BOOK REVIEWS

The interplay between spiritual leadership and entrepreneurship

Spiritual Leadership in the Entrepreneurial Business: A Multifaith Study
by Mario Fernando

Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, and Northampton, MA, 2007. xi + 165 pp

In this well informed, insightful and comprehensive study, Mario Fernando critically explores the complex and multifaceted interplay of management theory and practice, personal biographies, and the dynamics of faith and cultural traditions in order to elaborate and advance a coherent theory of spiritual leadership. Fernando underscores the ongoing interest in spirituality not only within a Western context, but as a critical component in shaping attitudes and stances, or affecting outcomes in modern business environments. Despite the fact that the contemporary workplace spirituality literature delineates a very promising field of academic inquiry, we have to admit that it has only emerged within a Christian Western context. As a result, empirical research on non-Western, primarily non-Christian spirituality in entrepreneurship and business has not been accorded due attention in the respective literature. The present study is a step towards filling this gap by placing emphasis on the cross-cultural and religious distinctions underlying the contemporary meaning and enactment of spirituality in business environments (p 51).

Thus the author stresses the need for an interfaith and multicultural perspective in enacting spiritual leadership, the absence of which may hinder the elaboration of flexible leadership discourses. This is reflective of his general aim in the book to report and discuss the findings of a cross-cultural case study regarding the enactment of spiritual leadership by business leaders conducting their business activities in a typically non-Western societal context. The research context includes the modern Sri Lankan entrepreneur operating in a highly collectivist culture that fosters a need for affiliation and yields benefits to the extended family, these being the primary factors shaping entrepreneurial behaviour. As noted by the author, the richness of the religious diversity and expression that prevail in Sri Lanka made it an ideal research setting for the purposes of this study (p 61). The case study involves the qualitative analysis of the interview material of 13 influential, spiritually motivated Sri Lankan entrepreneurs adhering to four different mainstream religious traditions (Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim).

Before proceeding to outlining the whole research endeavour and presenting the findings of this research project, Fernando raises a wide range of definitional concerns about spirituality (and workplace spirituality in particular), so as to conceive of the religion/spirituality distinction more effectively. He convincingly draws on the well established dichotomy between spirituality and religion. He is aware of the dangers in fusing religious and business values (pp 86–87), as well as of the potential conflict and tension generated when attempting to impose one’s own religious values on other groups (pp 121–123). Viewing spiritual leadership through the lens of a specific religious tradition is a risky endeavour: it may also prove a divisive issue, insofar as ‘it excludes those who do not share in that tradition’ (p 134). An inclusive approach to spiritual leadership, on the contrary, might be conducive to employees’ morale and well-being, as it can be beneficial to overall organizational goals. This seems likely when giving precedence to the internal, existential aspects of religion over the external ones (pp 116–117). Far from being merely instrumental, workplace spirituality may play an important role in organizational life: it may also serve as a basis upon which organizational virtuousness can rely. Authentic spiritual leadership, Fernando contends, could easily satisfy the three principal requirements of virtuousness—human impact, moral goodness and the unconditional benefits of corporate activities (p 23).

One of the book’s major concerns focuses on the growing recognition of the spiritual dimension in leadership theory. In contrast to Pry (2003), for whom spiritual leadership is a phenomenon occurring when a leader embodies spiritual values (integrity, honesty, humility) that make him an exemplar to followers, Fernando describes spiritual leadership from the viewpoint of spiritual business leaders’ behaviour (p 31). In this respect, he seems to draw on Reave’s (2005) view that spiritual leadership is demonstrated through behaviour, as well as through attitudes implying an ethical, compassionate and respectful treatment of others (p 30). He then considers the shift of emphasis on leadership theory, from transactional to transformational, up to transcendental leadership styles in terms of a dynamic process from an external to an internal locus of control and from low to high levels of spirituality (p 35). A move from a mechanistic to an
prominent practical view of the organizational life is critical to the attempt to incorporate spirituality in the enhancement of leadership.

One of the central findings of this qualitative study is that, although each entrepreneur’s outward practice of workplace spirituality appeared to conform to his deeper religious convictions, there undoubtedly existed some common elements. Fernando identifies three common ways of enacting spiritual leadership: the majority engaged in a religion-based type of spirituality enacted through religious practices at work, while a certain minority adopted a value-based spirituality substantiated in a specific value system. There were also those who resorted to a self-growth-based spiritual leadership exemplified through the realization of self. All these practices shared two particular aims: ‘a connection with self, other and a larger whole resulting in a need to direct and motivate followers to develop a culture driven by a sense of shared community’ (p 131; also p 31).

This sense of connection with an ultimate ideal/reality/God is elevated to a central theme in the meaning of spirituality, also consistent with the Western workplace spirituality literature. Fernando distinguishes between two types of connectedness: in a religion-based spiritual leadership one frequently experiences an external connection with a transcendent ultimate power to realize a sense of inner well-being. A minority, however, experienced an internal connection with the ultimate, unmediated by a particular religious faith (pp 85–87). This priority of connection has to be complemented by a concomitant need to motivate followers, so as to foster an organizational culture founded on such a sense of moral community (p 99). To avoid any overgeneralization from empirical data, the author carefully resorts to studies conducted in non-management fields (such as psychology, theology, health care), but equally suggesting this very primacy of connection as a basic construct of spiritual leadership (pp 105–108).

Interestingly, this predominantly religion-based enactment of workplace spirituality poses no particular problems to workplaces, given the priority of connectedness, as well as its commonality along different faith traditions. A transcendent frame of reference was considered as a source of additional inspiration, this spiritual dimension influencing ethical decision-making processes in business organizations. All the religious belief systems under examination revealed not only this centrality of connectedness, but also the need to motivate organizational followers to behave accordingly, enhancing organizational ethicality through the formation of the appropriate ethical guidelines. This multi-perspective view of spirituality generated further positive outcomes: spiritual leadership entailed various forms of pro-social behaviour (pp 93–94), and most importantly, higher levels of organizational commitment and citizenship behaviours. It was also supportive of management actions enhancing the well-being of all organizational stakeholders, or resolving ethical dilemmas, often resorting to a specific religious faith or value system for guidance (p 132).

The author is not ignorant of the fact that workplace spirituality may enter into conflict with other, secular organizational requirements (p 123). Insofar as spirituality and business represent two distinct belief systems underlying different organizational goals, a process of mutual accommodation is deemed necessary (p 121). Viewed as a stage in the evolution of management theory/practice, workplace spirituality, Fernando argues, is likely to be instrumentally oriented, thus claiming legitimacy as an economically and socially beneficial phenomenon (pp 124–125). The author arrives at the conclusion that ‘spiritual leadership is set to thrive effectively and fairly with the appreciation of a multi-perspective view of spirituality and diversity in the enactment of workplace spirituality’ (p 133).

The interplay between entrepreneurship and spiritual leadership properly illustrated throughout this book is unique in posing several questions to both business and management scholars and practitioners. Among these various issues, we can enumerate at least four:

1. One can further discuss the extent to which spiritual leadership, in its most genuine and authentic forms, is associated with positive organizational behaviour (POB), as understood in the contemporary framework of positive organizational scholarship. For instance, Fry’s (2003) qualities of spiritual leadership (vision, hope, faith, forgiveness, integrity, humility and so on) are quite reminiscent of positive psychological resource capacities, upon which the enactment of spiritual leadership could be based.

2. It would be of equal interest to examine the degree to which spiritual leadership may support a relationship-oriented behaviour addressing followers’ needs in a better way than task-oriented behaviour.

3. A possible way of discussing the interaction between spiritual leadership and business ethics discourses (suggested on p 138) could be, in our view, to analyse both constructs in a framework of organizational virtue. The spiritual dimension of leadership could be properly grounded on a virtue–ethics framework encompassing a moral business community.

4. Spiritual leadership may be an integral part of an enterprise culture highly respectful of the needs of all stakeholders. Accordingly, we could further examine how this type of leadership values otherness, manages diversity and resolves tension in global multicultural workplaces.

To conclude, Fernando effectively treats this sensitive area of inquiry, often in a self-reflective way, being aware of the dynamic interplay between the researcher and the research product within the framework of a qualitative research approach. Providing convincing arguments that spiritual leadership is both pragmatic and desirable, he critically contributes to spiritual leadership research and discourse through his interfaith qualitative study.

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References


New dictionary on management research

The Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Management Research
by R. Thorpe and R. Holt

The back-cover blurb tells us that the book aims to ‘support the first time researcher as well as the experienced academic who needs a handy and quick point of reference’. It includes ‘over one hundred entries’, all cross-referenced (there is no list of the concepts on which there are entries). Each defines a concept that the editors deem relevant to qualitative management research and includes a discussion of the value of the concept now and in the (near) future. The editors start with an exposition of the nature of management research.

In their explanation of ‘why a dictionary’, they call their work a ‘disguised encyclopaedia’, following Umberto Eco. They might have referred to Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary as well, as the entries provide examples-in-use of ‘what is meant by a particular word’. The aim of the entries is to be ‘read as accounts of how management researchers have investigated both managerial life and how […] that life can be lived differently’. Access is facilitated by an index of the concepts referring to the entries as well as of those occurring in their text.

The idea of creating a dictionary of positions, methods and methodologies or world views as used in management research is wonderful. Anyone doing or aiming to do such research (including shareholders) will be aware of the need for a shared understanding of the concepts and ideas used. Anyone aiming to produce a relevant dictionary will also be aware of its difficulties. This means that the authors are ambitious – unfortunately, too ambitious: the design of the dictionary already exemplifies their lack of a deep understanding of the subject.

The authors aim to answer the question ‘What is management research?’ in the title of their introduction. Part of their argument lies in their choice of entries, which they intend to deal mainly with qualitative research approaches. The difficulty of course is to recognize these. The authors take the easy road by concentrating on non-statistical approaches, while admitting that this is only a surface characteristic. They recognize the similarity of the underlying logic of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

If the authors’ aim is to induce a shared set of concepts via a dictionary, it would appear that this logic is to be taken seriously. Concentrating on the ‘qualitative’ seems to imply the opposite: a somewhat random selection. An example is the (starting) entry on ‘access’. Interviewing women in a culture where access by male interviewers is difficult does not preclude statistical analysis of the data. The logical approach to what to include in the intended dictionary would be via the type of language used to coordinate research activities.

The oldest language developed in scientific communities highlights the variable characteristics of units of analysis. It is qualitative (non-numerical rather than non-statistical) by itself. But its arguments can be easily translated into arguments constrained by a calculus, as devised by authors such as Descartes, Leibniz and Newton. In more recent times, many other languages have become available, however: for example, the language of problems, of decisions, of games, of shortages – each, accidentally, with its own numerical translation.

The main stimulus to developing these new languages is the inclusion of objectives; one wishes to solve one’s own problems, make one’s own decisions, etc; but not only that, also to deal with the objectives of others who may oppose one’s solutions and decisions if they feel disadvantaged. Such objectives have not been designed into the language of variables (as it was originally meant to convey ideas on units of analysis that do not appear to have objectives: planets [Galileo], falling apples [Newton], burning candles [Descartes]).

It would seem that the authors should have searched for such an underlying language and logic rather than choosing to be restricted to a superficial distinction such as ‘non-statistical’. Management researchers typically appear to realize, like the authors, that they have to ‘involve themselves with those they are studying’, both as a way to include others’ objectives and even emotions in their work and as a way to anticipate these if some solution or decision is to be implemented. The dictionary would have benefited from this type of understanding.

This is not to say that the authors lack intuition. They mention, for example, that management researchers are concerned with ‘problem-solving activities’ and the ‘distinct and alternative perspectives’ needed to implement solutions. The difficulty is that one would expect practitioners to solve problems and researchers to increase the ability to solve problems. The latter would be facilitated by the language of problems (see Kuhn, 1962) – not referenced, although an early defender of languages other than the language of variables.

While the style of the editors appears a bit ‘porrigid’ (lots of elements, little more coherence than being together), the entries are quite different. The entry on ‘positivism and post-positivism’ is a good example. The roots of positivism are argued to be that sense data are the ‘only legitimate source of knowledge’, as a ‘counter-blast to clerical dominance’. It is then argued that this approach fails when the researcher’s sense data relate to the intentions of others similar to him/her, as when they create what he or she senses.

The entry on ‘action research’ is quite different. Such research (based on theory) aims to intervene and to focus on the practice of management. At the same time, it is noted that action research is criticized for its lack of theory and of criteria for good theory. The latter would have to include not only what is to be done, but also why it has to be done, and hence how it might be improved when things go wrong. The authors recognize this double-level character (by claiming the need for meta-analysis), but do not elaborate.

Maturana and Varela introduced the notion of ‘autopoiesis’ to define the domain of biological research, that is, what one identifies variables on. In contrast, the entry introduces the notion...
The irresistible rise of the Net Generation


by Don Tapscott


The world in which many of us grew up is evolving in ways that few of us could have imagined only a short time ago. Everything is fundamentally changing and, to quote a favourite line from one of the popular Star Trek movies, ‘Resistance is futile’.

That is the basic premise of Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World, Don Tapscott’s latest attempt to help us understand what is happening before it is, figuratively as well as literally, too late. Toward this end, Tapscott clearly and convincingly demystifies the intricacies of the interrelationships between the economy, employment and education as the ‘Net Generation’ accelerates its execution of a paradigm shift of unprecedented proportions.

Since there is no universal agreement regarding the terms used to describe the demographic categories to which Tapscott alludes throughout the book, some preliminary definitions are in order. He defines the ‘Net Generation’ as anyone born between January 1977 and December 1997, which sandwiches this group between ‘Generation X’, which began at the end of the ‘Baby Boom Generation’ in December 1964, and ‘Generation Next’, which began in January 1998. Statistically, the Net Generation consists of 81.1 million individuals – even larger than the Baby Boom Generation.

This is where an initial criticism of Grown Up Digital seems appropriate and applicable. As part of a precursory investigation, Tapscott and his team interviewed almost 6,000 members of the Net Generation from 12 different countries: the USA, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, China, Japan and India; and although Tapscott references the global economy throughout the book and includes examples from many different countries, it is obvious that he tends to focus principally on Western culture in general and often the USA in particular. At times this is confusing for the reader because it has to be kept consistently in mind when considering the implications of his work for a worldwide audience.

In any event, the Net Generation’s sheer numbers, Tapscott asserts, should be sufficient motivation for acquiring a better understanding of how it is influencing almost everything.

Methodologically, Grown Up Digital is based on a qualitative investigation conducted by Tapscott and his research team. Employing a rather innovative and
sophisticated data collection strategy, the researchers set up a community on Facebook, a popular social networking site on the Internet. The community, called ‘Grown Up Digital – Help Me Write the Book’, enlisted the services of over 200 individuals who helped to solicit and compile viewpoints and stories from members of the Net Generation. In addition, Tapscott interviewed a variety of experts on the various themes represented in the book, which includes an extensive set of footnotes for each chapter as well as an exhaustive reference section.

Structurally, the book is organized into three sections. The first part, ‘Meet the Net Gen’, consists of five chapters outlining Tapscott’s characterization of the members of this demographic group. The second part, ‘Transforming Institutions’, is made up of four chapters in which Tapscott describes how fundamental societal institutions are evolving as a direct result of their collective influence. In the final section, ‘Transforming Society’, Tapscott spends three chapters discussing how the changes being driven by the Net Generation can ultimately serve to revitalize our political, economic and cultural systems.

Along the way, Tapscott manages to explain how members of the Net Generation typically process information, how they prefer to be educated and employed, how their growth and development have been facilitated, and how they are almost congenitally engaged in political and social reformation.

Tapscott is especially passionate when attempting to dispel many of the myths he believes are being wrongly perpetuated about the Net Generation by those who simply do not understand the intrinsic nature of the immense changes they are precipitating. He is particularly adept at pointing out what is often overlooked by many commentators who seem to feel threatened by the rise of a technologically enhanced communication culture.

Again, a significant portion of Grown Up Digital is spent deconstructing a number of misconceptions about the Net Generation. These include the widely held stereotypes of young people today as – compared with previous generations – having lower social skills, less shame, a more dysfunctional work ethic, and being essentially more violent and narcissistic than their predecessors. Tapscott sees these characterizations of the Net Generation as symptomatic of widespread ignorance and an almost irrational allegiance to cultural, political and economic structures that are becoming progressively less relevant.

The myth he seems most interested in debunking is the idea that the Net Generation is somehow less intelligent than its counterparts from the past. Tapscott observes that some authors have even gone so far as to suggest that they should be more accurately described as the ‘Dumbest Generation’ because ‘…they spend so much time staring at the screen, the young people forfeit the ability to think deeply or creatively’ (p 290). Tapscott points out that there is absolutely no substantive evidence to support such an erroneous characterization.

The real problem, Tapscott argues, lies not with the members of the Net Generation per se, but with educational policies and practices that are out of touch with their reality. As an example, he alludes to the fact that many classroom teachers have not been specifically trained to facilitate learning for the Net Generation: that is, they are using techniques and strategies that were developed for students who were not raised in the computer/Internet era. Tapscott is exactly right when he discerns that ‘…the Industrial Age model of education will be hard to change’ (p 127). Anyone who has even a rudimentary understanding of the reactionary nature of educational institutions would be hard-pressed to disagree with him.

It is obvious throughout Grown Up Digital that Tapscott is much more interested in describing the Net Generation in terms of ‘what they are’ as opposed to ‘what they are not’. Following this more positive orientation, he lists and describes eight ‘norms’ that collectively define the Net Generation. These can be summed up as: (1) a strong preference for individual freedoms, (2) an inclination towards customization and personalization, (3) a belief in complete transparency, (4) a desire for corporate integrity and complete openness, (5) a need to have entertainment and play woven throughout their work, education and social lives, (6) an affinity for collaboration and relationships, (7) an intolerance for anything that is not real-time, and (8) a compulsion to innovate constantly.

In one of the better chapters in Grown Up Digital, Tapscott argues persuasively that the Net Generation is decidedly less narcissistic than previous generations: that is, as a group they are not the ‘self-centric risk takers’ (p 300) some have portrayed them to be. This stereotype, according to Tapscott, is reflective of a lack of understanding of what actually drives members of the Net Generation to succeed in the modern world.

Moreover, Tapscott provides empirical evidence supporting the premise that the Net Generation is perhaps the most entrepreneurial in history. As part of the defence for this claim, he cites a worldwide study that found ‘…young adults age 25 to 34 were the most active entrepreneurs, not only in the United States but in many other countries around the globe’ (p 170). He also makes a strong case supporting the premise that most ‘Net Generations want to be entrepreneurs or own their own company’ (p 170). This conclusion confirms what social commentators and futurists such as Alvin Toffler, Jeremy Rifkin, Richard Florida and Glen Hiemstra have been preaching for decades: namely, that in the coming decades, the global economy will increasingly be driven by those who possess an entrepreneurial spirit.

Tapscott further explores the implications of the ideological shift associated with the rise of the Net Generation for contemporary business and industry. He argues that ‘In the workplace, innovation means rejecting the traditional command-and-control hierarchy and devising work processes that encourage collaboration and creativity’ (p 95).

Moreover, he sounds a much needed wake-up call when he notes that ‘Companies have to change in a far deeper way to adapt to the Net Gen’s way of working’ (p 172). Specifically, Tapscott explains that ‘…the old model of employee development – recruit, train, supervise, and retain – is outdated. The more appropriate employer–employee paradigm for this generation, we believe, is initiate, engage, collaborate, and evolve’ (p 172).

It is interesting that Tapscott spends much of Grown Up Digital describing
Technological change enhancing productivity and economic growth

The Economic Theory of Invention and Innovation

edited by Albert N. Link


One criticism of many research papers (and the research field of innovation) is that they are not sufficiently grounded in theory. Therefore, Albert N. Link’s edited contribution to the International Library of Critical Writings in Economics is particularly welcome. The volume, which is structured in five parts, brings together practically all the key writings on the economics of invention and innovation – in other words, the seminal articles that have laid the groundwork for contemporary research in the field. I will not attempt to summarize all these articles, but provide below a broad review of this book and identify some genuine highlights.

Academics who are teaching and/or writing in the field will, as a result, find the book of particular utility in understanding its development and, indeed, it is potentially magnificent as a tool to deepen students’ knowledge of the economics of invention and innovation.

In his introductory chapter, Link rightly emphasizes that technological change enhances productivity growth (and economic growth) and ‘ultimately leads to an improvement in the quality of life’ (p ix), which is thus important from a policy perspective. These aspects are the rationale for the book and the importance of the subject area, and Link makes an important distinction, noting that we should:

‘think of an invention as the creation of a new technology. Innovation, then, is the first application of the invention – the technology – in production.’ (pp x–xi)

An important distinction is whether an invention and/or innovation is (a) exogenous (out with an organization or unexplained; Part I), such as technical change in the ‘aggregate production function’ (Solow, 1957) or disaggregated into ‘an inter-industry and intra-industry component’ (Massell, 1961); (b) induced (‘purposive’ rather than unexplained: Part II), which is, for example, well complemented by Ahmad’s (1966) theory and Fellner’s (1971) empirical support; or (c) endogenous (within: Part III), such as Hébert and Link’s (2006) chronology of the entrepreneur as an innovator. The articles in the first three parts provide a broad basis for understanding the theoretical underpinnings of exogenous, induced and endogenous innovation.

Of great interest to this reviewer, given the rising interest within enterprise and innovation pedagogy of experiential learning, is one of the final articles in Part III on the ‘learning by doing’ aspect of innovation (Arrow, 1962), which leads nicely into Part IV (sources of innovation), with Cohen and Levinthal’s (1989) classic article on innovation and learning within the R&D process, described as its ‘two faces’ and the concept of ‘learning before doing’ in developing new process technology (Pisano, 1996). Kamien and Schwartz (1971), also in Part IV, are notable for their fascinating study of risky R&D projects’ expenditure patterns – an issue still relevant today, particularly for those financing high-risk R&D (assuming such investors are not foolhardy enough to use financial risk modelling, as major banks have done to regarding the way business should be conducted and about the process of democratic governance’ (p 310).

Ultimately, Tapscott succeeds in defending his primary thesis that we are not in Kansas anymore. Perhaps we never were. In any event, it is a safe bet that the Net Generation is indeed changing the world in ways that would have seemed incomprehensible only a few years ago. And yes, resistance is futile.
their – and our – misfortune). Finally, Part V brings together six articles providing great insight into the adoption and diffusion of innovation – there are, for example, papers on the rate of imitation (Mansfield, 1961) and on factors influencing technological diffusion (Rosenberg, 1972). Meanwhile, Arrow (1969) reviews the production and transmission of knowledge and offers this gem:

‘My guess is that economic factors have little to do with bias in technological progress (though they may have had a good deal to do with its magnitude). European desire for spices in the late fifteenth century may have had a good deal to do with motivating Columbus’ voyages, but the brute, though unknown, facts of geography determined what in fact was their economic results.’ (Arrow, p 35)

Because of Link’s fine pedigree in the field, I do not feel there are any significant omissions – though given that the earliest article in the volume is that by Brozen (1953), none of Schumpeter’s seminal papers are included. The choice of articles in this book is almost inspired and is necessarily focused on economic studies with an empirical and positivist paradigm (hence the omission of Drucker, 1985). Furthermore, the volume inevitably focuses on products and processes and does not cover the burgeoning field of innovation in services.

Entrepreneurship academics should read this volume, as it will remind them that ‘corporate entrepreneurship’ or ‘intrapreneurship’ is, in effect, invention and innovation.

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Note
1 Full references have been omitted, but can be found on the contents page of Link (2008).

Reference