to find its feet. What does this mean for the identity, place and role of the Christian Church? (p. vii)

While these reasons for competing voices require further research, for this article the point is clear that the voices of religious plurality have become an obstacle for the development of workplace spirituality for employee wellness. As loud are the voices of religious pluralism, so is the voice of secularism.

## Secularism

When spirituality has a limited view through the religious lens, secularism is a potential obstacle to workplace spirituality. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* dates the term 'secularism' back to the 1850s when it was first used by G.J. Holyoake (1817–1906) and by definition 'denotes a system which seeks to interpret and order life on principles taken solely from this world, without recourse to belief in God and a future life' (eds. Cross & Livingstone 2005). Jeanette (06 March 2015) sees secularism in the shift away from Western forms of religion to other concepts such as mindfulness. The respondent Wendy (interview, 20 October 2016) suggests that growing secularism imposes the thinking that there can be no place for religion in secular institutions. Where the definitions of spirituality and religion are not clear, secularisation will also potentially overlook the development of a workplace spirituality.

As in the previous section, what stands out is how vocal the voice of secularism is in a predominantly religious context. In the Statistics SA general household survey of 2015 report,

only '5,2% said that they were not affiliated to any religion in particular' (Statistics South Africa 2016:3). Yet, the voice of secularism, as Jeanette and Wendy suggest, seems to dominate so many spheres of South African life. Noting the predominantly religious context of South Africa, Schoeman (2017:6) asks the question, 'Is South Africa a Christian or secularised country, or what is the position of religion within the South African society?'

Bentley (2015:2) concludes that South Africa is a postsecular democracy with the understanding that a 'Postsecular democracy implies a form of democratic governance, which makes space for all eligible voices in society to contribute to the democratic project'. In this understanding, religion is not a taboo, but it is only one voice among many other voices. It is not within the scope of this article to explore why the voice of secularism seems to dominate so many spheres of life, but it is necessary for this article to note that where there is no a clear understanding of the difference between spirituality and religion, the voice of secularisation that opposes religion, or the many voices of postsecularism in which religion no longer has a dominant voice, may lead not only to religion being pushed out of the scope of wellness, but spirituality as well.

While I cannot assume that the following account is the product of secularism, it nevertheless speaks to a religious dominant society with secular voices. Kate (interview, 25 November 2016), a clinical psychologist, found it ironic that while spirituality is acknowledged as a means of wellness, there is an intentional resistance to its implementation. Kate refers to the disallowance of spiritual groups within the workplace as they:

... might negatively impact on performance ... And I thought ... how ironic that people can go for smoke breaks, but can't go for a spiritual break ... I mean you can go for 10 smoke breaks in a day, but you can't have a spiritual group because that's going to affect productivity. So, that for me was a very ironic statement. (Respondent 7, Female, Clinical Psychologist)

## Unhelpful religiosity

A further obstacle that fuels the taboo of workplace religious expression and the reluctance by association to embrace a workplace spirituality is what I would term an unhelpful religiosity. This may be in the form of using the role of the workplace spiritual helper to proselytise or using the voice of religion to scorn the other helping disciplines or the media-highlighted unhelpful practices of religious leaders.

The co-researcher Matthew (interview, 14 January 2016) indicates that should the spiritual helper understand his or her role to overtly proselytise employees, this would surely lead to conflict and division within the organisation. Warren (interview, 17 April 2015) notes the difficulties that will arise when a spiritual helper seeks to impose their own religion, or religious views, upon those whom they are caring for. The respondent Sylvia (interview, 24 October 2016), an HR manager, comments, 'I don't think it matters how you try to

do it in a spiritual way, it's going to cause problems somewhere down the line'.

Then there are those instances in which religious help, as sincere as it may be, is counter-productive to wellness. Carol (interview, 27 October 2016), for example, shares how certain religious opinions may hinder the wellness process as it stigmatises mental illness and the treatment of mental illness.

Then there are the unhelpful practices of religious leaders. The co-researcher Michelle (interview, 04 November 2015) indicates that the question of religion's credibility is raised as a result of the unhelpful practices among religious leaders and members that create a distrust of religious leaders and helpers. Lennart (07 March 2017) in discussing his work within the 'Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities' confirms that one of the reasons religion or spirituality is treated with caution in the workplace is because of a mistrust of religious leaders who have discredited the religious community. These perceptions may certainly sway the views that corporates have in considering help from those affiliated to religious bodies. These unhelpful practices may be in the form of outright outrageous religious practices which have dominated the media headlines, such as the eating of grass (Reilly 2014), drinking petrol (Thornhill 2014), swallowing snakes and rats (Raborife 2015), spraying 'Doom' into the faces of parishioners (Masuabi 2016) and even driving over congregants (Areff 2016). These unhelpful practices may also be in the form of abusive and unethical practices of persuasion and manipulation. Both forms endorse the reasons why the response of corporates and wellness providers conclude that it is just better and easier to avoid the complexity of religion, and by association, spirituality, in the workplace.

## Response: Defining spirituality's relationship to religion

The taboo of religious discussion, the complexity of religious plurality, secularism and an unhelpful religiosity give cause to overlooking religion and by association, spirituality in the workplace. While the question may be debated why in a country in which the majority of people profess to be Christian, the obstacle of religious plurality remains a dominant voice, the reality is that as long as spirituality's relationship to religion is misunderstood, both religion and spirituality will be sidelined in favour of not addressing the tensions and possible conflict of religious plurality. While the question may be debated why in a predominantly religious country secularism should have such an influence, the obstacle remains that when spirituality's relationship to religion is misunderstood, spirituality with religion becomes the denial of secularism. In the same way, when spirituality's relationship to religion is misunderstood, the taboo of religious discussion and the unhelpful practices of certain forms of religiosity become added reasons to avoid all matters religious and spiritual.

Spirituality's association to religion leads to overlooking the development of workplace spirituality and denies its role as a means of employee wellness. While spirituality needs to be differentiated from religion, religion cannot be separated from spirituality. Also, most South African employees will be affiliated to some religious tradition, and the meeting place of spirituality will inevitably dwell within the context of religion. Furthermore, most spiritual helpers will still be affiliated to religious organisations. An important part of this article's response is to define spirituality and its relationship to religion, with the aim of overcoming the observed obstacles that prevent the development of workplace spirituality.

'The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible' defines religion as, 'Respect and awe for the sacred and divine, strict observance of religious ritual, or conscientiousness in morality and ethics' (Given 2009:760). This stands apart from spirituality which I would express as that part of the human experience that refers to the inmost being, the spirit or the soul, searching for and experiencing the deepest values and meaning by which a person seeks to live. Spirituality is that which connects us to ourselves, to God or a belief system, and to each other and all reality.

In terms of religion's relationship to spirituality, Schneiders (2003:164–165) offers three models for the relationship. (1) Religion and spirituality are 'separate enterprises with no necessary connection' (Schneiders 2003:164–165). (2) Religion and spirituality are 'conflicting realities, related to each other in inverse proportion' in which the 'more spiritual one is the less religious, and vice versa' (Schneiders 2003:164). (3) Religion and spirituality are:

two dimensions of a single enterprise which, like body and spirit, are often in tension but are essential to each other and constitute, together, a single reality. In other words, they see the two as partners in the search for God. (Schneiders 2003:164–165)

While Schneiders (2003:165) favours the third model, I do not think it is necessary to choose between the three but to see all three at work in the relationship between religion and spirituality. To argue one model assumes that there is a shared consensus of a definition of spirituality and its relationship to religion, which is not the case. The relationship cannot be static. At times, spirituality will be viewed in a manner which does require religion or a religious definition. At other times, the two will be in conflict with each other. And yet at other times, they will work in partnership.

While religion cannot be separated from spirituality, the terms are not synonymous, and within this relationship, religion needs to be defined as an outcome of spirituality, not spirituality of religion. Because I am spiritual, I choose to be religious, not vice versa. Religion may offer the means to develop spirituality, but I would still argue that spirituality is the precursor of religion and is not dependent on religion. While religious plurality divides, spirituality can connect regardless of religious persuasion. Spirituality remains relevant even when secularism denies the place of religion.



While unhelpful religiosity discredits religion and religious practices, spirituality need not be associated with these religious fanatics. But, when spirituality and religion are viewed as synonymous, or when spirituality is only viewed through a religious lens, then an obstacle for the development of a workplace spirituality will certainly remain.

### Affirming workplace spirituality for wellness

In terms of an understanding of spirituality in wellness, the relationship of spirituality to the biopsychosocial model needs to be considered. Engel (1980:536) presented the biopsychosocial model as a 'systems approach' in which the physician runs the risk of 'neglect' or 'injury' for a patient should the patient not be treated as 'an organized whole'. Sulmasy (2002:24) 'expands on the biopsychosocial model to include the spiritual concern of patients' and presents a biopsychosocial-spiritual model of care arguing that 'genuinely holistic health care must address the totality of the patient's relational existence – physical, psychological, social, and spiritual'. Sulmasy (2002) defines the spiritual as:

... an individual's or a group's relationship with the transcendent, however that may be construed. Spirituality is about the search for transcendent meaning. Most people express their spirituality in religious practice. Others express their spirituality exclusively in their relationships with nature, music, the arts, or a set of philosophical beliefs or relationships with friends and family ... Thus, although not everyone has a religion, everyone who searches for ultimate or transcendent meaning can be said to have a spirituality. (p. 25)

While the presentation of the biopsychosocial-spiritual model highlights the neglect of spirituality and spiritual care in the biopsychosocial model, spiritual is more than the fourth component of an individual's being. The respondent Lennart, in his presentation to the Nelson Mandela Medical School (03 April 2017), offers an understanding that spirituality, including religion and other belief systems, is the connecting point of the biopsychosocial model. For myself, as mentioned above, spirituality is that which refers to the inmost being, the spirit or the soul, searching for and experiencing the deepest values and meaning by which a person seeks to live. Spirituality is that which connects us to ourselves, to God or a belief system and to each other and all reality. As such, spirituality is that which connects and gives meaning to the biopsychosocial. As such spirituality is not just the connecting point of the biopsychosocial, but the intersection of each to the other and that which supports and gives meaning and expression to the whole. With this understanding, spirituality gives meaning to why and for what purpose a person exists; it gives meaning to how the biological functions with a psyche and within social relationships. I would also interpret these social relationships in a broad sense that includes society and all of creation. To be well, the whole person needs to be well, the whole spiritual-biopsychosocial person. By placing 'spiritual-' before the 'biopsychosocial', I hope to emphasise the relationship that the spiritual has with, and the value the spiritual offers to, the biopsychosocial.

### Developing workplace spirituality for wellness

What is the task of workplace spirituality? Workplace spirituality operates for the individual and for the corporate, including the task of work itself. For the individual, there is the need to meet the employee in the questions of life and death such as trauma, including violence, abuse and crime; sickness; stress; relationships problems; and the list continues into everything that affects us as human beings. For the corporate, I would propose as a starting place the research of Gupta, Kumar and Singh (2014:79, 84) who recognise four areas of workplace spirituality: 'meaningful work', 'sense of community', 'organizational values' and 'compassion'. These four areas speak into the understanding of spirituality as that which gives meaning and as that which connects. In developing workplace spirituality, I would propose that it becomes the task of the workplace spiritual helper to (1) assess spiritual wellness and offer meaning into the lives of employees through pastoral counselling and (2) to offer a guiding and supporting presence in the development of the above four areas of workplace spirituality.

It is with this understanding I propose that spirituality can be freed from the religious-based obstacles and be embraced as a means for wellness. This does not mean that religion cannot be spiritual or that spirituality cannot include the religious. But it is to underscore that spirituality cannot be not restricted to a religious definition or viewed through a religious-only lens. Spirituality needs to operate across the religious and belief systems and can even be independent of them. It is this relationship of spirituality to religion that has the potential for spirituality to develop without the religious-based obstacles of the taboo of religious discussion, religious plurality, secularism and unhelpful religiosity and so be embraced as a means of wellness.

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### Authors' contributions

A.B. is the principal author. J.C.M. is the promoter of the PhD student A.B.

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