

# Rethinking Human-Centered Organizations: The Role of Spirituality, Religion, and Professional Values in Contemporary Work Environments

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## Abstract

*Contemporary organizational environments are increasingly shaped by technological acceleration, performance pressures, and digitally mediated work practices that often intensify fragmentation, stress, and the erosion of human connection. Within this context, workplace spirituality and religion emerge as significant dimensions in understanding employees' search for meaning, ethical grounding, authenticity, and existential connectedness in professional life. This study rethinks workplace spirituality and religion as interconnected yet distinct constructs that contribute to the development of human-centered organizational cultures grounded in value congruence, trust, compassion, and meaningful work. Drawing upon contemporary debates in organizational behavior, leadership, wellbeing, and digital transformation, the paper explores employees' perceptions regarding the relationship between spirituality, religious values, organizational culture, and professional fulfillment. Particular attention is given to how employees interpret meaningful work, alignment between personal and organizational values, and the role of spirituality in reducing stress, strengthening collaboration, and fostering loyalty and engagement within contemporary workplaces. The study argues that employees increasingly aspire not only to financial compensation, but also to environments that support psychological wellbeing, ethical coherence, and a deeper sense of purpose. Furthermore, the paper contributes to the scientific literature by proposing a renewed analytical perspective on workplace spirituality as an integral component of organizational culture within technologically accelerated societies. It also advances future research directions concerning the evolving relationship between fundamental human values, spirituality, religion, and human-centered organizational transformation in the digital era.*

## Keywords

Workplace spirituality; organizational culture; employee wellbeing; ethical leadership; digital transformation; workplace values; employee engagement;

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary organizational environments are increasingly characterized by acceleration. Not merely technological acceleration in the conventional sense of automation, digital infrastructures, or algorithmic coordination, but a broader intensification of organizational temporality itself. Employees are expected to remain permanently adaptive, emotionally responsive, professionally visible, and continuously productive within systems that rarely pause long enough to interrogate the human consequences of such expectations. This condition has produced a paradoxical organizational landscape: technologically interconnected yet psychologically fragmented, performance-oriented yet existentially uncertain. Discussions

surrounding workplace wellbeing often emerge precisely at this intersection, although they tend to remain operationalized through managerial categories of engagement, resilience, or productivity rather than through deeper questions concerning meaning, authenticity, or ethical alignment.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that workplace spirituality has re-emerged as a significant theme within organizational scholarship over the past two decades. Yet the concept itself remains somewhat unstable. In some strands of literature, spirituality is framed as an individual search for meaning and connectedness within professional life (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Elsewhere, it appears as an organizational resource associated with commitment, motivation, or performance outcomes (Milliman et al., 2003; Duchon & Plowman, 2005). Certain perspectives approach spirituality through leadership paradigms emphasizing vision, altruistic values, and intrinsic motivation (Fry, 2003), while others remain cautious of managerial appropriations of meaning that risk transforming existential needs into instruments of organizational control (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). The field has therefore evolved less as a coherent theoretical tradition and more as an uneasy convergence of organizational psychology, ethics, leadership studies, religion, and humanistic management.

The renewed visibility of religion within workplace debates further complicates this terrain. Although spirituality and religion are frequently treated as interchangeable categories in public discourse, organizational research has repeatedly emphasized their conceptual distinction (Benefiel et al., 2014). Spirituality generally refers to experiences of meaning, transcendence, authenticity, or existential connectedness, whereas religion tends to involve more structured systems of belief, institutional traditions, and collective moral frameworks. In practice, however, employees rarely separate these dimensions neatly. Professional identities, ethical orientations, cultural backgrounds, and spiritual worldviews often overlap in ways that resist managerial simplification. This becomes particularly relevant in increasingly diverse organizations where value pluralism coexists with intensified demands for alignment, adaptability, and organizational cohesion.

At the same time, contemporary organizations increasingly promote narratives of purpose, authenticity, and value-based cultures. Such developments are often interpreted positively within management discourse, especially in relation to employee engagement and organizational commitment (Rego & Cunha, 2008). Yet there remains an unresolved tension between genuine human-centered organizational transformation and the possibility that spirituality itself becomes incorporated into performance-oriented managerial logic. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) notably questioned whether organizations foster meaningful work or merely manage perceptions of meaning in ways that sustain productivity and compliance. Similar concerns appear in more recent discussions surrounding spiritual leadership, particularly where ethical aspirations coexist with pressures toward organizational loyalty or ideological conformity (Hayati et al., 2026). The language of purpose may therefore function simultaneously as a source of empowerment and as a subtle mechanism of normative control.

These tensions acquire additional significance within digitally mediated work environments. The expansion of hybrid work models, permanent connectivity, and technologically accelerated organizational systems has altered not only how employees work, but also how they experience belonging, identity, and relational presence within professional contexts. Dehler and Welsh (2010) observed that contemporary work increasingly involves existential dimensions extending beyond traditional economic exchange, while more recent studies continue linking workplace spirituality to psychological wellbeing, stress reduction, and emotional resilience (Syahir et al., 2025). Yet technological environments capable of enhancing flexibility and connectivity may also intensify isolation, fragmentation, and emotional exhaustion. Employees frequently seek meaningful engagement precisely within systems that appear structurally predisposed toward speed, measurement, and performative visibility.

The present study emerges from this unsettled landscape. Rather than approaching workplace spirituality as a purely positive organizational resource, the paper examines how employees themselves perceive the relationship between spirituality, religion, professional values, and organizational culture within contemporary work environments. Particular attention is given to experiences of meaningful work, value congruence, authenticity, trust, and ethical connectedness. The study does not assume that spirituality operates uniformly across organizational settings, nor that religious or spiritual dimensions necessarily produce harmonious outcomes. Instead, it investigates the ambiguities surrounding human-centered organizational cultures at a moment when organizations increasingly attempt to reconcile technological transformation with growing demands for psychological wellbeing, ethical legitimacy, and social cohesion.

In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing debates concerning the future of organizational life under conditions of technological acceleration and cultural uncertainty. Existing scholarship has extensively examined leadership, organizational commitment, workplace wellbeing, and value-based management. Less attention, however, has been directed toward how employees interpret spirituality and religion as lived dimensions of professional experience within digitally transformed workplaces. The distinction matters because contemporary organizational systems increasingly rely upon forms of emotional, ethical, and existential engagement that exceed conventional managerial frameworks. Employees no longer appear motivated solely by financial compensation or career advancement. Many seek coherence between personal values and organizational practices, alongside environments capable of sustaining dignity, belonging, and human meaning within increasingly unstable professional realities.

## **2 Literature Review**

The literature surrounding workplace spirituality has developed through a curious intellectual trajectory. What initially emerged as a reaction against excessively mechanistic and economically reductionist understandings of organizations gradually evolved into a broader inquiry concerning meaning, authenticity, and the human experience of work itself. Yet despite

the growing visibility of spirituality within organizational research, the field remains theoretically fragmented. Definitions vary substantially, conceptual boundaries frequently overlap, and the distinction between spirituality as existential experience and spirituality as managerial discourse often remains insufficiently interrogated.

Early foundational contributions positioned workplace spirituality primarily as an experiential phenomenon grounded in meaningful work, interconnectedness, and alignment between personal and organizational values (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). This framing proved influential precisely because it challenged assumptions that professional life could be adequately understood through performance, hierarchy, or economic motivation alone. Work was increasingly conceptualized not merely as instrumental labor, but as a domain through which individuals sought identity, purpose, and existential coherence. Milliman et al. (2003) extended this perspective empirically by linking workplace spirituality to positive employee attitudes, suggesting that employees who experience meaning and community within organizations tend to demonstrate stronger engagement and organizational attachment. However, such findings also contributed to a gradual managerialization of spirituality. Once associated with performance, commitment, or productivity, spirituality risked becoming absorbed into the very organizational rationalities it initially sought to critique.

This tension continues to shape much of the contemporary debate. On one hand, spirituality is frequently presented as a corrective to alienation, fragmentation, and emotional exhaustion within contemporary workplaces. Karakas (2010), synthesizing a broad range of organizational studies, argued that spirituality may foster wellbeing, ethical sensitivity, creativity, and organizational performance simultaneously. Similar arguments appear in research connecting spirituality with organizational commitment (Rego & Cunha, 2008), stress reduction (Syahir et al., 2025), and work unit effectiveness (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). Yet the assumption that spirituality necessarily produces emancipatory or humanizing outcomes has increasingly been questioned. Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) offered one of the more significant critiques by distinguishing meaningful work from what they termed the “management of meaning.” Their argument remains particularly relevant in digitally accelerated organizational contexts where institutions increasingly mobilize narratives of authenticity, purpose, and belonging while simultaneously intensifying surveillance, flexibility demands, and emotional labor expectations. Under such conditions, spirituality may function both as resistance to dehumanization and as a sophisticated mechanism through which organizations secure deeper forms of normative commitment.

Questions surrounding leadership further complicate this landscape. Fry’s (2003) theory of spiritual leadership remains one of the field’s most influential frameworks, emphasizing vision, hope, altruistic values, and intrinsic motivation as foundations for organizational transformation. Spiritual leadership theory contributed significantly to repositioning leadership away from purely transactional models toward more relational and value-oriented approaches. Nonetheless, subsequent research suggests that the ethical implications of spiritual leadership are less straightforward than early models implied. Hayati et al. (2026), for example, demonstrated that

spiritual leadership may under certain conditions coexist with unethical pro-organizational behavior, particularly where loyalty to organizational values becomes morally absolutized. Such findings are important because they destabilize the assumption that spirituality inherently produces ethical organizational cultures. Spiritual discourse may strengthen trust and cohesion, yet it may also intensify conformity pressures or suppress critical dissent when organizational identities become sacralized.

The relationship between spirituality and religion introduces an additional layer of conceptual ambiguity. Organizational literature has repeatedly attempted to separate spirituality from religion, often presenting spirituality as inclusive, individualized, and existentially oriented, while religion is associated with institutional doctrine and collective belief systems (Benefiel et al., 2014). This distinction has strategic implications. Spirituality is generally perceived as more adaptable within pluralistic organizational environments, whereas religion remains potentially contentious due to its explicit theological or moral claims. Yet such distinctions may oversimplify lived professional experience. Dik et al. (2012) argued that religion, spirituality, and vocational calling frequently intersect in ways that shape professional identity and career orientation simultaneously. Employees rarely compartmentalize existential meaning, ethical values, and professional aspirations into isolated categories. Instead, workplace experiences often involve layered forms of identity negotiation through which spiritual and religious frameworks influence perceptions of purpose, dignity, and moral responsibility.

The concept of calling is especially revealing in this regard. Research on spiritual meaning-making and vocational orientation suggests that individuals increasingly seek careers aligned not only with competencies or economic advancement, but also with deeper ethical and existential aspirations (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). Joshi et al. (2026) extended this discussion through the notion of “spiritual employability,” proposing that professional adaptability increasingly involves emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions alongside technical competence. Such perspectives reflect broader transformations within contemporary labor markets where employability itself becomes intertwined with identity formation and self-realization. Yet this development also raises difficult questions. If organizations increasingly demand authenticity, emotional engagement, and purpose-driven commitment, employees may become vulnerable to forms of self-exploitation masked as fulfillment. The search for meaningful work may therefore operate within tensions between empowerment and organizational appropriation.

Organizational culture research similarly reveals ambivalent dynamics. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) argued for a more systematic science of workplace spirituality capable of integrating ethical values, organizational performance, and human development. Their contribution was significant because it framed spirituality not as a marginal personal concern, but as a structural dimension of organizational life. Subsequent scholarship frequently linked spirituality to trust, collaboration, compassion, and holistic organizational cultures (Sheep, 2006). Yet the assumption that organizations can cultivate “whole person” environments without generating new forms of normative pressure remains debatable. Human-centered

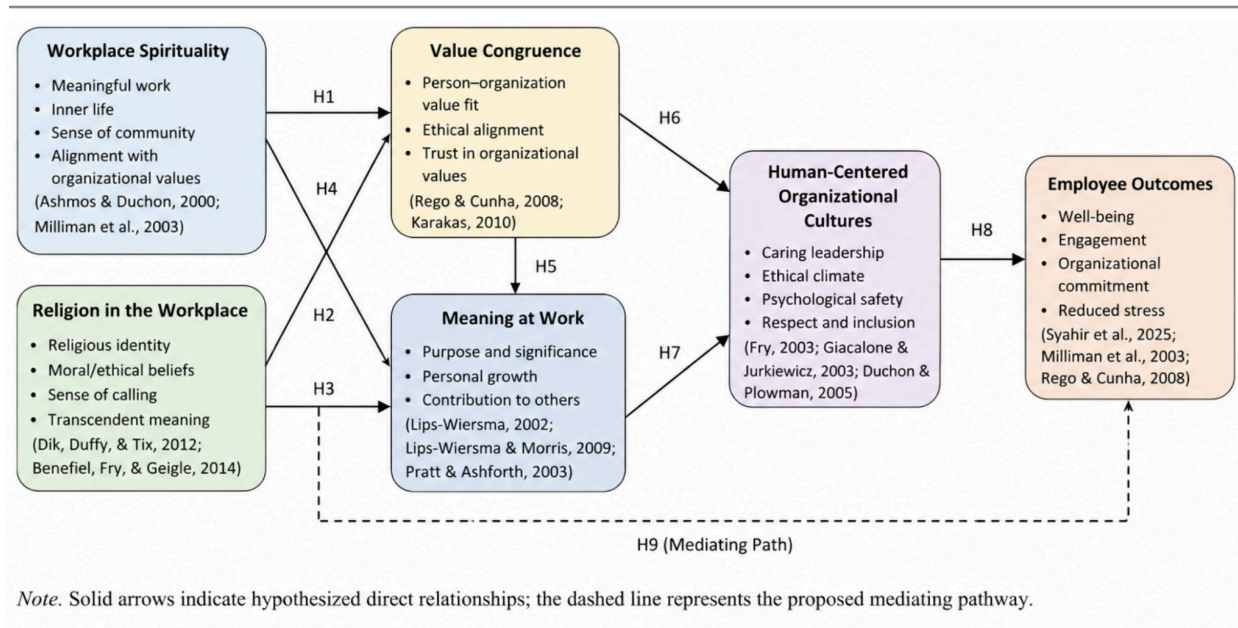
organizational rhetoric may create expectations of emotional transparency, cultural conformity, or value alignment that are not equally experienced across diverse employee populations.

Cross-cultural perspectives complicate the field further. Petchsawang and Duchon (2009) demonstrated that understandings of workplace spirituality vary significantly across cultural contexts, particularly regarding collectivism, relationality, and interpretations of meaningful work. More recent studies integrating prophetic values and emotional-spiritual intelligence frameworks within human resource development similarly illustrate the extent to which spirituality remains culturally embedded rather than universally defined (Ikhwan et al., 2025). The organizational implications of spirituality therefore cannot be detached from broader social, religious, and historical contexts. This becomes especially important in increasingly globalized workplaces where organizational values often intersect with diverse moral and spiritual worldviews.

The emergence of technologically mediated work environments has intensified many of these tensions rather than resolving them. Dehler and Welsh (2010) observed that contemporary workplaces increasingly involve existential dimensions extending beyond traditional economic exchange, a dynamic arguably amplified by digital transformation. Technological acceleration may enhance flexibility and connectivity while simultaneously weakening embodied community, deep attention, and stable professional identity. Employees often seek authenticity and meaning precisely within organizational systems structured around speed, adaptability, and continuous visibility. The result is a curious contradiction: organizations increasingly recognize the importance of spirituality, wellbeing, and human-centered cultures at the same moment they intensify many of the structural conditions producing fragmentation and existential fatigue.

Existing literature has therefore generated important insights concerning spirituality, religion, leadership, meaningful work, and organizational commitment. Nevertheless, relatively limited attention has been directed toward employees' own interpretative perceptions of spirituality and value congruence within technologically accelerated professional environments. Much of the field remains dominated either by normative leadership models or by organizational-performance frameworks that implicitly instrumentalize spirituality. Less understood are the ambiguities through which employees themselves negotiate authenticity, ethical alignment, connectedness, and existential meaning within contemporary workplaces. The present study responds to this tension by approaching workplace spirituality not as a stable managerial construct, but as a contested and evolving dimension of organizational culture shaped by broader transformations in work, identity, and human experience.

To synthesize the theoretical relationships identified throughout the literature and to illustrate the conceptual logic guiding the present study, Figure 1 presents the proposed framework linking workplace spirituality, religion, value congruence, and human-centered organizational cultures.



Source: Authors' own conceptual contribution

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model of Employee Perceptions of Workplace Spirituality, Value Congruence, and Human-Centered Organizational Cultures

### 3 Methodology

The present study emerged from a broader concern regarding the changing nature of organizational life under conditions of technological acceleration, value fragmentation, and increasing psychological pressure within contemporary workplaces. More specifically, the research sought to explore how employees interpret workplace spirituality and religion in relation to meaningful work, organizational culture, ethical alignment, and professional wellbeing. While previous scholarship has extensively examined spirituality through leadership theories, organizational commitment models, or performance-related outcomes, considerably less attention has been directed toward the lived interpretative perceptions of employees themselves, particularly within digitally transformed work environments characterized by continuous adaptation and blurred professional boundaries.

Against this backdrop, the study was guided by three interconnected research questions. First, how do employees perceive the relationship between workplace spirituality, religion, and meaningful professional experience? Second, to what extent do employees associate spirituality and religious values with organizational trust, wellbeing, and value congruence? Third, how are these perceptions shaped by the broader conditions of technologically accelerated and performance-oriented organizational cultures? These questions were intentionally exploratory rather than strictly causal. The objective was not to verify a deterministic relationship between

spirituality and organizational outcomes, but rather to examine the ambiguities, expectations, and tensions surrounding spirituality as part of contemporary organizational experience.

Given the interpretative nature of the research problem, a mixed-methods design was adopted combining quantitative survey analysis with semi-structured qualitative interviews. This approach was considered appropriate because workplace spirituality itself operates simultaneously at experiential, relational, and organizational levels that cannot be adequately captured through a single methodological lens. Quantitative data allowed for the identification of broader patterns concerning employee attitudes toward spirituality, value alignment, and wellbeing, while qualitative narratives provided greater insight into the emotional and existential meanings participants associated with professional life. At several stages, however, the distinction between measurable attitudes and deeper interpretative experiences became less stable than initially anticipated. Certain participants articulated highly nuanced perceptions that resisted easy categorization within predefined survey constructs.

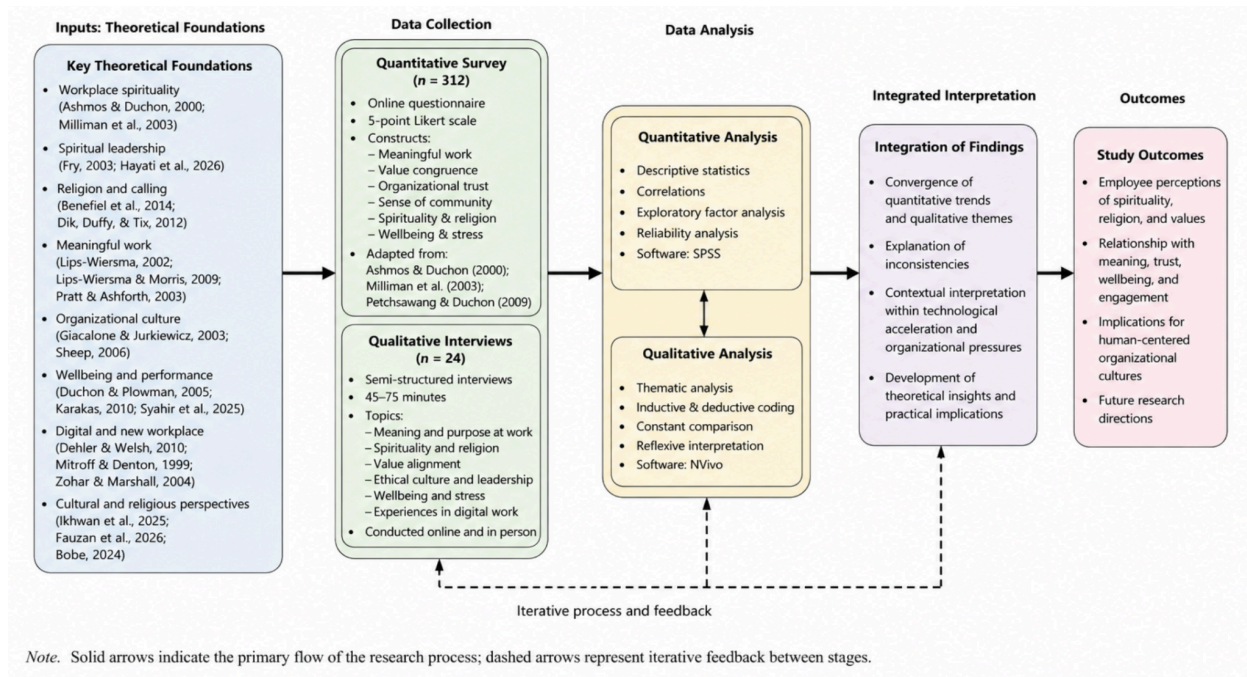
Data collection was conducted between October 2025 and February 2026 across organizations operating in education, healthcare, public administration, financial services, and private consulting sectors. The final sample included 312 participants from Romania, selected through purposive and snowball sampling strategies intended to capture organizational diversity rather than strict statistical representativeness. Participants occupied a relatively broad range of professional positions, including managerial roles, administrative staff, healthcare practitioners, educators, consultants, and operational employees. Although the sample was not nationally representative, the diversity of organizational environments proved analytically valuable, particularly in revealing variations in how spirituality and professional meaning were interpreted across institutional cultures.

The quantitative component consisted of an online questionnaire structured around five thematic dimensions derived from the literature: meaningful work, sense of community, organizational trust, value congruence, and perceptions of spirituality and religion in the workplace. Several items were adapted from existing workplace spirituality measurement frameworks developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Milliman et al. (2003), and Petchsawang and Duchon (2009), though some modifications were introduced to better reflect digitally mediated organizational contexts and contemporary hybrid work environments. Respondents evaluated statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. The questionnaire also included open-ended prompts allowing participants to elaborate on experiences insufficiently captured through scaled responses.

The qualitative phase involved 24 semi-structured interviews conducted online and in person. Participants were selected from the survey pool based on willingness to participate further and diversity of responses concerning spirituality and organizational culture. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and explored themes including professional fulfillment, ethical tensions at work, perceptions of organizational values, experiences of stress and belonging, and understandings of spirituality and religion within professional settings. Interestingly, many

participants initially expressed uncertainty regarding the meaning of “workplace spirituality,” often associating the concept either with religion or with vague organizational wellbeing rhetoric. Only gradually did discussions move toward more nuanced reflections concerning authenticity, moral coherence, emotional exhaustion, or meaningful contribution. This hesitation itself became analytically significant because it suggested that spirituality remains conceptually present within organizational life even when employees do not explicitly name it as such.

To clarify the methodological structure of the research and the integration between quantitative and qualitative data, Figure 2 illustrates the analytical framework underpinning the mixed-methods design adopted in this study.



Source: Authors' own conceptual contribution

**Figure 2: Analytical Framework of the Study: Mixed-Methods Design and Data Integration**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and exploratory factor analysis in SPSS. The intention was not to produce highly predictive statistical models, but rather to identify patterns capable of informing broader interpretative analysis. Several anticipated relationships did emerge, particularly concerning the association between value congruence, meaningful work, and organizational trust. Yet the data also revealed inconsistencies. Employees who strongly valued spirituality did not always report higher organizational satisfaction, particularly when organizational values were perceived as performative or strategically instrumentalized. Such findings complicated more optimistic assumptions within portions of the workplace spirituality literature.

The qualitative material was analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis informed by interpretative organizational research traditions. Coding initially followed broad categories derived from the research questions, although additional themes gradually emerged through repeated reading of interview transcripts. These included emotional fatigue associated with “performative positivity,” skepticism toward corporate authenticity narratives, and tensions between personal spirituality and organizational expectations of cultural alignment. At times, participants appeared simultaneously attracted to and distrustful of organizational discourses emphasizing purpose, compassion, or value-based leadership. Rather than treating these contradictions as methodological inconsistencies, the study interpreted them as reflective of broader ambiguities within contemporary organizational life.

Several methodological limitations inevitably shaped the study. The sample was geographically concentrated and culturally situated within Romanian organizational contexts, limiting broader generalizability across institutional or national settings. The reliance on self-reported perceptions also introduced interpretative subjectivity that cannot be entirely separated from organizational impression management or personal reflexivity. Moreover, workplace spirituality remains a concept vulnerable to semantic ambiguity, particularly where spirituality, religion, ethics, and wellbeing overlap within participants’ own language. Nonetheless, these limitations do not necessarily weaken the analytical contribution of the study. If anything, they reflect the conceptual instability characterizing spirituality itself within contemporary organizational discourse, where meaning, identity, and professional life increasingly intersect in fluid and contested ways.

## **4 Results**

The findings revealed a more layered and occasionally contradictory organizational reality than many normative workplace spirituality models tend to assume. While participants generally associated spirituality and value-based organizational cultures with wellbeing, trust, and meaningful work, these perceptions were neither stable nor uniformly positive across organizational contexts. Employees frequently articulated a desire for authenticity, ethical coherence, and emotional connectedness within professional life, yet they also expressed skepticism toward organizational narratives that appeared strategically designed to instrumentalize purpose or compassion in service of performance expectations. This tension emerged repeatedly throughout both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study and became central to interpreting the broader organizational implications of spirituality within technologically accelerated workplaces.

The quantitative analysis indicated relatively strong associations between meaningful work, value congruence, and organizational trust. Employees who perceived alignment between their personal values and organizational culture generally reported higher levels of professional satisfaction, emotional engagement, and interpersonal connectedness. These findings are broadly consistent with prior research linking workplace spirituality to commitment and employee

attitudes (Milliman et al., 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008). However, the relationship appeared considerably less linear when examined alongside variables associated with organizational pressure and digital work intensity. Participants working in highly performance-oriented or continuously connected environments often reported simultaneously high levels of organizational commitment and elevated emotional exhaustion. In several cases, spirituality appeared to function less as a stable source of wellbeing and more as a compensatory mechanism through which employees attempted to preserve coherence under increasingly fragmented professional conditions.

Factor analysis suggested the presence of four principal interpretative dimensions shaping employee perceptions: meaningful contribution, ethical organizational culture, relational connectedness, and existential fatigue. The emergence of the final dimension proved particularly revealing. Although workplace spirituality literature frequently emphasizes fulfillment, transcendence, or intrinsic motivation, many participants described experiences marked by ambiguity rather than harmony. Employees appreciated organizational cultures promoting empathy, collaboration, or value-based leadership, yet some also perceived these expectations as emotionally demanding or subtly performative. One participant working in healthcare noted that “organizations increasingly ask employees to bring their whole selves to work, but only certain versions of the self actually seem acceptable.” Such observations reflect concerns raised by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) regarding the possible managerial appropriation of meaning within contemporary organizations.

The qualitative interviews further complicated assumptions surrounding spirituality and religion in professional settings. Contrary to expectations that employees would sharply distinguish between the two concepts, participants often described spirituality and religion as overlapping moral and existential frameworks rather than entirely separate domains. Some associated spirituality with inner balance, empathy, or personal authenticity, while religion was linked to ethical discipline, moral responsibility, or community traditions. Yet these distinctions remained fluid. Several participants explicitly rejected institutional religion while simultaneously describing deeply spiritual understandings of work and interpersonal responsibility. Others interpreted religion as providing ethical stability in organizational environments perceived as increasingly unstable or morally ambiguous. This suggests that spirituality and religion may operate less as fixed conceptual categories and more as interpretative resources employees mobilize differently depending on organizational experience and personal identity.

Unexpectedly, managerial employees often expressed greater uncertainty regarding spirituality than non-managerial participants. While leadership literature frequently frames spiritual leadership as a source of organizational cohesion and intrinsic motivation (Fry, 2003), several managers described difficulty reconciling human-centered values with operational demands centered on efficiency, adaptability, and measurable outcomes. In interviews, some acknowledged that organizational discourses emphasizing wellbeing or purpose occasionally functioned more as reputational narratives than deeply embedded cultural practices. This perception did not necessarily produce cynicism, but it introduced visible ambivalence.

Managers appeared aware of the growing expectation that organizations support psychological and ethical wellbeing, while simultaneously recognizing structural limitations within contemporary performance-driven systems.

The data also revealed significant generational and sectoral variations. Participants working in education and healthcare generally articulated stronger expectations concerning ethical alignment, meaningful contribution, and compassion within organizational culture. Employees in financial or consulting sectors, by contrast, more frequently associated spirituality with stress management, work-life balance, or emotional resilience rather than existential fulfillment itself. Younger participants often emphasized authenticity and psychological wellbeing, whereas older respondents were somewhat more likely to frame spirituality through moral responsibility, dignity, or professional vocation. These distinctions were not absolute, though they suggest that workplace spirituality may increasingly reflect broader cultural transformations concerning identity, work expectations, and professional meaning across generations.

One particularly notable finding concerned the relationship between spirituality and organizational loyalty. While many participants associated spiritual or value-based cultures with stronger engagement and trust, this relationship weakened significantly where organizations were perceived as inconsistent in applying declared ethical principles. Employees appeared highly sensitive to perceived discrepancies between organizational discourse and lived professional reality. In such cases, organizational references to purpose, compassion, or human-centered values occasionally intensified rather than reduced employee frustration. Participants frequently described disappointment not simply because organizations failed operationally, but because they failed morally or symbolically. This indicates that organizational spirituality may heighten expectations regarding authenticity and ethical coherence, thereby increasing vulnerability to disillusionment when organizational practices appear strategically performative.

Religious dimensions within organizational life produced similarly complex findings. Very few participants advocated explicitly religious workplaces. Most instead preferred environments characterized by respect, openness, ethical fairness, and freedom of personal belief expression. Nevertheless, religion often remained implicitly present through values associated with compassion, honesty, responsibility, or community orientation. Several participants suggested that organizational cultures increasingly adopt forms of “soft spirituality” detached from explicit religious language while still drawing indirectly upon moral frameworks historically shaped by religious traditions. Such observations align partially with Benefiel et al. (2014), though the present findings suggest a more porous boundary between secular organizational values and spiritual or religious meaning systems than some managerial literature acknowledges.

The findings therefore resist simplistic interpretations of workplace spirituality as either wholly emancipatory or purely managerial. Employees clearly value meaningful work, ethical cultures, and environments supporting dignity and psychological wellbeing. Yet they also remain attentive to the possibility that organizational narratives surrounding spirituality, purpose, or authenticity

may conceal pressures toward emotional conformity, intensified commitment, or performative engagement. Spirituality within contemporary organizations appears neither entirely personal nor fully organizationally controlled. Rather, it functions as a contested space where employees negotiate meaning, identity, ethical coherence, and professional belonging under conditions increasingly shaped by technological acceleration and institutional uncertainty.

## **5 Discussion**

The findings complicate several dominant assumptions within the workplace spirituality literature, particularly the tendency to frame spirituality as an inherently positive organizational resource capable of simultaneously enhancing wellbeing, ethical behavior, engagement, and performance. While the study broadly supports existing research linking spirituality with meaningful work and organizational commitment (Milliman et al., 2003; Rego & Cunha, 2008), the empirical material suggests that spirituality within contemporary organizations operates through considerably more ambivalent dynamics. Employees indeed seek value congruence, authenticity, relational trust, and ethical coherence in professional life. Yet these aspirations emerge within organizational environments increasingly shaped by acceleration, performativity, and emotional intensification, conditions that may simultaneously sustain and destabilize experiences of meaning.

One of the more significant insights concerns the unstable relationship between organizational spirituality and managerial culture. Earlier conceptualizations often positioned spirituality as a corrective to mechanistic organizational systems (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). The present findings only partially support this perspective. Participants generally associated spirituality with compassion, respect, psychological safety, and human-centered organizational environments. However, they also demonstrated acute awareness of the possibility that organizational narratives surrounding purpose, wellbeing, or authenticity may become strategically instrumentalized. In this respect, the study extends the concerns raised by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009), who questioned whether organizations genuinely cultivate meaningful work or instead manage employee perceptions of meaning in ways aligned with organizational control. Several participants appeared simultaneously attracted to and distrustful of corporate language emphasizing values, belonging, or emotional engagement. Such ambivalence may reflect broader transformations in organizational life where emotional and existential dimensions increasingly become integrated into managerial expectations themselves.

The relationship between spirituality and religion also proved more fluid than much organizational literature suggests. Benefiel et al. (2014) argued persuasively for distinguishing spirituality from religion in workplace contexts, largely to preserve conceptual inclusivity within pluralistic organizations. Yet participant narratives frequently blurred these boundaries. Employees rarely treated spirituality and religion as entirely separate categories; instead, they described overlapping experiences involving ethics, purpose, responsibility, connectedness, and

personal identity. This does not imply that contemporary organizations are becoming overtly religious. Quite the opposite. Most participants favored organizational neutrality regarding institutional religion. Nevertheless, many continued drawing upon moral frameworks, symbolic traditions, or existential beliefs indirectly shaped by religious culture. The findings therefore suggest that secular organizational environments may remain more spiritually and morally textured than managerial discourse typically acknowledges.

Questions surrounding leadership generated similarly nuanced implications. Fry's (2003) spiritual leadership model remains influential precisely because it reconnects leadership with meaning, intrinsic motivation, and ethical orientation. The present study broadly confirms that employees value leaders perceived as authentic, compassionate, and ethically coherent. Yet the findings also indicate that spiritual leadership may generate tensions when organizational expectations surrounding positivity, commitment, or value alignment become excessive or morally absolutized. Hayati et al. (2026) observed that spiritual leadership under certain conditions may coexist with unethical pro-organizational behavior. The present research supports this caution indirectly. Employees frequently appreciated organizational cultures promoting empathy and purpose, but they also resisted environments where emotional alignment appeared implicitly mandatory or where disagreement risked being interpreted as moral disloyalty. Human-centered organizations, therefore, cannot be reduced simply to emotionally expressive or value-driven cultures. They also require space for ambiguity, critical distance, and individual moral autonomy.

The findings additionally contribute to contemporary debates concerning technological transformation and the future of organizational culture. Existing research increasingly recognizes that digital acceleration reshapes professional identity, wellbeing, and social connectedness (Dehler & Welsh, 2010). The present study extends this argument by suggesting that technologically intensified workplaces may indirectly strengthen employees' search for existential coherence and human meaning. Participants repeatedly associated spirituality with attempts to preserve dignity, authenticity, or psychological balance within environments perceived as increasingly fragmented or performative. In this sense, workplace spirituality appears partly as a response to organizational conditions generated by digital capitalism itself. Employees seek not merely flexibility or efficiency, but forms of professional experience capable of sustaining emotional continuity and ethical orientation under conditions of permanent adaptation.

At the same time, the study raises questions regarding the growing organizational emphasis on "bringing the whole self to work." Human-centered organizational rhetoric often assumes that greater emotional openness and personal authenticity necessarily improve organizational life. Yet several participants experienced such expectations as emotionally exhausting or subtly coercive, particularly where organizations appeared to demand forms of positivity or cultural alignment difficult to sustain authentically. Sheep (2006) warned that workplace spirituality may generate ethical tensions precisely because organizations increasingly involve themselves in dimensions of personhood previously considered private or existentially autonomous. The

findings reinforce this concern. Spirituality within organizations may support wellbeing and connectedness, but it may also blur boundaries between professional participation and deeper forms of identity management.

The discussion surrounding wellbeing similarly requires qualification. Recent systematic reviews strongly associate workplace spirituality with reduced stress, improved psychological health, and stronger interpersonal relationships (Syahir et al., 2025). The present findings generally support these relationships, particularly where organizational cultures were perceived as ethically consistent and relationally supportive. Yet wellbeing outcomes appeared significantly weaker in environments characterized by symbolic inconsistency or intensified performance pressure. Employees seemed particularly sensitive to discrepancies between organizational values and organizational behavior. Consequently, spirituality may not function as a stable organizational resource independent of institutional credibility. Trust, authenticity, and ethical congruence appear central to whether spiritual discourse is experienced as supportive or performative.

Several broader implications emerge from these findings. Theoretically, the study suggests that workplace spirituality should not be approached solely through functional organizational frameworks emphasizing engagement or productivity outcomes. Spirituality also involves tensions surrounding identity, autonomy, vulnerability, and existential meaning that resist purely managerial interpretation. Practically, organizations seeking to cultivate human-centered cultures may need to move beyond symbolic value statements toward more consistent ethical practices, relational transparency, and psychologically sustainable work structures. Employees appear increasingly capable of distinguishing between organizations that genuinely support human wellbeing and those that merely communicate human-centered values rhetorically.

The study nonetheless remains shaped by several limitations. The cultural specificity of the Romanian organizational context inevitably influenced how spirituality, religion, and organizational values were interpreted. Additionally, because spirituality remains conceptually fluid, participant responses occasionally reflected semantic ambiguity difficult to separate analytically from the phenomenon itself. Yet these ambiguities may also reveal something essential about contemporary organizational life. Spirituality within workplaces appears less as a stable managerial category than as an evolving response to broader conditions of uncertainty, acceleration, and existential fragmentation shaping professional experience in the digital era.

## **6 Conclusion**

The study set out to examine how employees perceive workplace spirituality and religion within contemporary organizational environments increasingly shaped by technological acceleration, performance pressures, and evolving expectations surrounding human-centered organizational culture. More specifically, the research explored the relationship between spirituality, meaningful work, value congruence, organizational trust, and professional wellbeing, while also considering

how these dimensions are interpreted under digitally mediated conditions of work. The findings suggest that workplace spirituality cannot be adequately understood either as a purely personal phenomenon or as a straightforward organizational strategy. Rather, it emerges as a contested and interpretative space where employees negotiate meaning, ethical coherence, connectedness, and identity within organizational systems that often simultaneously support and destabilize these aspirations.

The research questions were therefore answered only partially and with necessary conceptual caution. Employees generally associated spirituality and religiously informed values with meaningful work, authenticity, compassion, and stronger interpersonal trust. Organizational cultures perceived as ethically coherent and relationally supportive were more likely to foster engagement, loyalty, and psychological wellbeing. Yet these relationships were neither automatic nor universally experienced. Spirituality did not function as a uniformly positive organizational resource detached from broader structural conditions. In several cases, participants perceived organizational narratives surrounding purpose, wellbeing, or authenticity as performative, strategically instrumentalized, or emotionally demanding. Such findings complicate idealized representations of human-centered organizational culture frequently present within portions of the workplace spirituality literature.

One of the study's more significant contributions lies in its attempt to reposition workplace spirituality within the broader realities of technologically accelerated organizational life. Existing scholarship has often emphasized the beneficial dimensions of spirituality in relation to leadership, engagement, and organizational performance. While these dimensions remain important, the present findings suggest that spirituality increasingly reflects employees' efforts to preserve existential coherence and ethical grounding within professional environments characterized by uncertainty, fragmentation, and continuous adaptation. In this sense, workplace spirituality appears less as a peripheral organizational concern and more as part of a wider cultural response to the human consequences of digital transformation and intensified organizational performativity.

The study also contributes to ongoing discussions concerning the relationship between spirituality and religion in organizational contexts. Rather than treating the two concepts as rigidly separate categories, the findings indicate that employees frequently experience them as overlapping moral and existential frameworks shaping perceptions of work, responsibility, and human connection. Participants rarely advocated explicitly religious workplaces, yet many continued drawing upon values historically associated with religious traditions, including compassion, dignity, honesty, and communal responsibility. Contemporary organizations therefore appear more morally and spiritually layered than secular managerial discourse often assumes.

At the same time, the findings caution against overly optimistic interpretations of spiritual leadership and value-based organizational cultures. Organizations increasingly encourage employees to seek meaning, authenticity, and emotional engagement through work itself. Yet

when such expectations become organizationally performative or insufficiently supported by institutional practice, employees may experience frustration, skepticism, or emotional fatigue rather than empowerment. Human-centered organizational transformation consequently requires more than symbolic references to purpose or wellbeing. It demands organizational consistency, ethical credibility, relational transparency, and sustainable work structures capable of supporting genuine human flourishing rather than merely intensifying emotional investment.

Several limitations inevitably shape the interpretative scope of the study. The sample remained geographically and culturally situated within Romanian organizational contexts, limiting broader cross-cultural generalizability. The reliance on self-reported perceptions also introduces interpretative subjectivity that cannot be entirely separated from organizational impression management or personal reflexivity. Additionally, workplace spirituality remains conceptually fluid, particularly where spirituality, ethics, religion, wellbeing, and organizational culture overlap within participants' own understandings. Nonetheless, these limitations may also reflect the instability of the phenomenon itself. Spirituality within contemporary organizations does not appear as a fixed construct, but rather as an evolving response to changing conditions of work, identity, and social belonging.

Future research would benefit from comparative cross-cultural studies examining how spirituality and religion are interpreted across different organizational and societal environments, particularly under conditions of digital transformation and hybrid work expansion. Longitudinal approaches may also provide greater insight into whether organizational spirituality produces enduring changes in employee wellbeing and ethical culture or whether its effects remain contingent upon broader institutional dynamics. Additional research exploring tensions between authenticity, emotional labor, and organizational control could similarly deepen current understanding of human-centered organizations in the digital era.

Ultimately, the study suggests that contemporary employees increasingly seek more than economic stability or professional advancement within organizational life. Many aspire toward workplaces capable of sustaining meaning, dignity, ethical coherence, and relational connectedness under conditions that often appear structurally resistant to such aspirations. Whether organizations are genuinely capable of supporting these expectations remains uncertain. Yet the growing visibility of spirituality and religion within organizational discourse may itself indicate a broader recognition that professional life cannot be reduced indefinitely to performance metrics, technological efficiency, or managerial optimization alone.

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