

Research and Theory

Relationships Between Adult Workers' Spiritual Well-Being and Job Satisfaction: A Preliminary Study

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The authors studied the relationships between adult workers' spiritual well-being and job satisfaction. Two hundred participants completed 2 instruments: the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (C. W. Ellison & R. F. Paloutzian, 1982) and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire Short Form (D. J. Weiss, R. V. Dawis, G. W. England, & L. H. Lofquist, 1967). A bivariate correlational analysis showed spiritual well-being, religious well-being, and existential well-being to be positively related to job satisfaction for this sample. With a forced-entry multiple regression analysis, overall spiritual well-being was found to have a moderate influence, existential well-being had a much stronger influence, and religious well-being had a minimal influence all on, general job satisfaction.

Spiritual well-being has been found to correlate positively with a variety of indicators of psychological adjustment and overall wellness. For example, marital satisfaction, physical health, social adjustment, possession of strong coping skills, and resiliency in times of stress and personal crisis have all been linked to higher levels of spiritual well-being (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano, & Steinhardt, 2000; Ellison & Smith, 1991; Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Kamyra, 2000; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; Roth, 1988; Westgate, 1996; Wolf & Stevens, 2001). Although the research cited focused on the relationship between spiritual well-being and mental health, physical health, and personal relationships, no empirical studies have investigated the relationship between spiritual well-being and job satisfaction. In fact, Dorn (1992) and Bloch and Richmond (1997) suggested that the integration of personal and career issues has been noticeably absent in the literature. Thus, the examination of potential connections between the work domain and spiritual well-being may provide a valuable contribution to both the practice and future research efforts of counselors, especially career counselors.

Although research exists linking overall psychological well-being to both spiritual well-being and job satisfaction (Adams et al., 2000; Kamyra, 2000), surprisingly little empirical evidence exists describing the relationship be-

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tween these two constructs. This lack of evidence is even more surprising given the existing models of wellness that describe spirituality and spiritual well-being as central to overall wellness and identify the work domain as an important part of overall well-being (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Hattie, Myers, & Sweeney, 2004; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000). In addition, the definition of overall wellness used by the World Health Organization (1998) includes spiritual well-being as an essential component. The definition reads, in part, "health is a dynamic state of complete physical, mental, spiritual and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization, 1998, p. 4, annex 1). Researchers have found that persons who possess strong spiritual orientations and a positive sense of spiritual well-being do not experience many of the symptoms related to mental illness and loss of productivity in the workplace (Ellison, 1983; Tsuang, Williams, Simpson, & Lyons, 2002; Westgate, 1996).

For this study, *spiritual well-being* is defined as people's perception of the quality of their spiritual life (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). Spiritual well-being includes both a horizontal component (purpose and meaning in life) and a vertical component (a sense of a relationship with God or a spiritual being). Spiritual well-being can be a source of balance, harmony, and happiness through connective relationships to self, community, world, and a higher power (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002; Nolan & Crawford, 1997).

The importance of defining a person's spiritual well-being is also reflected in the literature (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). This investigation follows the definition previously given that defines spiritual well-being as having two components: existential and religious (Ellison & Smith, 1991). Existential well-being includes the individual's sense of purpose in life and life satisfaction, which is a horizontal concept (Ellison & Smith, 1991); existential well-being is connected to a sense of vocation and purpose, which has been considered essential to job satisfaction (Trott, 1996). Religious well-being includes the individual's belief in God or a spiritual being, which is a vertical concept.

Components of people's perception of their spiritual well-being include searching for meaning and purpose in life, living by a set of values and beliefs, making a contribution in the world, and transcending oneself. Making meaning and finding purpose in life—the definition of existential well-being—are important components of wellness that may be attained by expressing one's spiritual well-being in the workplace.

It has been suggested that the boundaries between work and life are merging and that separating work and personal life does not contribute to people's spiritual well-being (Skelton, 1999). Work is a major life task and a source of personal identity and wellness (Dorn, 1992; Myers et al., 2000). In an effort to identify variables to improve work and life satisfaction, job satisfaction studies had been conducted throughout the 20th century (Herr & Cramer, 1992).

Overall job satisfaction has been defined as people's overall positive attitude toward work and the extent to which their current position meets their needs, values, and expectations (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). Researchers rec-

ognize the importance of job satisfaction to organizations in increasing productivity and retaining workers (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001) and to employees in their finding meaning, purpose, and overall life satisfaction (Hagihara, Tarumi, Babazono, Nobutomo, & Morimoto, 1998; Trott, 1996). The work domain can provide an arena for expression of spiritual well-being and contribute to a personal sense of meaning and being (Bloch & Richmond, 1997; Brewer, 2001; Eanes, 1997). Low levels of job satisfaction may contribute to a variety of stress-related illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, and addictive disorders (Cropanzano & Wright, 2001; National Academy on an Aging Society, 2000; Walsh & Srsic, 1995).

The concept of spirituality in the workplace and its connections with productivity, worker well-being, and job satisfaction have become of interest in the literature on management (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Nadesan, 1999); however, studies that have been conducted in the workplace pertaining to spirituality have been exploratory in nature and few in number (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2001). Exploration of the relationship between work and spirituality may help counselors integrate the issues of job and life satisfaction. The limited research in this area indicates that spirituality and spiritual well-being are important components of people's overall wellness and work life (Bloch & Richmond, 1997; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Savickas, 1997; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002); therefore, there have been calls in the counseling literature for research that connects these two important wellness domains (Bloch & Richmond, 1997; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002).

Recent literature on job satisfaction and work adjustment has emphasized the importance of measuring the relationships among various life domains as an accurate assessment of occupational wellness (Dorn, 1992; Liptak, 2001; Zunker, 2002). Most academic study of spirituality in the workplace has, however, lacked critical analysis and has produced little empirical evidence (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Savickas, 1989). The assumption is that the relationship between spiritual well-being and work can be a pathway to a better understanding of how people create meaning in their lives; however, a review of the literature yielded little empirical research that supports this assumption. The purpose of this study was to provide empirical evidence to support or reject the assumption that the relationship between spiritual well-being and job satisfaction can have an influence on both the individual and the workplace.

To accomplish the purpose of this study, we looked at the following research questions, as recommended by the authors of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Ellison & Paloutzian, 1982):

1. What is the relationship between (a) overall spiritual well-being and general job satisfaction, (b) religious well-being and general job satisfaction, and (c) existential well-being and general job satisfaction?
2. To what extent does overall spiritual well-being predict the level of general job satisfaction?

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 200 full-time working adults (83 men and 117 women) from the northeastern United States. We defined full-time worker as one who worked a minimum of 25 hours per week. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 76 years ($M = 37.6$, $SD = 12.5$). Most participants were White (89.5%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (3.5%); African American (3%); Asian (2%); and other, not specified (2%). The largest portion (45%) of the sample reported their marital status as married, followed by single (39.7%), divorced (7.5%), separated (3.5%), cohabitating (3.5%), and widowed (.5%). (One participant did not answer this question.)

Twenty-two percent of participants held a bachelor's degree, followed closely by associate's degree (21%), master's degree (18%), and a degree beyond a master's degree (10%). The socioeconomic status of the sample varied greatly; the mean income level was in the \$50,000 range. This sample represented an above-average income for this geographic area, which has the third highest per capita income in the country. As already indicated, the participants were also highly educated, which is reflective of the geographic area. This sample included workers from a spectrum of job classifications, including labor workers (e.g., fruit picker, landscaper, waiter, cook), financial services and computer professionals, sales/marketing professionals, administrative support, technical personnel (e.g., engineer, electronics technician), and senior management personnel. Of the 184 participants who reported job titles, 68% held professional/managerial jobs, 17% held technical jobs, 8% held administrative support or hourly worker jobs, and 7% held jobs that did not fit in one of the preceding categories.

The predominant religious affiliation reported by study participants was Christian (78.5%); 3% reported that they were Jewish, 1.5% Islamic, 1% Buddhist, and 4.5% other. The remainder (11.5%) indicated no religious affiliation.

Procedure

Participants in the study were drawn from two general sources: (a) full-time working adults at seven business locations representing seven industry sectors (i.e., managed care, telecommunications, marketing services, publishing, trade shows, higher education, and cultural arts) in the Northeast and (b) adults enrolled in 10 undergraduate and graduate courses at a private university in the Northeast. Survey packets were distributed to potential participants; of 350 total packets distributed, 250 were returned. We did not use the data from 50 packets because the information was not complete.

At the business sites, permission was requested from departments of human resources to distribute the survey packets through interoffice mail. Participants were informed of the study in a letter of invitation sent by company e-mail and were told that participation was entirely voluntary. Each partici-

pant was provided a packet that contained an informed consent form, a demographic survey, the SWBS, and the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ; Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967). All material was returned by prepaid, addressed envelopes directly to us (offsite to ensure confidentiality) or collected by us. All instrument packets from the business sites were numbered sequentially for tracking purposes.

The university courses that were used to solicit participants were chosen from part-time adult education programs at a private university in the Northeast. The courses included those in a master's of business administration program, graduate education classes in counseling and education, and undergraduate liberal arts and business courses in the university's adult degree program. After permission was received from faculty to use class time to collect data, potential participants were informed of the purposes of the study and requested to complete the instruments. Individuals could withdraw at any time. Packets were both completed by students and collected during class time.

Instruments

The SWBS (Ellison & Paloutzian, 1982). The SWBS is a 20-item measure of spiritual wellness that produces an overall score as well as scores on two subscales, Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB), along these two dimensions. The overall score on the SWBS is obtained by summing all 20 items. Subscale scores are generated by summing scores of the 10 items on each subscale. Items include "I believe that God loves and cares about me," "I feel unsettled about my future," and "I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in." For this sample, Cronbach's alphas were overall SWBS, .81; RWB, .94; and EWB, .80, indicating that the scales had acceptable internal consistency. Test-retest reliability for the SWBS has been previously established (.93 SWBS, .96 RWB, and .86 EWB; Brooks & Matthews, 2000).

In several previous studies, factor analyses supported the two main factors (RWB and EWB; Endyke, 2000; Genia, 2001; Scott, Agresti, & Fitchett, 1998). In addition, a differential pattern of correlations between the RWB and EWB subscales has established that they in fact measure two distinct constructs (Genia, 2001).

The MSQ-Short Form (Weiss et al., 1967). The MSQ-Short Form (for the sake of brevity, hereafter referred to as MSQ) is a 20-item measure of present job satisfaction that generates a total overall general job satisfaction score (MSQGEN). The MSQ also provides scores for two subscales measuring job satisfaction, Intrinsic (MSQI) and Extrinsic (MSQE). Participants mark responses on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*). The MSQI subscale consists of 12 items. Examples are "the chance to work alone on the job" and "the chance to do things for other people." The MSQE subscale consists of 6 items. Examples are "my pay and the amount of work I do" and "the praise I get for doing a good job."

For this sample, coefficient alphas for MSQGEN, MSQI, and MSQE were .82, .88, and .80, respectively, indicating that the scales had acceptable internal consistency. Previous researchers determined that test-retest reliability coefficients were high, ranging from .87 to .92 for MSQGEN, .84 to .91 for MSQI, and .77 to .82 for MSQE (Weiss et al., 1967).

Results

To investigate the research questions, we performed a bivariate correlational analysis to estimate the relationships between overall spiritual well-being, religious well-being, and existential well-being and general job satisfaction. The mean level of overall spiritual well-being for these participants ($M = 91.5$, $SD = 17.98$) represented a high moderate level of spiritual well-being (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). The participants' scores were slightly skewed toward the higher end of possible scores. The mean score on the EWB in this sample was 48.9, representing a high moderate score; the mean score on the RWB was slightly lower at 42.6. The mean score on the MSQGEN, indicating the level of general job satisfaction for this sample ($M = 75.0$, $SD = 13.50$), was consistent with scores for satisfied workers as reported by Weiss et al. (1967).

As hypothesized, the results indicated positive and significant relationships between overall spiritual well-being and general job satisfaction and between the two components of existential and religious well-being and general job satisfaction (see Table 1). In the present sample, the significant and positive correlations between spiritual well-being, existential well-being, and religious well-being and general job satisfaction were at the .01 level ($r = .323$, $p < .000$; $r = .458$, $p < .000$; and $r = .183$, $p < .000$, respectively). As stated in the literature, the EWB and RWB subscales measure distinct constructs, and the authors of the SWBS recommended reporting all three scores and their correlations (Life Advance, 2005).

TABLE 1
Bivariate Correlations Between Spiritual Well-Being Scores
and Job Satisfaction

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SWBS	—	.756	.932	.323	.258	.345
2. EWB		—	.467	.458	.428	.396
3. RWB			—	.183	.112	.246
4. MSQGEN				—	.936	.870
5. MSQI					—	.658
6. MSQE						—

Note. $N = 200$. SWBS = Spiritual Well-Being Scale; EWB = Existential Well-Being subscale; RWB = Religious Well-Being subscale; MSQGEN = Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire General Job Satisfaction; MSQI = Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire Intrinsic; MSQE = Minnesota Job Satisfaction Questionnaire Extrinsic.

A separate regression analysis using a forced-entry method to control for interrelationship and multicollinearity suggests that overall spiritual well-being significantly predicts job satisfaction (see Table 2). As indicated in Table 2, overall spiritual well-being, $F(1, 199) = 23.07, p < .001 (R^2 = .104)$, accounted for 10.4% of the variance in job satisfaction. Separate forced-entry regression analyses were also run for existential well-being and religious well-being. Existential well-being, $F(1, 199) = 52.434, p < .001 (R^2 = .209)$, accounted for 20.9% of the variance in job satisfaction; religious well-being, $F(1, 199) = 6.856, p < .001 (R^2 = .033)$, accounted for 3.3% of the variance in job satisfaction. Table 3 shows the standardized beta coefficients for each of the predictor variables and indicates the relative magnitude of the predictors.

Discussion

We investigated the relationships between overall spiritual well-being, religious well-being, and existential well-being and job satisfaction and found that all three variables had a positive significant relationship with job satisfaction. These findings support the connection between work and spiritual domains in terms of workers having a sense of meaningfulness, purpose, and vocation. The findings have been suggested by previous qualitative studies (Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Savickas, 1997); however, this study provides empirical evidence that may support the importance of spiritual well-being in the work domain and that may be replicated for future research.

For this particular group of participants, the relationship between existential well-being and job satisfaction was the strongest, suggesting that having purpose or meaning in life might be connected to a high level of job satisfaction. As might be expected, spiritual well-being was a stronger predictor of job satisfaction than was religious well-being; religious well-being accounted for only 3.3% of the variance in job satisfaction scores.

The results of this study indicate that measurement of spiritual well-being may be a method of identifying and recognizing clients' individual worldview and belief systems regarding work. This information may be of use to all counselors, especially career counselors.

TABLE 2
Linear Regression Analysis of Spiritual Well-Being and
Job Satisfaction ($N = 200$)

Variable	R^2	F	p
SWBS	.104	23.068	.000
RWB	.033	6.856	.010
EWB	.209	52.434	.000

Note. SWBS = Spiritual Well-Being Scale; RWB = Religious Well-Being subscale; EWB = Existential Well-Being subscale.

TABLE 3

**Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting
Job Satisfaction (N = 200)**

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p(t)	R ²
SWBS	.243	.051	.323	4.80	.000	.104
EWB	.839	.116	.458	7.24	.000	.209
RWB	.185	.071	.183	2.62	.010	.033

Note. SWBS = Spiritual Well-Being Scale; RWB = Religious Well-Being subscale; EWB = Existential Well-Being subscale.

In practice, career counselors may enhance their work by including the EWB subscale items as part of the career intake process. Because scores on the EWB subscale accounted for a large degree of the variance in job satisfaction scores, the level of existential well-being may provide a sense of the client's self-perceptions regarding vocation and purpose, which are an integral part of the career counseling process (Brewer, 2001).

For counselors in general, having a structured way of assessing and discussing a client's worldview and belief systems may enhance the overall counseling process and assist the counselor in seeing the client in a holistic way. In particular, for clients who are searching for career direction or who are confused about career choices, this information at intake might be helpful in treatment planning.

The results of this study may have implications for the wellness and improved mental health of workers. By focusing more specifically on the person's level of existential well-being, counselors may identify strategies for improved mental health and overall wellness through appropriate interventions.

If clients report a low level of job satisfaction, perhaps a measure of overall spiritual well-being is warranted. In particular, counselors might note whether clients report low EWB scores. If they do, then a more formal measure of depression or psychological well-being might be suggested. Assessment and diagnosis for effective treatment planning in career counseling may be enhanced by addressing overall spiritual well-being.

Counselor educators have long recognized the centrality of work and career in people's lives and have noted the need to address the connections between work and other life domains, including spirituality. The findings of this study offer support for these interconnections and the need to address them in the training of counselors. The results may support the need to integrate overall spiritual well-being into the career development process.

In this sample, overall spiritual well-being scores contributed 10% of the variance in job satisfaction, indicating that spiritual well-being is important to adult workers. Individuals who exhibit high levels of spiritual well-being are more likely to be more satisfied with their jobs than are individuals who do not exhibit high levels of spiritual well-being.

According to this research, scores on the EWB were the most significant predictor of job satisfaction, accounting for 20.9% of the variance in job satisfaction. Therefore, this finding may indicate that adult workers who report meaning

and purpose in life will also report high levels of job satisfaction. This finding supports earlier research by Trott (1996), who found that existential well-being was connected to a sense of vocation and purpose.

Existential well-being may be an important factor for organizations looking to recruit and retain productive workers (Carson, Carson, Phillips, & Roe, 1996). In the search for factors contributing to job satisfaction, organizations may need to explore this dimension of wellness to improve worker satisfaction and work climate. Organizations attempting to provide supportive and positive work environments, in an effort to increase worker productivity and retention, may need to seriously consider the importance of meaning, purpose, and spiritual wellness to overall occupational wellness and job satisfaction.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study has several limitations. The generalizability of these results may be limited because of geographic location and ethnic composition of the sample; in addition, the workplace climate in the region of the study included increasing unemployment and downsizing. The adult workers in this sample from the northeastern part of the United States may not be representative of workers in other regions. In addition, the adult part-time students recruited for this study were from a Catholic university; further examination of their responses may not represent those of the general public. Also, participation in religious services and activities was not accounted for in this study.

This research expands the support for a connection between overall spiritual well-being and job satisfaction, and, in fact, the results indicate a strong relationship between the two. The interest in identifying factors that enhance or predict job satisfaction has continued to increase. The interest in work and spirituality in the literature and popular culture in the 1990s suggests the need for further study (Bloch & Richmond, 1997; Looby & Sandhu, 2002; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002).

The findings of this study may provide support for the integration of spiritual well-being into the work domain and the recognition of its relationship to job satisfaction. Assessing the spiritual well-being of workers, particularly focusing on their existential well-being, may enhance the ability of employers, career counselors, and workers to identify satisfying work settings and opportunities. In addition, exploring workers' existential well-being might result in improvement in worker-environment fit.

The centrality of work as a major life domain and the centrality of spirituality to overall wellness form a connection that both workers and employers should address. Recognition of the importance of spiritual well-being in the workplace may inform future studies that attempt to identify factors contributing to job satisfaction. Spiritual well-being may play an important part in a person's perception of his or her spiritual life and overall well-being and may contribute to satisfaction in other areas of his or her life. Ongoing research in this area may enhance attempts to help workers adjust to a continually changing and stressful workplace.

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