

Journal of
Management,
Spirituality
& Religion

JMSR

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**A decolonial reimagining of workplace spirituality:
Embracing Sufi wisdom**

Journal:	<i>Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion</i>
Manuscript ID	RMSR-2023-0139.R3
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue Article
Keywords:	Islam, workplace spirituality, employee spirituality
Keywords:	Sufism, Enchantment, Decolonial theory



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3 **A decolonial reimagining of workplace spirituality: Embracing Sufi wisdom in the quest**
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5 **for meaningful enchantment**
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8 **Abstract**
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11 This paper critically examines the human quest for meaning and enchantment in the context of
12 modernity's disenchanting tendencies and the subsequent emergence of co-opted forms of re-
13 enchantment. It argues that while the workplace spirituality movement attempts to address the
14 crisis of meaning in organizational life, it often reproduces neoliberal capitalist rationality
15 embedded in coloniality. Drawing on decolonial theory, the paper proposes engaging with
16 Islamic spirituality, Sufism, as a means to generate a radical imaginary capable of providing
17 deeper meanings and expanding human potentialities. The concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi* (intense love
18 of the Divine) is presented as a cornerstone for reimagining enlightenment in more holistic and
19 spiritually grounded terms. This approach offers promise not only for addressing existential and
20 moral crises but also for fostering more humane and sustainable forms of social and economic
21 organization. The paper contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of spirituality in
22 management and organizational studies by offering a decolonial perspective that challenges
23 dominant Western paradigms and opens up new possibilities for understanding human
24 flourishing in organizational contexts.
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44 **Keywords:** Workplace spirituality, Islam, Sufism, decolonial theory, meanings, enchantment
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3 Neither this body am I, nor soul,
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6 Nor these fleeting images passing by,
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9 Nor concepts and thoughts, mental images,
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12 Nor yet sentiments and the psyche's labyrinth.
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16 Who then am I? A consciousness without origin,
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18 not born in time, nor begotten here below,
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22 I am that which was, is and ever shall be,
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25 A jewel in the crown of the Divine Self,
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28 A star in the firmament of the luminous One.
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31 (Rumi as quoted in Nasr, 2007, p.10)
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34 These verses from the mystic poet, Jalauldin Rumi, suggest that the answers to our most
35 fundamental questions, such as 'who am I,' transcend the conventional understanding of
36 consciousness and material existence, pointing instead to a deeper spiritual essence. This
37 essence, which Rumi locates in the 'heart of our spirit,' encompasses what he sees as the root of
38 self-awareness ('I-am-ness') and a transcendental sense of identity. The importance of these
39 questions is reflected in the works of all the great sages of the world who approached these
40 questions from diverse perspectives and sometimes drawing diametrically opposing conclusions.
41
42 Regardless, the enchantment of the transcendent and the sacredness of the universe never faded
43 in human history up until modernity which aimed to replace it with secular humanism (Taylor,
44 2004). The charm, mystery, and awe of the really Real and cosmological modes of explanation
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3 are now assumed to be eclipsed by impassionate science, disengaged reason, and positivism, thus
4 conjuring up a disenchanting world (Weber, 1930). This shift in values has given rise to a modern
5 ethos rooted in materialism and hedonism. This ethos has profoundly influenced contemporary
6 capitalism, where economic rationality, wealth maximization, and the relentless pursuit of
7 efficiency have become ends in themselves (Fraser, 2022). As a result, engagement with
8 meaning-making activities—whether through religion or spirituality—has diminished at both the
9 individual and societal levels. This existential void has inevitably permeated organizational life.
10 In this atmosphere of meaninglessness, businesses have increasingly become sites of alienation,
11 anxiety, and purposeless labor (Graeber, 2018), further deepening the disenchantment of the
12 world.

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15 In order to reverse this dark and mechanical organizational reality, the contemporary workplace
16 spirituality movement offers a way to re-enchant the bureaucratic workplace (Casey, 2004;
17 Taylor & Bell, 2012), challenging Weber's predictions about the inevitable secularization of
18 organizational life. This can be accomplished, for instance, through Buddhist-inspired
19 mindfulness, chakra meditation, Qigong exercises, and similar practices that aim to enchant
20 supposedly rational and secular organizational spaces (Dubey & Bedi, 2024). However, these
21 efforts, while well-intentioned, often fall short of providing genuine spiritual fulfillment and
22 meaning (Ul-Haq, 2020).

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25 In this paper, I argue from a decolonial perspective (Mignolo, 2011) that efforts to re-enchant
26 organizations not only obscure the neo-colonial exploitation of human nature but also distract
27 from the urgent need for fundamental shifts in our thinking to build a better world. While the
28 desire for enchantment is a natural human inclination, providing a way to express intrinsic
29 meaning and purpose in life, contemporary attempts to reintroduce enchantment are ultimately

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3 doomed to fail. These efforts often undermine, rather than confront, the core challenges
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5 humanity faces. For example, the workplace spirituality movement, despite its intention to
6
7 resolve the crisis of meaning in organizational life, frequently reinforces the neoliberal capitalist
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9 logic that remains deeply tied to coloniality - the lingering structures of exploitation established
10
11 during colonialism, which continue to shape modern socioeconomic systems. In contrast, I
12
13 propose that engaging with Islamic spirituality, or Sufism, offers both intellectual and spiritual
14
15 resources that can cultivate a radically new imagination based on *ishq-i haqqiqi*, or the love of
16
17 the Divine. This radical imaginary (Castoriadis, 1994) can reconnect us with a deeply
18
19 meaningful system capable of reshaping our worldview and truly re-enchanting the world.
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21 Sufism's relevance persists in many parts of the Muslim world and has also gained traction in the
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23 West, where it offers innovative adaptations of Eastern spiritual traditions for contemporary
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25 times (Hermansen & Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2023).
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31 This paper is structured as follows: First, I will explore the historical context of modernity's
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33 disenchanting tendencies and the rise of co-opted forms of re-enchantment in response. Next, I
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35 will critically examine the workplace spirituality movement from a decolonial perspective.
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37 Finally, I will propose engaging with Islamic spirituality, particularly Sufism and its concept of
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39 *ishq-i haqqiqi* (the love of the Supreme Reality), as a pathway to fostering a 'True
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41 Enlightenment' that offers deeper meaning and expands human potential within organizational
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43 contexts.
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48 **Humanity's need for enchantment**

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51 Humans often experience existential angst, a deep sense of unease that arises from fundamental
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53 questions about the nature of reality, our identity and place in the universe, and the purpose of
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3 our existence (Leaman, 2013; Pyszczynski et al., 2004). This inner drive compels us to seek and
4 create meaning on both personal and cosmic levels, helping us to understand the world, commit
5 to a way of life, and affirm that *life is worth living* (Park et al., 2013). The search for meaning,
6 which Viktor Frankl (1969) termed the "will to meaning," takes precedence over other powerful
7 human drives, such as the pursuit of pleasure or power. It reflects a fundamental desire to resolve
8 the existential questions that fuel human anxiety and uncertainty. This quest involves seeking a
9 teleological purpose—a sense of direction and significance that connects us to a greater cosmic
10 order (Alexander, 2013, p. 34). Such a broader sense of meaning brings coherence to our lives,
11 offering not only intellectual satisfaction but also a deeper existential resolution to our most
12 profound questions about life.
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17 The significance of leading a meaningful life goes far beyond mere philosophical contemplation.
18 Empirical research demonstrates that it plays a crucial role in fostering human maturity,
19 cultivating hope, and enhancing overall well-being (Crego et al., 2020; Debats et al., 1995;
20 Mascaro & Rosen, 2006). Conversely, the absence of perceived meaning has been associated
21 with various psychological issues, including depression, substance abuse, and anti-social
22 behavior (Blazer, 2011; Morojele & Brook, 2004; Kish & Moody, 1989). Viktor Frankl (1969)
23 argued that the "will to meaning" is so central to human existence that it surpasses even Freudian
24 instinctual drives, making it a fundamental force within the unconscious mind. This quest for
25 meaning is not only true at an individual level but also at a societal level. A shared system of
26 meaning can foster social cohesion and inspire new moral or religious frameworks, which, in
27 turn, shape collective consciousness and behavior across generations (Jung, 1921). This
28 collective dimension of meaning-making underscores its profound impact on social structures
29 and cultural evolution.
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3 Given the fundamental role of the "will to meaning," it is unsurprising that humanity has
4 historically turned to religion as a primary source of meaning (see al-Attas, 2005; Baumeister,
5 1991; Iqbal, 1934; Koltko-Rivera, 2004). Religions have long provided both a sense of the
6 transcendent and a coherent framework for understanding one's place in the cosmos, serving as
7 conduits for enchantment. Indeed, this pursuit of meaning has led us, almost inevitably, toward
8 the divine (Taylor, 2007) - God as the ground of being, the prime mover, the uncaused cause,
9 and the ultimate reason for existence. It is within this greater whole that the ultimate meaning of
10 our lives can be found. Outside of it, we encounter only 'language games' (Wittgenstein, 1968)
11 or, worse, a deep existential abyss (Heidegger, 1967). As Weber explains:

22 "Religion claims to offer an ultimate stance toward the world by virtue of a direct grasp of
23 the world's 'meaning' ... It claims to unlock the meaning of the world not by means of the
24 intellect but by virtue of a charisma of illumination" (Weber, 1969/2009, p.352).

31 Weber's observation highlights the profound role religion has historically played in providing
32 both meaning and enchantment. In this paper, I approach religion and spirituality as deep
33 systems of meaning, capable of generating such enchantment. While modern interpretations of
34 enchantment often refer to a charm associated with the extraordinary in the material realm, a
35 philosophical exploration reveals its original roots in the magical or supernatural (Ellis, 2021).
36 The term 'enchantment' aptly captures the feelings of ecstasy, wonder, and euphoria that arise
37 from an individual's encounter with the divine. These experiences, often described as religious
38 or intuitive, are characterized by their direct, immediate, clear, and holistic nature (Iqbal, 1934;
39 James, 1902). In this sense, enchantment can be understood as *a spiritual state achieved by*
40 *transcending ordinary consciousness and immersing the soul in a direct realization of the*
41 *Supreme Reality*. This state brings life-enhancing ecstasy, instilling a deep reverence that

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3 enhances our sense of wonder about existence and clarifies our purpose and relationship with the
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5 Real. Enchantment, in this context, has a spiritual and transcendental dimension, independent
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7 from mere intellectual activity (Iqbal, 1934). Though this spiritual élan is closely tied to
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9 meaning-making and the validation of revealed truths, its nature often defies easy discursive
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11 articulation. Yet, despite its ineffable qualities, this spiritual state is invariably accompanied by a
12
13 cognitive component, making it at least partially perceivable and communicable. Historically, the
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15 source of this enchantment has been diverse spiritual and religious traditions, a topic which I turn
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22 **A framework of spiritual traditions**

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25 The contemporary use of the term ‘spirituality’ remains contested and sometimes ambiguous,
26
27 despite its long history (Sheldrake, 2007). Scholars have conceptualized spirituality in various
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29 ways, including as an approach to God, an ascetic path, a sense of awe, the ability to gain
30
31 intuitive experiences, and an appreciation of the complexity of this living universe (Khan, 1965;
32
33 King, 1996). While there are numerous spiritual traditions globally, most focus on providing
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35 meaning and producing enchantment through a religious/spiritual experience, i.e., an experience
36
37 whose object is Supreme Reality or God. It is important to point out at this juncture that there is
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39 contestation as well as skepticism in the academic literature regarding the role of
40
41 religion/spirituality as the most powerful and productive generator of human meanings. Scholars,
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43 such as Viktor Frankl, provide primacy to religion and consider it as fundamental to human
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45 meaningfulness (Frankl, 1969) while others, such as Freud, treat it as a pathological response to
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47 human existential angst and the hallmark of an escapist mentality (Freud, 1912). Similarly, the
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49 link between religion and spirituality is also a matter of debate as some scholars argue that
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51 spirituality is an integral and experiential part of religion (Ul-Haq & Khan, 2018) while others
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3 claim that spirituality has an independent, secular existence and can even resist traditional
4 religion, especially in its New Age form (Pavlovich, 2020; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). This
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6 later impression of spirituality as a positive but culturally deviant force might have increased its
7
8 acceptability among those who reject institutional religion but might also marginalize its status in
9
10 the academic discourse (Stark et al., 2005).
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15 Traditional religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism etc., consider
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17 spirituality to be an inherent part of their belief systems, with specific texts, institutions,
18
19 practices, and doctrines to guide believers on a spiritual path (al-Hujwiri, 2001; Jacobs, 1984;
20
21 Sheldrake, 2014; Sivaraman, 1989). However, one can also identify a different type of
22
23 spirituality divorced from organized religion, manifesting in beliefs related to esoteric, magical,
24
25 occult, or supernatural forces (Moore, 2005). This latter form of spirituality often embraces an
26
27 animistic sense of a living universe and has many discursive forms, with the latest iteration being
28
29 'New Age Spirituality,' which elevates the self and personal religious experience to a cosmic
30
31 level (Heelas, 2008). It is crucial to note that most theistic religions have strongly condemned
32
33 occultism from their inception (Tambiah, 1990). Additionally, some scholars, following the
34
35 perennial philosophy, believe in a common core of all spirituality but without giving primacy to
36
37 either revelation or prophethood (Huxley, 1945; Stace, 1960). This perspective suggests a
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39 universal spiritual truth underlying all religious traditions, accessible through mystical
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41 experience and contemplation.
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48 To provide a comprehensive framework for understanding spiritual traditions, we can
49
50 conceptualize them along two primary spectrums: theistic to non-theistic beliefs and revealed
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52 religion to occultism/esotericism. These spectrums reflect different metatheoretical assumptions
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54 about the existence of God and the method of accessing supernatural reality. Such an analysis of
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3 spiritual traditions cuts through surface details to focus on fundamental aspects of each tradition's
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5 worldview. The different spiritual traditions in the world are classified in Figure 1 below.
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18 Expanding on the above framework, we can identify four primary quadrants:
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21 *Theistic revealed traditions*
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24 This category includes spiritual branches within major theistic religions such as Kabbalah in
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26 Judaism (Jacobs, 1984), Christian mysticism/redemption (Sheldrake, 2014), and Sufism in Islam
27
28 (al-Qushayri, 1304/2007). These traditions emphasize divine revelation, prophetic teachings,
29
30 belief in an afterlife, and the importance of direct personal experience with the divine. They
31
32 often incorporate esoteric practices aimed at purifying the seeker's soul, alongside symbolic
33
34 interpretations of sacred texts and rituals designed to deepen their connection with the divine
35
36 (Sheldrake, 2014). This connection helps them in understanding their place in the cosmos and
37
38 fostering a sense of purpose through the pursuit of enchantment and spiritual elevation. These
39
40 traditions contribute to societal cohesion by establishing shared ethical norms and rituals that
41
42 bind communities together, often serving as a source of cultural identity and moral guidance.
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48 *Non-theistic revealed traditions*
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51 This category includes mystical branches within religions such as Buddhism (Harvey, 2013) and
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53 Jainism (Dundas, 2002), which do not centralize a supreme deity but still have established
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55 scriptures, practices, and ethical systems. Buddhism's spiritual traditions emphasize the path to
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3 enlightenment through practices like yoga, mindfulness, and simple living, focusing on the
4 attainment of *Nirvana*, a state of liberation from suffering. Jainism's spiritual traditions center on
5 the principles of non-violence (*ahimsa*), self-discipline, and asceticism, guiding adherents toward
6 spiritual purity and liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth and rebirth. These traditions
7 provide individuals meaning through personal transformation and liberation from suffering.
8
9

15 *Theistic occultist traditions*

18 This category includes theosophy, developed by Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society
19 in the late 19th century (Goodrick-Clarke, 2004). Theosophy represents a distinctive fusion of
20 theistic and occult traditions. While acknowledging a divine source or "Absolute", theosophy
21 draws heavily from esoteric and occult philosophies, incorporating elements of Eastern religions,
22 Western mysticism, and pseudo-scientific theories (Kramer & Strube, 2020). Theosophists seek
23 hidden knowledge through intuitive insights, psychic abilities, and the study of ancient texts.
24 Theosophy's emphasis on personal spiritual development, reincarnation, and the existence of
25 "ascended masters" further exemplifies its unique position as a theistic yet occult tradition
26 (Goodrick-Clarke, 2010). Theosophy creates meaning by offering individuals an eclectic
27 spiritual path.
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42 *Non-theistic occultist traditions*

45 This category includes a wide range of spiritual practices that do not centralize a supreme deity
46 but focus on esoteric knowledge and practices. New Age spirituality, for instance, often
47 emphasizes personal spiritual growth, holistic healing, and the interconnectedness of all things
48 without necessarily positing a central divine figure (Heelas, 2008). Similarly, many magical
49 traditions, such as certain forms of Wicca and neo-paganism, focus on manipulating natural and
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3 cosmic energies without adherence to a specific theistic doctrine (Hutton, 1999). These non-
4 theistic occultist traditions often draw from a variety of sources, including ancient wisdom
5 traditions, modern psychology, and alternative scientific theories. They typically create meaning
6 by emphasizing individual experience and personal intuition over revealed scripture or
7 established dogma. Practices may include meditation, energy work, divination, and various
8 rituals designed to expand consciousness or manipulate reality at a subtle level.
9

10 We also find some traditions that lie at the intersection of the above quadrants. For instance, the
11 various Dharmic traditions within Hinduism (Sivaraman, 1989) often demonstrate a remarkable
12 flexibility in their metaphysical stance. They can encompass both theistic and non-theistic
13 viewpoints, as well as revealed and esoteric elements. For example, Advaita Vedanta, a major
14 school of Hindu philosophy, posits a non-dualistic reality that can be interpreted in both theistic
15 and non-theistic ways (Long, 2008). This fluidity allows Dharmic traditions to span multiple
16 quadrants of the proposed framework and offer meaning by promoting tolerance and adaptability
17 in the face of changing personal and social conditions.
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19 Similarly, perennial philosophy, as articulated by Aldous Huxley (1945) and others, transcends
20 the boundaries of this categorization. By positing a universal core of spiritual truth underlying all
21 religious traditions, perennialism suggests a fundamental unity that encompasses both theistic
22 and non-theistic expressions, as well as revealed and esoteric approaches to spirituality (Huxley,
23 1945). This perspective invites us to look beyond surface-level differences and recognize the
24 common experiential core that may unite diverse spiritual paths (Smith, 1976). It provides
25 meaning by providing individuals with a meta-framework for understanding diverse spiritual
26 paths.
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3 The rich tapestry of spiritual traditions presented in Figure 1 demonstrates the diverse ways in
4 which humanity has sought to create meaning and experience enchantment throughout history.
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6 These traditions, whether theistic or non-theistic, revealed or esoteric, have played a crucial role
7
8 in shaping human consciousness and providing answers to existential questions. However, as we
9
10 approach the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries, we witness a profound shift in
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12 the intellectual landscape that would challenge the primacy of these spiritual worldviews. This
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14 period marked the rise of a more secular and rationalist approach to understanding reality,
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16 fundamentally altering our engagement with spiritual and metaphysical concepts.
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22 **A modern and disenchanting world?**

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25 The transition to the Enlightenment era marked a profound shift in the intellectual landscape,
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27 challenging the longstanding primacy of spiritual worldviews that had traditionally shaped
28
29 human consciousness. Enlightenment thinkers began to prioritize reason and scientific
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31 methodologies over revelation and mystical experiences as the primary means of understanding
32
33 the world and human existence (Taylor, 2007). Their primary goal was to establish the
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35 supremacy of scientific rationalism, 'liberating' humanity from superstition and asserting
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37 epistemic sovereignty (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947), while de-centering God from human
38
39 consciousness (Ul-Haq, 2024). This epistemological shift had significant implications for how
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41 knowledge was generated and validated. The basis of knowledge production shifted from
42
43 revelation to the systematic application of empirical observation and independent intellectual
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45 abstraction (Milbank, 1988). Objects in the universe—such as stars, mountains, animals, and
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47 humans—were no longer viewed as symbols pointing to a higher reality. Instead, they came to
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49 be seen as mere material entities, the fundamental building blocks of the physical world, now
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51 deemed suitable for scientific explanation (Hervieu-Leger, 1999). This secular approach aimed
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3 to maximize human emancipation by substituting divine authority with human authority and
4 redefining progress as advancements solely in material and technological conditions (Ul-Haq,
5 2024). The renowned sociologist Max Weber argued that this trend would lead to
6 *Entzauberung*, or an increasingly secularized and 'disenchanted' world (Weber, 1969/2009).
7
8 For Weber, disenchantment represented an ontological estrangement from traditional forms of
9
10 magic, religion, and mysticism, driven by the process of rationalization and the rise of the
11
12 capitalist order (Weber, 1963). As described by Ernest Gellner, disenchantment is:
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20 “... the Faustian purchase of cognitive, technological and administrative power, by the
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22 surrender of our previous meaningful, humanly suffused, humanly responsive, if often also
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24 menacing or capricious world” (Gellner, 1987, p.153).
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28 The cumulative effect of these changes has led to a profound transformation in human
29
30 experience and social relations. Modern society has become an 'iron cage' of reason (Weber,
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32 1930) - a metaphor that aptly captures the constraining nature of rationalized social structures.
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34 In this environment, individuals find themselves ensnared within systems driven by efficiency,
35
36 calculation, and control. The quest for meaning and enchantment is now often dismissed as
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38 mere "subjective emotions," to be corrected solely by the absolute power of "objective reason,"
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40 which is seen as the ultimate arbiter of truth (Williams, 1998). This process of rationalization
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42 does not occur in isolation; it is closely linked to the economic system that both drives and is
43
44 shaped by it: capitalism. According to Badiou and Gauchet (2015), capitalism acts as the
45
46 primary vehicle for the disenchanting tendencies of modernity. It has evolved into a vast
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48 totalitarian system of formal rationality that permeates every facet of social life, thereby
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50 reinforcing the iron cage of rationality. Weber's description of capitalism elucidates this all-
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52 encompassing nature:
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3 “Capitalism is today an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which
4 presents itself to him ... as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the
5 individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to
6 capitalist rules of action” (Weber, 1930, p.54).
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13 This portrayal highlights how capitalism, as the dominant economic system, imposes its secular
14 materialist logic on individuals, further entrenching the disenchantment process (Sennett, 1998).
15 As Mark Schneider describes it, "this process would turn life into a tale which, whether told by
16 an idiot or not, would certainly signify nothing, having been evacuated of meaning" (Schneider,
17 1993, p.xiii).
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25 However, the narrative of disenchantment has never been wholly complete (Jenkins, 2000). The
26 pursuit of a meaningful and enchanted life is fundamental to human existence and cannot be
27 entirely eradicated, even amidst epochal changes (Joas, 2021). This persistent human need has
28 led to various attempts at re-enchantment, including the rise of New Age Spirituality movements.
29 These developments illustrate the ongoing negotiation between the rationalizing forces of
30 modernity and the enduring human longing for transcendence and meaning within organizational
31 contexts.
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42 **Co-opted re-enchantment**

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45 The disenchantment wrought by Enlightenment-era ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard, 1984), which
46 sought emancipation and universal progress, ironically led to severe consequences, including
47 world wars, imperialism, colonialism, racism, slavery, climate change, and totalitarianism
48 (Bauman, 1989). In response to this disenchantment and the crises it generated, there has been a
49 partial revival of enchantment in everyday life, most notably through New Age spirituality.
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3 However, this resuscitation has taken a co-opted form, resulting in a curious blend of the
4 spiritual and the secular offered as a consumable experience (Ritzer, 2005). This shift can be
5
6 seen as part of the broader postmodern turn, which some scholars view as a reaction against the
7
8 modernist drive for disenchantment (Bauman, 1993). Postmodernity's embrace of mystery,
9
10 acceptance of contingency, and respect for ambiguity opened the door to re-enchantment which
11
12 crystallized into an esoteric 'spiritual turn' (Houtman & Aupers, 2007), culminating in the 'New
13
14 Age movement' (Groothuis, 1986). Emerging in the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, this
15
16 movement represented a form of resistance against mainstream religion and spirituality
17
18 (Sutcliffe, 2003). It combined supernatural elements from Eastern traditions with Western
19
20 religious ideas, creating an eclectic mix that included practices such as divination, channeling,
21
22 possession, and holistic healing (Campbell, 2007). The consumerist nature of this spiritual blend
23
24 transformed it into a commodifiable experience, where direct access to supernatural realities is
25
26 packaged and sold (Redden, 2016). This corporate co-optation of spiritual practices is evident in
27
28 the rise of mindfulness apps like Headspace and Calm, which provide meditation services to
29
30 corporate employees (Jablonsky, 2022).
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38 While the commodification of spiritual practices within the New Age movement has faced
39
40 significant critique, it is crucial to recognize its role in facilitating the transmission of Eastern
41
42 spiritual traditions to the West. This cross-cultural exchange has introduced many Westerners to
43
44 practices such as meditation, yoga, and mindfulness, which have arguably benefited
45
46 contemporary society (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Additionally, the popularization of Eastern
47
48 philosophies has fostered a broader appreciation for holistic approaches to health and spirituality,
49
50 promoting greater cultural openness and diversity in spiritual practices across the West (Heelas,
51
52 2008). However, this co-opted re-enchantment, despite appearing to offer a return to meaning,
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3 ultimately reinforces the very systems it aims to challenge. The commodification of spiritual
4 experiences in the New Age movement has not been limited to personal practices; it has
5 extended into organizational contexts as well. As businesses confronted the challenges of
6 maintaining employee engagement and productivity in an increasingly disenchanting world, they
7 sought to incorporate spiritual elements into the workplace (Casey, 2004). This adoption
8 represents a significant shift in how businesses address employee well-being and corporate
9 culture, laying the groundwork for the emergence of the workplace spirituality movement.
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20 **Workplace spirituality: The will to succeed**

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23 The workplace spirituality movement signifies a profound shift in organizational thinking,
24 transforming workplaces into environments where employees can explore deeper meanings of
25 life (Case & Gosling, 2010; Fry & Altman, 2013). In recent years, this movement has gained
26 traction, with corporations like Ford, Google, American Express, and Deloitte embracing New
27 Age spirituality practices including mindfulness, Qigong exercises, and yoga. These practices are
28 implemented with the goals of enhancing employee productivity, reducing anxiety, and fostering
29 innovative thinking (Miller et al., 2017). For example, Google's 'Search Inside Yourself' program
30 provides mindfulness training to boost emotional intelligence and leadership skills (Tan, 2012).
31 While these programs are marketed as tools for personal growth, they also align employees' inner
32 lives with corporate objectives, potentially blurring the lines between self-development and
33 organizational control.
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49 As corporations integrate spiritual practices, this shift is influencing not only organizational
50 routines but also leadership structures. For example, a management conference proposal from a
51 co-convenor of the Diwa-Kapwa community suggested replacing the Chief Human Resource
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3 Officer (CHRO) with a Chief Spirituality Officer (CSO) (Coloma, 2023). This reflects a growing
4 trend of embedding spirituality into leadership and organizational frameworks. Another notable
5 example of this trend is the rise of retreat centers focused on executive spiritual renewal. The
6 Esalen Institute in California, for instance, has become a popular destination for Silicon Valley
7 executives seeking to reconnect with their spiritual selves. As the institute's director notes:
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15 “There’s a dawning consciousness emerging in Silicon Valley as people recognize that their
16 conventional success isn’t necessarily making the world a better place. The CEOs, inside, are
17 hurting. They can’t sleep at night. They wonder if they’re doing the right thing for humanity.
18 These are questions we can only answer behind closed doors” (Marantz, 2019).
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25 These retreats offer a variety of activities designed to foster spiritual exploration and self-
26 reflection, including mindful eating, mindful walking, compassion practices, yoga, and
27 meditation exercises aimed at integrating life and work (Marantz, 2019). The eclectic nature of
28 this movement is evident in its incorporation of diverse spiritual practices such as chanting,
29 chakra meditation, and even guitar classes intended to offer a new *perspective*. While executive
30 retreats provide temporary immersion in spiritual practices, a new class of professionally trained
31 spiritual guides has emerged to offer ongoing support within organizational settings. Figures
32 such as Sri Aurobindo, Carlene Sullivan, Terri Wade, and Alisha Begum position themselves as
33 conduits to the sacred, guiding employees and entrepreneurs to harness their spiritual power for
34 business success (Purser, 2019; Upadhyaya, 2013). However, a critical examination of these ‘spirit
35 means business’ practices reveals a significant shift in focus from traditional spiritual goals. As
36 one spiritual guru remarked, "In a spirit-led organization, spirituality drives the workers' *will to*
37 *succeed*" (Coloma, 2023). This statement highlights a fundamental reorientation of spiritual
38 practice towards enhancing organizational performance and success. Critics argue that this
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3 integration of spirituality into organizational life alters the nature and purpose of spiritual
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5 practice, shifting its focus from personal transcendence to achieving material and organizational
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7 outcomes (Case & Gosling, 2010).
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11 Despite criticisms, advocates of workplace spirituality maintain that integrating spiritual
12
13 practices into organizational settings can bring substantial benefits to both employees and
14
15 organizations. They argue that such practices foster more humane and fulfilling work
16
17 environments, enhancing employee well-being and improving organizational performance (Fry
18
19 & Altman, 2013). Proponents believe that spiritual practices can be authentically woven into
20
21 organizational life without being fully co-opted by corporate interests (Benefiel et al., 2014).
22
23 However, this view often overlooks the inherent tension between sacred spiritual goals and
24
25 secular capitalist imperatives. Still, the workplace spirituality movement continues to assert that
26
27 it infuses organizations with metaphysical notions of purpose, meaning, and higher
28
29 consciousness (Bell et al., 2012). This shift is accomplished by replacing traditional religious
30
31 concepts like God, prophets, and piety with corporate-friendly terms such as efficiency,
32
33 profitability, and performance. This linguistic reframing allows managerial roles to be redefined,
34
35 positioning managers both as 'seekers' on personal spiritual journeys and as guides helping
36
37 employees reach their full spiritual potential (Fry & Vu, 2023; Vu & Gill, 2018).
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44 This shift has drawn substantial criticism from both academic and popular circles. Critics argue
45
46 that it represents a repressive strategy designed to enhance organizational performance and
47
48 impose normative control (Willmott, 2018). The corporate adoption of spiritual practices reflects
49
50 a form of neo-rationality (Casey, 2004), repurposing the desire for re-enchantment to serve
51
52 instrumental ends. This raises concerns about the authenticity and potentially coercive nature of
53
54 such organizationally sanctioned spirituality. Other critics view this trend as a form of
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3 colonization driven by performativity—the principle of efficiency at all costs—which suppresses
4
5 conflicts between transcendent religious values and materialist organizational goals (Bell &
6
7 Taylor, 2003). A clear example of this colonizing influence is seen in the rise of corporate
8
9 mindfulness programs. For instance, Aetna’s mindfulness initiatives, while framed as promoting
10
11 employee well-being, are explicitly tied to increasing productivity and reducing healthcare costs
12
13 (Gelles, 2015). This instrumentalization of spiritual practices for corporate gain illustrate how
14
15 workplace spirituality can reinforce, rather than challenge, existing power structures.
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20 From a critical standpoint, the workplace spirituality movement can be viewed as ‘just
21
22 management’—a set of practices focused on everyday organizational concerns, rather than a
23
24 deep engagement with the sacred to create genuine meaning (Ul-Haq, 2020). This critique
25
26 suggests that the movement's emphasis on the "will to succeed" overshadows the "will to
27
28 meaning," which traditionally addresses deeper questions of purpose through spiritual practice.
29
30 As a result, while the workplace spirituality movement seeks to address the crisis of meaning in
31
32 organizational life, it often fails to provide a truly transformative paradigm. Its limitations arise
33
34 from its entanglement with the very structures of Western modernity and capitalism that it
35
36 ostensibly aims to challenge. To fully understand and critique these limitations, a theoretical
37
38 framework that transcends dominant Western epistemology is necessary. Here, decolonial theory
39
40 becomes crucial, offering a critical lens through which to examine the underlying assumptions
41
42 and power dynamics shaping our understanding of spirituality in organizational contexts.
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48 **Decolonial theory of spirituality**

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51 Decolonial theory emerges as a vital framework that challenges the hegemony of Western
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53 modernity as the primary epistemological referent for understanding reality (de Sousa Santos,
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3 2018; Grosfoguel, 2007). By doing so, it provides an alternative perspective that rethinks
4 spirituality through a lens that is not bound by Western-centric thought. This theoretical
5 approach posits that the political process of colonialism, described by Mignolo (2011) as the
6 "darker side of Western modernity," engendered a hierarchical process of domination and a
7 peculiar structure of global power that persists to this day. This continuity of colonial
8 exploitation, termed 'coloniality,' is central to the neoliberal capitalist world order and possesses
9 a powerful structure for (re)producing and legitimizing Western knowledge. Ramon Grosfoguel,
10 a prominent decolonial historian, articulates this epistemic privilege of the West:
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22 “Epistemic privilege of the West was consecrated and normalized through the Spanish
23 Catholic monarchy’s destruction of al-Andalus and the European colonial expression since
24 the late 15th century.... [It] characterized all non-Christian knowledge as a product of pagan
25 and devil forces In this way, all ‘other’ traditions of thought were deemed inferior
26 (characterized in the 16th century as ‘barbarians’, in the 19th century as ‘primitives’, in the
27 20th century as ‘under-developed’, and at the beginning of the 21st century as ‘anti-
28 democratic’” (Grosfoguel, 2010, p.30).
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39 This process of epistemic domination has systematically eradicated or marginalized other
40 knowledge systems, relegating them to the realm of ‘irrationality’. Decolonial theorists
41 describe this phenomenon as ‘epistemicide’ (de Sousa Santos, 2014), wherein the diverse
42 cultural and intellectual histories of the world have been subsumed into a singular, global
43 model of power centered on Western Europe (Quijano, 2008). As a result, the rich
44 epistemological diversity of the world—or what de Sousa Santos (2004) refers to as the
45 ‘ecology of knowledges’—has been stifled. This includes alternative models of meaning-
46 making and cosmologies, where the universe is often interpreted symbolically, and where God
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3 is seen with absolute authority. In this shift, humanity has moved from a pluriversal world
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5 (Mignolo, 2011) to a homogenized universal order, leaving little room for traditional
6
7 cosmologies and spiritual wisdom to exist on their own terms.
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11 In response to this epistemic hegemony, decolonial theorists advocate for a process of
12
13 ‘delinking’ from the Western-centric world system which entails resisting the colonial logic
14
15 and modernist discourse through what Mignolo (2011) calls ‘epistemic disobedience’. Central
16
17 to this approach is shifting the locus of knowledge production and enunciation from Western
18
19 contexts to non-Western ones—such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America—and drawing from
20
21 their rich indigenous and local intellectual traditions. As de Sousa Santos et al. (2007, p.xix)
22
23 assert:
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28 “To confront this paradigm in all its dimensions is the challenge facing a new critical theory
29
30 and new emancipatory practices. Contrary to their predecessors, this theory and these
31
32 practices must start from the premise that the epistemological diversity of the world is
33
34 immense, as immense as its cultural diversity and the recognition of such diversity must be at
35
36 the core of the global resistance against capitalism”.
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41 While decolonial theory addresses various dimensions of colonial power structures, its
42
43 application to religion and spirituality offers particularly valuable insights for challenging
44
45 dominant paradigms of meaning-making. A critical analysis of colonial history reveals how
46
47 colonizers exploited religion and spirituality to further their imperialist agenda (Yountae, 2020).
48
49 By appropriating the transformative power of spiritual enchantment and the Christian civilizing
50
51 mission of human betterment, they encouraged the adoption of a colonized identity that aligned
52
53 with their objectives (Gerbner, 2015). Religion, particularly that of the colonizers, became a
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3 marker of colonial difference, used to assert a sense of superiority while reinforcing relations
4
5 with the colonized 'other' (Fleck, 1998).
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8 Ironically, the disenchanting tendencies and spiritual impoverishment of modernity eventually
9
10 led Western Europe to distance itself from this religious identity, relegating religion to what de
11
12 Sousa Santos (2015, p.14) calls 'globalized localism'. This shift created a spiritual vacuum in
13
14 meaning-making, partially filled by the New Age spirituality movement, which sought to address
15
16 the West's spiritual crisis. However, this movement often manifests as a form of globalized
17
18 localism itself, commodifying spiritual practices from diverse cultures without fully engaging
19
20 with their original contexts or deeper metaphysical foundations. A decolonial critique of New
21
22 Age spirituality reveals its limitations as an authentic alternative to colonial spirituality, as it
23
24 often serves as a "trojan horse for neoliberal ideologies" (Karjalainen et al., 2021, p.484). The
25
26 movement's commodification of spiritual experiences creates a simulacrum of enchantment,
27
28 reinforcing rather than subverting coloniality. This critique extends to the workplace spirituality
29
30 movement, which claims to bring meaning and spirituality into organizational life but often
31
32 aligns with and reinforces capitalist imperatives. For example, the adoption of "servant
33
34 leadership" in corporate settings often draws from spiritual traditions (Hunsaker & Jeong, 2023)
35
36 yet reframes them in ways that prioritize organizational goals. While such approaches purport to
37
38 empower employees, they can ultimately reinforce existing power dynamics and obscure
39
40 systemic inequalities (Tourish & Tourish, 2010). This selective appropriation of spiritual
41
42 concepts reveals how workplace spirituality can function as a form of 'spiritual neocolonialism',
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44 imposing Western corporate values under the guise of universal wisdom.
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53 Nevertheless, some scholars argue that the relationship between spirituality and capitalism is
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55 more nuanced than a simple binary of resistance or co-optation. Carrette and King (2005)
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3 suggest that while spirituality has indeed been commodified, it also has the potential to introduce
4 alternative values into capitalist systems, potentially transforming them from within. This
5 perspective challenges the view that all forms of workplace spirituality are inherently
6 compromised by their association with capitalism. However, even this nuanced view operates
7 largely within the framework of secular Western modernity. A decolonial approach urges us to
8 go further, challenging not just the commodification of spirituality but the very epistemological
9 foundations on which modern conceptions of spirituality are built. This involves a radical
10 reimagining of spirituality, drawing on knowledge systems and practices that have been
11 marginalized or delegitimized by colonial epistemologies (Wood, 2020). Such an approach
12 requires more than merely incorporating non-Western universal wisdom traditions into existing
13 frameworks; it calls for fundamentally rethinking the nature of spirituality and its relationship to
14 knowledge, power, and social structures. This demands a critical examination of how spiritual
15 practices can either reinforce or subvert colonial power dynamics, alongside a commitment to
16 fostering forms of spirituality that contribute to genuine decolonization and emancipation.
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36 As outlined above, the limitations of the workplace spirituality movement stem from its inability
37 to fundamentally challenge the underlying logic of capitalist rationality. In contrast, Sufism, with
38 its emphasis on divine love and spiritual transformation, offers a radically different paradigm for
39 understanding the relationship between work, spirituality, and human flourishing. By turning to
40 this rich tradition, we can explore alternative ways of conceptualizing organizational life that
41 transcend the instrumentalizing tendencies of modern management practices.
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Islamic spirituality (Sufism):

Islamic spirituality, or Sufism (*Tasawwuf*), provides a profound and authentic alternative to the co-opted forms of spirituality critiqued earlier. Rooted in the rich tradition of Islam, Sufism emphasizes the purification of one's intentions and actions, guiding individuals toward the ultimate goal of attaining God's pleasure, love, and eternal salvation (Khan, 1965). This path of experiential knowledge leads to the perception of both exoteric and esoteric realities (*ma'arifa*), along with ever-deepening levels of inner purification (*tazkiya*) (Schimmel, 1975). As external religious and spiritual practices are dependent on the internal state of one's soul, Sufism is regarded as the essence of Islam (Gardner, 1917) and an integral aspect of the Prophet's (PBUH) teachings (Khan, 1965). This holistic approach to spiritual growth is encapsulated in the concept of *ihsan*, which represents the highest form of faith and constitutes a foundational principle of Sufi practice. According to one of the most important hadith, *ihsan* is defined as worshiping God as if one sees Him, illustrating the deep connection between inner awareness and external devotion. The Prophet (PBUH) explained *ihsan* as:

“Worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you see Him not, yet He sees you.” (Khan, 1965, p. 13)

This state of continuous realization of God's presence fosters mindfulness of the Divine Reality in all actions and thoughts (Bashir, 2011). It enables believers to transcend spatio-temporal limitations, remain in the lasting presence of the Real, and perceive God as the 'Necessary Being' (*wajib al-wujud*), while understanding all creation as contingent beings (*mumkin al-wujud*) (Ibn Arabi, as quoted in Chittick, 1996). Unlike the New Age and workplace spirituality movements, which often disconnect spiritual practices from their metaphysical roots, Sufism maintains that without God, the spirit in spirituality cannot be defined. It insists that the spirit's

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2
3 true potential can only be nurtured through a direct connection to the Divine which profoundly
4 shapes the inner consciousness of the Sufi, producing new insights and experiences (al-Hujwiri,
5
6 2001). This spiritual engagement reminds the Sufi of the primordial covenant (*mithaq*)
7
8 mentioned in the Quran, in which all uncreated souls acknowledged God as their Lord (Abdel-
9
10 Kader, 1962). This covenant establishes human beings as God's vicegerents on earth, a divine
11
12 appointment that deeply influences the Sufi's spiritual journey and sense of purpose (Quran,
13
14 35:39). Al-Hujwiri, in his seminal work, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, presents Sufism as a harmonious
15
16 blend of outward religious observance and inner mystical experience, challenging the modern
17
18 dichotomy between spirituality and religion (al-Hujwiri, 2001). It is worth noting that while
19
20 some spiritual traditions view the body negatively (Shahzad, 2007), traditional Sufism offers a
21
22 more positive perspective on human corporeality. Ibn Arabi, for example, argues that the body is
23
24 not an obstacle to spiritual realization but rather an essential part of it. He writes, "Know that the
25
26 makeup of man, in its perfection of spirit, body, and soul, was created by God in His image" (ibn
27
28 Arabi, 1229/2004, p. 201), emphasizing the body's role in harmonizing the spiritual and material
29
30 aspects of human existence. This reverence for the body acknowledges the physical form as a
31
32 manifestation of divine beauty and as a means of experiencing divine love.

33
34 In this context, Sufism offers a robust framework for meaning-making, presenting a
35
36 comprehensive moral cosmology that stands in stark contrast to the modern secular paradigm
37
38 (Hallaq, 2013). This cosmology places the human being within a larger metaphysical framework,
39
40 offering a sense of purpose and meaning that transcends the material realm (Weir, 2012). In
41
42 contrast, modern forms of spirituality, often detached from a comprehensive moral foundation,
43
44 frequently fail to address the deeper ethical and existential challenges confronting humanity. As
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46 Burton et al. (2018) suggest, without a firm metaphysical grounding, spiritual practices can
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3 easily be co-opted to serve egocentric interests rather than aligning with theocentric intentions,
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5 leading to what is termed "dark spirituality". The Sufi tradition, with its focus on the purification
6
7 of the heart and submission to divine will, provides a powerful counter to these self-serving
8
9 tendencies. Through the cultivation of this submission, it offers a framework for discerning
10
11 between authentic spiritual guidance and self-serving impulses that often masquerade as
12
13 spirituality.
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17 Moreover, Sufism is not limited to personal transformation; it also presents a holistic model of
18
19 spiritual development that integrates social and ethical responsibilities, ensuring that one's
20
21 spiritual growth aligns with a broader sense of moral accountability (Hallaq, 2018). In this sense,
22
23 it aligns with recent work on relational models of spirituality (Jeong et al., 2024), which
24
25 emphasizes the importance of understanding spirituality not just as an individual phenomenon,
26
27 but as a relational one. Sufism exemplifies this relational approach, highlighting the
28
29 transformative power of a deep, loving relationship with God and His creation. Far from being a
30
31 relic of the past, Sufism's focus on spiritual development and ethical conduct offers a compelling
32
33 alternative to the fragmented and commodified practices found in contemporary spiritual
34
35 movements, addressing key deficiencies in current approaches to workplace spirituality. Figure 2
36
37 below is a comparison chart which visually represents the key differences between New Age
38
39 spirituality, workplace spirituality, and Sufism. It highlights the focus, goals, and impact of each
40
41 approach. New Age Spirituality emphasizes individual transformation and personal well-being,
42
43 but risks commodification. Workplace Spirituality, while aiming for organizational performance
44
45 and employee engagement, tends to reinforce capitalist logic. The Sufi-inspired Approach,
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47 grounded in the concept of divine love, offers a path to transcendence, meaning, and true
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3 enlightenment, potentially providing a more profound and authentic spiritual experience in the
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5 workplace context.
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12 INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE
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18 The Sufi path emphasizes the cultivation of the body and spirit through practices such as
19
20 obligatory and voluntary prayers, spiritual meditation (*tafakkur*), remembrance of God (*dhikr*),
21
22 and ethical conduct (*adab*) towards others. These are not mere rituals of a Sufi order, but holistic
23
24 techniques that integrate the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the
25
26 disciple (Nasr, 2007). Their aim is to transcend the ego and achieve profound spiritual
27
28 transformation (al-Daghistani, 2022). While these foundational principles provide the structure
29
30 for Sufi practice, it is the concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi*—intense love of the Divine—that truly
31
32 encapsulates the transformative power of the Sufi path.
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35

36 37 *Love of the Divine (ishq-i haqqiqi)*

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39

40 This profound love, *ishq-i haqqiqi*, lies at the heart of Sufism, not only defining the spiritual
41
42 journey but also addressing the limitations of contemporary spiritual movements. It empowers
43
44 individuals to live meaningfully as God's vicegerents, fostering deep, sincere submission to His
45
46 will. Such devotion, as Lings (1975) describes, can "shake one to the depths of their being and
47
48 set them in motion upon the path" (p.30). The love of God illuminates the Sufi's heart, generating
49
50 an intense yearning (*shawq*) to ascend towards higher spiritual stations (*maqamat*) (Nasr, 2007).
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54 The Qur'an reflects this divine reciprocity, stating, "He loves them, and they love Him" (5:54),
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3 emphasizing the mutual nature of this sacred bond. This theme and its subtle variations have
4
5 been a subject of the great Sufi poets, such as Hafiz who said:

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7
8 One day in pre-eternity a ray of Your beauty

9
10
11 Shot forth in a blaze of epiphany

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14 Then Love revealed itself and cast down

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16
17 A fire which razed the earth from toe to crown

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20 (A poem of Hafiz Shirazi, as quoted in Lewisohn, 2015)

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23
24 This intense and passionate love of the Real is cultivated by transforming one's body and spirit
25
26 through following in the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH) (Ul-Haq & Khan, 2018). This divine
27
28 love instills confidence, granting individuals a sense of psychological freedom and the will to
29
30 strive for positive change in themselves and society. Unlike the self-centered focus of New Age
31
32 spirituality (Hanegraaff, 1999) or the performance-driven approach of workplace spirituality,
33
34 *ishq-i haqqiqi* orients individuals toward a higher other-worldly purpose beyond self-interest or
35
36 material success. It provides a moral compass, one notably absent in modern secular ethics
37
38 (Hallaq, 2013), offering a path to reconnect with the sacred without succumbing to the
39
40 commodification or instrumentalization. The great Sufi Shaykh, ibn al-Arabi, describes this
41
42 gradual self-perfection as fulfilling humanity's role as vicegerents of God, becoming mirrors that
43
44 reflect the Divine's beauty and magnificence (*mir'at al-haqq*) (Chittick, 1998). However,
45
46 attaining this state of divine love is not a solitary pursuit in the Sufi tradition; it requires guidance
47
48 and mentorship from spiritual teachers.
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3 *Spiritual master (shaykh)*
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6 To attain this divine love, one requires the guidance of a spiritual educator or master (*shaykh*),
7 who imparts knowledge of the spiritual path and gradually elevates the disciple to a higher
8 spiritual state (Buehler, 2016). This process ultimately leads to the experience of *fana fir rasul*—
9 annihilation in the presence of the Prophet (PBUH), the master of all masters (Khan, 1965).
10 Sufism's emphasis on the teacher-disciple relationship provides a structured and disciplined
11 approach to spiritual development, a key element often lacking in modern spiritual movements.
12 This relationship ensures the transmission of authentic spiritual knowledge and practices,
13 safeguarding against the eclecticism and dilution frequently seen in New Age spirituality. A Sufi
14 shaykh commented on the stringent requirements of being a master as:
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28 “For a Shaykh, an understanding of the stations and the stages of the path, the colors of the
29 Divine lights peculiar to each one ... as well as the gnosis of His Greatness, Magnificence,
30 Unity and Individuality is a must” (Gangohi, 2005).
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36 Spiritual masters can establish their own *tariqa* (spiritual order), which represents an
37 institutionalized form of Sufism (le Gall, 2004). Among the numerous orders, the most renowned
38 and still enduring are the Naqshbandi, Chishti, Qadiri, Shadili, and Suhrawardi. Joining a Sufi
39 order allows one to receive the spiritual blessings (*baraka*) transmitted through the master's
40 presence, which can open the heart to unveilings (*kashf*)—direct perceptions of divine reality.
41 The Quran highlights the *fuad* (heart) or *qalb* as the seat of this spiritual knowledge. Such
42 intuition allows access to dimensions of Reality beyond mere sense perception or intellectual
43 abstraction, offering glimpses of divine beauty and majesty that evoke a deep sense of spiritual
44 enchantment. As Rumi poetically remarked:
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3 “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself
4 that you have built against it” (Rumi as quoted in Heaven, 2007, p. 1)
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8 The gnosis attained through spiritual perfection is limitless, allowing the disciple to transcend
9 mere perception of objects and their Platonic forms, and to apprehend their ultimate reality
10 (*haqeeqat*) and deeper meaning. The intricate beauty and complexity of God’s creation serve as
11 signposts, directing the seeker toward the Creator, revealing the divine presence immanent in all
12 things. As another Sufi commented:
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21 “Heaven is called ‘heaven’ due to its loftiness. The heart is a heaven since it rises by means
22 of faith and gnosis without any limit or end. Just as God – the Known One – has no finite
23 limit, likewise gnosis of Him has no end” (Ja’far al-Sadiq as quoted in Ernst, 1999, p. 437).
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28 The primary focus is not solely on understanding the universe or achieving human freedom, but
29 on perfecting one's relationship with God. Through this spiritual alignment, true emancipation
30 naturally follows (Ul-Haq, 2024).
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36 *Societal role of Sufism*

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39 While the spiritual journey in Sufism is deeply personal, its impact extends far beyond the
40 individual, influencing societal norms and the ethical regulation of interpersonal relationships. A
41 key corollary of *ishq-i haqqiqi* (divine love) is the love for God’s creation. In this sense, Sufism
42 serves not only as a personal spiritual path but also as a social institution that has historically
43 contributed to the moralization of societies. Its universal kindness transcends barriers of religion,
44 race, creed, gender, and other social categories (Heck, 2006). This holistic approach to
45 spirituality and ethics is crucial for addressing the moral and existential crises of the modern
46 world (Hallaq, 2018). By reconnecting individuals with a broader metaphysical and ethical
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3 framework, Sufism provides a way to counteract the alienating effects of modern capitalism and
4 secularism. Additionally, it offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between
5 individuals and society (Curry & Ohlander, 2012). Unlike New Age spirituality, which often
6 focuses exclusively on individual transformation, or workplace spirituality, which tends to align
7 spiritual practices with organizational objectives, Sufism integrates personal spiritual growth
8 with a profound sense of social responsibility. This interconnectedness, however, is not
9 synonymous with passive pacifism or political disengagement; rather, it fosters a commitment to
10 justice and advocacy for the oppressed.
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22 Critics might argue that introducing explicitly Sufi concepts like *ishq-i haqqiqi* into diverse,
23 secular workplaces could risk alienating those with different religions or no religion at all.
24 However, proponents of integrating Islamic spirituality into management, such as Ali (2005) and
25 Khan & Naguib (2019), argue that many Sufi principles can be translated into universally
26 applicable values. The emphasis on love, compassion, and ethical conduct resonates across
27 cultural and religious divides, making it relevant in various organizational contexts. Nonetheless,
28 applying these concepts without imposing a specific religious worldview remains a topic of
29 ongoing debate. Additionally, suggesting an Islamic spiritual tradition as a remedy for issues
30 arising from Western modernity may seem paradoxical to some. This perceived contradiction,
31 however, diminishes when the tradition is viewed as a dynamic and enduring force that has
32 maintained a global human ecology over centuries (Anjum, 2007). While not static, this tradition
33 evolves gradually, adhering to a principled order grounded in high-order metaphysical precepts
34 (Hallaq, 2010). Its consistent, principled logic enables it to engage with modernity, adapt to its
35 pressures, and remain relevant (Asad, 2015). Despite facing threats from colonialism and the
36 violence of modernity, this tradition persists as a living and lived experience. Therefore,
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3 engaging with Sufism is not about replacing one totalizing narrative with another. Instead, it
4 provides a framework for exploring diverse ways of understanding and experiencing modernity,
5 particularly within organizational contexts.
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10 *The colonial and modern era challenges*

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14 Despite its profound spiritual and social contributions, Sufism has not been insulated from the
15 broader historical and geopolitical forces that have shaped the Muslim world, particularly
16 colonialism. While often perceived as apolitical, many Sufi orders have historically been deeply
17 involved in political resistance and state-building, playing crucial roles in the formation of
18 Muslim empires (Malik, 2018). In fact, Sufi movements frequently provided both ideological
19 frameworks and material support for anti-colonial struggles, making them one of the most
20 challenging groups for colonizers to control (Knysh, 2002; Muedini, 2015). The intersection of
21 spirituality and political activism underscores Sufism's ability to resist external domination while
22 fostering both individual and societal transformation. As a result, Paul Heck observes:
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35 “Networks of Sufism took the lead in resisting European colonial powers in the 19th century,
36 for example, in North Africa against the French and in the North Caucasus against the
37 Russians. Some networks resisted post-colonial states that aggressively sought to secularize
38 local society” (Heck, 2009, p.15)
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45 Before colonialism, Muslims typically adhered to a specific legal school (*madhab*), a school of
46 theology (*aqida*), and a spiritual order (*tariqa*). However, colonial and Orientalist campaigns
47 sought to marginalize and distort Sufism, attempting to sever it from the heart of Islam and
48 reframe it as magical, heretical, or aberrant (Neale, 2017). This effort facilitated the
49 normalization of anti- or pseudo-Sufi sects within Islam. By the 20th century, the success of this
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3 colonial agenda had relegated the vibrant world of Sufism to a state of passive obscurity
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5 (Christmann, 2008), distorting and erasing the historical role of Muslim resistance against
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7 oppression. The secular nation-state, emerging from political decolonization as a manifestation
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9 of neo-colonial ideologies, further diminished Sufism's political engagement by enforcing a
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11 politically neutral form of religious expression (Mandaville, 2005). Consequently, Sufism is now
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13 often reduced to images of whirling dervishes, detached ascetics, esoteric poetry, and intricate
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15 paintings, rather than being recognized as a symbol of resistance to injustice. This reduction to
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17 mere aesthetic or cultural expressions has diluted Sufism's transformative potential, effectively
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19 turning it into an antithesis of active resistance.
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24 Despite these challenges, Sufism's rich intellectual heritage remains a significant resource for
25
26 addressing the spiritual deficiencies of the modern world. Its emphasis on direct spiritual
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28 experience, ethical conduct, and social responsibility offers a more integrated approach to
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30 spirituality compared to the fragmented and commodified practices often found in New Age and
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32 workplace spirituality movements. As a living tradition, Sufism provides a coherent
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34 metaphysical framework, ethical system, and path of spiritual transformation that addresses
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36 many of the shortcomings identified in contemporary spiritual practices. Reconnecting with such
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38 rich spiritual traditions, as Hallaq (2018) suggests, may be crucial for cultivating the moral
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40 resources necessary to lead a meaningful life.
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46 **Overcoming modern disenchantment: True enlightenment through *ishq-i haqqiqi***

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49 There is a growing recognition in management scholarship of the grand societal challenges we
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51 face—economic, ecological, and political (Voegtlin et al., 2022). While initiatives like
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53 sustainable development goals, corporate social responsibility, and employee well-being
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3 programs aim to address these issues, they often amount to technocratic solutions that fail to
4 tackle the deeper existential crises of meaning and disenchantment. Even efforts to re-enchant
5 organizations through workplace spirituality often merely reproduce the neoliberal capitalist
6 rationality embedded in coloniality (Willmott, 2018). What is needed is a radical reimagining, an
7 alternative ontology that shifts focus from mere appearances to the existential realm of meanings.
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10 This paper proposes that the Sufi concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi* (intense love of the Divine) offers a
11 radical reimagining capable of challenging the oppressive structures of colonial modernity. By
12 drawing from Islamic spirituality, we can re-enchant our world, uncovering deeper meanings and
13 expanding human potential. While the notion of re-enchantment might be perceived as a
14 regression to irrationality, this view stems from a particular form of Western rationality and the
15 *modern* belief in material progress (Hallaq, 2018). In reality, classical spiritual traditions like
16 Sufism are not retrogressive; rather, they are progressive in their ability to preserve and revitalize
17 the quest for a meaningful existence. Furthermore, some contemporary Sufi movements
18 reinterpret *ishq-i haqqiqi* as a foundation for social and political activism, challenging the view
19 that Sufism is inherently quietist or disengaged from worldly affairs (Malik, 2018). Nonetheless,
20 criticisms of this approach warrant careful consideration. Scholars such as Lips-Wiersma et al.
21 (2009) caution against the uncritical adoption of religious or spiritual practices in secular
22 organizations, pointing out issues of power imbalance, coercion, and discrimination. They
23 emphasize the need for a thoughtful introduction and implementation of spiritual concepts in
24 diverse workplace settings. Addressing these concerns is essential for developing a more
25 nuanced and ethically sound approach to workplace spirituality.
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53 In light of these challenges, I propose the concept of “True Enlightenment,” drawing on Hallaq’s
54 critique of the modern secular paradigm, as a means to achieve a more balanced perspective.
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3 Hallaq (2018) argues that the Enlightenment project, while claiming to liberate humanity, has
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5 instead trapped us in a moral and epistemological framework at odds with human nature and the
6
7 cosmos. The modern state, with its legal and economic systems, views the human subject as an
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9 autonomous, rights-bearing individual detached from any higher moral order. This atomized
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11 conception of personhood (Thompson, 2022) neglects the relational and spiritually oriented
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13 nature of human existence. True Enlightenment, in contrast, would recognize humans as
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15 embedded in a complex web of relationships—with each other, with nature, and with God. It
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17 would seek to cultivate knowledge and governance that nurture these relationships rather than
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19 severing them in the name of autonomy or efficiency. Such an approach requires rethinking core
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21 concepts like reason, freedom, and progress, grounding them in a more holistic understanding of
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23 human flourishing (Hallaq, 2013). The Sufi concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi* provides valuable
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25 resources for envisioning and realizing an alternative form of enlightenment. It offers a
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27 motivating force and organizing principle distinct from secular European enlightenment. While
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29 modern systems often fragment reality into discrete units, *ishq-i haqqiqi* presents a unifying
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31 vision that sees all creation as a manifestation of Divine beauty and majesty. This divine love
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33 reveals profound insights and alternative ways of engaging with the world across multiple
34
35 dimensions. Its holistic nature aligns recent calls in workplace spirituality research for
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37 approaches that integrate individual, organizational, and societal levels of analysis (Dubey &
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39 Bedi, 2024).

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41 Epistemologically, *ishq-i haqqiqi* challenges the dominance of discursive reason and empirical
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43 observation as the sole means of acquiring knowledge. It emphasizes intuitive and experiential
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45 understanding, acknowledging that profound truths often transcend logic and sensory perception.
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47 This expanded view promotes a holistic approach to addressing complex social and
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3 environmental challenges, guiding us toward true enlightenment. Ethically, *ishq-i haqqiqi* fosters
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5 a love for the Divine that extends to all creation. This divine love underpins ethical behavior,
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7 surpassing rule-based morality and utilitarian calculations, and inspires a more compassionate
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9 and ecologically sensitive approach to organizing society and the economy. Regarding selfhood,
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11 *ishq-i haqqiqi* offers a vision rooted in loving submission to the Divine, rather than individual
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13 autonomy. This reorientation can counteract alienation and purposelessness, fostering a deeper
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15 connection and sense of meaning in life. It also teaches one humility, which can serve as a
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17 crucial virtue in mitigating the negative effects of workplace spirituality, such as job idolization,
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19 workaholism, and exploitation (Molloy et al., 2019). In terms of social relations, Sufism's model
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21 of authority is based on wisdom and spiritual insight rather than formal credentials or
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23 bureaucratic position. This framework could inspire more organic and trust-based social
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25 organizations, where leadership is earned through spiritual realization and moral integrity. David
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27 Weir (2012) has documented how the Islamic concept of *diwan* offers a leadership model with a
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29 focus on inclusive decision-making. Finally, *ishq-i haqqiqi*'s focus on the eternal provides a
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31 counterbalance to modernity's fixation on novelty and progress, valuing tradition and timeless
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33 wisdom without rigidity. Engaging with these ideas thus paves the way to true enlightenment.
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40 Hence, *ishq-i haqqiqi* offers a transformative paradigm for reimagining knowledge, ethics,
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42 selfhood, social relations, and time. It should be viewed not as a regression to premodern social
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44 forms but as an invitation to engage with time tested spiritual practices that enhance life and
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46 generate meaning. Aligning with decolonial theorists' calls for epistemic disobedience and the
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48 recovery of marginalized knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2011), engaging with *ishq-i haqqiqi*
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50 challenges Enlightenment categories and opens new possibilities for human flourishing in
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52 organizational settings. While the workplace spirituality movement has its limitations, it reflects
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3 a widespread yearning for meaning and enchantment. I address this yearning by offering a
4 deeper engagement with the authentic spiritual tradition of Islam, particularly through Sufism,
5 which provides a more profound and grounded approach to meeting these needs.
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10 **Limitations and future research directions**

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14 Despite the critical analysis presented in this paper, which explores workplace spirituality
15 through the lens of decolonial theory and proposes Sufism as an alternative framework, some
16 limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the focus on Sufism, may limit the applicability of
17 these insights in diverse cultural and religious contexts. Future research could explore how other
18 non-Western spiritual traditions might contribute to reimagining workplace spirituality.
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21 Secondly, the theoretical nature of this paper calls for empirical studies to validate and refine the
22 proposed concepts. Future research could investigate how the Sufi concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi*
23 might be operationalized and implemented in organizational settings, and examine its effects on
24 employee well-being, ethical decision-making, and organizational performance.
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27 Thirdly, while the paper critiques the commodification of spirituality in workplace settings, it
28 does not fully address the practical challenges of introducing deeply spiritual concepts into
29 secular organizational environments. Future studies could explore strategies for navigating
30 potential conflicts between spiritual practices and organizational goals, as well as addressing
31 concerns about religious discrimination or coercion. Lastly, the paper's critique of modernity and
32 capitalism, while theoretically grounded, may face resistance in implementation within existing
33 organizational structures. Future research could investigate how organizations might practically
34 transition towards more spiritually-informed management practices.
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Conclusion

Sufism, with its historical and contemporary relevance, offers valuable spiritual and social resources for addressing the complexities of globalization and modernization (Malik, 2018). The concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi*, in particular, presents a compelling alternative to the disillusioning trends of modernity, the commodified forms of re-enchantment, and the multifaceted nature of colonial violence, which permeates various aspects of human existence, including racial, gender, cultural, and spiritual dimensions (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In response to these pervasive forms of oppression, I argue for the necessity of a radical imaginary that shifts focus from superficial appearances and dark spirituality to profound existential meanings. The Sufi concept of *ishq-i haqqiqi* emerges as a powerful alternative ontology, capable of generating a praxis that confronts and dismantles the oppressive structures of colonial modernity.

By drawing upon the rich well of Islamic spirituality, I propose a path towards re-enchantment through 'true enlightenment' that expands human potentialities and provides deeper meanings. The vision of *ishq-i haqqiqi* offers a foundation for imagining future alternatives to postmodern society, aligning with Weber's (1930) speculation about the potential emergence of "new prophets" or a "rebirth of old ideas and ideals". This vision will also enable us to deeply engage with some of the basic human questions that religion answers instead of presenting instrumental approaches that view religion primarily as a means to improve organizational efficiency (Smith et al., 2021) or as an agent of capitalism (Barker & Carman, 2000). Religion and associated spirituality need to be about the human body and spirit and a meaningful life which is socially and morally significant.

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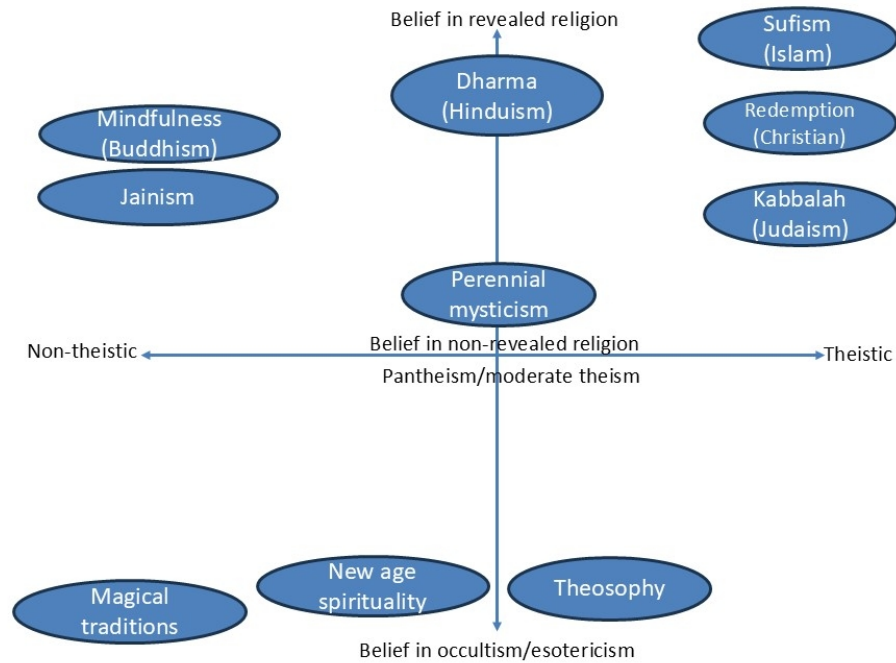
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Figure 1: Important spiritual traditions of the world



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Figure 2: Comparison of spiritual approaches



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2
3 Dear Dr. Orneita Burton,
4

5 I am thankful for the 'tentative acceptance' and the opportunity to revise and resubmit my
6 manuscript to the *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion (JMSR)*. Your thoughtful
7 feedback and careful review have significantly enhanced the quality of the work.
8
9

10 In response to your feedback, I have implemented several key revisions to enhance the
11 manuscript's clarity, theoretical grounding, and overall contribution to the field. As suggested, I
12 have reintroduced the original diagram as Figure 1, with the modification of replacing
13 "Mysticism" with "Redemption" under the Christian category. This change better articulates the
14 universal pursuit of ultimate reality across theistic traditions. The new diagram has been
15 incorporated as Figure 2, offering a comparative analysis of New Age Spirituality, Workplace
16 Spirituality, and Sufism. Both figures are now accompanied by detailed explanations within the
17 text, elucidating their theoretical implications and relevance to the paper's central arguments.
18 Furthermore, I have deepened the engagement with previous publications in the Journal of
19 Management, Spirituality & Religion (JMSR), explicitly articulating how this work builds upon,
20 contrasts with, or extends prior contributions. The conclusion from the initial version has been
21 reintegrated, providing a spiritually-oriented summary that emphasizes the distinction between
22 true spirituality and its capitalistic adaptations. Lastly, a new section addressing limitations and
23 future research directions has been added, offering reflections on potential avenues for further
24 inquiry and the implications of addressing these limitations for the field's development.
25
26
27

28 I am deeply appreciative of your faith in this manuscript's potential, and I believe it has been
29 substantially improved through three revisions. I extend my sincere gratitude to you for your
30 constructive suggestions. I look forward to publishing this manuscript in JMSR.
31
32

33 Kind regards,
34 Shoaib Ul Haq
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