Spirituality as Connectedness Brings Language to Workplace Spirituality

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ABSTRACT

In a post-secular society with diverse spiritual worldviews spiritual capital has been shown to enhance business function and job satisfaction. A lack of common language has led to much organizational silence around spirituality, yet it has been shown to increase job satisfaction, as well as Organizational Citizenship Behaviours such as compliance to organizational practices, responsibility, positive attitudes, patience, and tolerance. Spirituality within the workplace also points to increased innovation and creativity, and decreased stress levels. The literature suggests spirituality research needs a contemporary definition appropriate for multidisciplinary use that can transform knowledge into evidence-based practice. Any contemporary definition needs to transcend specific belief, use current language held by the general population, allow individual rating of the significance of spirituality, and highlight spiritual strengths and current spiritual state. The methodology employed in this research study was hermeneutic phenomenology; specifically the human science of van Manen's life world. This provided analysis that was harmonious with the deep awareness of spirituality, unearthing individual unique understandings, and perceptions held in common. Spirituality was identified as connectedness and relation, with the capacity towards ultimate unity. The ability to define spirituality and have a corporate understanding and lexicon requires organizational conversation and education. Emerging within this industry-based research Connecto, is a simple and elegant spiritual assessment tool that is easily taught and embedded within everyday professional practice. It provides a lexicon of spirituality and identifies spiritual self-care options for well-being and increased organizational spiritual capital.

Keywords: Spirituality, Connectedness, Spiritual Capital, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Life World, Palliative Care

INTRODUCTION

In a post-secular society, with a plethora of diverse spiritual worldviews, recognition of spirituality within the workplace could have the capacity to enhance business function for both management and individual employee, while raising the spiritual capital of the organization. A small community-based palliative care organization, Ballarat Hospice Care Incorporated (BHCI), was chosen for this industry-based research. The aim was to initiate organizational conversation about spirituality and spiritual care, thereby assisting personal understandings to emerge and become communal understandings and perceptions. Informed by the literature these conversations raise the spiritual capital of the organization.

LITERATURE

As a universal human experience, whether religious or not, each human being is naturally, intrinsically spiritually oriented (Bellous & Csinos, 2009; de Souza, 2009b; Ranson, 2002; Sulmasy, 2002; Tacey, 2010). Nevertheless, the attempt to define spirituality within the workplace has led to a range of diverse and often nebulous definitions (Fisher, 2011; Schley, 2008), and a lack of common language has led to much organizational silence around spirituality (Tacey, 2000). Yet spirituality in the corporate setting, workplace spirituality, has been shown to increase job satisfaction and function (Gupta, Kumar, & Singh, 2014), to increase organizational citizenship behaviours (Ahmadia, Namib, & Barvarzc, 2014), increase innovation and creativity, (Baker, Stokes, Lichy, Atherton, & Moss, 2011), all while decreasing stress levels (Shinde & Fleck, 2015).

Emerging from the literature of business, social work, education, and health is a broadening characterization of spirituality to include more than religiosity (Barry & Gibbens, 2011; Grant, O'Neil, & Stephens, 2004; Holloway & Moss, 2010; Hyde, 2008; Liu & Robertson, 2011; Walter, 2002). This stance is prevalent in the literature coming out of the UK, where spirituality is

becoming identified as a generic term totally disengaged from religion (Swinton, Bain, Ingram, & Heys, 2011). Walter (2002, p. 135) hypothesises that the rising interest in spirituality is based on three features of contemporary western society:

• the focus on the individual has led to a new spirituality that is a personal and exclusive inner quality;
• individualism comes with a distrust of institutional authority and fear that individual spirituality will be stifled by prescribed religion;
• answers to ultimate questions need personal engagement, rather than being authoritatively provided by religious dogma.

This individualistic spirituality focuses on making sense of life, forgiveness, inner peace, ultimate questions, and inner meaning, suggesting that spiritual need can be experienced by people who consider themselves religious, spiritual, atheist, and even agnostic (Baldacchino, 2008; Bouma, Cahill, Dellal, & Zwartz, 2011). The phrase, "I'm spiritual, but not at all religious" is seemingly a growing trend in western society (de Souza, 2009; Pargament, 2013; Peterman, Fitchett, Brady, Hernandez, & Cella, 2002). Personally positioned on a sacred-secular continuum, contemporary spirituality does require a common understanding to enable language for the articulation of shared concept, meaning, and appreciation (McGrath, 2002).

Sometimes labelled the post-secular society, this era takes in various fresh spiritual worldviews, many with a focus on the individual (Watson, 2013). The individual combination of spiritual and existential strengths and needs is eclectic, broad and diverse; as unique as each human person (Swinton et al., 2011). A review of responses from five major surveys into "I am spiritual but not religious" found Americans consider themselves decreasingly religious, and increasingly more spiritually aware (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Tacey (2010, p. 1), declares we are seeing the unrolling of a spiritual revolution that brings "a new interest in the reality of spirit and its healing effects on life, health, community and well-being." The verbose character of this spiritual upheaval has brought talk of spiritual things from the private sphere into a more public one.

While some voices in the literature maintain that spirituality should be tied to religion (Koenig, 2008; Malloch, 2010; Pargament, 2013), others experience spirituality and religion as two separate entities (Bouckaert, 2013; de Souza, 2014; Lee, 2002). Our post-secular world calls for spirituality presented as a continuum ranging from secular spirituality through to religious spirituality (Murray, Kendall, Boyd, Worth, & Benton, 2004), where the individual identifies their position on the continuum for themselves.

Transpiring in the everyday of life and intrinsic to the human person (de Souza, 2009a; Fisher, 2011; Sulmasy, 2002), spirituality is relational, based in the connectedness of all things (Bennet & Bennet, 2007; de Souza, 2009b). Portraying a series of human quests, spirituality embraces purpose, love, meaning, hope, and connectedness (Swinton & Pattison, 2010), where spirituality is associated with a search for meaning and purpose (Aghadiuno, 2010; Holloway, Adamson, McSherry, & Swinton, 2011; Swinton et al., 2011; Swinton & Pattison, 2010), asking ultimate questions (Puchalski, 2002), and searching for answers (Burke & Neimeyer, 2012; Holloway et al., 2011). Spirituality can be at once an individual response and a corporate one, seeking to deepen connections that increase our wellbeing in good times and to re/discover coping resources in challenging times (E. Kelly, 2012a).

Spirituality is not a constant or static, but rather a dynamic, living concept (McSherry & Jamieson, 2011), an evolving dimension (Fisher, 2011), in movement towards ultimate unity (de Souza, 2009). It has with it the capacity to be actualized, stimulated, and taught in the endeavour of unlocking inherent growth and spiritual potential (King, 2008). The spirituality of each person, then, is both distinctive and dynamic (Rolheiser, 1998; Speck, 2005). This potential for evolving spiritual awareness bestows dignity for each individual, embracing the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual domains (Chochinov, 2007; Sinclair & Chochinov, 2012).

The literature points to spirituality research needing a contemporary definition appropriate for multidisciplinary use (Holloway et al., 2011), that can transform knowledge into evidence-based practice (Cobb, Dowrick, & Lloyd-Williams, 2012). Any contemporary definition is required to transcend specific belief (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2010; Sessanna, 2011), use current language held by the general population (Holloway et al., 2011; Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010), allow individual rating of the significance of spirituality (Bishop, 2013; Hodge, 2005; E. Kelly, 2012c), and highlight spiritual strengths and current spiritual state (Hodge, 2005; Koenig, 2007; Monod et al., 2011).

To this end, a useful and widely accepted model for defining spirituality and spiritual well-being is connectedness: embracing connectedness with Self, connectedness with Other, connectedness with creation/creativity, and connectedness with transcendence (Liu & Robertson, 2011; Nolan, Saltmarsh, & Leget, 2011; Puchalski et al., 2009; Yan, Staps, & Hijmans, 2010), always moving towards ultimate unity (de Souza, 2006; Fisher, 2011).

Attributes of spirituality as connectedness defined within the literature provide descriptive layers of meaning to the connectedness framework and provide nuanced understanding.

Table 1: Attributes of spirituality as connectedness

Connectedness with Self:

acceptance, authenticity, care, comfort, consciousness, contentment, forgiveness of self, inner harmony, inner peace, peacefulness, serenity, inner strength, thankfulness, valuing, wellbeing, self-identity, self-knowledge, wholeness.

Connectedness with Other:

accepting differences, caring, compassion, feeling supported, forgiveness of others, giving, gratitude, giving/receiving love, harmony, helping, interconnectedness, peace, respecting others, sense of belonging, being valued, volunteering, reconciliation.

Connectedness with creation/creativity:

appreciating art/beauty/the natural environment, creativity, gratitude, inspiration, interconnectedness, peace, respecting sense of belonging, wonder.

Connectedness with transcendence:

awe, belonging, celebrating life, faithfulness, fulfilment, gratitude, hope, interconnectedness, life meaning, purpose, mystery, meditation, peace, reason to exist and live, sacredness, secular, transcendence.

Attributes of spirituality within a connectedness framework are based on the work of Sessanna (2011), de Jager Meezenbroek, et.al. (2010), and Chao, et al. (2002).

Bringing spirituality into the workplace brings benefits to both organizations and the individuals within them. Workplace spirituality has been shown to identify and increase spiritual capital (Bouckaert, 2013), increase job satisfaction and function (Gupta et al., 2014), increase innovation and creativity (Baker et al., 2011), while decreasing stress levels (Shinde & Fleck, 2015).

In the corporate world 'capital' has been defined as "Company assets that can be converted to owner's equity in the event of financial difficulties" ("Corporate Capital", 2015). However, a broader understanding of corporate capital includes three elements:
- human capital;
- social capital;
- spiritual capital.

Human capital incorporates the knowledge, skills, and experience embodied in human beings (Malloch, 2010). Social capital is composed of the social, human structures and connections that enable the sharing of knowledge, coordinating action, innovation and creativity, and high productivity (Bouckaert, 2013; Malloch, 2010). Spiritual capital is a relatively new concept. Malloch (2010) understands spiritual capital to be "beliefs, examples and commitments that are transmitted from generation to generation through a religious tradition". However, Bouckaert (2013) insists that to condense spiritual capital to 'religious capital' is to neglect the individual and experience-based connectedness, and search for meaning and purpose, that exists within a post-secular concept of spirituality.

Spiritual capital can then be more broadly defined corporately as " a company's ability and commitment to develop a deep value-driven meaning in its mission, in all its activities and in its relationships" (Bouckaert, 2013, p. 350). For the employee, spiritual capital has the capacity to stir up an awareness of co-creativity, inspiration, and co-responsibility. Further, spiritual capital displays what an organization believes in, strives for, and to what it holds itself to account.

Spiritual capital is built up through spiritual-based leadership and spiritual-based entrepreneurs rated with spiritual intelligence (SQ). SQ is the ultimate intelligence of the visionary leader (Zohar & Marshall, 2000) bringing the ability to think out of the box, humility, and transcendence beyond the personal and day-to-day concerns.

An increase in spiritual capital augments job satisfaction for the employee which increases communication, morale, and productivity in the workplace, while generating creativity and innovation (Altaf & Atif, 2011). It also results in identification with, and loyalty to, the organization, and greater job involvement (Collins, 2010; Kolodinsky, Giacalone, & Jurkiewicz, 2008). Job satisfaction benefits the organization through reducing workplace deviant behaviour (Ahmad & Omar, 2014), and fostering organizational citizenship behaviours (Ahmadia et al., 2014).

Organizational citizenship behaviours are behaviours employees engage in that serve the organization, but are not a part of their prescribed job description (Ahmadia et al., 2014). These extra-role behaviours are productive, inventive, and unprompted actions (Bester, Stander, & van Zyl, 2015), and they include features such as compliance to organizational practices, responsibility, positive attitudes, patience, and tolerance in the workplace (Ahmadia et al., 2014).

For the employee, job satisfaction and the resulting peaceful mind generate creativity and innovation (Altaf & Atif, 2011; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004). Within management, spirituality has been seen as a resource to support the development of

connectedness, improve innovation and creativity, and reduce stress, (Karakas, 2010; Shinde & Fleck, 2015). In their research Shinde and Fleck (2015) found spirituality gave participants a sense of coping with workplace situations that were stressful. Further, swift stress reduction was produced by regular spiritual practice, while belief in a higher power decreased the feeling of vulnerability to stress by some participants.

At BHCI the multidisciplinary team members are all experienced professionals in their own disciplines as well as in palliative care. It was not appropriate, nor would it have been well received, to impose understandings of spirituality and spiritual care from outside of the organizational culture. Informal evidence indicated three issues contributing to a lack of engagement with spirituality at BHCI:
- a lack of common language and understanding about spirituality and spiritual care;
- a lack of organizational education and training regarding spirituality and spiritual care;
- a lack of guidelines and policy at BHCI regarding spirituality, spiritual care, and a standardised, validated spiritual assessment tool.

As there was no formal modus operandi pertaining to spirituality within BHCI, this research with the use of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, set out to discover the communal understanding and essence of spirituality held by management and employees across the disciplines. It was expected that the drawing out and collecting of understandings and stories about spirituality at BHCI would assist with the defining of spirituality in an inclusive way. These characterizations from the workers within this community-based palliative care organization could embed a broader communal understanding of spirituality within BHCI policy and everyday praxis.

Situated centrally in the rural city of Ballarat, BHCI is an independent non-government organization with links to Grampians Regional Health, Palliative Care Victoria (PCV) and Palliative Care Australia (PCA). This totally community-based palliative care organization provides treatment and nurture for those diagnosed with a terminal illness, all given within the home of the patient. Their primary objective is to provide specialist palliative care equitably and responsively within available resources, and promote palliative care values within the community (Ballarat Hospice Care Incorporated, 2013). The workforce consists of professionals from a variety of fields; health and medical, social work, counselling, volunteer co-ordination, administration and management, and spiritual care.

RESEARCH METHOD

Methodology chosen for this research was the qualitative inquiry of case study which is best employed for the exploration of current, subjective phenomena in a real-life context requiring empirical inquiry (Creswell, 2003; Simons, 2009; Yin, 2009). Case study is a strategy of investigation that involves focused and in-depth multi-sourced study of one or more cases within a bounded system, resulting in a descriptive account (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). It pays attention to the idiosyncratic (Creswell, 2007; Simons, 2009; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009), and has the capacity to co-create perceived reality while presenting the possibility of self-reflexivity for the researcher (Simons, 2009).

The theoretical perspective employed was hermeneutic phenomenology; specifically the human science of van Manen's life world (van Manen, 1997). van Manen's four fundamental life world existentials of lived space, lived time, lived other, and lived body were used as guides to reflection and interpretation of the textual conversations, providing analysis that was harmonious with the deep awareness of spirituality. The life world existentials unearthed individual unique understandings, as well as perceptions held in common and those outworked within the organizational culture, all gathered and interpreted into an organizational understanding. This allowed the essence of the experience of spirituality at BHCI to emerge and be given language by those who actually worked there. It was then situated within the literature to provide an evidence-based working lexicon for spiritual conversation, spiritual awareness, and appropriate referral to spiritual support.

FINDINGS

The hermeneutic phenomenological findings from the textual conversations provided five major themes:
- Spirituality understood as relational, and based in connectedness;
- Spiritual pain defined as disconnectedness;
- Contrasting aspects of religious and spiritual care;
- Spirituality within the unique context of community-based palliative care;
- Lack of common language highlighted the need for education, and clarity of communication and understanding.

Spirituality as relational based in connectedness. The understandings and perceptions of spirituality as experienced at BHCI are relational and connective in nature.

Spirituality is about connection (Participant A).

The outer social foundation of spirituality is about my connectedness with

others (Participant L).

Concurrently spirituality is socially established (Participant F).

These perceptions echo throughout the literature, where to be spiritual is to be in relationship, or to live in connectedness with the Self[1], with Other[2], with the creation/creativity, and with transcendence (de Souza, 2009b; Ellis & Lloyd-Williams, 2012; E. Kelly, 2012b; Liu & Robertson, 2011; Sheldrake, 2007).

While spirituality is influenced by life and context, spirituality also influences life and context, providing a collaborative interplay on day-to-day life.

.spirituality is dictated to by all these things, but it also influences all

these things (Participant M).

My spirituality seesaws between the inner going out into the world and

the influence of the world (Participant J).

Rarely static, spirituality ebbs and flows in movement along a relational continuum from separateness, through connectedness with Self, Other, the creation/creativity, and transcendence towards ultimate unity (de Souza, 2009b, 2011).

Spirituality involves the whole person.anything they are able to draw

together in forming themselves as a whole person (Participant L).

The schema of spirituality as connectedness with Self, Other, creation/creativity and transcendence brings common language to the workplace and is inclusive of all people regardless of belief, values, and personal meanings.

Spiritual pain defined as disconnectedness. The second topic that emerged through the research was that of spiritual despair as disconnectedness, sometimes characterized as spiritual need, spiritual pain, or spiritual distress. With the positive side of spirituality being defined as connectedness, then the source and description of spiritual despair sits tidily within the experience of disconnectedness: a disconnectedness and dislocation with Self, with Other, with the creation/creativity, and with transcendence (de Souza, 2012; Ellis & Lloyd-Williams, 2012; Liu & Robertson, 2011; Sheldrake, 2007).

Disconnectedness.illustrates the unfamiliar landscape of spirituality in palliative care (Participant A).

Contrasting religious care and spiritual care. While there is some overlapping of the two concepts, at the extremes religiosity rises from the faith community and moves towards the individual, where an external treasury of wisdom and faith provides a worldview and meta-narrative (E Kelly, 2013; Lee, 2002; Murray et al., 2004). Whereas spirituality begins with, and is drawn out of, the individual, and is seen as a personal, innate, inner core that moves internally and outward (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Peterman et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

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1   *Self*: is used throughout the research to refer to the inner self, also acknowledging that each human being bears the image of the Transcendent within the true self. "If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him." Thomas Merton (1972). *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New York: New Directions Books, p. 36.

2   *Other*: is used as a personification of, and encounter with, the collective other. Michael Buber (1957). *I and Thou*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, uses 'I-Thou,' or Other, describing encounter that is based in relation, and has capacity to lead to transformation of both the I and the Thou.

While participants agreed vocally that spirituality was not about religion.

Well it's not really to do with religion (Participant D);

in the shadows of the conversation, religion was clearly present.

Religion would come in as well. (Participant S).

Religion could be, but doesn't need to be part of it. (Participant A).

Spirituality within community-based palliative care. All holistic care at BHCI is practised within the lives, homes, and contexts of the patient. The delivery of community-based palliative care was the fourth category that rose from the textual conversation. Community-based palliative care is experienced as connectedness with Other (de Souza, 2012; Holloway et al., 2011; E. Kelly, 2012b; Sheldrake, 2007), and is designated by time and patient agenda.

Time, respect and relationship.you have the time and opportunity to

build these things, all within the patient's own space and under their

direction. (Participant G).

We go into their home, we're in their surroundings, in their environment, so we follow them and what they want (Participant M).

Lack of common language highlighting the need for education and clarity of communication and understanding. Training was identified as important to break the perceived silence and concealment around spirituality at BHCI. The capacity to define spirituality and have a corporate understanding and lexicon requires organizational conversation and education.

Some type of conversation would break the current silence

(Participant L).

Conversations, education, and training about spirituality were seen as important with emphasis on:
* the need for a common language;
* suspension of judgment;
* active listening;
* Self/Other awareness and intuition.

The need for evidence based education and practice is an opinion which is upheld in the literature (Cobb et al., 2012; Culliford, 2009; Holloway et al., 2011; Jenkins, Wikoff, Amankwaa, & Trent, 2009; Wasner, Longaker, Fegg, & Domenico Borasio, 2005).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

In true hermeneutic phenomenological fashion, a spiritual screening tool, *Connecto*, emerged from the textual conversations and was developed by a spiritual worker trained in interpretive traditions and disciplines of spirituality. A simple, elegant device based on the theoretical framework of connectedness, *Connecto* transcends specific beliefs (de Jager Meezenbroek et al., 2010; Sessanna, 2011), traverses worldviews and theologies (Watson, 2009), allowing the individual to identify meaning, and whether religion is significant for them (Bishop, 2013; Hodge, 2005; E. Kelly, 2012c). Transferable across contexts, *Connecto* explores spiritual strengths, spiritual distress, and a person's current spiritual state (Hodge, 2005; Koenig, 2007; Monod et al., 2011).

Connecto is easily taught, performed, and embedded within everyday professional practice where it can provide a lexicon of spirituality and identify spiritual self-care options for employee well-being and increased organizational spiritual capital. *Connecto* does not measure spirituality as a whole but rather it identifies spiritual strengths and weaknesses through the framework of connectedness and disconnectedness.
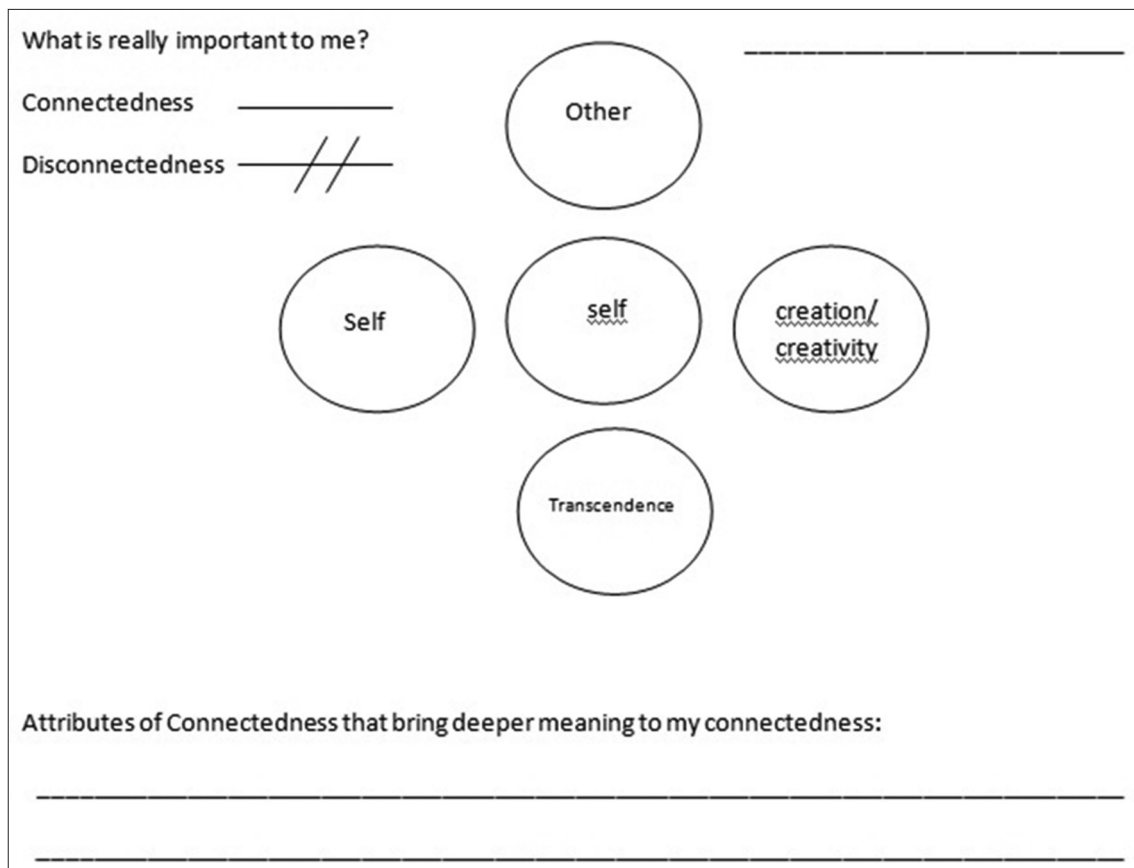
Diagram 1: Connecto Template

While many spiritual assessment tools have been developed their focus has mainly been on employing a spiritual thermometer; however *Connecto* has the capacity to delve deeper into what people are thinking and feeling. *Connecto* is based on existing evidence based theory, using relevant common language (Holloway et al., 2011; Kapuscinski & Masters, 2010).

With the use of self-reflection *Connecto* (Diagram 1 above) begins with the question: "What is really important to me?" (Bhuvaneswar & Stern, 2013; E Kelly, 2013; Miner-Williams, 2006). Then places of connectedness strengths can be identified and a line drawn from the self at the centre, towards the aspect (Self, Other, creation/creativity, transcendence). Recognised areas of spiritual vulnerability, or disconnectedness, are identified and a similar line is drawn, with two short lines intersecting (------/--/-------). Taking the time to reflect and fill-in *Connecto* identifies spiritual strengths and spaces of disconnectedness, or spiritual vulnerability. The attributes of connectedness presented in Table 1 above provide cues and descriptions that can bring greater depth to individual meanings of connectedness.

CONCLUSION

Education about spirituality as connectedness and the accompanying attributes, with the undertaking of *Connecto*, can provide language and deeper self-revelation that strengthen workplace spirituality for both organizations and their employees.

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